

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES SIMON

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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William Buie: This begins an interview with Dr. James Simon and William Buie on June 30, 2016, in New York, New York. To begin, can you tell me when and where you were born?

James Simon: Yes, Clifton, New Jersey, November 27, 1952.

WB: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, starting with their names?

JS: Sure, George and Grace Simon. They were married during World War II. My father was over in Europe fighting the Germans. Their American success story was his coming back in one piece. He ended up raising a family in Clifton, New Jersey, and we moved around a little bit. I was always a fan of New Jersey. When Rutgers created this new unit called Livingston College, I was eager to take part. I was in the second entering class in the fall of '70.

WB: What was it like growing up in Clifton?

JS: Clifton is kind of a blue-collar town. It's famous for racial steering, that Paterson and Passaic had large black populations and Clifton was 96.1 percent white. That was an enormously white environment to grow up in. I think I probably sought out a more diverse college experience based in part on that. It was a lower-middle-class upbringing. It was comfortable; I never wanted for anything.

WB: Do you have any siblings?

JS: Two younger brothers.

WB: What are their names?

JS: Robert and Greg. Robert also went to Rutgers five years after me, so he probably was in the entering class of '75.

WB: In your high school years, did you have any part-time jobs, hobbies, clubs?

JS: I was one of the lucky ones who found his passion really early in life. It was a ninth grade teacher with the unlikely name of Betsy Ross, like the Revolutionary War heroine, who had me in a ninth grade class, noticed some stories I wrote about sports, and said, "You really should think about a newspaper career." She also was the advisor of the school newspaper [laughter] and was scouting talent back then. Two years later, I was the sports editor of the newspaper and parlayed that to coming to Livingston College and starting the school newspaper there and then going off on a journalism career. There are so many serendipitous breaks in life, and to find somebody taking an interest in me and giving me some guidance at age thirteen, I was certainly very fortunate.

WB: What year did you enter high school?

JS: I entered high school in the fall of '67.

WB: Do you remember how you got interested in writing?

JS: It's more the subject area. With sports, I remember writing about spring training. I did stream-of-consciousness things about the smell of the grass and the ball hitting the gloves, and I was a big baseball fan back then. Baseball, I think, was a bigger sport than football still in the 1960s. I enjoyed writing about it on my own, and that was kind of my muse. That spurred me on.

WB: Did you have a favorite team?

JS: Wherever I lived. It was the Mets in the New York area, and then when I moved to Arizona, it was their team [Diamondbacks] out there and ditto in San Francisco [Giants] and ten years in Boston, I was a Red Sox fan. I'm a little bit fickle that way.

WB: What year did you graduate high school?

JS: I graduated in 1970, and I was only seventeen. I started college a little bit early. I was seventeen in the fall of 1970.

WB: How did you decide on Livingston?

JS: Let's see, I had applied to a variety of colleges. Some, like Syracuse, were a lot more expensive than a state school like Rutgers. I would love to tell you that I loved Livingston from first sight, but I think like most people, I applied to Rutgers College, was put on the waiting list, and Livingston offered me guaranteed admission, so I was happy to do that. I must say Livingston already rhetorically was presenting itself as a multi-racial experimental college, and I found that to be very attractive because, again, my upbringing in Clifton, New Jersey was really lily white.

WB: Had you been to New Brunswick or Piscataway or any of the surrounding towns there before?

JS: I hadn't. My mother drove me down in March or April for open admissions day, and we got there too late. Actually, I guess we had screwed up the time, so, no, it was one big surprise.

WB: Did you live on campus?

JS: I lived on campus three of the four years, and then senior year, I moved to Highland Park with a bunch of friends.

WB: Can you tell me a little bit about your freshman year?

JS: Livingston, of course, was built on the old Camp Kilmer, and so much of it, all the trees [had been removed], had denuded the landscape. Most of us who are still in touch from that era remember a lot of red mud, because there was no grass. There was no trees. It's amazing to go back now and ride your bicycle around there as I have done, and, boy, the place, of course, has

really changed in forty years. It was a time of Black Nationalism and pride. Livingston was designed by a lot of liberal white scholars to be a melting pot and instead wound up having students choose to segregate themselves. Whites lived with whites in dorms, and blacks lived with blacks in dorms. There was kind of a third-world dorm to try to integrate the two groups. If you went to the lunch room, whites generally sat at the white table and blacks at the black table. It was de facto segregation. I think the goal of the people who helped plan the place didn't quite work out as well as they had thought. What was clear to me is there was a need for a school newspaper. The year before me, so the fall of '69, there were five hundred students there. There was a paper called *Fango*, F-A-N-G-O, which I'm told is Spanish for mud, that circulated a bit but really didn't make it. I had the newspaper background. The most valuable experience I ever had was not in a class. It was coming up with the idea of a school newspaper, badgering the administration for funding, finding volunteers to work, finding a place to print the thing, who's going to distribute it, and that baptism by fire, that hands-on experience, really was one of the pivotal things in my journalism career.

