

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFFREY RUBIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KATHRYN TRACY RIZZI

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TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Jeffrey Rubin, on May 27, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. This interview is part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. Dr. Rubin, thank you so much for doing this oral history interview.

Jeffrey Rubin: You're welcome, glad to be here.

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

JR: I was born in Jersey City, but my family was in Hoboken at the time. That was August 15, 1949.

KR: What do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side of the family?

JR: I think they're Russian and German immigrants. My mother's mother died young. Then, I guess, the tradition in those days was that the sister married the widower, so the person I knew as my grandmother, for many years, turned out not to be my pure biological grandmother but a step grandmother. It never really mattered to me, and it was not an issue. My mother had a twin brother and another brother, it's a good question whether he was older or younger, so there were two uncles then on that side. One of my uncles, the twin, never had any children, and the other uncle had one [son], who we'll get to him when we get into Rutgers. He was at Rutgers before me.

My grandfather, I remember visiting him playing cards in--it was like a clubhouse in the park in Hoboken, around where I played ball, and he was always there. I don't quite know what he did for a living other than playing cards, but he passed away first. They lived three blocks away. Then, my grandmother ultimately moved into a first-floor apartment in the same building where we lived. So, I would see her coming and going. As I went out the door, I'd knock and check on her and then vice versa, coming home. My mother, of the three siblings, was the one who had most of the responsibility for caring for her. Then, they eventually hired probably an illegal immigrant in those days that spoke a little English, and she and my grandmother got along fine. She spent most of the day. I can't tell you for sure how much she was there. Those grandparents on that side, I knew both of them, and the grandmother, I'm not sure how old I was when she passed away. Yes, so, that's my mother's side.

KR: What about your father's side of the family? What family history do you know?

JR: So, I'm named after my grandfather, who died about a year or so before I was born. His name was Isaac Jacob, and so in the Jewish tradition, they typically give you a name with the same initials. My legal first name is Ivan and I was Ivan Jeffrey, but my parents never told me that [laughter] until I was probably ten or eleven. I found out when I had to get a birth certificate for Little League, and it kind of became clear that that was my name. After 9/11 actually, I had to go back and everything had to say Ivan on it to match up with the birth certificate and the passport. I still sometimes get into a bit of a hassle because technically that's on all the legal documents. A lawyer suggested, at one point, to just change it to Jeffrey Ivan, and I said I didn't feel comfortable doing that. My grandfather was Isaac Jacob; I'm Ivan Jeffrey after him. I shouldn't really change it, so I never changed it.

I didn't know that grandfather. My grandmother, who I knew as Fannie, they had--and I was trying to think about this--maybe eleven or twelve children. So, I grew up with a fairly big set of uncles. I think one aunt may have died when I was very young or before I was born. Another aunt died not long after and another aunt we didn't see that much, but I saw my uncles a lot and I've got a ton of first cousins. I think only one or two of the cousins have passed away. I don't see them all that much, but it was a big family. A lot of them lived in Hoboken, but then others moved to Bayonne and Linden, Palisades Park. That's kind of where they spread out, and then the cousins are all over the place now.

KR: I am wondering what stories your parents told you about living through the Great Depression and World War II years.

JR: Yes, so, not a hell of a lot. It wasn't what you would call the most open set of conversations. I know my father didn't graduate from high school, and he would always say that he had to go to work to help support everybody in the family during the depression. He always spoke very highly of the union. He sold shoes. I assume he did that at the very beginning. Several of my uncles sold shoes. One of my uncles had a shoe store. I'm not sure why, but my father did not serve in the Army. Some--and I don't know which ones--of my uncles did. I did have a couple of cousins, one served in the Navy; the other one made a Navy career and ended up marrying, meeting someone, staying in Australia, which was totally different than the rest of the family.

The one story I've often told, when we have the kids here periodically, was, one day we must've had one of those Perdue oven stuffer chickens, and we pretty much picked the thing clean. I went to throw the carcass out, and I got yelled at because there was still a little bit of meat on the chicken and you really shouldn't do that. I'm sure that was a depression-era mentality. I certainly didn't know details of my parents' finances. I was sort of shielded. They just didn't tell the kids much about anything. So, I learned a lot of things [laughter] after the fact maybe or not even, what I didn't know. There are a couple other stories that they just didn't quite tell you all the truth. They were trying to protect you. It's a fine line with your own kids, how truthful you want to be or how explicit or how detailed. My mother's fear of dentists--there were two stories that I clearly tell--like, "Come on, we're just going for a ride," and I ended up at the dentist, which gave me a lifetime issue with dentists, well, not a lifetime but a problem. I ended up with innumerable cavities because I never went. When I finally did go, it was brutal because I had been chewing bubble gum from baseball cards for so long. What was the other story? It'll come to me. I just lost it.

KR: Sure, when you think of it.

JR: I'll tell you, we used to go to a store up in West New York called Schlesinger's. It was a big clothing store. It was always, "Try this on for size," and I would always come home with whatever it was. I was just trying on for size. I didn't have much say in that either. You just don't know what things kids remember and what the reality was, but those are some of the things I typically recall from growing up.

We were pretty free. We lived on Bloomfield Street in Hoboken, cars parked on both sides of the street. It was one-way traffic going north. We played on the sidewalk. We played in the street. We played on the sewers on the corners, we did all that stuff. [It is] kind of mindboggling today to think about. My granddaughter, on a dead-end street, you wouldn't let her go near the curb. Or thinking of my grandkids in D.C., walking to school and crossing the street, it's like how can they possibly do that? Of course, we all did it, and we all survived.

Yes, so, growing up, we were kind of on our own, the typical, you know, Mom would stick her head out the window and say, "It's time to come in for dinner," or lunch or whatever. There were a group of kids on the block. Some were nice. Some were not so nice. Then, we were two blocks away from Elysian Fields, which is kind of around where the "first baseball game was played." So, you had that there, and there was a Maxwell House factory there that's now torn down and a big housing development all along the water there. We could walk two blocks, three blocks to this park, until you got big enough so that when you punched the little Spalding ball and you could keep hitting it out of the park, then you couldn't play there anymore. But when you were little, that was fine. I even remember going to the field there with a helmet and shoulder pads and playing some football. We were there all the time. [Editor's Note: Hoboken claims to be the site of the first recorded baseball game played by recognizable modern rules. The game took place at Elysian Fields in 1846.]

There was a luncheonette on Washington Street, where you would go get, typically, an ice cream soda. I told people, years later, I got one of my first lessons in economics there. It was owned by three--I don't know if it was two brothers and then somebody married to one of their sisters--but there were three guys who owned it, and anytime one of them had a kid, the price of an ice cream soda went up a nickel, my introduction to inflation.

KR: What was your neighborhood like in Hoboken in terms of class, race, nationality and religion?

JR: There weren't very many Jewish kids there. I can remember walking to synagogue, and we'd have a *tallit* [prayer shawl] bag with a Jewish star on it and I could never decide whether I wanted to hold it so the star was facing out or facing in. I don't think people knew much about Jews then. It wasn't a very big Jewish [community]. At the time we were growing up, I think there were two synagogues, one Orthodox, where the women still were upstairs, I think where my grandparents had gone, and then a Conservative synagogue. We weren't overly religious, but we certainly got bar mitzvahed and we went to services and did all that. There was another Jewish kid on the block. If I had six or seven in my high school class, it was a lot. My wife grew up in Plainfield, [which] had a big Jewish population. So, as she got involved with her high school reunion, you could see how different it was in that community.

On our block, our building was an apartment building with four levels and there were three or four of those at the end of the block, but the rest of the block was what you would call typical brownstones that my son pays a fortune to live in, in Brooklyn. A lot of those, somebody may have owned it and then somebody lived on the ground floor or the basement level, somebody lived on the first, and then there may have been a second or even third family up above. I'm not sure how different families did that. There were a lot of Italian kids. It was an era where other

kids were Puerto Rican more than other Hispanic backgrounds. I didn't look at my high school [yearbook]; I looked at my Rutgers yearbook. I didn't look at my high school yearbook, but there were black kids around in high school. We were uptown. There was a whole area where a lot of young kids lived, that's been upgraded, in Hoboken on Harrison and Clinton Streets and so on, where I didn't even go. My aunt had a candy store on Washington Street around the corner, and then the next block down, my other aunt was there. Then, there was an empty lot behind them where we played stickball. That was my circle.

