RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTY SIEDERER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and
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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Marty Siederer. The interview is taking place on March 1, 2015, at 88 College Avenue, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interview is being conducted by myself, Molly Graham, and I'm joined by--

Mohammed Athar: Mohammed Athar.

MG: I should tell you that Mohammed works for us, and he's also taking our "Introduction to Oral History" course, so he's been with us for a while.

MA: Almost a year. In May, it'll be a year.

Marty Siederer: Great, great.

MG: So, Marty, let's start at the beginning. Can you just tell us when and where you were born?

MS: I was born on May 17, 1955, in Brooklyn, New York, Flatbush section. My parents, Doris and Herman Siederer. My mom was a homemaker. My dad worked eventually in the steel fabrication business, which was based in Brooklyn. In 1965, the company moved to South Plainfield, New Jersey, and we ended up moving to Highland Park, New Jersey, right down the street from here.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your family history, starting on your mother's side.

MS: My mother's maiden name was Orland. They came from Russia and also moved to the Brooklyn area, many of them ended up in the Upstate New York area, too. She met my dad at a dance. His family was also from the Russian area too; they're just part of the wave of immigrants of Russian Jews that came to America--their parents, not them. They met at a dance in 1952, got married right after that. In addition to myself, I have a sister, Joan, who is also a Rutgers graduate, went to Cook, got out in 1985, and got her Master's in Public Health fairly soon after that also from Rutgers.

MG: Is she older or younger than you?

MS: She's seven years younger.

MG: Were your parents were born in New York after their parents immigrated?

MS: That's correct.

MA: Were your grandparents escaping persecution from Russia?

MS: I don't know about persecution so much as it was just a better place to be in terms of economic opportunities. It wasn't anything about racial discrimination or religious discrimination at that point, but obviously, that came down in history.

MG: What do you know about your father's family history?

MS: My grandfather ran a candy store in Brooklyn, and really hustled to make a living. My dad always talked about the newspapers coming in on Saturday nights. Back then, the Sunday newspapers came out late on Saturday night, about 9:00 PM, ten o'clock. So he would be the one to put all the sections together, have to pick them up about two blocks away from the candy store. Then his father, my grandfather, would sell them. That grandfather died very young, so I really never got to know him at all.

MG: Tell us about growing up in New York and what you remember during those years.

MS: Yes. Again, I was in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. In the 1950s, early '60s, it's all the things that you heard about, with kids playing stoop ball, with kids buying the stickball bats or making them out of broom handles, or buying what they called the Spaldeens, the pink balls--playing stickball and games like that. I lived in an apartment complex, which probably now is a project, but back then, who knew? It was just a middle-class place to live. I think it was really one of those romantic eras in Brooklyn. Just as we were getting out, things started going downhill in terms of quality of life, and then Brooklyn sort of became a nostalgia place. Now Brooklyn's cool. [laughter]

MG: What have your parents told you about living through the Depression and World War II?

MS: I mean, they really didn't talk much about that at all. I think it was mainly that because they were middle class, it wasn't like they were rich to begin with. My mom used to joke that she did not have a middle name because her family couldn't afford one. `

MA: You mentioned in your survey that your father served in World War II in the Army Air Corps. Did he ever share any stories with you?

MS: A lot. One of the things he did share was that he served in the Air Corps. He was stationed in England, worked mainly on propellers, making sure that the propellers on the planes worked properly. We had family in England. At that time, during World War II, there were shortages of eggs and chocolate, but they were plentiful at the Army store, the PX [post exchange]. So he was the hero when he came to visit the relatives because he could bring candies and chocolates. Everybody loved him for that.

MG: Did he tell you any other stories about his service?

MS: He was never really pressed into action, fortunately. I think it was more he learned a lot about repairs, and I think that really made him very self-sufficient, and encouraged us to do that too, in terms of--my sister was sixteen years old, and she was taught how to change the oil on her car, and this was before you could drive up to a gas station or a Jiffy Lube and do that for twenty bucks.

MG: Had he met your mother before he entered the service?

MS: Met her afterward.

MG: Do you know how she spent the war years?

MS: I think mainly at home. She went to school. Back then, [women] either went on to become homemakers or had clerical jobs. It wasn't like now where opportunities are endless.

MG: What else about New York and your neighborhood do you remember from those years?

MS: I was just speaking with my mom about this the other day, because--remembering taking the bus with my best friend by ourselves. We were nine years old, and taking the bus probably about twenty blocks away to see a showing of *A Hard Day's* Night with The Beatles. Nowadays, can you imagine letting a nine-year-old take the bus or the train by themselves? No, you wouldn't do that.

MG: What did you think of The Beatles?

MS: It was really life-changing. Seeing them on Ed Sullivan, I remember that, seeing them in movies at that time. They were on the radio all over the place. It really gave me an appreciation of music.

MG: What were some other groups you liked from that time period?

MS: The Beatles mainly, and then, I think as the sixties went on, I really got into groups like Cream, Led Zeppelin, too. I think because when we moved to Highland Park, you were exposed to so many different things because of the composition of Highland Park. Highland Park, as you probably know, consists of a lot of Rutgers professors, melting pot of people from New York, other aspects of life. So you have in Highland Park, people who were Nobel Prize winners, Rutgers professors, *New York Times* journalists, actors. So in this little town, 1.8 square miles, you're exposed to so many different types of people, cultures, lifestyles, educational opportunities.

MG: I'm curious about the cultural dynamics in Brooklyn before you moved. Were there other families of the same heritage that clustered together?

MS: My best friend was Asian, and I remember being at his house. He was actually a next-door neighbor in the apartment complex on the fifth floor, 14th and Brooklyn Avenue. His father would teach him to write Chinese in the little boxes. I remember my dad coming in to pick me up, I guess. The father, Mr. Kwei, looked at him and said, "Oh my gosh, I hope I'm not doing something wrong." My dad was like, "No, it's okay. It's okay." Again, I think it was just a time when you did normal things. Obviously, you didn't have the opportunity to play games on your phone or computers, too, so you had to be creative. I also remember that right before we moved--you heard about the blackout in the Northeast. So, it was November 1965. We moved a month later. So listening to WABC, all of a sudden, records die, our power went out, [and] nobody knew what happened. My mom sent me about a block away to buy batteries, and of course, stores were closed. Nobody knew what the heck was going on. So I remember that very vividly.

MG: What caused the blackout?

MS: Apparently, there was a surge, or something happened with a power grid someplace. I know New York City--I think a lot of the Northeast was without power from about 5:30 that evening. I think it was November 19th, and I think it recovered the following morning. I also remember that ice cream was going to melt in our freezer, so we pigged out.

MG: I think I also heard that there was a big baby boom maybe nine months after the blackout.

MS: Yes. No additions to our family at that time, but I think also what you saw, too, was that people handled it very well. There was a blackout, I think it was, in the 1980s where unfortunately there was looting and things like that, but people really helped out. I think what was also helpful, too, was it happened to be a very warm November evening. I think it was around fifties or sixties--unheard of for November. So you didn't have to worry about bundling up or having on fans and air conditioning.

MG: I think when something like that happens to the whole city, there's a feeling of, "We're all in this together?" Did you feel that way when the blackout happened?

MS: Being young, it was the, "Wow, what the heck is going on?" and I get to eat ice cream. [laughter] That was the feeling I had.

MG: Tell us a little bit about your household and certain family traditions you had.

MS: We were Jewish, so I got sent to Hebrew school. Like most kids, I didn't want to go to Hebrew school. It was tacked on at the end of the day, so I wouldn't have time to play with my friends. I think the other thing that was different, too--because I know your question earlier was about differences between New York and New Jersey. Back then, even though it was public school, you went to school dressed up--nice shirt, nice pants. On assembly days, we all had to wear these ties that crossed, and there was a snap in the middle. So we moved out to Highland Park. First day of school, my mom dresses me up in a shirt with a tie. Everybody in Highland Park's Hamilton Elementary School's fifth grade was dressed very casually. Do you think I fit in with anybody on that day? No. [laughter]

MG: How old were you when you moved to Highland Park?

MS: Ten years old.

MG: So that was in 1965?

MS: Yes, December.

MG: How did you feel about the move?

MS: I missed my best friend at the time, Jimmy Kwei. I really missed him a lot. Again, going back to when we were talking about getting on public transportation by yourself, my mom let me take the bus, suburban transit, from New Brunswick to visit him. I would take--again, ten years old, I used to go back to visit him. I would take the bus by myself and then take the subway back down to Flatbush--things that you wouldn't let a young person do at all nowadays. So that mitigated a lot of it, and I did make friends after that bad dressing incident over at Hamilton School.