WB: The newspaper we are talking about is *The Medium*.

JS: *The Medium* [laughter], yes, which has gone on to a certain level of infamy. I've kept up with it a little bit. I guess it views itself as a cutting-edge satirical or political paper on campus. Some pieces on Holocaust deniers have caused quite a bit of fuss, so it's really quite different than we ever anticipated. I can remember the very first staff meeting. We struggled with a name and actually came up with the name *Medium* because we wanted to be a medium in terms of the communication channel among all the students on campus, black, white, otherwise, a medium between a newspaper and a magazine, so kind of going longer form. If you're a weekly newspaper, you really don't break news. It's more of a [feature] style. That's where we came up with the name. [Editor's Note: Dr. Simon is referring to the April 21, 2004 issue of *The Medium*, which caused controversy due to its anti-Semitic content. After *The Daily Targum* expanded to cover all campus news, *The Medium* shifted its focus to become a weekly entertainment publication, its satirical slant originating in a section called "The Censored Pages." (<http://i-am.rutgers.edu/2011/11/working-at-the-medium/>)]

WB: Did you see yourself working in concert or in opposition to or as alternative to *The Targum*?

JS: *The Targum* welcomed us. We were printed by *The Targum* in one of the basements in the quad on the New Brunswick main campus for a couple of years. The layout was done there. We had a fairly warm relationship with them. We were certainly aware of them. They had the great advantage of being a daily, and they'd be able to break news and still deal with it while it was still current. Working on a weekly paper or a weekly magazine like *Time* magazine is always after the fact. It lets you be more analytical, but you're not breaking the news.

WB: Can you talk to me about some of the specific challenges with getting *The Medium* started?

JS: Yes. Since the campus chose to segregate itself, it was to convince, if I can be candid, scared white kids to walk up to often more savvy, street-smart black kids and get them to talk on the record for things. One of the most amazing stories was it was still illegal to engage in

homosexual activities in New Jersey in 1970 and yet we sent a woman to a meeting of the fledgling gay pride club, which was out on Route 18 in one of those tall apartment houses. I remember her calling me [laughter] and saying, "Everyone is making out right now. What should I do?" [laughter] I said, "Just get people to talk on the record with their names about the activity if you can." We had an early story on that. There was a lot of friction among black students on campus. Rival student groups popped up. If you go back to the newspapers of that era, literally one group kidnapped the president of another group. The cops got involved. I think the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] got involved. There was plenty of news to cover on campus. [Editor's Note: This incident occurred on Friday, March 12, 1971. Armed men abducted Livingston student DeForest Blake "Buster" Soaries, Jr., a leader of the Organization of Black Unity (OBU), and then released him later that day in Princeton. (See Rutgers history professor Dr. Paul Clemens' article "The Early Years of Livingston College, 1964-1973: Revisiting the 'College of Good Intentions.'" The article appears in *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* and is co-written by Carla Yanni.)]

WB: Did you find that black students were willing to talk to the scared white students, as you described them?

JS: Yes, and sports was kind of an intermediary. The sports teams were dominated by students of color. They wanted publicity, like all athletes do [laughter], so that was one reason to pick up *The Medium* back in that era. If I can jump ahead to the second year, we were so successful that a group of black students demanded their own four pages in the newspaper. Once again, it was a segregated view of the newspaper that the news shouldn't be integrated throughout the paper. Here are four separate pages to be owned by the black student club on campus. I was wise enough to say, "Sure, we'll even help you lay it out. You can borrow our cameras." They did it one week. They got lots of pats on the back, and then I remember saying, "The deadline is Sunday for your next four pages." There was gasps on their part. There's a lot of energy to do something once and it's fun the first time, but one of the problems of journalism is there are deadlines. They continued to do it for a while and then just realized they didn't have enough energy to keep it up.

WB: What were your responsibilities those first couple years?