Then, as we got older, the other story to tell, there came a time--and I don't know if I was ten or eleven or twelve--I could memorize A to 59th, D to 161st. So, I take the number 63 bus in Hoboken, go to the Port Authority, get the A train to 59th and the D to 161st to go to Yankee Stadium. I don't know how old I was, whether I was in my teens or before that. You didn't have a cell phone. You just went.

There was a lot of stuff by bus. There was a bus to Jersey City to Journal Square. There was a bus to West New York and Union City and then the bus to New York. My parents never had a car and my father worked in National Shoe stores in Newark and Jersey City and in other places, so he travelled by bus and by train all over the place and then later had a different job and he travelled some more for the company. My brother, maybe when he graduated from college and got a car, that was the first car in the family. We depended on aunts and uncles taking us, you know, going to places with them on weekends. I don't know if my parents couldn't afford a car, didn't want a car, never learned how to drive. At some point in their seventies, my mother talked about getting a driver's license. [laughter] That never happened. Hoboken was a tough place because if you didn't have a driveway, you could ride around for hours trying to find a parking space. I got pretty good at parallel parking. Maybe my third year or the beginning of my fourth year at Rutgers, I blew out the engine on a Corvair. That was my first car. Then, my parents bought me, I think it was, a 1970 Volkswagen Beetle. So, that was a little easier. I didn't need as big a spot, but I still had to find a spot.

KR: You mentioned going to Yankee Stadium. What recollections do you have of the Yankees when you were growing up?

JR: Okay, again, the classic story that I tell is I went with two kids. One was on the block, Robert, and another kid, two blocks over, Marty, who's the brother of [the woman who] became my brother's wife, so he's my sister-in-law's brother. So, the three of us went to Yankee Stadium. We're in the upper deck, throwing peanut shells down to the first deck, when a police officer came and said, "You boys come with me." In the old Yankee Stadium, I could still remember walking up the ramp and seeing the grass on the field. I mean, every kid that's ever been to Yankee Stadium can tell you that story. But he asked us our names, and we told him our names. He looked at us and he said, "Are you boys Jewish?" We said, "Yes." He said, "Well, my name is Officer Schwartz. I'm going to give you a break. You can go sit somewhere else, but don't let me catch you doing this again." So, that was the last time we threw peanut shells.

Then, I remember, in the old days in Yankee Stadium, you could leave the stadium by walking on the warning track and go out the bullpen, and so you could walk through the bullpen. I remember leaning over in the outfield to watch them warm up in the bullpen and hearing the

sound of the ball echo when it hit the catcher's glove. In Yankee Stadium, in those days, there used to be general admission. There was a sign that hung from the rafters, so you could walk maybe past first base, and depending on how important the game was, where general admission started was either closer to home or further away, and then you could just go and sit anywhere within general admission. I was at Yankee Stadium for a one-hitter by Bob Turley, which I was sure was broken up by a fly ball to left field, which I ended up looking up on *The New York Times* and it turned out it was a fly ball to right field, I think, or vice versa, but anyway, my recollection was totally wrong.

The other story, I wrote an op-ed piece which never got published, which I thought was very good. It was called "Mickey's Back." We all grew up Mickey Mantle fans. The best part was sitting in the upper deck behind first base, which was the side where Yankees would sit, and in a doubleheader, Mickey typically didn't play the second game or at least that's my recollection. But if the game was close--and you didn't have cameras, you couldn't look on the video screen above you--everybody would wait for Mickey to come out of the dugout to pinch hit in the eighth or ninth inning. You'd see the number seven on his back, and it was like the crowd would go crazy waiting for Mickey to come up. Of course, they'd boo like crazy if he struck out. One of my great disappointments is never going to his bar in New York to say hello, but, apparently, he wasn't the nicest guy. He had an alcohol problem, and everybody and his brother wanted to be his friend. Yes, I never got to meet Mickey Mantle. That's one of those regrets. I had several versions of a Mickey Mantle glove before Tom Tresh replaced it and they didn't make Mickey Mantle gloves anymore.

KR: You had a large extended family living near you in Hoboken. What do you remember about family get-togethers and family traditions?

JR: One of my cousins had some mental problems, behavioral problems. I'm not sure today what he would be diagnosed with, but I can remember uncles being brutally unfair to this kid, just thinking you could pound him into behaving a certain way. I think they ended up sending him to some military academy for a while, and that always struck me as terrible. I remember going to, I don't remember how much we went with family, there used to be an open pool in Totowa, for some reason, I remember, that we used to go. I don't know if that was family get-togethers. I do remember uncles telling Frank Sinatra stories and fights with this group or that group.

For many years, two uncles--one of them was married to one of my father's sisters--were in Bayonne and they would periodically come in on Sundays because they had a car. We didn't have a car. They would come in and they'd play Pinochle with my parents for hours and hours and hours. It used to be, "Is Bayonne coming?" was the expression, you know, are they coming today? There were other cousins, but they typically had moved on by then.

My grandmother, on that side, lived on the top floor of a building, maybe on Eighth Street, between Garden and Park. My uncle, who was the only one who went to college, was a pharmacist and his wife and their one son lived downstairs. I think it must have been every month where the uncles would go and meet at Grandma's house for a meeting, and I would go with my father. I would sit in a big armchair. It was a leather chair with those little metal studs

on both sides of the arms and up the back, and my grandmother would bring out a Coke for me. They gave her money. I suspect there wasn't Social Security for her at the time, so they supported her. She was living there, where my uncle lived. I don't know who owned the house.

My grandfather on that side was a tailor. You asked about my father. He said he always regretted--my grandfather wanted him to learn how to make clothes and stuff, and he didn't want anything to do with it. He said, "I could've had a better life if I had just taken the time to learn to be tailor." It's interesting because my wife's grandfather, on one side, was also a tailor. It's what they were doing in Europe. I know she had many clothes that her grandfather made for her as a kid. My brother was born five years before me. I don't know if my grandfather was making stuff for him. I can't recall.

There were always bar mitzvahs and then there were weddings and then there were funerals, you know, all the usual. I had another uncle who was also married to one of my father's sisters who died young. Then, there was a big contretemps, I guess is the right word, with the uncle who was the pharmacist and another aunt's husband. He blamed him for her early death from breast cancer, I think. So, we didn't see those cousins for a hundred years, and I think one of my older cousins, who played with them, eventually got in touch. I think we met one or two of them at one point, but they were much older than me. I was towards the younger end of the cousins, although I have a couple of younger cousins. A lot of people (uncles) were hot headed, short tempered. Only one of them went to college.

Anyways, this other uncle, Uncle Harold, was married to Aunt Bertha, and Bertha, the story was, used to take my brother and buy him all these really nice clothes. They had one kid, who was the one who ended up in the Navy in Australia, cousin Harvey. But Uncle Harold, after his wife died, he would come around to the candy store, and maybe it was Saturday night. Hoboken is a dead end from First Street or Observer Highway up to 14th Street. It's really kind of weird, the main street is literally a dead end at both ends. He and my father would walk from Tenth Street or Eighth Street, where the candy store was, down, and I would go with them. We'd walk just back and forth, and it was just a long walk down Washington Street.

What else? A lot of time in my childhood was at the Jewish Community Center, which wasn't really what someone growing up in the suburbs knew as a Jewish Community Center. It was its own building, but it was just part of a series of row houses on Hudson Street, which is a really nice neighborhood, and they had a downstairs. My mother worked there, I guess, as an aide, kind of watching kids after school. We would go there and play basketball downstairs in a makeshift gym, which had baskets, one end was literally flush against the wall and the other one was hanging down over stairs. When you went to drive for a layup, you either ran into a wall or you fell underneath the stairs, and, amazingly, I don't remember people getting hurt very much. We played a lot of basketball after school, every day pretty much. We didn't want to do arts and crafts. Then, at the end, at four-thirty, you'd go upstairs and then you'd have Hebrew school in the same building. The synagogue was down at First Street in Hoboken, but the Jewish Center was where you went after school in those days. I was there a lot. The boys would always go downstairs and play basketball.

I'm trying to think of aunts and uncles' stories. Again, the other aunt and uncle had the candy store, and they had hand-packed Breyers Ice Cream. We went to the store, and my aunt would bend over with the big shovel and pile on that ice cream. I would get half a pint of chocolate chip mint and go home and eat it. I mean, you'd just eat the whole thing. I don't know if it was every night, every other night, but she would push that ice cream into that container. It was a lot of ice cream. Then, my mother ended up helping out there a lot. She just hung out there and did stuff.