MA: What was school like in the early '60s?

MS: I think one of the big changes was you had a big elementary school, P.S. 269, in Brooklyn. Then coming to Hamilton School--again, in the town of Highland Park, very small. You walked to school. We actually moved to another apartment complex on Montgomery Street, so nothing changed in that part of it in, growing up. I did make friends. It was almost like Brooklyn in that you could walk to everything.

MG: I think when you grow up in the city, anywhere outside the city feels like the boonies. Did you have that feeling?

MS: Not in Highland Park, because you walked around Brooklyn; you could walk around Highland Park. But I think, later on in life, when we moved into East Brunswick or get into a car, and you could see that once you got down Cranbury Road and saw farms, then you got an appreciation for the boonies.

MG: How did life change for your family when you moved in 1965?

MS: I think it was for my dad. I know it was a shorter commute for him because, at that time, the Verrazano Bridge was being built. I think it was just completed, but before that, his company moved to New Jersey, and he had to hop on the Staten Island Ferry to get from Brooklyn to Staten Island, and then deal with a drive to South Plainfield. So, obviously, he had a shorter commute. My mom eventually started working at a printing company on the north side of Highland Park. That was once my sister and I were more grown-up; she felt she could start doing that. I also remember, too, back then, since everything was walking distance, you could go home for lunch. That's something that, in most suburbs and most cities, kids don't do that anymore. As a result, I was a big fan of the *Jeopardy* TV show because that would be on at lunchtime. Then, later on, in high school, we had what was known as an open campus, and if you had a study hall, and your lunch was study/lunch or lunch/study, you could go home for study hall. So, I would have like an hour and a half lunch, which also came in handy because once we got cars, we could drive to exotic restaurants like Tastee Subs over on Plainfield Avenue for lunch and come back.

MG: Yes, that's a big deal. [laughter]

MS: Yes, absolutely. Still go to Tastee Subs.

MG: What kind of things did your parents get involved in when they moved to Highland Park? I know there are a lot of organizations and temples.

MS: They were members of the Highland Park Conservative Temple; I went to Hebrew School there. I continued after my Bar Mitzvah, part of it was because I wanted to play on the basketball team, and they said, "You're missing a lot of Hebrew School. If you keep missing Hebrew School, you can't play basketball." So [I said], "Alright, fine." My sister also went there, too. So we were both Bar and Bat Mitzvahed at that same temple. My mom and dad really did not do a lot of social stuff. My dad was involved as a volunteer for the temple; my mom was a volunteer for their blood drive and still continues that to this day.

MG: The '60s was such a period of change. What elements of the time period did you witness? Were politics discussed in the house?

MS: One thing was interesting was that my dad, obviously growing up in the middle of a war, where people had to fight for their country--I think he was one way about the war, and then in the '60s, I think he felt very pro-soldiers being in Vietnam. His views evolved. I think part of it, too, was that we had a relative who was stationed over there, who basically went because he felt he had to register rather than being drafted. He ended up getting injured.

MG: This is in Vietnam?

MS: Yes, and I remember my parents' views evolving to the point where the then-Senator of New Jersey, Clifford Case, came to our temple to do a speech, and my mom going up to him and begging him to get our cousin out of Vietnam.

MA: I want to backtrack a little bit. You must have been very young when Kennedy was assassinated, but do you have any recollection of that event?

MS: Yes, that was actually when I was still in Brooklyn, and they closed school early that day. My best friend at the time, Jimmy Kwei, still recalls that he wanted to play that day, and I said, "No, it's a sad day." I remember watching everything on TV and just the way that the country was. Now you read later that two or three months later was when The Beatles really hit the forefront. So it was almost like America could come out of our funk and have fun again. It was almost like with 9/11 when Saturday Night Live aired a couple of nights later, and Lorne Michaels asked Rudy Giuliani, "Is it okay to have fun now?" Giuliani's response was, "You guys were never funny. Why start now?" [laughter]

MG: Did it feel like things were changing so quickly in the '60s, or is it only in looking back that you can notice the changes?

MS: I think things were changing a lot, not so much '60s, early '70s where you saw hairstyles changing, that people instead of dressing up for school they wore flannel shirts, t-shirts, things like that. I think also, again, Highland Park being a very progressive place, you just saw this microcosm of all that happening. You had groups like the [inaudible] were all the hippies. You had the college prep kids. You still had greasers, too, kids who dressed in leather jackets and

smoked outside of school. So you had all these different groups in school, so it was like a microcosm of what was going on in real life.

MA: They were almost like cliques?

MS: Yes, I think there are cliques anywhere. But again, in a small town, some folks had to band together. Like in gym class, all the groups are in one class and, of course, the greasers beat you up there anyway, or challenge you to fights after school.

MG: Where would you say you fit in?

MS: Definitely in the college prep side. Yes, I definitely was not the hippie person. I definitely was not the greaser, no muscles here. [laughter]

MA: Growing up during the Vietnam War, were you aware of the changing attitudes about the war and the protests and those kinds of things?

MS: Yes, I think part of it was again watching it on the news, watching my dad. My dad would be one of those people who would watch the TV and shake his fist and shake the newspaper at it. He was very pro-Israel. In 1967, you had the [six] day Israeli War. [Editor's Note: From June 5 to June 10, 1967, Israel and neighboring Arab nations were embroiled in the conflict known as the Six-Day War.] So I remember when Walter Cronkite would come on with the news, and he would say, "Today in Israel." We would start talking, [and my dad would] go, "Shh, shh, shh. They're talking about Israel." It was in the news. You couldn't escape it at that time. Again, I think Vietnam was more coming into play in the news in the early '70s, senior year of high school, but also coming to college. There were still protests taking place here at Rutgers.

MA: Were there any veterans coming back to Highland Park that you were aware of?

MS: Nobody in Highland Park. You would hear about some protests over the ROTC building on campus, but I don't think there was the same treatment of veterans where you read about where people were getting spit on after serving in the war. It's interesting. I just read an article where now people come up to veterans and say, "Thank you for your service," and veterans are almost feeling embarrassed about that stuff. It's almost a reverse thing, where people are coming up and doing it all the time, and a veteran has to say, "Well, I just served on a base in Arkansas; I didn't do anything."

MG: Were you getting fearful as you approached eighteen that the war would continue on, and you might be drafted?

MS: Yes. They had draft lotteries back then, and I would always track the numbers when I was sixteen, seventeen. I was scared because my birth date would always come in the top fifty, which meant you were likely to be called, whereas if your number was 360, that was not likely to happen. Fortunately, my senior year of high school, they were really starting to wind things down. So, that was 1972, '73. We got draft cards. The status was 1-H, which was holding. Basically, they could say, "Hey, we're not going to draft you, but just in case, here's your draft

card." The main advantage of having a draft card was that they lowered the drinking age to eighteen that year, so you could use it as proof of ID.

MG: Did you take advantage of that?

MS: Yes. [laughter]

MG: Where would you go drinking? In Highland Park or New Brunswick?

MS: Yes, mainly Highland Park. I think New Brunswick was perceived as so run down at that time. Actually, moving here in '65, you could still walk across the bridge and go to movie theaters. So I remember doing that. Then when the riots took place here, and movie theaters closed, I think New Brunswick was [sort of like], "Okay, no reason to go there. We can go to the bars in Highland Park or go to friends' houses and do that."

MG: I live in Highland Park, and it's interesting to see just the difference a bridge makes between the two towns.

MS: Yes, I remember standing on top of the hill where the Jewish Community Center used to be, on Raritan and First [Avenue]. Albany Street Bridge was closed. I guess this was this one night in 1967 because they were trying to prevent riots and things from coming across the bridge.

MG: Can you talk to us about the riots? What precipitated them? What do you remember about that?

MS: I think it was, again, just seeing stuff on the news. I think it was that racial inequality was coming into play because Vietnam, the '60s, awareness, the media--I think any movements just took hold because there was an easy way to spread that around. Granted, there wasn't a Facebook or a Twitter or meet-ups, but that type of media really took hold. Just all the things that happened, like Martin Luther King's assassination, Robert F. Kennedy's assassination--so it was just turmoil.

MA: I know that teach-ins were quite common back then. Did you attend any of those teach-ins?

MS: At Livingston--so I started there in '73, and there weren't really teach-ins in terms of anti-war stuff, but I think that every class at Livingston had an element of: "Let's look at things from all angles. The establishment isn't always the right way of doing things."

MG: When did you start to have those feelings?

MS: I think it was in senior year of high school. Part of it, again, was just growing up in Highland Park and being exposed to so many different viewpoints, media, [and] just the general rebellion that we all deal with at that time too.