JS: I really started the paper with a guy named Wayne McCabe. He liked the title publisher, even though usually the publisher has some of his or her own money involved in something. He had that title, and I wanted managing editor, because I wanted to manage the week-to-week operations of the paper. We were up on the second floor of Tillett Hall. There was a suite of offices there for student clubs. We had a couple of those offices. Tuesday was the layout night. I think Wednesday it was printed. It was distributed Thursday morning, but then by Thursday night, you have to worry about next week's paper already. It was my job to roll out the troops and have story ideas. We had a couple photographers. There was no video back then. Also, just to think about next year, because my memory is I only did this for one year, then moved over to the radio station. One of my close friends (Michael Arosy?) became the editor for a year and there were a variety of people.

WB: Why did you leave?

JS: I enjoy inventing things and starting things. I've just always had an entrepreneurial spirit. I got that underway, and then I said, "Why don't we have a radio station?" We did have a radio station, WRLC back then. It was carrier current, so it could only be heard on campus in the buildings. I think they ran a wire from building to building and that transmitted it. They didn't have any news program whatsoever. I wanted to dabble a little bit in broadcast news, so I went over and got them organized. I organized the record library. There were no CDs [compact disc] then. It was still all vinyl and got that under control, thoroughly enjoyed it, and then started taking a lot more journalism classes. Usually, you would take a class and then apply what you learn in the real world. I did the trial and error first and then learned the theoretical. I'm not sure I did it in the right order, but it seems to have worked out pretty well for me. I got bored with the radio station. Junior year, I was one of the, I guess, big men on campus. The administration hired me to publicize student events, so I was an assistant in the student affairs office or something like that. They paid me some money, and I did that junior and senior year. I tried different things every year.

WB: Were you a news junkie?

JS: Very much so. My mother remembers in January of 1968, most kids would take their money and go out and try to illegally buy beer or whatever when you were in high school, I bought a TV so I could watch the Democratic presidential race. [laughter] Lyndon Johnson decided not to run again, and [so it was] Eugene McCarthy against Robert Kennedy [in the Democratic primaries]. I wanted my own TV in my own room just to watch TV news. Yes, I've always been obsessed with it. It's not too surprising I wound up doing it, and I'm now teaching about it. [Editor's Note: After winning the California primary, Robert F. Kennedy was shot on June 5, 1968 and died the next day. In August at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy lost the nomination to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who was defeated in the general election by Richard Nixon.]

WB: Did you have newspapers and magazines in the house?

JS: Yes, very much so. In the house growing up, it was a conventional house and a conventional use of the newspaper. Back then, there were four sections. Dad would get the news section. Mom would get what was often called the four Fs, family, features, fun and something else, the lighter news, because women were stereotyped as only being interested in that. Junior or me would get sports, and the daughter would get the entertainment pages. We used up the newspaper fully that way. It was infamous, I guess, at Rutgers junior year, we got a daily subscription to *The New York Times*, which sounds great, but they really pile up after a while and became quite a fire trap in the South Tower. I was on the eighth floor. The fire marshal came by a couple times. He wasn't very happy seeing all the newspapers lying around.

WB: In terms of *The Medium* staff, was it an all-student staff?

JS: Yes, sure. There were no grad students.

WB: Right. What were the demographics of the staff? Do you remember?

JS: Yes. Probably sixty-four men over women, overwhelmingly white. We weren't aware of it then actually and maybe shame on us. Certainly, our professors were preaching diversity, but you dealt with that and nodded in the classroom. I'm not sure it got into our heads enough to actually apply it in our real lives [laughter] when you're seventeen and eighteen. There's certainly much more sensitivity to that these days. We were all liberal Democrats. There was no diversity that way. What was really nice is we hung out together. Jumping to the conclusion, in two Saturdays, they'll be ten of us who are still friends from that era who get together down the Jersey Shore every summer and hang out for a weekend at our old professor's house from Livingston. The newspaper was something that was really important to us. It kind of branded us together, and we still celebrate it each year.

WB: Do you remember any stories in *The Medium* that you were particularly passionate about?