Then, for a while, my cousin and I, in those days--I say "in those days" a lot--but in those days, *The New York Times* came, a part of *The Times* came on Friday, and then, on Saturday night, we'd wait for the paper and then we'd put the paper together, maybe we did some of that Sunday. Some of it I remember at night. Then, we even delivered some of those papers to different people in the neighborhood. I remember standing in the back of the store, collating the different parts of *The New York Times* or *The Daily News* and *The New York Post*, whatever, mostly *The Times* I guess, sitting in the cramped back of the store and then people waiting on line.

The other thing, I remember people every night waiting for *The Daily News* delivery truck to show up, because *The Daily News*, in those days, had the results from the afternoon racetrack. One of the results, besides the horse racing results, was the daily handle, the amount of money that was bet at the track. Before lotteries became public, the lotteries were an illegal activity, and the way the number was determined, the winning number, was the last three digits of the handle at Aqueduct or Belmont or whatever the racetracks was. You couldn't find it out until the newspaper came. You couldn't look online. You couldn't call anybody. You had to wait for the newspaper. At that time, the payouts were not pari-mutuel. They didn't depend on how much money was bet on a particular number. It was a set payout. I think it all depended on the odds. Obviously, the bookies made money at the end of the day, but [for] a nickel, I think you got twenty-four dollars if you had a combination of the three digits, the three numbers. Anyway, so they were pre-determined. I don't know what it was if you got it straight, if you got the right three digits.

The classic story was that there had been a big plane crash in New York, and the picture on the front of *The Daily News* that day was of the tail of the plane with some three-digit number on it. Everybody played that number the next day, and it came out, the bookies just took a beating because they had to pay out for everybody and it's not pari-mutuel. That's the risk they run is that everybody bets on the same number, and that number comes out.

I looked it up before we got on; there's a book called *Five-Finger Discount* by a woman who grew up in Jersey City, whose childhood in some respects was similar to mine. My parents and my aunt, in the store, I don't know who ended up getting the money, but we would collect the slips. I would run the slips with the bets around from my mother, who got them from somebody, to my aunt's candy store, who got picked up by somebody. Then, it would all work in reverse when they had the payouts. You had all these slips, where you kept track of the money and who bet what. That seemed to me a normal childhood. Apparently, it isn't normal for people to be doing illegal activities as eight-year-olds, but it was to me. [Editor's Note: Helene Stapinski's 2002 memoir *Five-Finger Discount: A Crooked Family History* tells the story of her growing up in Jersey City.]

The other thing that always was a common thing was clothes would show up. I remember a suede coat with a fur collar that I got as a kid that "fell off the truck," was the expression. Someone highjacked the truck somewhere, and they showed up at the candy store with, "You want to buy a coat?" instead of a watch. "You want to buy a coat?" That's how I got some clothes. I didn't have any clue. This was just all normal for me was what it was.

KR: What were political discussions like in your family when you were growing up?

JR: Everybody was Democrats. Hoboken was Democrats. It was pretty much a machine. Hudson County is still very Democrat. There really wasn't a debate. I can't remember, but I'm sure Franklin Roosevelt was everybody's hero. I tell people, just a little off track, what I remember most clearly and having the most effect on me was seeing Lee Harvey Oswald get shot live on TV. It just really hit me that that was actually happening while I watched it. That was one of those things that's just like, "Holy crap." That was an era, assassinations were all the time. There were riots in the street. It was a pretty crazy time, but I was pretty isolated from that, much like my years at Rutgers. That stuff wasn't happening in Hoboken. [Editor's Note: On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated while traveling by motorcade through Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas. Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested and then was shot and killed by night club owner Jack Ruby on November 24, while being transferred from the Dallas Police Headquarters to the county jail.]

Yes, so, there wasn't much debate about any of that, and I can't remember discussions about the war. I'm sure my parents would've supported whoever was the president and had been against the long-haired protestors. They didn't raise rebels, that's for sure, and they weren't rebels. Everybody in the family [had a] pretty straight-and-narrow kind of upbringing in life. I'm trying to think of anybody who I would consider semi-radical, and there really weren't. So, that wasn't a big part of growing up.

The big event in town was going to a political rally to see the mayor of Hoboken, John Grogan, the Irish mayor, speak. Again, this whole Irish-Italian, I can't say I was all that aware of these different ethnicities and stuff as a kid, other than the comments you'd hear people make about Puerto Ricans. That was the slur that was common in those days. I ended up working with a guy in a shoe store in Union City who was Cuban and I kind of got a little bit more, but even there I didn't have a good sense--if you'd asked me to identify Cuba and Puerto Rico on a map, I don't know if I could've done that.

Before I lose a couple of other stories, let me give you the growing-up stories. The story my kids hear and almost everybody hears, it's amazing we're almost forty minutes in and you haven't heard the home run story yet. I'm pretty impressed it took me this long. Like any kid, I grew up playing baseball. You know, you wanted to play baseball. To go back one step, the bigger baseball diamond was down near where they built the high school, called Veterans Park or something. I remember, my father worked on the weekends and then worked nights, I don't remember what days, but Sundays, he didn't work. Later on, he did work on Sundays. He went to work for a different company in Paramus with somebody, selling shoes. That was one of the few times I got a sense he had to do something to make more money.

Anyway, I can remember walking back from Veterans Park one day. We went there, and he would hit fly balls to me and I would catch them and throw them back. Coming home, he had blisters and his hands were bleeding. I don't know how bad it was, but my recollection was that his hands were sore from just hitting baseballs. You probably didn't have baseball gloves in those days like you would do now. I spent many an hour with my kids hitting baseballs and tennis balls, seeing how high I could throw them up in the air.

My father was there, not my mother, when I hit my home run in Little League. That was an amazing event because I think the team may have hit three or four home runs the whole year. There was one kid who I went to Rutgers with who had a brother. I was young because in Hoboken at one point, they used to have A and B grades. They got rid of that and I was going into a B grade, so I skipped to an A grade and then I was born in August. So, I graduated high school at sixteen and then turned seventeen when I got to Rutgers. There's a good reason now in this virus time to give people a year off. If you're seventeen, it's a good thing. It also would be a good thing to take a year off, but I didn't, so I dealt with it.

Anyway, his brother was like a home-run king. He hit sixteen or seventeen, I don't know how many, home runs, but home runs were not that common. We had a police captain who was our manager. I was twelve at this point, so it was probably 1961, which happened to be the year Roger Maris--or was it 1960?--Maris hit sixty-one homers. [Editor's Note: In 1961, New York Yankees outfielder Roger Maris set the single-season home run record with sixty-one home runs, breaking Babe Ruth's prior mark of sixty home runs. The record stood until 1998, when it was broken by Mark McGwire, who ended up with seventy home runs after a season-long home run race with Sammy Sosa (who hit sixty-six).]

I think it was a Sunday afternoon game. It was the weirdest thing. Players talk about how well they see the baseball, and I try to teach my kids and my grandkids, the whole trick to hitting a baseball is to watch it, to see it, the same thing with golf. You say you're never going to take your eye off the ball, and sure enough, you swing and you move your head, you don't watch it.

This particular day, I can remember, Phil Tucson--again, whether I have it right or not--Phil Tucson was pitching and he shook off the catcher. There weren't many signs, but he tried to throw a curveball periodically. In my little twelve-year-old head, I said, "I think he's going to try to throw a curveball." I saw the ball come out of his hand, and it just hung, this curveball. The bases were loaded, which makes it even more spectacular. Sure enough, I hit this thing, and it went way up in the air. I have no idea if the wind was blowing, but it barely made it over the fence. It was like, "Holy cow, how did that happen?" So, I've told the story a thousand times. I probably could find the clipping from *The Jersey Journal* someplace. That's a top-five highlight for me. I didn't hit another homer. I played third base and then I pitched one inning, got all three guys out, got the save, before they had saves. That was my Little League career.

I had a very minimal, quick Babe Ruth League career with one single off a pitcher who threw a real curveball, which I could not believe. This thing was just--I was running for the dugout when it was coming right at me, and it came over the plate, it was like, "I'm done." I think I may have had four at bats that year in Babe Ruth. My parents showed up and they sat there for every

game. At least, again, in my recollection, they were there all the time. That's my Little League story.

KR: What other memories do you have of growing up that you would like to share?

JR: The other thing we ended up doing, my father sold shoes, so when we were sixteen, the routine was you were expected to get a summer job. You could work Friday night, or the typically nine-to-five shift at the shoe store on Saturday--they weren't open on Sunday--and make some money. I mostly worked in a store in West New York, and I worked there a lot. I would take the number 21 bus and get off on 58th, 57th Street. There was a Jewish deli. There was Schlesinger's clothing store. There was a National Shoe store. People who read this who grew up in that area would know it.