MG: Can you talk to us a little bit about school when you came to Highland Park? Do certain subjects or teachers stand out to you?

MS: It's interesting. I just happened to see on Facebook; there are a couple of Highland Park Facebook [groups]. So there was a sixth-grade teacher, who was very, very strict; would keep us in for lunch, and we'd have to sing the song "Inchworm" in rounds. Again, it was strict, but I think it was her way of saying, "We're preparing you [for] the real world and when you go to college." So even back then, Highland Park was a good preparation ground for things like that. The curriculum was pretty advanced. Back then, there was a new middle school for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades in Highland Park and was a block away. The thing with Highland Park was that all the schools where we lived were two or three blocks away. So there was never [an excuse that] the car didn't start, the bus didn't come, I don't feel that great. Unless there was a bone showing, you went to school. In Highland Park High School, English was a big deal. There was Spanish class, too. Chemistry, too. We had this weird cast of teachers, some very eccentric, some just out of college. I remember one of the teachers just out of college, wore hot pants. We just thought she was the hottest thing in the world--Mrs. Kruta. [laughter]

MG: [laughter] She wore hot pants to work?

MS: She did, yes.

MA: In elementary school, did your school participate in the air raid drills?

MS: Mainly in Brooklyn, yes. So we had to go under the desk, and, of course, you're wondering, "How could something this thin protect you from a nuclear bomb?" It was silly looking at it, but yes, I think it was more in Brooklyn.

MG: Did you continue to play sports when you moved to Highland Park?

MS: It's interesting. I was really not great in sports. I played more intramural sports. I did go out for the track team. I think I finished last in every race but played a lot of intramural flag football, volleyball, things like that. I did play some Little League in Highland Park, but I was always the kid picked last, got the worst uniform, in terms of the edges being frayed and things like that. But sports were part of it, but I think it was more playing with friends.

MG: Could you tell us about how Highland Park is unique? It's changed a lot over the years. What changes have you witnessed?

MS: It's interesting you bring it up because my mom still lives there, so I do go back pretty often. In Highland Park, a town that was one-third Jewish at that time back in the 1960s and '70s, you had three Kosher butchers. You had two small supermarkets. You had the drug stores, things like that. So you didn't really have to go out of town to get anything special, but also you had the fact that New York was so close by to do any big cultural stuff. In some ways, Highland Park has not changed in terms of the residential stuff, and the storefronts are still small businesses, but now you're seeing different types of restaurants. So instead of Cohen's Knishes,

you have a Thai restaurant. You still have the falafel place. There's one supermarket instead of two.

MG: Where was the other one?

MS: One was where the Rite Aid is; it was on Fourth and Raritan Avenue. The other was where the Stop and Shop is on Fifth and Raritan.

MG: I heard the library used to be on the corner where that martial arts place is on the second floor. It's now a natural food store.

MS: When we moved out, the library was at the current place on Fifth Avenue, but it was small. They doubled it. I know it's still small, especially living in East Brunswick, where you've got the huge expanse with every CD in the world you want to borrow--so that library still looks small. I have an interesting footnote with Highland Park. In 1995, when our family was living in East Brunswick, we lost power for three days because a tornado hit a tree. My mom and dad happened to be on vacation in South Carolina, so I had keys to their apartment. I took our two young daughters and basically lived in their place. I remember, we packed our stuff, and I said, "You guys want to go to the library?" They said, "Yeah!" So, we start walking past our car, and our daughter said, "We're not getting in the car?" I said, "You can walk to everything in Highland Park," which they found fascinating.

MA: Was the Jewish community in Highland Park particularly close-knit?

MS: Yes, and I think particularly then there was the Highland Park Conservative Temple, and then there was the Sephardic Temple, Etz Ahaim. Now there are four or five temples in Highland Park. I think it's close-knit, but everybody goes to all these different shuls. I saw a little bit of that too because when Hurricane Sandy hit, our section of East Brunswick lost power for a week, so we actually slept in my old bed at my mom's place for one night. My wife and our daughters took our dog over to my sister's place in Plainsboro because they both got power back very quickly. So that night, I remember walking over to services over at one temple on Raritan Avenue at Agudath Israel, and then the next morning, I went to the Highland Park Conservative Temple services with my mom. She did the whole, "This is my boy" bits. She was happy with that.

MG: What ideas or plans for the future did you have while you were in high school?

MS: A still good friend of mine, Sam Freedman was somebody whose house I played basketball at. I would go over to his house, listen to records--actually records, not CDs or stuff that you download. He was heavily into journalism. He became editor of *The Highland Fling*, the high school newspaper, and we went to a concert together, and he assigned me to write an article about it. So I think that was really my start into journalism. So that was my plan, and that was going to be my major. I really wanted to go to Wisconsin because he was going there. I didn't get financial aid, so I ended up actually going to Livingston as a result.

MA: Did you look at any other schools while you were in high school?

MS: I applied to Pace College, which was in lower Manhattan, and I remember getting accepted for early decision. I remember I got that October twelfth of senior year. It was kind of that good feeling that, "Hey, this is great. I have someplace to go to. I don't have to worry about anything." So I was basically just watching the other applications. I think I looked at Rider [University]. Obviously, Rutgers, I knew about because it was, again, across the river. At that time--you guys have probably have heard about this--each college of Rutgers had separate applications, so I was not accepted for College Ave., but I was accepted for Livingston. Back then, it was perceived as a back door in. But I said, "Heck, let's go," not really knowing what I was going to be in store for.

MG: During high school, would you go into New York City to visit or hang out?

MS: Mainly with my friend, Jimmy. We would do some things there, but I think it was mainly social stuff. My mom and dad would do some social things, and we still had relatives in the city, but it would mainly be every couple of months. I think it's interesting because my wife grew up in Jersey City, literally, in an apartment overlooking the Lincoln Tunnel, and it was like the river was a barrier. She'd never done stuff [in New York City], and I think we've maybe seen like five Broadway shows this year. So it's interesting how that's changed.

MG: You mentioned going to the concert with your friend and kind of getting introduced to journalism. Were you also witnessing the drug culture of the time?

MS: Yes, I think at concerts. I mean, it was nothing that I partook in at that time, but obviously, you saw it; you knew it was there.

MG: Can you talk about the time leading up to going to Livingston College? How did life change? How were you preparing for school?

MS: I lived at home. Tuition back then was a hefty and expensive $358 dollars. I'm still paying off our daughter's tuition. She graduated in January from SAS [School of Arts and Sciences], so I know the contrast very well. I think her books may have cost $358 dollars one semester. So you guys are obviously living it, too. I lived at home. I remember going to an orientation at Livingston. Instead of just taking a tour, they made it a capture the flag game. They walked people to Beck Hall and said, "Okay. There's a big grass hill here. There's a big brick wall that led up to Beck Hall. So instead of taking the roadway to go around to the entrance, let's get a big rope and try to work together to climb up to the top." Thinking about it now, it was a way that people got to know each other, and it was a fun way to learn the campus. Actually, the Livingston orientation back then won a lot of leadership awards before they had that type of stuff, and it was one of those things that probably has transformed into a lot of things going on at Rutgers right now. People at Livingston know in their hearts [what] happened there, and Livingston should get more credit for it than it really does.

MG: Did you remember when Livingston was first founded and formed? It was only a few years before you attended.

MS: I don't remember that, but here's a really ironic thing--while talking about my dad's service--either when he was going to be going out to England or coming back, they had the soldiers at a processing center to just do the transition bit. Camp Kilmer was one of the places he did his transition. So who knew that we would be living close to Camp Kilmer? Who knew that I would be going to college on the grounds of Camp Kilmer?

MG: I always think it's a unique juxtaposition between the kind of college Livingston was and a military processing place.

MS: Yes, it's amazing. You drive around, and you see some of the buildings that used to be barracks, too.

MG: Can you talk about the early mission and principles that Livingston was founded on?

MS: Livingston's mission was going to be very liberal, open to ideas, and basically exploration, and it didn't have to be inside the classroom. You had heard stories of the first years of Livingston, where some professors lived in the dorms with the students. If the students wanted a class at midnight on something, knock-knock-knock on the professor's door and they had a class, whether it was in the lounge--things like that. I was a commuter student, so I didn't really see a lot of that or experience it, but some of that history was incredible. I think there was a lot of flexibility about designing your own majors, designing your own curriculum. They tried to formalize it a little bit by the time I got there as a freshman. I think they were starting to sense that being very liberal is good, but that could lead to administrative chaos.

MA: I'm curious because Livingston campus is very different now than it was back then. What was it like when you went to college?