JS: In the years I wasn't editor anymore, I would still dip back in when I was interested in writing about something. I can remember an op-ed [opposite-editorial] piece I did that was a smart piece for that era [on] how television accentuates the differences between political candidates just to make it more newsworthy. I actually had somebody draw a little TV with a face on it with two arms pushing George McGovern and Richard Nixon aside, getting at the fact that the more conflict there is, the greater differences there are among candidates, the more newsworthy something is and the bigger audience you can generate from that. I remember that piece. Then, one other, I was walking, I was over at Douglass [College]. I was always interested in politics. The Eagleton Institute of Politics is there, which I attended later, a couple years later, and there was Pete Seeger, one of the icons of the folk movement, getting ready to give a lecture and a concert in their little chapel. I went in. I was blown away. I started taking notes and wrote about Seeger but how also these extracurricular activities can so enrich your college experience and perhaps you're learning more from what you're doing outside the classroom compared to what you're doing inside the classroom. [Editor's Note: In the presidential election of 1972, Democratic candidate George McGovern lost in a landslide to President Richard Nixon.]

WB: You mentioned getting together at one of your professor's houses. Can you tell me about some of your professors that made an impact on you or some of the classes that you were particularly interested in?

JS: Yes. In hindsight now, we just realized how overwhelmingly male the faculty was, even at a school that was very aware of gender differences. A wonderful politics professor named Susan Fainstein was one of the few women I had. I counted recently, I took roughly six extra courses, so I took thirty courses times four credits each, and I took six more. Of those thirty-six classes, I think thirty-two were probably taught by males. It was just astonishing. I don't know if relatively few women were getting Ph.Ds. or if they just weren't getting hired at that school. I was a triple major. There was no core, because there was no general education requirements. I majored in politics and in education and in communication. The professors were earnest, liberal, overwhelmingly Jewish, which perhaps goes with being liberal in that era and the fact that we were so close to New York City. [The professors were] really concerned with students and wanting to, again, go beyond the classroom. I can't tell you how many parties at professors'

houses I went to, where the drinking age was eighteen and they foolishly served us as much liquor as we wanted as we staggered home in the car. I, as a professor, have never have students come to my house, because I realize the liability [laughter] that goes with that. [They were] very much aware of the world, politics, whatever was happening. Whatever outrages of the Nixon Administration were happening were brought into the classroom immediately. [There were] lots of teach-ins, where there would be a subject and then professors from six or seven or eight different disciplines would speak on it in an interdisciplinary manner. The problem, looking back at it, is they all had the same liberal perspective on things. You're not going to get too many pro-Nixon people speaking at a Livingston College teach-in. I think everybody was captured with this interesting experiment of a really racially diverse student body. [They were] top-notch faculty; these were a lot of great people from Rutgers College who decided they want to try something different over there. A lot of future deans and administrators came out of the faculty. We weren't using phrases yet like critical thinking, but we really were encouraged to analyze, to synthesize, to role-play, and to do perspective-taking to evaluate things and then kind of come to a conclusion. That's what we call critical thinking these days, so in some ways, I think we were way ahead of that. Things like shouting matches were encouraged in class. For its time, there was relatively little lecturing. The research on lecturing is really clear. You remember so little a week or two later. Either they got it, or the kind of professors they hired at Livingston, that just wasn't their style. We were constantly broken up into groups, which I don't think was done all that much in the early '70s, and then the groups would report out. It was really interactive. It was lively, and I certainly made the right decision going there. It was also inexpensive and cheap. Even as an out-of-state student, I think it was three thousand dollars for tuition and fees and room and board, which, given today's costs, is amazingly low.

WB: Did you live on campus all four years?

JS: Yes. [I lived] freshman year in Quad I [and] sophomore year in Quad II. I had a single junior year in the South Tower on the eighth floor, where the elevator would break every week. You would walk up and down eight stories, which wasn't much fun. Then, senior year, [I lived] in Highland Park. While almost everything was fun and games, one night it wasn't. Earlier in the day, the cover of *Newsweek* magazine for that week was called "Fortress America," and it had a gun on the cover. It was picking up on the fact that Richard Nixon in '72 was running for reelection, trying to scare the heck out of people. That night, we were held up. People smelled marijuana smoke either coming from our room or from another room, banged on the door, came in with a gun, held the gun to my roommate's head, said, "Where are the drugs?" We didn't have any in our room at that time. [The perpetrator] went into the next room, put a gun to the head of the women who were there, didn't get anything there either, and then ran off. Suddenly, this idyllic, safe college experience without a care in the world was tied to "Fortress America," and *Newsweek* had maybe picked up something in the ether.

WB: Was drug use a problem on campus, or was it an issue? Maybe problem is not the right word.