I was working with a lot of adults. It was kind of an interesting experience, and I can remember everybody being afraid when the general manager was going to make a visit to the store. I was pretty good at it, to the point--in those days, the shoes had a six-digit code, and everything was stocked. Somebody came in and said they wanted this particular shoe or they saw the shoe in the window, and they gave you the number. I think the first number was the color. The second number was the material. The third number was the height of the heel. The last number was the price, 8.99, 9.99, or whatever. I could tell, after a couple weeks working, when they came in and they gave me a number, whether we had that shoe in that size before going into the back. I did a lot of selling shoes [in the] summers.

Then, after a while, when I got older, I had a car, I would fill in for people on vacation. So, I would go to Irvington or I'd go to Newark or I would go to 34th Street in New York, and, again, I don't remember all of the details of that. There were some shoes you got an extra quarter if you sold those, or you got commission on top of your salary. I'd get a paycheck or money in an envelope. I don't remember. If you sold polish or a handbag or something, you got extra money. Most of it was ladies shoes. There were some kids' shoes. I don't think there were men's shoes.

The other part was the summers before then, we would go [to] Jersey City or, I guess, West New York, they had cabana clubs, which were basically swim clubs, I guess you would call them now, where you could rent a cabana. You'd go there in your car. It was in North Bergen, I guess. The one was called Columbia Park Swim Club, and then the one in Jersey City, which is no longer there, was called Skyline Cabana Club, right at the Statue of Liberty. We'd play softball in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, which, if you grow up somewhere else, that's kind of a mindboggling sort of a thing, but that's just where we went.

At Columbia, we'd go there maybe after lunch or we'd bring lunch, I don't remember, and there was sort of a summer camp. They had this high school coach from Weehawken who was coaching us in basketball. So, we'd play basketball for an hour, and then we'd maybe take a dip in the pool. Then, we'd play softball for two hours and then a dip in the pool, and then we'd go back and play basketball for an hour. Then, we'd go home.

Then, when we got home and if it was light out, we would probably go out and play. So, we did that when I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. There was a little bit of boy-girl stuff going on, and

they had parties. There was that sort of stuff. It was a bit of a social life, but most of the boys spent their time, for me at least, playing softball.

There came a time, in the one in North Bergen, it sort of bordered, I don't know if it was Tonnelles Avenue, that covered area if you go towards the Lincoln Tunnel, if you come from Route 3, off the Turnpike to go to the Lincoln Tunnel, there's a covered roadway there, and this area bordered that. Behind the cabanas, it was all blacktop, and that's where we played softball, not on a grassy field. They drew the lines. The top of the cabanas, [which] must have been eight or ten feet tall, were in left field, and they were about 180 feet away. Maybe the day I turned thirteen was the day I could hit a softball onto the roof, when my friend was pitching, who would groove one just in the right spot. Then, when we went to Skyline, left field was about the same distance, but they had a twenty-foot fence and I could never do it. No matter how hard I tried, I could not hit the ball over that fence. It was fine, I played well. I had a great time. I think we played other cabana clubs.

On Sundays, in the falls, this other kid, Marty and I, we ended up going with this coach, the guy who was our coach at Columbia Cabana Club, which at some point was owned by mobsters and eventually shut down, but I can remember those guys screaming and yelling at people. It looked pretty scary. Anyway, he got us to play basketball. He was coaching. Was it him? I think it was him. He was coaching a team from a synagogue in North Bergen that didn't have enough kids. So, Marty and I would take the bus up on a Thursday night and practice up there. Then, at like ten o'clock, we'd walk back to the bus, get on the bus at 80th Street in North Bergen, and go back to Hoboken. Then, on Sundays, we would play.

Two recollections, one is we were playing a game in Fort Lee. There was some big kid on their team. I was guarding somebody, and this kid set a pick. Nobody said anything, and I ran into it and I went down. I think I got knocked out for a split second. I never hit a pick that hard. It was legal, but I can remember falling flat on my back.

Then, the other thing I remember, and I don't know where we were playing, but Marty's father and my father were in the front seat, and the assassination of Malcolm X came on the radio. I didn't know much about who Malcolm X was, but I'm sure it was a Sunday afternoon. I have to look up the date, but I was in the car coming back from this basketball game. Somewhere in the basement, I think it made the move with us from Piscataway, is a green satin jacket with a white emblem for the B'nai Abraham championship team from that year, '65, '66, or something like that. I think I can still fit in it, which probably meant that it was big when I got it. I'm sure there's other ones, but you're getting most of the good ones, the ones that I've certainly told before. [Editor's Note: Malcolm X was assassinated on Sunday, February 21, 1965, while addressing his Organization of Afro-American Unity at the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights, New York City.]

KR: What schools did you go to, and what was your schooling like?

JR: It was Brandt, B-R-A-N-D-T, and then, I don't remember this, but I think we stayed there for ninth grade, from kindergarten to ninth grade, because the new high school, Hoboken High School to replace Demarest High School, which is where my brother went, wasn't open. I

remember a conversation at a reunion that said we were in the high school for only three years. I don't really remember that clearly. I remember, of course, being in biology class in tenth grade when the announcement came on that Kennedy was shot.

In Brandt, we played slapball on the roof--it had a big fence, obviously--with a Spalding ball. I bought one of those recently. I was going to show my three-year-old granddaughter, and I decided, no, that's not a good idea for her, bouncing that thing around. We played with a twenty-five-cent Spalding. Oh, I'll go back and tell you one other story. Speaking of Spaldings and playing, we would play on the four street corners between Ninth and Tenth on Bloomfield, slapball, same thing, except, unlike the roof, the four corners all had sewers, and of course the ball would periodically go down the sewer. For twenty five cents, you couldn't leave it there. We would pick up the really, really heavy sewer plate, take a hanger, and dig a ball out of that mucky sewer, whatever was down there. I eventually ended up with a kidney infection and spent a whole summer in bed at home because my mother was afraid to send me to a hospital, where I could've gotten cured quicker. Nonetheless, I spent the whole summer in bed when I was five or six. I guess that wouldn't have been from the sewer because that would've been years later. Anyway, my friend Robert and I were putting the sewer cover back, and my toe got in the way. Marty's father, my sister-in-law's father, was a podiatrist, so I had to go and have the nail drilled off my big toe. We got the ball, but I learned about the sewer plate.

Speaking of bikes, the other quick story is I never learned to ride a bike, but my brother did. I don't think we had a bike. He must've borrowed it, and he put me on the bar. I don't know if I was on the handle bars, and of course he forgot to tell me to keep my feet out of the spokes. So, we came home and I was all banged up, which reminds me of one other story and I hope you can figure out and make sense. I think my earliest recollection, I might've been three years old. I could've been a little older. There was a Hudson County park, up in North Bergen. I must've gone running along by the pool there and I fell, and that opened up a gash in the back of my head. I can remember my father picking me up and carrying me, and I think it was an ambulance took me to the hospital to get stitches. Again, maybe my brother remembers how old I was, but I think I was only three or four.

Anyway, where were we? Brandt. Brandt was, I don't remember where exactly, we had to walk two or three blocks over and then three blocks down to Brandt, and then there was no automobile traffic on the street between the school and one of the side streets. There was a candy store there, where you could get the five-cent soft pretzels. I was retelling that story the other day because my son, who's visiting with us now, was making the same pretzels from scratch, which you had to eat them right away. The next day, they weren't quite the same, but they were very good. They used to be a nickel. [Editor's Note: Joseph F. Brandt Primary School is located on Ninth Street between Garden Street and Park Avenue in Hoboken.]

I remember in that schoolyard, there was some kid who knocked over a friend of mine, and I went running after him. The school guard stopped me and took me to the principal's office and wanted to know what I was doing, and I said I was helping out my friend and I got caught running in the schoolyard. I remember seeing Mr. Gaynor, the principal, who seemed enormous at the time, maybe he was, I don't know, but that was my trip to the principal's office.

I was a pretty good student, although I like the stuff in the pandemic, where people have posted things about schoolteachers lying to them about their child, "What a pleasure he was to have in class." [laughter] The parents are finding out, he's not really a pleasure to have in class. I remember my handwriting, the notes on the report cards were, "Terrible handwriting" and, "Doesn't sit still." These days, I probably would've been on some drug or something because I was antsy, probably bored because I got stuff.