MS: Yes, it's interesting because, again, I see it then and now, too. Livingston even then didn't have the best stuff compared to College Avenue; it was definitely the stepchild in terms of resources. Also, transportation wasn't as plentiful too. Busses were available, [but] it wasn't like it is now. You're probably going, "Yes, the busses ain't good now either," because I get the *Targum*, and I read that stuff. Back then, you could actually drive from one class to another and park. Your parking passes weren't as restrictive as they are now, and you actually do it within twenty, thirty minutes. So that was a plus. I think one of the things that was great about Livingston was that a lot of the classes that you took there were really applied toward what was happening in the real world, in careers. A good example was journalism. Our classes were exercises in writing stories. I took some journalism classes here, and it was more theory; it was a lot about Marshall McLuhan. It was very interesting when, eventually, the two journalism departments united. So you had the best of both worlds under one roof, but it took time to get there.

MG: Was journalism your major at Livingston?

MS: Yes, it was. I think somebody I really got to admire at that time was my faculty advisor, Jerry Aumente. [Editor's Note: Jerome Aumente is a former professor in the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. He was Founding Director of the Journalism Resource

Institute, Rutgers University, and former Chair, Department of Journalism & Urban Communications program at Livingston College.] Jerry was a seminal figure in founding the journalism department. He was somebody who worked as a reporter for the *Newark Evening News*, which was an evening newspaper counterpart to the *Star-Ledger* being the daytime paper. So you had somebody who was in the establishment world but had very liberal ideas [that] was asked to come here and create a journalism department that reflected what was going on at Livingston. So professors came from different backgrounds. We were learning about things like cable TV, local access, portapak cameras that you could bring out in the field and film stories, rather than have a film projector and wait to develop the stuff, and then pray that it got on the news that night. It was basically that you could do things and show people now what it was all about.

MA: What was student life like for you?

MS: As a commuter, there wasn't much there, but I think in terms of clubs, there were some things on campus. The fraternities were mainly racial or ethnic at that time, so there really wasn't much to join. The social activities were generally centered around the dining area, which was the old Tillett Hall, which wasn't much. It was like, "Okay, let's drive back to Tastee Subs, and get some real food." The library wasn't much. So it was mainly doing things in dorms. So if I had friends who lived on campus, I was doing things with them. There wasn't really much at Livingston. Seeing Livingston's history, because there wasn't much here, people got to know each other because it was survival mode.

MA: Did you pledge to any fraternities?

MS: I almost pledged to one on College Avenue because I was working in the Post Office that summer and one of the coworkers was a fraternity person. I pledged, and then I decided: not for me.

MG: How come?

MS: I think part of it was being a commuter. I figured, "Okay, what was I really going to get out of it?" I didn't think it was going to be an *Animal House* or anything like that, so it didn't scare me. It was just really not for me.

MG: The college I went to we didn't have fraternities or sororities. Can you tell me what it would have meant to be in a fraternity? What would you have done?

MS: I remember going to pledge weeks here, so I think mainly seeing the fraternities as, "Alright, it's party time." It was more of that. I think if I had lived on campus, maybe it would have been an opportunity to live on campus differently. But I had the best of both worlds in that I lived at home, so I still could live under that roof. I had enough friends on campus, either people I met or people that went to Highland Park High School who were living here. I wasn't hurting for stuff to do.

MG: It's a little unclear to me how it works--each college was its own entity, but you could have still been part of a Rutgers fraternity?

MS: Yes, I think it was basically that they didn't care whether you had an L next to your college name or a D or an R or a C. I think they were open in that respect. What was also interesting at that time, too, was that they were insular, but you could actually take classes on other campuses. So I remember taking psychology at Douglass. Granted, was it a--"Oh, I can meet chicks?" Yes, yes. But it was an opportunity to do different things. As I mentioned earlier, being able to take a journalism class on College Avenue, too. So Rutgers was great in that you could have that insular community, but you could venture outside and see what else was there. I also took meteorology over at Cook, too. I flunked the class, but I am such a weather geek now. So I don't know how that happened.

MA: Now, at this time, were women allowed to attend Livingston College, or were they still at Douglass?

MS: It's interesting that you mention that, too. All of Rutgers College and Livingston College were both accepting of men and women, but I think Livingston was more aggressive about things like accepting women. Also, things like Women's Studies started at Livingston, so I think a lot of opportunities for women were geared there too.

MG: Did they have a lot of other minority students as well?

MS: Yes, so I think it was really a microcosm of what was going on in the cities back then, too.

MG: Can you tell us about the kind of students that went to Livingston and opted for this sort of school?

MS: I think it was a mix because you had people from the cities. You had people from middle-class backgrounds who weren't Princeton folks. You had people who came from other places because they heard Livingston was Berkeley-East and couldn't afford Berkeley, or thought, "Okay, I don't want to go to Berkeley, but I'm an hour away from Livingston. Let's go here and see what it's all about." So, it was wild in that respect. Also, the experience, too, during the day, you'd get out of class, and you would have the jazz department doing concerts where the fountains are now. Again, things that you might see in a city where people might be playing in a park, you'd get that on Livingston campus every day. Or, people having tables in Tillett Hall, petitioning for different causes. So it was just, again, this microcosm of all that was going on in the world, and just to see it in one place was pretty amazing.

MG: Wasn't it supposed to be the Massachusetts Institute of Technology of social science?

MS: Yes, that was probably the academic way of putting it. I think Berkeley-East was probably the way that it was really--not sold to people, but I think that was the perception by people because Berkeley was such a hotbed of activism. I think it was an effort to have Livingston be that.

MA: Were there veterans from the Vietnam War at Livingston College?

MS: Not at Livingston at that time, or at least, there wasn't an ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] movement. I don't think anyone came out and said, "I'm a vet. I've changed. I'm wearing my hair long."

MG: What examples of activism did you see on campus during your time there?

MS: There was a dean that came in who was from the Rand Institute, and the perception was that they were going to make Livingston very establishment, so there were a lot of sit-ins in that dean's office, a lot of protests. A lot of activism for equal rights in the black community. A lot of activism for better things for the Livingston campus at that time, too. I was a writer for *The Livingston Medium*. I'm kind of embarrassed by what the *Medium* is now by comparison. You were exposed to different types of ways to express your sentiments, [such as] writing an article, but also you had political cartoons, too, that expressed a viewpoint but not being tasteless about it.

MA: What would you say is different about the newspaper?

MS: I think the *Medium* is more trying to be funny than anything else. When I was growing up, *Mad Magazine* was, I'll call it the high-brow version of satire, and *Crack Magazine* was the real dumb thing. I think in Livingston, *The Medium* just really hasn't risen above sophomoric humor. We'll call it that to be nice.

MG: What was *The Livingston Medium* like back then?

MS: I think there was a lot of coverage on campus of things that were going on, also trying to really talk about the contrast between what was going on at Livingston versus Rutgers. A lot of things were being covered in arts and entertainment. For example, when [Bruce] Springsteen played a concert here in '76, that got more play in the *Medium* than it did in *Targum*.

MG: Did you go to that concert?

MS: I stood outside. I did see Springsteen at the Stone Pony playing with Southside Johnny and The Asbury Jukes and doing encores and things like that. I didn't see him on campus here, but I did stand outside. You could hear him two or three blocks away; it was a big deal.

MA: Did you ever get the sense that Rutgers College students felt that they were superior to the Livingston College students?

MS: Yes, I think it was the folks who hadn't been on Livingston or hadn't experienced the classes. Yes, there was definitely the [feeling that] the RC designation was better than the LC designation.

MG: What were some of the stories that you remember reporting on?

MS: I remember when the swine flu was a big deal. Livingston and none of the campuses set up a swine flu vaccine area. So I wrote this serious headline, and the [inaudible] copy editor put the headline, "Pig Disease Conquered at Livingston." So it was serious reporting, but let's have a little fun with it. I also did some cultural stuff, too. I did some album reviews. I think some heavy metal stuff at that time.

MG: When did the radio station come on campus?

MS: It was actually [in] the very first years, and it was only heard in the dorms. It was a very short signal, and it was known as WRLC-- I think were the call letters. They were on the second floor of Tillett Hall. I remember hanging out with some of the people. I never did a tryout, even though Highland Park had a radio station, and I had a show on there. Then it was an interesting evolution in that you had a small station on campus. Then, when I joined the Livingston Alumni Association, one of their volunteers was involved in the movement to build an antenna for the station, which became 90.3 FM The Core, so it could be heard throughout. Then years after that, my daughter ended up with a show on there, and then my son and his wife still have a show on there.

MA: Was the station popular?

MS: I think in the dorms, but I think nobody knew about it outside of--I think WRSU was what people knew about. Right now, I'll listen to RSU because I like their coverage of sports events better than what they do on the commercial stations, but I listen to The Core a lot for music.