I did okay. I wasn't a great student. [laughter] I can't remember doing homework. It's weird, whereas my kids and their kids, I remember them clearly doing it. I'm sure I did it, but a lot of times, it was done the ten minutes in study hall or something. That, of course, just killed me my first year at Rutgers. I just wasn't prepared. I had no study habits. I thought I could do it the night before, and you couldn't do it. I wasn't that smart.

In high school, they picked a few of us to go to Stevens [Institute of Technology] to take calculus, and I just never put any effort into it. I thought you could just go to class and do it, and I never learned it. It was a waste of time, a waste of their time and my time. It turned out it didn't help me much my first year at Rutgers either. It took me almost flunking out to figure out how to go to college and how to learn and study a little bit better.

Yes, I got through. It was all this, "You got a ninety-five? Why didn't you get a hundred?" stuff and I tried hard not to do that to my kids. But my kids' SAT scores were embarrassingly better than mine. I applied to Rutgers-New Brunswick and Stevens Tech, which I could've gotten, I think they gave three or four kids in Hoboken High School a full scholarship, but I didn't think I wanted to be an engineer. There weren't a lot of other options at Stevens that I knew of, so I didn't really want to go there. My brother went there with a full scholarship.

I was in high school, obviously, in twelfth grade, when the letter came, and of course, my mother opened it. At one point, I had this huge fight with my mother about opening my mail. It's one of the few times I've kind of totally lost it and literally had a family fight and I can remember yelling about that. Anyway, she called the school. Somebody called the teacher, and she called me up to tell me I got accepted to Rutgers. I forget what class I was in. I was pretty stunned because, like I said, I was better than average SATs, but I don't know how I compared to my classmates at the time. I got in.

I had an English teacher, Mrs. Bufano, and she had us--to this day, I still read newspapers partly because of her--if you read a newspaper, she had a list of words, for every ten words you could find and cut out of the newspaper in a sentence, you could get a point on your final grade or your quarter grade or whatever. So, I can remember looking for the words that were on the list. [I had] Mr. Rodriguez for biology. My wife has much better recollections of high school classes and things than I do. I wasn't in the school play, but I remember almost dying. I don't know where we were going after the school play. I was with some of the kids who were in the play. There's a little bridge going from Hoboken out to Weehawken, and the kid was going way too fast and hit a bump. My side of the car started to look like it was going right for a pole and obviously we never hit the pole, we were fine, but there was a moment there that I was like, "Oh, this is not good." There were a couple moments like that in cars.

I was driving my Volkswagen one time--this may have been after I graduated--and it was a highway that was under repair. Somehow, I didn't see it, read it well. There was like an entrance ramp, but it should've been closed. It was closed, but the concrete barrier was one of those [that] starts as a triangle. I can't show you with my hands, but I can describe it for you. It's basically a triangle. It starts at a small point and then it's a V-shape going out and it gets wider. I'm going forty or fifty on the highway, and the next thing I realize, in a split second, is I have a tire on each side of the V. I just turned the wheel, and I ended up on the entrance ramp of the road that was closed. So, I had to then back on to the highway and get back on it. It was one of those, I guess, you survive them. Not everybody survives mistakes on the highway, but I had a couple of accidents, minimal accidents.

I think my parents did tell me when I was two or three, we were in a rollover accident, and cars in those days were built like tanks. Even though you didn't have seatbelts, we all came out of it okay. But I don't think I ever got the full story of that. I don't think anybody got hurt. The story was, as I remember, the car did roll over.

I think that gets me through high school. I didn't do much in high school. I didn't do much at Rutgers. What did I do? I was in the Key Club in high school, and I had all these quick schemes to try to raise money for Key Club, which I don't think ever ended up doing anything. One of my uncles had, I don't know where he came across, boxes and boxes of these little notebooks, and we were going to sell them for Key Club. We couldn't sell them. I remember having tons of them leftover.

I remember trying to build a bookcase with a friend in his basement. [laughter] My brother ended up helping us out, but it was all crooked. It was terrible, but I think we brought it into one of the classes. That was in either seventh or eighth grade. I don't think it was in high school. What else? There was the time in high school, I think we had, it must have been, not the inspectors but the people who do certifications for high schools must've been visiting. We were all supposed to be on our best behavior and I don't know what we were doing, but we were playing some game and the coin fell through the table. I looked down to get the coin, and while all these people were in the cafeteria, this mouse goes running by. I don't remember what happened. I just remember seeing a mouse in the cafeteria at the time there wasn't supposed to be a mouse in the cafeteria. In elementary school, we would go home for lunch because I would watch *Guiding Light* for years, and in high school, I guess we ate in the cafeteria there. I don't know if you could go out or not. I think you could, but I don't know if we ever did. I don't remember. [Editor's Note: *Guiding Light* was a radio soap opera from 1937 to 1956. It was then adapted to television, airing from 1957 to 2009.]

KR: You mentioned you had a family member who went to Rutgers.

JR: Yes, so, my older cousin, Harold, different last name, was a year ahead of me. He was Class of '69, and then I actually had a cousin a year younger, Ken, who went to Rutgers a year after me. He was Class of '71. Harold ended up getting a Ph.D. in psychology. I got a Ph.D. in economics, and Ken is an M.D. and is a gastroenterologist in North Jersey. So, we did okay. I roomed with Harold in Frelinghuysen my first year, and then I roomed with Ken in Frelinghuysen, different room, my second year. Then, I moved off campus. [Editor's Note:

Frelinghuysen Hall is a residence hall on George Street on the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University. It is one of the "River Dorms." It was built in 1956. There are classrooms in the basement.]

KR: Did you visit Rutgers before you started your freshman year?

JR: I'd take the ride back with my uncle and my father to bring Harold back on the weekends, when he came home. It was that wonderful time when you were a kid and you could sit in the back of the car and I'd ride back. Then, on the ride back to Hoboken, I'd fall asleep. It was a great hour's sleep in the car. I don't remember how much we were actually on campus. I didn't know anything about it. The idea of researching schools or getting a tutor for SATs or a college counselor or even using a high school counselor, I had no clue, and there was no way we were going to afford anything other than Rutgers or Stevens. So, those were the options.

I guess some people went to, in those times, they were all teacher's colleges, Jersey City State, Montclair State, if you wanted to be a teacher. My sister-in-law went to Jersey City State. Those were the options. I applied to just those two, Rutgers [and Stevens]. One of our good friends, Bruce, went to Rutgers-Newark, and he ended up being a lawyer in California. Everybody, in my cohort there, did pretty well.

KR: You started Rutgers in September 1966. What do you remember about your first days and weeks at Rutgers?

JR: Again, I know I had five eight o'clock classes. We did have classes on Busch and you'd catch the bus in front of The Ledge. I spent way too much time with Dominic and Bob from Hoboken in The Ledge, which was a snack bar, instead of studying. I went every night. I have no idea what we talked about, what we did. I think Bob flunked out. I don't know what he did. Dominic, I met years later, and he became an architect, which really surprised me, but whatever he did at Rutgers, he went back to school and did something else. He got his architect degree. So, I spent a lot of time at The Ledge. We had the beanies. I don't remember the sort of activities. [Editor's Note: The Ledge is now called the Student Activities Center, located on George Street, next to Frelinghuysen Hall.]

I remember going to football games wearing a sports jacket. I was looking in the yearbook--I guess that was '69, so let's hold off going to the Princeton game--I don't remember any particular game other than a game against Army, where it drizzled the whole game, but I don't know if that was in '66 or not. I remember going to basketball games and seeing Lloyd and Valvano play basketball at the old gym [the Barn]. I think I was much more into basketball than football games, but I might have gone to the football games. [Editor's Note: The first-ever college football game was played on November 6, 1869 between Rutgers and Princeton. On September 27, 1969, the two teams faced off in the centennial game, and Rutgers won 29-0. Jim Valvano (1946-1993) played on the Rutgers men's basketball team from 1964 to 1967. He went on to coach men's college basketball, winning the national championship with NC State in 1983. Robert "Bobby" Lloyd played on the Rutgers basketball team from 1964 to 1967. He then played in the NBA from 1967 to 1969. Lloyd and Valvano led Rutgers to a third-place finish in the 1967 National Invitation Tournament (NIT).]

Then, I had Western civ [civilization], and then I had calculus. I had English. For English, I had a husband in one semester and his wife in the other semester in 1966-'67, and one of the classic stories is from the semester we had the woman, Mrs. Muth, M-U-T-H, probably a graduate student in English, we showed up one day, and it was supposed to be a discussion of the book. At that time, we all had books we were supposed to read over the summer. Just to [compare], maybe the honors program has one book. I think we had four books. We had *Growing Up Absurd* by Goodman, impressive I can remember this, *The Other America* by Harrington, which was kind of incredible in how similar, if you go back and read it today, probably a lot of the same issues about inequality that were on the table then were in that book. Maybe somebody else, I'm sure, in the group will remember the other ones, but for many years, I had those books. When we moved, I probably got rid of them, but those two I remember reading. [Editor's Note: *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* is a 1960 book by Paul Goodman. *The Other America* is a 1962 book by Michael Harrington.]

Anyway, we showed up for class for Mrs. Muth. She was asking questions about the book, and nobody had anything to say. It was just terrible. At some point, she just broke down crying and left the room. That had a pretty big impact on me. When my son went to school--the older one went to Duke and he went to Piscataway High School--one of his first reactions was, in class everybody read the stuff. You could go to class and you could have a discussion because everybody read it. It was interesting. Later on, when I was at Rutgers and I would try to get a discussion going and I would get no reaction, I would tell them this story and I would say, "No matter what you guys do, I am not crying and I am not leaving this classroom." I used this story. More than anything she said in class about the books, you remember the other stuff that comes up in those kind of events.

Just going back to high school for a second, again, not remembering necessarily a lot of things, but I remember this kid, Dennis, and the gym teacher--the typical gym teacher, young, bulked-up guy--and Dennis just wouldn't listen. I can remember them, one running after the other on the rooftop, just trying to catch him and just total juvenile delinquent kind of stuff, just chaos there. I remember being stunned in those days.

I don't know whether you've heard this, that when we had to do swimming at Rutgers freshman year, you had no bathing suit. I was not a great swimmer, but you had to learn. My younger son went to Columbia. They also still have a swim requirement, but I assume they wear bathing suits. We didn't wear bathing suits at Rutgers, [laughter] which is totally bizarre, but I guess they were trying to prevent germs or whatever, I don't know.

KR: Everybody was just nude.

JR: Yes.

KR: Wow.

JR: You haven't heard that story.

KR: No. [laughter]

JR: You've got to ask other people whether I'm having a strange recollection, but I am 99.5 percent sure that was what swim class was. That was the swimming pool behind the basketball court on College Avenue. Yes, that was gym. Everybody had to have gym.

I had English. I had Western civ. I had calc [calculus]. What else? I don't remember. Somewhere, I probably had [transcripts], unless I threw them out because I was embarrassed because I was on probation after the first semester of the first year. I didn't take Spanish. I ended up taking German. I don't know if I would've done that in the first semester. I don't know any German today. Science, I guess I had to take geology. I can remember falling asleep when they turned out the lights in--where was it? Was that in Voorhees? It was a big [auditorium]. There was also a big auditorium for lectures in Records Hall. We can talk a little bit later about that.

I don't know if they did the fraternity things in the first semester or the second semester. I wasn't fraternity material. Again, I was way too young and immature for that. I probably drank too much beer, got thrown out of a place for not behaving. We spent a lot of time going out at twelve o'clock to Carolier Lanes to go bowling and then going to Greasy Tony's afterwards for cheesesteaks. There were a couple of sophomores on our floor. It turns out, my floor had two guys, which years later I found out, who went to high school with my wife. I obviously didn't know that at the time, but one of them we see quite a bit because he's on her reunion committee and scholarship committee. So, I'm still in touch with him. I've got to make sure I get his name and see if he can sign up, but they were on the floor. There were a lot of pranksters. A lot of that stuff was happening on the floor, shaving cream and empty milk cartons that you step on and shoot into the room and stuff like that. [Editor's Note: Greasy Tony's was a fast-food restaurant at the corner of Somerset Street and Easton Avenue. It was in operation from the 1960s until the 1990s.]

Calling your parents, there was a phone at the end of the hall if you wanted to make a phone call or if your parents called you. When my son got to college, he called and asked if he should be calling every day. Not if you don't have anything to say. I think they had just started maybe email and stuff at that point in 1996. We said, "Why?" He said, "Well, some of the kids here, they're calling their parents every day." It's like, "Well, you've been to sleepaway camp. You're used to being away on your own. If you don't need to call us, don't call us. It's fine. Just send a letter or stay in touch. Send an email." We stayed mostly in touch with email or talked to him once a week or whatever. I don't know what happens today. I was often in class teaching at Rutgers, telling students to tell their mother, while they were busy texting during my class, "Tell them how great your econ professor is."

I have one strong recollection from my calculus class. We had Professor [Joshua] Barlaz from the Math Department. I looked, it was interesting, in the yearbook. I guess I didn't realize this. There were just twenty of us who were math majors, and I was only a math major because some high school counselor said, "Gee, you're good at math. You should be a math major." That was like the stupidest thing ever. If I had understood the different options at Rutgers and the different things you could do, I would've made totally different choices, and it's sort of amazing to me that

I got through a math major. I don't know if I had the lowest GPA [grade point average] of the math majors, but I graduated.

Anyway, Professor Barlaz had what he thought was a sense of humor and was early on doing a proof in calculus. He finished a proof, and he wrote the letters "QED" after the proof, which is Latin for [*quod erat demonstrandum*], essentially we've shown what we were supposed to show. We proved the proof. But he didn't say that. He wrote, "QED" and he said, "Quite easily done," which is cute, but for three years, I thought "QED" meant "Quite easily done." [laughter] I was a freshman. The professor said, "QED, quite easily done." I wrote it down.

When I was undergraduate director years later, I would tell this story to the graduate students and the TAs [teaching assistants] that you have to be careful what you say because you are the expert up there. They're writing it down, and not everybody is going to get what you think is an obvious joke. For me, it turned out to be useful in providing that sort of advice to people, that you have to be careful that an offhand comment you make that you think is funny, first, might offend somebody, which you have to worry about these days more than then, but that somebody is going to carry that with them. I can remember, it wasn't in class, but I remember the first time I saw the phrase "for all intents and purposes" written out. It was like, "Oh, that's what that is when people [say it]." I kind of knew what people meant when they said it, but if you had asked me to spell out the words, there was no way I knew what that set of words looked like. It was like one of those bells goes off when you read it, you see it on a piece of paper. Yes, I remember that. I did poorly in that class, but it wasn't Professor Barlaz's fault.

I think I may have had physics--I don't think I had physics then--physics was maybe my sophomore year because you needed this two-credit physics class for a math major, and that was the only class I flunked. I had no interest in it. I can still remember meeting with Mr. Siegel, who was the TA, who was a graduate student, who I remember was a big guy. What was interesting was I think he wore jeans and sneakers. It was like everybody got dressed, and that was sort of odd. He was telling me, "If you don't do this work, you're going to flunk." Again, when I would deal with faculty as undergraduate director and they'd say, "People aren't doing the work. Don't they know they're going to flunk?" I would tell them this story. I said, "He told me I was going to flunk and I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I just couldn't get it." The next year, I took a different physics and different professor, and I got by. It was a whole year of physics, and I did it. I don't know any physics today. I memorized what I needed to memorize to pass the class, but that was another good lesson. It's like sometimes you just can't do it. You give up, and you come back next year and you try again. All the counseling and all the advice in the world, if somebody just has a block about it, they're just not going to do it.

I have students tell me they studied so hard, they did this and did that, and they're still getting "F's." I said, "Some people just don't get economics. They don't get it the first time. They don't get it the second time. Maybe the second time, you get it a little bit better." For some people, it's a way of thinking that just isn't the way your mind thinks and as a result, it isn't logical to you, whereas me, when I first got exposed to economics, it was so obvious and so logical, having had the math, that it just seemed simple and easy and straightforward. It's always difficult for professors, who have been doing this for twenty, thirty, forty years, to try to remember what it's like the first time you see or listen to this material. I would tell people, it took me many years. I

mean, I can remember coming home the summer after--I don't know if it was graduate school even--I'm trying to remember, which way does the supply curve go? It was like, "Don't memorize this stuff. Try to understand it, because if you memorize it, you're going to screw it up." You've got to be able to do it. You've got to be able to reason through it.

Now, I hope one of the things my kids have gotten from me, that they pick up at home, [is] that you just don't give them the answers. You reason through stuff, you go step [by step], like a proof, and then you sort of say, "Why is the price of beef higher during a pandemic? Let's think about what's happening. It's not just somebody's raising the price." "It's higher because somebody raised the price." "No, that isn't why. What's going on?" You try to get people to think like that. But there's some people, when you're teaching, they're taking the class because it's required. They just can't get it.