MG: Yes, it's a great station.

MS: Yes, absolutely great. I'm glad you like it.

MA: Were there any professors that stuck out to you?

MS: At Livingston?

MA: Yes.

MS: Jerry Aumente was one professor. Jay Miller was a professor that was really into the whole thing about the new media at that time. So a lot of the journalism professors. I think those were the ones that stuck out the most. There was another professor, who was teaching literature and was very involved with women's studies at that time, so we'd get that bent, too. It was those folks that I remember immensely. When I became president of the Livingston Alumni Association and got involved with the Livingston Legacy Preservation, one of the first things I did was--"Let's bring back all of the old Livingston journalism professors and do an hour program with them where they talked about their memories." It was kind of like my equivalent of when people who are Mets fans get to go down to the fantasy camps and play with their heroes down in Florida for a week. [laughter]

MG: Well, tell us more about that event then. How did it happen? What stories came out of it?

MS: So I became Livingston Alumni Association President about ten years ago. So I guess that would be--I think it was around 2003. I had kept in touch with some people I met from Livingston in those journalism classes. We would always talk on the phone about what made Livingston unique and what also made the journalism department so unique. So I had kept in touch with the Jerry Aumentes of the world and a couple of others. We ended up doing one program where we pulled together a couple of professors that were involved with Livingston's very beginnings: Gerry [Gerald] Pomper, Gordon Schochet were among them--and did a little bit of advertising. [Editor's Note: Gerald Pomper is Board of Governors Professor of Political Science at the Eagleton Institute of Politics of Rutgers University and former chairman of the University and Livingston College political science departments. Gordon Schochet was a professor of political science and the last member of the Livingston planning group who was still on the active teaching faculty.] Had about thirty people to that. I think that's really where you got a good appreciation for what Livingston was like for current Livingston campus students. This was towards the end of the Livingston College years before it was folded into SAS. So, I said, "Let's try something with the journalism department." I had been keeping in touch with the current School of Communication and Information, not knowing that one of the professors, Steve Miller, really revered the Livingston journalism years. So we went from this awareness among alumni to Steve Miller telling his students, "If you don't go to this Livingston lecture program, you get an F. But you get class credit for showing up." So, we had a hundred and fifty alumni and students at this thing. You had a great panel discussion on the second floor of the student center. It was a lot of fun. I think that started the groundswell of, "Let's try to capture Livingston's history." I do want to mention, too, that Lea Stewart, the Livingston Campus dean, has also been great about trying to capture the history, too.

MG: I want to ask about the motivation and enthusiasm for this oral history project. Is it because Livingston was so unique or because it was incorporated into Rutgers and, therefore, its history is endangered?

MS: I think it's both, Molly, honestly. I think when Livingston's principles started going away, and you saw Rutgers starting to adopt some stuff without acknowledging Livingston, people who went to Livingston felt hurt, particularly among the alumni. So, I think we wanted to make sure that was acknowledged. Things like the philosophy department started at Livingston. Women's studies, I mentioned earlier, started at Livingston. The journalism department that had internships and hands-on experience started at Livingston. There was a movement to make sure that that stuff wasn't forgotten, and that Livingston just didn't become a footnote. Particularly, when you went on Wikipedia a couple of years ago--you would google "Livingston College," go on Wikipedia, and you'd see where it [said], "failed social experiment." I think we felt stronger that it was not that. Did everything work? No. But were there things that contributed to the overall Rutgers community and global communities? Absolutely. You're judging by some of the folks who have been since honored with all Hall of Distinguished Alumni Awards by Rutgers alumni. I think there's a feeling that Livingston had great things. We need to preserve that and acknowledge it.

MA: Coming out of Livingston College, did you feel prepared to enter the workforce?

MS: I did. Although, the workforce at the time was--I wanted to be a journalism reporter, and then there was a newspaper recession. Yes, that's happened again, too. When I graduated, I got out [in] January '77, jobs were not that available, so I ended up going into public relations. The internship prepared me for the workforce for what I thought I wanted to do, which was to be a newspaper writer. So I actually did an internship with *The Trenton Times*. I covered sports, covered a murder trial. Back then, you had reporters in the field calling in stories so they would dictate things, so you have to type it in a typewriter. Some things that you read about from the old newspaper days of typing on a paper and editors would be looking at stuff and marking it up. So, yes, that was I think romantic, but also I realized, "Well, I would want to do this at certain papers but not go up in the boondocks to learn about it and then come back."

MG: What about journalism appealed to you?

MS: I think part of it was it was the Watergate years. I think everybody wanted to be Woodward and Bernstein. [Editor's Note: Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein are investigative journalists who worked together to uncover much of the Watergate Scandal in 1972, which led President Richard Nixon to resign.] Also, my friend's influence way back in high school. Also, I do have a knack for writing under deadline. I think that was just a combination of whatever skills I had growing up as well as from college. I never did anything like, "Okay, I have to crash a paper in three hours." I never did anything like that, but I think in terms of crystalizing something that's a couple of paragraphs, that's something I've always been good at. So probably said, "Hey, I can take that and report it out."

MG: You covered a murder trial as an intern?

MS: Yes, for *The Trenton Times*.

MG: What happened?

MS: It was at Burlington County Courthouse, and it was a murder trial. I think the reporter had called in sick, so they sent me down there. I was there. I remember I was trying to report it straight, and I wasn't writing any of the tabloid stuff--"The defendants dressed in a red bandana." It was kind of heady that they assigned me to do that. I also remember writing a feature about vintage cars called Mercers that were made in the 1920s in Trenton. It was part of that whole era, "Trenton Makes, the World Takes," and that ended up on the front page, too. So I experienced everything as well as covering sports. I did some high school baseball games. I wanted to be Oscar Madison growing up. But I didn't realize until then Oscar Madison had to work until two in the morning because sports events don't take place Monday through Friday during the day and you get an hour for lunch, and you're home by five o'clock.

MG: I forgot to ask who was the president of Livingston when you attended?

MS: Ernest Lynton was there the first year. Then it was Dean [Emmanuel George] Mesthene. After him, I don't think it was [W. Robert] Jenkins. I'll have to think about that.

MG: You said a new dean arrived who was potentially going to threaten the culture at Livingston.

MS: That was Mesthene, Emmanuel Mesthene. "Mesthene rhymes with Destiny," was the motto that students gave to him because of what he was trying to do.

MG: Why was he hired? What impact did he have on the college?

MS: I think part of it was the confusion where--the current Rutgers president, Edward Bloustein, wanted Livingston to succeed, [but] had his hands tied in terms of what resources he could provide. I'm guessing--there's nothing in history that says this--that Bloustein hired Mesthene, thinking, "Maybe Mesthene could bring some order to the liberal chaos going on up there, and make the administration run smoothly." I think because of the Rand Institute background, everybody freaked out, and he was gone in a year. You read in Rutgers's history that Bloustein was very pro-Livingston, and the Dean before that, Mason Gross, was part of the Livingston planning. One of the things that was part of the first Livingston Legacy Program with Schochet, Pomper, and also Ed Ortiz, who I should have mentioned earlier, they spoke about [how] back then student groups on campus would protest and take over Mason Gross's office. Mason Gross's advice to them was, "You can take over my office, but do not touch the liquor cabinet, and do not make calls on the WATS [Wide Area Telephone Service] line," which is what you could use for free long-distance calls at that time.

MG: Did people obey those rules?

MS: I think so, yes. [laughter] Whereas, I think, if people took over Mesthene's office, [the attitude] was, "Heck, we're trashing the joint."

MG: There was a different level of respect for Mason Gross.

MS: Yes, I think that you had Deans who understood what was going on, on campus, and there had to be things like that. Just like, you read where President McCormick would buy cookies for the people who took over his office.

MG: You mentioned taking a psychology class on Douglass campus, and that you got to meet women that way.

MS: Yes.

MG: What was dating like during those years?

MS: I think it was obviously more exposure to all types of folks. Between parties going on at dorms at Livingston, open-air stuff going on, frat parties, College Avenue, dances on the Douglass campus, yes, it was easy to meet people. I was probably more the square in terms of dating, in terms of going to movies or Broadway stuff, holding the car door open for women, which I still do.

MG: What kind of shows would you see, or movies do you remember?

MS: I remember *American Buffalo* had just come out with Al Pacino; that sticks in my mind. I think it was a lot of things, like Circle in the Square [Theatre] in Greenwich Village.

MG: What about the early history of Livingston have you learned since attending? Could you give me a summary of how it was founded and what those early years were like?

MS: The things I wasn't aware of were what happened between 1969 and '73 when I got there. So, things like the classes in the dorms, the very liberal majors. Actually, some of that ended up sticking around because I learned after I left and talking to other Livingston alumni people that students could still design their own majors and be encouraged to do that. So, the last dean, Arnold Hyman, encouraged one student to do that, Jason Goldstein, who's now the current president of the Livingston Alumni Association. He was involved in starting the theater company, basically designed a theater development major, combined with some business stuff. So, some of the Livingston things did stick through to the end.

MG: Are any of those elements of Livingston leftover today?

MS: I think the liberal thinking still pervades; it just takes different forms nowadays, whether it's a protest movement, whether it's a Twitter feed. I think the communication movement--back then it was videotape and cable TV. Now it's Twitter. So you could say some of that started at Livingston in terms of getting students engaged in different ways other than just picket. I think the opportunity to experience different classes, rather than just take business classes. You actually see that now in the SAS program. It's not just that you're taking business classes. You have to take this different array of programs. At Livingston, it's kind of open--here are the opportunities for you. So you got a good liberal arts education without leaving campus in theory. I think SAS was an outgrowth of that to some degree. On the other hand, some of the things that I think Livingston stood for went away when they started centralizing the campuses in the '80s, at least from what you read in history. Then, I think, [in the] '90s, things loosened up a little bit. Then, when President McCormick started to centralize--I think even he realizes now that it probably could have been handled a lot better without alienating alumni. According to a friend, he's even said as much, recently with doing his book tour a couple of weeks ago.

MG: Do you have other questions about the college years?

MA: No.

MG: Is there anything that we're leaving out from your time at Livingston?

MS: One of the things also to talk about is what was going on during those times. In my freshman year, that was the Iranian Crisis. Even though I was living off-campus, there were challenges getting to campus because you had gas lines. I biked to school a couple of times from Highland Park to the Livingston Campus. It wasn't like the world stopped, and things didn't change. The outside world had a lot of influences too.

MA: Were you following these events in the news, or was it just that it affected your commute, and it was something you had to deal with?

MS: Yes. Starting probably in sixth or seventh grade, you could get student subscriptions to *The New York Times*, and I've been a *New York Times* geek ever since then too. I always followed it as a result. Going back to when my dad was putting together the Sunday newspapers, I would still go out and buy the *Daily News* and *Times*. I've got a *Times* subscription now, and [I'm a] crossword puzzle guy. I can't get past Wednesdays, though; Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays are tough.

MG: [laughter] How do you think your relationship with the news is different as a journalist?

MS: I think seeing how people cover things. Also, now that I work in fundraising and work in PR [public relations], seeing things like when a story is covered, people don't just stand in one place. It's like, "Oh, we're talking about things at Rutgers, so conveniently we'll go to the student center and do our stand up there." Sometimes you see that and roll your eyes a little bit because some of it is so staged.

MG: What was your first job after you graduated?

MS: It was with a PR firm in Somerville. Ironically, during my last high school year, I worked at a printing company where my mom was a bookkeeper. One of the owners joined with the son to develop a PR firm in Somerville. So, I went to work for them. Political footnote with that was the firm owned by Ray Bateman, who was running for governor against Brendan Byrne. Byrne was thought to be political toast after his first term, so the slogan "One-Term Byrne" came up. You may have heard in some other oral history stuff. So, Bateman was so sure he was going to win the election, he sold the PR firm to these contacts at the printing company. Byrne trounced Bateman. Bateman was well-to-do, so as my mom would say, "It wasn't like we had to take up a collection for him." So I worked for that firm for about a year. It was tough because, ironically, the boss was a Marine. So you can imagine, Mr. Sixties kid; [he] didn't take too well to that. Then, I ended up looking in *The New York Times*, found a job at The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society in 1979. I've been there ever since.

MG: Why did folks think Byrne wasn't going to be reelected? And then how did he end up winning in a landslide?

MS: Part of it was--what a surprise--arguments about funding the state's treasury, just how money was being spent, education. Byrne was not a very charismatic figure, so a lot of things that he did back then were easy to attack. But now, he's really being revered as a governor who knew what he was doing and really could cut deals and do it without rank or partisanship too. Ironically, my mom and I went to see him speak at an Eagleton program about two or three months ago. It was interesting to see the crowd of people that came back to see him because they respected his work.

MG: How did you find this job at The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society?

MS: Back then, there used to be an ad campaign that said, "I got my job at the New York Times." There was a job open for an administrative assistant. I applied for that, and then I found out that this administrative assistant job was part of the PR department. I said, "Oh, that's what I do." I got hired. That was in New York--commuted there. It was a different experience than driving to Somerville, but I was happy that I was away from the Marine boss. Turned out, things that I learned from Livingston came in handy, because back then, cable TV networks were starting to come into play, and we came out with a new set of public service spots. I said, "I could place those on cable TV networks." They're like, "What's that?" I said, "It's this new thing, like MTV, CNN, ESPN. They're looking for programming. They're looking for ways to fill ad time that they don't sell." So, it ended up that The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society public service spots were getting played all over the place. So we got all this great awareness, too. [inaudible] learned at Livingston, about this new technology called cable TV.

MG: Walk us through your career there. What different titles and roles did you have?

MS: Sure. So I started off as the research grant coordinator. Part of this admin work included getting the grant applications ready for the medical professionals to review for research funding. So I was exposed to some of the medical side of it. I remember at that time, The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society was very small. They were celebrating the fact that they were going to be funding two million dollars in research. Well, fast-forward to today, they're now funding seventy-four million dollars a year in research. So, I started with that. Then they finally grew enough where there was a PR department, so I became the assistant director of public relations. In 1985, two things happened. One, I got a new boss who, one, was from North Brunswick; two, had worked for the Boy Scouts, which used to be on Route 1 and 130. They were moving to Dallas, so somebody I became very friendly with. He had said at one point, "If you ever get celebrities, that's your job." We get a call; a representative for the then-new New York Mets catcher, Gary Carter, had called and said, "Gary Carter wants to work with you. Will you have him?" I was a baseball fan, [and] knew Gary from being a [Montreal] Expos player. So I was like, "Yes, this is great." Turns out, 1985 was, one, the Mets were on Channel 9, which was a superstation back then, seen across the country. Two, Channel 9 had printed these posters of Gary Carter to sell, [but] they never got permission from him. So the solution was let's sell them for charity. A week later, we get a call. They want to do this public service promotion. Again, the ad is seen around the country. I got into this whole new world of fundraising through my PR job. Also, the Mets helped promote Gary Carter's involvement with our organization. I was kind of wearing two hats and really having a good time with it. A year later, the organization gave Gary Carter an award. I'm thinking, "Hey, it's been great working with you." He goes, "I'm not done. I'm just starting. I want to do a golf tournament." So I ended up running a golf tournament, too. I got more into the fundraising side, which led to, later on, being assigned to the fundraising department, campaign development as they called it. I was working on golf tournaments, things like that. Then we had some staff adjustments in '93. I ended up working on some special events, fundraising programs like the Pennies for Patients program where kids collect spare change, and the school that raised the highest amount of money gets prizes. The top fundraising classroom gets a spaghetti lunch from Olive Garden or a pizza party. Sounds like you probably have done that in your school, right?

MG: No, actually.

MS: Okay, did you?

MA: I remember having those kinds of things.

MS: Okay, yes. So it's a big deal. I am still working on the golf tournaments. Then this program came along called the Leukemia Cup Regatta, where sailors did fundraising. That went nationwide, and that's what I've worked on now since '93.

MG: Are you able to see the funds that you helped raise go towards the cause?

MS: Absolutely. Back then, when I first started, kids were getting good results with treatment, but adults, it was a different story. Now you're seeing some incredible cancer survivor stories, where before, it was hard to find an adult who was a cancer survivor that you could spotlight as an honored hero in a fundraising campaign. Now there are many. I also think nowadays, people are more willing to talk about it than they were years ago. In the '60s, people didn't talk about cancer; it was "the big C," or they'd refer to something else. Nowadays, treatments are more targeted. Now you're seeing things where they can take people with cancers that were very untreatable, and if not get them into long-term remissions, at least extend life. My goal is when I have to change jobs, they say at the next job interview, "Why did you change jobs?" I can say, "They closed the organization down. We cured cancer." I want that on my resume.

MG: During this time, you also got married. How did you meet your wife?

MS: A high school friend had met her through a relative. One night, I was at the Ale 'N 'Wich bar, over on [Hamilton] Street, and I was there with my friends. My friend Jeff was there with the woman who became my wife. I commuted to work with Jeff on the train. That was just after I started working with The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Jeff said he wasn't going to date Fran. I said, "I'd like to meet her." So after about thirty days of him going, "I don't want to pass along a phone number. That's kind of skeevy," he finally did it. We went out on a date. She lived in Hazlet at that time with her family, and we just hit it off incredibly.