That got me through freshman year, not doing all that well. Then, I think, that summer or the next summer, I didn't sell shoes. My uncle worked at a concrete yard in West New York that also had to deal with the mob, because of the union and teamsters or whatever. There were guys in black limos that would periodically drive up. [laughter] I had no idea. One of my great experiences dealing with the union was a day when a customer came in. I learned the difference between concrete and cement, which I try not to correct people too much, but they always get it wrong. Cement is the powder which you mix with stone and water to get concrete. So, the trucks that you see mostly are making concrete. They're not cement trucks. Anyway, they were supplying the concrete for most of the high rises that were getting built in Fort Lee at the time, so the guy who had the business had a very good business. It was lots and lots of concrete trucks going out every morning. I had to get up pretty early because the trucks went out early. There wasn't a Home Depot in those days, so people who wanted to buy concrete to do their own steps would come in and buy bags of concrete. I remember two issues that came up. One, I went into the yard to grab a bag of concrete for somebody. I got yelled at by the union guy because I was taking a union guy's job and the guys who were in the office were in the office and the guys who were in the yard were in the yard and they couldn't do the other guy's job. It was like, "Okay. He's just a stupid college kid. Let it go."

Then, there was the other time, somebody came in--I'll go back to grade school, another good story. I kind of knew three dimensions, but all the concrete stuff was sold in cubic yards. When you're trying to decide for a truck, somebody wants a truckload of concrete, you have to know how many cubic yards. Length by width by height, you have to do the calculations. Somebody came in with all the dimensions, and I did the calculations. I did it right, but the guy must have done something wrong or the guy who loaded the truck did something wrong because he came up short. They had to send another truck out. So, I got yelled at. They redid the calculations, and they said, "No, you did it right, but you should always add a half a yard, just in case someone messed up the measurements, or it doesn't all come out."

Going back, one of my other great lessons, educational lessons, was I think in sixth grade shop maybe, sixth grade. I still have, by the way, the tie rack with my name "Jeff" spelled out in script in a rope with little pegs--I don't use it, but I still have it--that I made in shop. I was not good. I have a friend who's really [good]. He's got a whole basement and he builds furniture for his grandkids. It's just amazing. Anyway, we were maybe in a math class. I wasn't in shop

class. We were in a math class, and the teacher sent me down to the shop to get a two by four. I don't know if he was doing this to teach me a lesson or he just needed a two by four for something. I got to the shop floor, and I asked the guy, I said, "Mr. Pizza," I think Piazza or Pizza was his name, "wants a two by four." The shop teacher said, "How long?" At that moment, I understood three dimensions. It was like, "Oh, you needed a third dimension to know how long the two by four is supposed to be." It's like here I am, sixty years later, I can still remember that educational moment when somebody asked me how long a two by four should be. Again, I don't know if that was a planned thing, but it was one of those things that happened. That kind of takes me through year one.

Like I said, in the summer, I sold shoes or I worked in the concrete [yard], one of those summers I worked there, because my brother had worked there. My cousin had worked there, and I think my brother worked there the most. He was an engineer. He was more into the building stuff. It wasn't really my thing, but it was a good experience.

Then, one other interesting experience is, in those days--something which comes back now that I do consulting on personal injuries--one of our drivers got killed on the job, got crushed between [two trucks]. He was on the back of his truck unloading the concrete. I think they're designed differently, so this can't happen. Another truck backed up and I don't know if they had those back-up beepers in those days or he couldn't hear it, but he got crushed. That was not a good day. I don't remember exactly what happened after that, but I remember him being one of the younger guys on the job. That was another eye-opening thing. People get killed on the job. It happens.

KR: You mentioned ...

JR: I'm sorry. Is the mic picking up my neighbors? Do you hear that?

KR: I hear them, but I can hear you perfectly.

JR: Okay, because I can close the window.

KR: You mentioned wearing a beanie.

JR: Yes.

KR: What other Rutgers traditions stick out in your mind?

JR: So, the beanie story is--I think I have it somewhere--but unfortunately my mother put it in the laundry and didn't read the label about the dryer. So, the beanie never fit years later. I know there are all these [traditions]. Other than wearing a sport jacket and walking to the football games for the most part from College Avenue across, I can't say I remember.

The other thing I remember about freshman year, we had a bunch of people who were in ROTC, and ROTC did their outside drills on Wednesdays. I think it must've been the first eight or nine

weeks of our freshman year, it rained every Wednesday, so they couldn't do their outside drills. I'm pretty sure I remember that.

It's mostly just hanging out in the dorm. In those days, I think the lounges were still open in the River Dorms. They eventually closed them because people committed suicide off the open lounges on the top floor, and so they sealed up those [outside areas]. You could still go to the lounge, but they sealed up the outside part. I [remember] just sort of hanging out, wasting time. I don't remember anything about not crossing the gate at Old Queens, like some of them talk about now. I don't remember anything about Willie the Silent. I don't remember that. [Editor's Note: On Voorhees Mall, on the College Avenue Campus, there is a statue of William the Silent, or William I, Prince of Orange. Erected in 1928 to commemorate Rutgers University's Dutch roots, the statue is known as "Willie the Silent."]

Let me close that. [Editor's Note: Jeff Rubin closes the window.] That's better. Sorry, yes, it was distracting to me, even if you couldn't hear it. When I went through the yearbook, it was interesting because of the people who spoke freshman year or '69-'70, I remember some people. I don't know if I mentioned to you or I mentioned to the other guy who emailed me some of the speakers. Hubert Humphrey, I don't know if he was freshman year. We were trying to search and find out, but he said Muhammad Ali was junior year. Barry Goldwater was probably later because it was either in '69 or '70. So, I have a clear recollection of that speech and some of the back and forth actually, which I'll tell you when we get to later years. [Editor's Note: Vice President Hubert Humphrey spoke at the bicentennial convocation on September 22, 1966. Muhammad Ali spoke in Records Hall in 1967.]

Interestingly, in reading the yearbook, there was a lot of turmoil I guess in the Student Center, which maybe opened in '69 or '68. There were fights and drug problems. I was off campus, so I probably just wasn't as aware of that or I knew to stay away. There were all these issues. Maybe when we were freshman, they used to have dances at Records Hall and then you'd have townies come in and there were racial issues and there were fights and chairs flying. I don't know if The Four Tops and The Temptations were there, one or both, and I was not there. I don't think I went to any [concerts]. Maybe after I came back, I saw Art Garfunkel, and then maybe when I was at Rutgers, maybe it was in the summer, Rutgers tried to do a jazz festival and I went there with someone. I don't know what year. That didn't work. There weren't very many people there. [laughter] It wasn't a big success.

I don't remember Rutgers traditions. Walt Ashby was--what's the word for the floor guy, why am I blanking?--our preceptor, in those days, and I think he played hockey too on a club team for Rutgers. I remember that. Yes, hanging out at The Ledge was sort of a big and then going bowling, all this kind of wasting [time]. I'm trying to remember if there were other things.

New Brunswick was pretty much in the dumps. I worked for a little bit at National Shoe store there, and at the time, there was a group of transvestites that would come into the store and I just couldn't do it. I could not sell shoes to these big black guys dressed as women. I'm here, this naïve seventeen-year-old kid from Hoboken. This is totally new to me, and I didn't have a clue what was going on.

I'm not sure when Menlo Park Mall opened, but, you know, the malls became the end of the downtowns, and the National Shoe store closed and all those stores closed until J&J [Johnson & Johnson] came back years and years and years later. There were porn movies downtown, and so New Brunswick was not [safe]. It was amazing, I ended up living on Remsen [Avenue], which is between Albany Street and closer to Douglass, which was not a great neighborhood, but I don't remember having any car problems with anybody and I never got mugged, as far as I can remember. Maybe I was just in the right place at the right time, or it wasn't as dangerous as we thought.

Years later, obviously, we were at Rutgers and parents would always ask about safety. I don't know if anybody paid any attention or thought about that, but reading the yearbook about senior year and the Student Center, it sounds pretty scary. There was a lot of bad stuff going on there. Again, I do remember reports of riots or fights and chairs flying and stuff, but I wasn't near any of that.

KR: Do you remember the riots in 1967, the riots in Newark? Then, there were near riots in New Brunswick, and there were riots in Plainfield and other places in New Jersey.