MG: Were you still living at home at this point, or had you moved out?

MS: I actually just moved out. I was living with a couple of other people through an ad I found in the *Home News*--Regency Manor, which was across the street from what is now the movie theater by the Route One bridge. So I was just living with those folks. So, Fran and I were dating for a couple of months, and then we moved in together. We got an apartment by Middlesex County College. I was just actually telling somebody a story because having a college nearby was interesting in that, one, that same year Hall and Oates were just getting big, and they ended up playing Middlesex County College's gym. So we were able to walk to a concert. Also, Edison was great because we could drive to the Metuchen train station, still be near our families too. Then we ended up moving to North Brunswick. That's where we got married, November 1, 1981.

MG: Tell me a little bit about Fran, and what she is like.

MS: She's a calligrapher. She is probably more of the heart of the family. I'm more the business end. She's more the creative end. She'll probably be the first to agree that I make the trains run on time. I'm probably the one that has the next six months planned out, whereas, I think with her it's, "Okay, let's see how the kids are doing. Let's see what's going on." I'll go, "Well, we have tickets to a Broadway show six months from now." We were actually just talking a couple of weeks ago. I asked her if she wanted to see the new Larry David play, and she goes, "Well, I'm kind of a fan. I don't know." I said, "Let's just see it. I really like him." We saw the play in previews, and she happened to say last night, "Wow, there's this great buzz about the Larry David play, and it's not even open yet." And I said, "Yeah, it's sold out until June. Now you're glad you saw it, right?"

MG: How was it? I'm kind of curious about it.

MS: It's incredible.

MG: I heard it's hilarious.

MS: He kind of plays himself to some degree. He and his brother are at their father's bed in the hospital, father's about to die, and he goes, "I want you to take care of your mother when I pass away." The brothers start arguing over which of them their father pointed to.

MG: It's called Fish-something?

MS: *Fish in the Dark*. The title refers to when the mother was growing up, and they had fish in a dark place or something. But yes, it's an amazing show. Definitely see it.

MG: I'll try to get tickets. What other shows have you seen?

MS: We're season ticket holders for McCarter Theatre. We've had that for about twelve years. That was because of a friend of ours in North Brunswick took us there; he would have extra tickets. So, we got the bug--season ticket holders. We're supporters of McCarter. We've seen a lot of stuff at McCarter. Princeton has a summer theater program run by students, which is amazing. So we do that. That's our date night during the summer. We catch a lot of Broadway stuff, too. We try to do it early before stuff gets buzz.

MG: Because you've grown up and lived in the same place for a long time, how have you seen this area change?

MS: It's interesting because, as I referenced earlier, when I got a car, and I drove on Cranbury Road, after East Brunswick High School, it was all farms. Now it's all built up, but there still is a lot of suburban stuff, particularly compared to if you do things in the city, you do have that big contrast. I try to explain that to our daughters when they see a car parked in front of our house. "There's a strange car parked outside our house." I'm like, "If you lived in New York, there'd be like a hundred and fifty strange cars parked in front of your house." So I try to explain those contrasts. I also try to explain to them about being street-smart. In the city, one of our daughters

was carrying a dollar bill, waving it around like this, and I said, “Put it in your wallet.” “Why?” I said, “You have to learn to be street smart.” I think it's gotten more suburban, more homogenous. I'm not a shopping mall person, so I don't think there's that much to do around here. Thankfully, there's Princeton to do stuff in. There's New Brunswick, at least for the restaurants. Also, working with the alumni associations up here has really given me a whole set of activities to do. My wife and I talked about how we've made just a whole load of friends in the last ten years that we wouldn't have had without the alumni association involvement.

MG: I will ask more about the Livingston Alumni Association, but first, I wanted to ask when you started your family and when your children were born?

MS: We married on November 1, [1981]. Our first son, David, was born April 17, 1983. Didn't waste much time obviously. Our daughter, Emily, was born April 9, 1989, and then our youngest daughter Ariel was born April 19, 1993. So, yes, April is a bankruptcy month in our household.

MG: How did life change once you became a father?

MS: Obviously, it was a different regimen. Something that was kind of tough for me to transition to because of the whole scheduling, things like that. But I also have memories of having to dress up for work back then, because everyone wore jackets and ties, doing the feeding at 5:00 AM, burping David, spit-up on the shoulder, and having to wear a suit jacket all day to cover it up. [laughter] But also, having to do the feedings at midnight again, getting to watch David Letterman and also pro-wrestling too. So it was a whole different take on pop culture.

MG: [laughter] What memories stand out to you about this early family life, any trips you took?

MS: One of the things was with Fran being at home and working, commuting to New York, I think my time was pretty limited during the week. I would really make an effort on Sundays to go out for breakfast and give her some quiet time on Sundays. I remember those breakfast things really well when they got a little bit older. Working at a nonprofit, you don't get rich, so it wasn't like we got to go to these exotic places and do things like that. So I think it was mainly sort of like blending into the suburban thing. Then, in 1985, we moved to East Brunswick to a townhouse complex near the high school, so we got to know some neighbors that way too. I think we got to make more friends through that. With our son, also realizing that he was very computer savvy at that time, too, and that transitioned to working for Apple computers, working at their stores, and now he works for SHI Technologies up the block. I think having that skill set at such a young age was interesting.

MA: Having gone to Livingston College, did you push your kids to go to Rutgers?

MS: Well, our son ended up going to different schooling, and his grades were not--he wasn’t interested in doing a four year school, so he actually went to the Berkeley Business School over in Woodbridge. He actually met his wife there. But always wanted to start working, so he graduated and then started working for one of the Apple stores back then. He got into it early. Our middle daughter, Emily--same thing. She had decent academics, went to Middlesex County

College for a year, [but] it really wasn't for her. She works part-time at the mall. She's still trying to find herself a bit. Our youngest daughter is a bit of a wait-till-the-last-second person on some stuff. So I said, "College applications are due tomorrow," and she goes, "Well, I want to apply to the University of Texas-Austin. I heard it's cool." "Well, what about a safety school?" "I don't know." "How about applying to Rutgers?" "Okay." She did not get into Austin, got into Rutgers, so lived Davidson the first year, one of the river dorms second year, off-campus the third year, and then she lived with us because she got out a semester early like myself.

MG: How did you get onto the board of the Livingston Alumni?

MS: Great story, great question. Career services, way back when, had a request out for alumni that might be interested in coming back and speaking with students. I probably was the only person in the nonprofit world who offered to do that, so I would get calls from career services saying, "Can you come back and be part of a panel to talk about careers? We have somebody from business; we have somebody from these fields, we don't have anybody from nonprofits." So I would get a lot of calls. I got a call from career services probably about '98, '99, and they said, "We're doing this networking night on Livingston with students. You should come on." I met the then-president of the Livingston Alumni Association, Yash Dalal, really though highly of Yash. It was a great night. I had said to Yash at the end of the evening, "I'd love to be involved." "Great, thanks." "No, Yash, I really mean it." So I got involved on their board, as one of the committee chairs. I think it was membership. Then became a vice president. Part of Rutgers's history was when they started transitioning the closing of the colleges. The Association had a meeting with President McCormick, who was making the rounds to the different associations. We frankly realized that Livingston was going to be toast at that point.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MS: So when we had a sense that Livingston was not going to be saved, Yash really lost the desire to be president. There were a couple of us officers in the room, and they said, "Well, I don't want to be president." I don't know what made me say, "I'll be president," because I was never a leader in anything. I think I was the alternate student council representative in my senior year in high school, and that was really the most I ever did. So, I end up being elected president. I think it was an opportunity because we had this creative board of people like Jason Goldstein, Rob Bertrand, some other folks, where we could do some fun things. They did an awards program. We made it into a pretty cool awards dinner. With Jason and Rob's talents, they had audiovisuals, made the room lighting really cool. Even when the Livingston Student Center was being ripped up, the event was moved to Trayes Hall, and they converted that into looking like a real cool banquet hall. We attracted some really cool people to be honorees, like Marla Diamond from CBS Radio was one of the honorees. One of the folks from the--who's the guy who's in *Deep Space Nine,* who teaches on campus? I'll think of his name. [Editor's note: Mr. Siederer is referring to Avery F. Brooks, who played the role of Benjamin Sisko on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, a spin-off of Star Trek: The Next Generation. He graduated from Livingston College in 1973 and is a tenured professor of Theater Arts at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts]. He was one of the honorees. Actually, my son was a Trekkie, so it was like geek-dom for him, too. Out of that came the creation of a Livingston Legacy Award to capture the people who were responsible for Livingston history and impact. That became part of the awards

program. I ended up serving as president for four years, and I realized the fourth year I was trying to do the same thing over and over. It was probably time for new leadership. My last function was the awards dinner, which actually moved into the new Livingston Student Center, which is obviously beautiful. My closing remarks were about being in the same place where my dad had been stationed was pretty amazing, a good way to close things out.

MG: Which four years were those? When did you get on the board? When did you become president?

MS: I was president from 2003 to 2007.

MG: How did you see the board change? What was that transition like when Rutgers absorbed Livingston?

MS: I think part of it was that we had an award called the Livingston Pride Award. It was actually renamed a couple of years ago in memory of Riki Jacobs, who was a Livingston graduate who was involved with the Hyacinth AIDS Foundation and was really a big fighter for people with AIDS and women's rights. I think one of the problems with the Alumni Association's existence was that we knew with the college closing down, it was going to be hard to attract members. So what could we do? We could get people interested in capturing Livingston's history and celebrating it, so we really had to start changing our mission, and laying the groundwork at that time.

MG: What are you worried is going to be lost if we didn't start preserving these memories and stories?

MS: I think the main thing is, again, the impact that Livingston had--the people, the culture, the curriculum--on Rutgers and overall life. It was really heartening to see that the new book that's coming out about Rutgers 250th Anniversary, there's a chapter called "Livingston Lives On." I haven't seen the content. The author did come to an LAA board meeting, spoke with us. I think she was really psyched. So the fact that there's a chapter just about Livingston is really cool.

MG: You mentioned the award that you would give out. Who have been some of the recipients of the Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award?

MS: Jerry Aumente was one, Gordon Schochet, Jerry Pomper. Other honorees: Roger Cohen, who was also involved in the journalism program. People who went to Rutgers basketball games years ago, Roger was the public address announcer. There's that instructional TV studio over at Livingston. Roger started that. Roger started what really became RU-TV, and was one of the adjunct professors. So his impact back then, creating a television curriculum is obviously living on now bigtime with RU-TV. Jerry Pomper was one of the big voices in political science. He was really the go-to guy for a number of years when they needed a political commentator for presidential elections. Schochet was also a go-to for political commentary, but Schochet and Pomper, along with Ed Ortiz, also were recipients of the Livingston Legacy Award. They were really the people who Livingston principles were founded on. Another honoree was Maria Canino, who started the Latino Studies program there. Obviously, it's a big program here. So I

think that's what we're trying to preserve with Livingston. Don't forget the roots. Don't forget where the stuff came from.

MA: Would you say that's why you joined the alumni society, to preserve this history and make sure it lasts?

MS: I think it was that there were some cool programs with likeminded people, and then this legacy program was an outgrowth of that. I think it's attracting people to get involved because we're seeing that already. The ironic thing about this is [in] 2007 there was the networking night with alumni and students I was referencing. We combined it with a program [of] the Rutgers Alumni Association, which mainly consisted of Rutgers College students. So we combined with that, and now I'm the president-elect of the Rutgers Alumni Association. [laughter]

MG: What are your duties there?

MS: The Rutgers Alumni Association has a number of committees, so I work with the different committees, different volunteers on functional stuff such as promotion, volunteer relations, event organization, working with our president on some of the financial stuff. It's interesting going from a group like the Livingston Alumni Association, where the college wasn't even founded until 1969, to an alumni association that was founded in 1831. That blows my mind. Also, being the first Livingston College graduate to be the president of the RAA is groundbreaking, in my mind anyway.

MG: Could you walk us through the history of your tenure on the board of the Livingston Alumni Association? Were there any notable moments or issues that were tackled?

MS: I think the awards dinner was a big thing, and also the awards programs. Also, what I mentioned earlier about taking something like the Pride Award, which you give to a student that exemplifies community service, and not losing that when Livingston died. Fortunately, there were enough people on campus that believed in Livingston, [such as] Riki Jacobs, Muffin Lord down at the Honors Program, Elizabeth O'Connell-Ganges, who said, "Look, we don't want to lose this. We'll help you promote it to all SAS students throughout New Brunswick and Piscataway." So it's kind of cool to see Livingston live on through that, and then through folks like Elizabeth O'Connell-Ganges being able to present that award at the rosters or the student awards program. So it's really neat to see things that started at Livingston. While there's not a Livingston College, there is a Livingston Campus. Some people may be aware of the history of Livingston. But the fact that those principles live on.

MG: When was the idea to preserve this as an oral history presented?

MS: We were actually speaking with Dean Lea Stewart, over at the communications department, and she's the campus dean for Livingston. So we'd been talking about different ways to preserve Livingston's history, and I think there's always been fits and starts. Like an intern would write a history paper, the intern would leave, the paper would sit. We would have a Livingston legacy lecture, [and] we would record it, but there was never really a way to put it all together. So I think it was a combination of folks like Jason Goldstein, Eric Schwartz, who's part

of the library program, who said, “Well, let's work with the oral history society on recording this history and really preserving it and doing something with it.” So, in addition to recording this history, there are also plans afoot to look at other ways to capture memories, given that there's so many other ways to do that now. Another example would be yearbooks. The University Archives did not have any Livingston yearbooks up until a couple of years ago. Fortunately, when Livingston was winding down, one of the Kilmer librarians said, “This is important. We should give these over to University Archives.” So the University Archives has some. We're looking for a way to digitize all of those, too.

MG: It would be neat to connect an oral history excerpt with the digitized photographs.

MS: Yes. So that phase is going on, too. There are a couple of alumni members who are involved with that effort. So I think the oral history is really one of the attempts to capture this the best way we can.

MG: I know you gave me a couple of names of people to add to our list, but is there anyone else we should talk to for this project?

MS: I will think about that and give you a callback. The folks I emailed, Schochet and Pomper. Unfortunately, what we're also seeing is because Livingston started "so long ago"--I hate to think that 1969 was so long ago. I'm still not getting over the fact that I'm going to turn sixty this year. Maybe time can stop it. May 16, 2015, I won't have to turn sixty. But unfortunately, a lot of folks that were involved with Livingston's history are getting up in their years. So I think the sooner we can capture memories from some of those folks, the better. Maria Canino, who I mentioned earlier, would be a good person to speak with because of the Latino studies connection. That's something we all need to work on. Peter Kline, with the philosophy department, was involved in Livingston's early days, too.

MG: I think he's on our list.

MS: Rob Snyder. Rob was a student the same year as me. Rob has written a lot of blogs about Livingston, and he is a journalism professor, I think, for the Newark campus.

MG: I've gotten to the end of my questions, but I wanted to make sure we haven't missed anything from your career, your education, your family, and your time on the board.

MS: I think we've covered it all. I'll definitely give a ring back or write an addendum or something, but this has been really, really great.

MG: Well, it's very easy to meet up again. You're so close by. If, after we leave today, we think of other things we want to add, we can just get back together and chat about those things. Mohammad, are there any other questions that you had?

MA: No.

MG: I'll send you a CD copy of this interview. If I think of other questions, I'll get in touch with you. But this has been a lot of fun and a real treat to talk to you.

MS: Great, thank you. Likewise. I had a great time.

MG: Good. I'll turn this off. Thanks again.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: We're back on.

MS: One of the things I didn't mention was with our daughter going to school here was that Livingston became cool. When I was at Livingston, it was the uncool place and hard to get to. She lived in Davidson her first year. It was actually my recommendation because I said, "The quads, it's not the best dorm. You might end up in the Towers. It's just big cinder blocks. Really not much to do." What does she do? She took the bus every chance she could to go to Livingston Campus to do things. That was about the time that the "Livi" nickname came up, that Livingston Campus had this cool nickname, "Livi." So she was really excited about Livingston. I think that was one of her regrets that she didn't get to live on Livingston.

MG: Why would you say it's cool again?

MS: I think part of it is all the different things they have there. The dining hall is really cool. We've had a couple of meetings up there. Yes, I've used my daughter's guest dining pass. You have the sushi there and make your own burger, and they have a Mongolian Grill. Just to see that on campus is phenomenal. The student center is really great too. All the other building that has been going on around campus, it's been really amazing.

MG: I should spend some more time there.

MS: Yes, and now you see Starbucks, Henry's.

MG: Good. Well, I think this project will inspire me to explore it.

MS: Yes! Take the REXL or the LX [bus route].

MA: You could just drive there, too.

MG: All right.

MA: It's a short distance.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Molly Graham 12/3/2019
Reviewed by Marty Siederer 12/19/2019

Reviewed by Zach Batista 1/7/2020