JR: I'm trying to think whether I was working in Newark. For the most part, I don't remember seeing any of that, other than on TV. My wife, her father had a store on the edge of Plainfield, and maybe in his nineties, one of his sons found a rifle that he had under his bed in Florida, which he finally got rid of. [laughter] I think he was robbed a couple of times. They were in Plainfield but on the edge of South Plainfield. That was the end of Plainfield as a fairly successful Jewish community. People just left, obviously. Hoboken didn't have that problem. If there were riots or speeches or protests, it was not part of my life. I don't know if my father was working in Newark. I don't remember him saying anything. He may have been in Jersey City at that time, I don't know. Whatever it was in New Brunswick, I don't think New Brunswick was as bad as the others, but it was pretty bad in Plainfield, I think, yes. No, for me, I assume that stuff happened during the summer, so we weren't in New Brunswick. I was home, probably working in West New York. It's just something you saw on TV mostly, as best as I can recall. I'm happy to read Philip Roth and get a sense of Newark. We have friends who grew up in Union, but Hoboken was pretty far removed from Essex County and Union County and Middlesex County, so you just didn't see it. [Editor's Note: The novelist Philip Roth (1933-2015) grew up in the Weequahic section of Newark and set some of his novels there.]

KR: Your sophomore, junior, senior year, what was your course of study like?

JR: I took more math courses because I was a math major. In those days--again, I said, "in those days"--but in those days, we had, as I remember it, there was a distribution requirement. You needed six credits or twelve credits from six different areas, social science, humanities, science and so on, which is how I ended up taking economics in my junior year. I needed another social science course; Barry Qualls always liked that story because he's a big fan of forcing people to get a broad liberal arts education and that's why it matters. In fact, when Rutgers went through this whole turmoil about its new curriculum seven or eight years ago and we were trying to classify courses into these A through Z categories, I thought it was just ridiculous. [Editor's Note: This is referring to the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum]

requirements.] We could go back to the same six areas and tell students they had to take six or twelve credits from those areas and you would have gotten [a broad education], but the politics were every department wanted to be able to have some weight, have some of their courses required, so they could get students, so they could get enrollment, so they could get funding. To me, it just made the system way too complicated. [Editor's Note: Barry Qualls served as an English professor and administrator at Rutgers from 1971 to 2016. Qualls held the post of Vice President of Undergraduate Education and headed the Task Force on Undergraduate Education.]

One of the courses I took--I don't know [the year]; I wish I could find my transcripts, but I don't have them--I took "Greek and Roman Civilization," partly because I needed a humanities and partly because it was at Douglass. It was a way to meet women theoretically, to go to Douglass. Women would take classes at Rutgers and vice versa, and there was a lot of that social effort, at mixers, back and forth. So, I took "Greek and Roman Civilization," which was actually very interesting. I had all these books later on, on Locke and Rousseau and some of that. When I got to graduate school, I read John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*, and then my son took a lot of philosophy and he used some of the same books. So, I thought that was kind of an interesting course for me.

Maybe one last story for today. I think I'm kind of talked out. I don't know if the rocket's going to take off or not. [Editor's Note: This refers to the SpaceX launch, scheduled for the day of the interview, May 27, but delayed due to weather. On May 30, SpaceX successfully launched two astronauts, Robert L. Behnken and Douglas O. Hurley, into orbit in the Crew Dragon capsule, which carried them to the International Space Station. The reusable Falcon 9 rocket landed intact.] In "Greek and Roman Civilization," one of the things we learned about was the concept of hubris. In some of the writings, that was kind of the moral of the story, that people who showed hubris end up being brought back down to earth. Then, I think in my junior year, it must've been, I took a course in "Chinese Literature and Translation." Don't ask me why. I needed a humanities. It probably fit the schedule or whatever. I had to write a book review of a novel called the *Monkey* and it dawned on me, as I read this thing, that it was the same as the Greek and Roman problem of hubris. I wrote my book review basically describing how this was the same moral; I don't remember what it was. What was impressive to me, for the first time in my college education, or of my education generally, is I could take something I learned in a totally different class and apply it somewhere else. It was like kind of, "Wow, isn't that interesting that you could learn something over here in this course and you could think about it or read something in a totally different way and yet get a similar lesson out of it." I probably told that story to people in classes myself many times. I think I got a really good grade because I thought it was a really good paper. I could make some good points that I'm sure the other people had no clue. I had a really big advantage over everybody, and it made me read a book in a way that was very different than I was probably reading books before then. [Editor's Note: *Monkey: A Folk-Tale of China* is Arthur Waley's 1942 translation of the Chinese novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en.]

I grew up in a household where there was nothing to read other than the *Daily News* or the *New York Post*, and my parents just didn't think much of reading books. I can remember them saying something like, "Well, what do you get from reading a book? What's the point of that?" At some point, I read a book, one of the early Joyce Carol Oates books. I don't know if I was in

high school or in college--I think it was *Them*; her stuff got kind of weird later on--but that was the idea of reading novels for fun. [Editor's Note: Joyce Carol Oates' *Them* (1969) is the third book in the *Wonderland Quartet* series. In 2003, Oates told *The Washington Post* that she thinks she will best be remembered for *Them* and her novel *Blonde*, published in 2000. Dr. Rubin met Oates at a dinner for the Honors program.]

Then, the other one I remember having a big impact was Jonathan Kozol wrote *Death at an Early Age*, which was stunning for somebody who grew up without those kinds of problems. I read several of his books after that, but that got me interested in reading, not nearly like my kids. My grandkids are voracious readers. My view was, "When my kids get bored, there's going to be lots of things around for them to read." I'm not going to make them read them, but this stuff is going to be there. Then, they grew up reading, they started with *The New York Times* sports page and then of course they could memorize all the statistics and all that. Then, you go from there to reading other stuff. They read, my older one especially, both of them, they read to their kids two or three books a night, even if it's the same book, all the time, all the time. [Editor's Note: *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* is a 1967 autobiographical book written by author, educator and activist Jonathan Kozol.]

The one in D.C., their kids, by the time they were seven or eight, I think, they'd gone through all the *Harry Potter* books because their mom was a big *Harry Potter* fan, so totally different upbringing. My kids had a totally different upbringing than me, and their kids probably have a different upbringing than them. Of course, my wife was a schoolteacher, she knew a lot more than my parents did about what's important for raising kids, smart kids, kids who were motivated, kids who were thinking and so on, and so that translated into how the kids were raised. My tendency, as an economist, was to think through a problem, like I was saying, it was never giving them an answer. It was making them think about something.

Trying to explain to a three-year-old the space ship going up and meeting with another rocket ship without just putting on a video [is difficult] and she is very smart. She kind of picks up this stuff, and she remembers it. So, we'll see what happens today, but we'll watch the video. We'll watch it happen live. I can remember being at Rutgers on 9/11. I can remember [being] at Rutgers when the space shuttle blew up, both of those, but that's for next time. [Editor's Note: 9/11 refers to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. The Space Shuttle *Challenger* disintegrated seventy-three seconds after launch on January 28, 1986, killing all seven astronauts onboard. The *Columbia* disintegrated upon reentry on February 1, 2003, killing the seven crew members.]

KR: One last question for today. Do you remember who your economics professor was?

JR: The first one was a graduate student and I'll tell you his name. We may not want to leave it in because I don't think he was very good.

KR: Okay, sure.

JR: I take that back. His name was Fitzgerald. He was a graduate student. I had him for both micro and macro, probably in the basement in Frelinghuysen. Maybe for the first time that I think about, as we talk, maybe I found him boring because I found it easy and he had to do it slow for the people who weren't math majors and didn't find it easy. But tomorrow, I'll tell you about my intermediate micro economics teacher, which was a guy named Larry Falk, who was the guy who changed my life. [Editor's Note: Laurence "Larry" Falk served as an assistant professor in the Rutgers College Economics Department and an associate professor in the Economics Department at Hunter College of CUNY. He later worked as a research economist in the Office of Economic Policy for the State of New Jersey. He died in 2010 at the age of eighty-one.]

KR: Okay, I look forward to hearing this story.

JR: That's a great end to this episode, of this video. [laughter] I should've been a TV writer. [laughter]

KR: That sounds good. Well, I look forward to hearing more stories tomorrow.

JR: Okay. You do a great job letting me keep talking, unlike the lawyers. You just look at me, without saying, "Come on," your eyes are saying, "If there's more, keep going." You've done this before.

KR: Yes, I have. Is two-thirty a good start time tomorrow?

JR: Yes, we're good. I'll see you on WebEx.

KR: Thank you so much.

JR: Sure, great, thanks a lot.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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