JS: Yes. Drug use was the norm on campus. A decade later, we joked when Ronald Reagan appointed somebody to the Supreme Court, the person said he hadn't smoked marijuana in the '60s or '70s, and a lot of people joked, "Well, that's a cause for concern," because it was just so

widespread. I would imagine eighty or ninety percent of the students at Livingston smoked on a regular basis. It was one of the things that brought blacks and whites together, because both groups indulged in weed. Often, white students had better quality drugs and shared them, and so it was just kind of a given. Unless it manifested itself as a real problem like a robbery or break-in, the administration didn't do too much about it. One other thing, just while I think of it, I guess it was senior year, we opened a pub on campus. It didn't cut into the drug use at all. [laughter] It was just a different form of recreation. Some of my friends did that, too. It was in Tillett Hall on the front corner of the building.

WB: What was the name of the pub?

JS: I don't remember.

WB: I have heard about the pub before. Did you ask for identification at the door?

JS: Yes. It was a couple of friends. (Mike Ennis?) was the person who was the manager of it. I think it was a rather weak idea. [laughter] I think the drinking age was eighteen though, so therefore everyone could drink except for freshman. There was less of a need perhaps for the IDs.

WB: To go back to the attempted robbery, did you report that to the campus?

JS: Instantly, yes.

WB: Did anything become of that?

JS: No. It's funny. We think we knew the people who did it, because they didn't have masks on. [laughter] We saw them around campus. No, we were scared for three months, and then the fear subsides over time.

WB: You said you lived in the Lynton Towers junior year.

JS: Correct.

WB: Was it rare for Livingston students to be living in the Towers? My understanding is that was mostly for New Brunswick's overflow.

JS: I'm not sure that's the case. This would have been the fall of '73 and spring of '74. I think for that year all my friends were together. All the newspaper kids hung out on the seventh and eighth floor of the South Tower.

WB: Then, during your senior year, you lived in Highland Park.

JS: Correct. One or two other things just popped in my head. You may want to come to them later. Another source of friction on campus is how should student fee dollars be spent on musical groups. Today, I would do anything if I could go see Parliament Funkadelic and Ohio

Players and the various funk groups of that era, and the black student groups on campus were very successful in lobbying for fee dollars to bring those people to campus and attracting only a black audience. Again, I like to invent things, so I started the rock concert series. Spring of my final year, so it would have been spring of [1974], we brought in David Bromberg, who's now a fairly well-known folk singer, Happy and Artie Traum, New Riders of the Purple Sage, all kinds of groups like that, and attracted only a white audience. In hindsight, I'm sure we could have found some groups that would have appealed to both, [laughter] but we chose to separate from one another and in hindsight that's really unfortunate.

WB: How were those decisions made about which bands to invite with these limited resources?

JS: Pressuring and lobbying. The black kids, to their credit, had their act together sooner. The gym attracted a lot of black students. That's where the concerts were too, so there was a certain synergy there. There was an incredibly charismatic gym director named (Stan Wister?), whose brother was (Jerry Wister?) from the Chicago White Sox, who really kind of revved things up there and the gym was a great outlet for angst and any kind of hostility on campus. It certainly was done well. We also had a seven-foot Puerto Rican volleyball player named (Brian Blake?) who was the director of student affairs and kept a lid on any problems and was pretty evenhanded, he being my boss, since I was an assistant in the student affairs office. It was pretty evenhanded in distributing the goodies on campus.

WB: Did you have any difficulty managing your extracurricular activities with your studies?

JS: Is there a hidden question there? [laughter]

WB: No. Literally, how did you do it?

JS: Yes, I think time management skills are something we shouldn't minimize. I was really good at it. My second semester junior year, I student-taught at East Brunswick High School, and that really ate into all the extra stuff because you had to get dressed up all day and spend all night doing your lesson planning for the next day. [laughter] It helped convince me I didn't want to be a high school teacher. It fed the bug about wanting to teach and communicate and reach out to people. Again, I wound up with 152 credits, instead of 128, so I took an extra course for six of the eight semesters I was there because the courses were just so good. I couldn't get enough of it. I took some courses at Rutgers College, Douglass College, but the bus system was kind of erratic. You never knew how much time to allow.

WB: That is a complaint that has persisted for some time. If you had back-to-back classes on different campuses, it would be difficult to get there on time.

JS: Can't do it.

WB: You could not do it.

JS: You'd have to leave at least one period in between. I think I had a car senior year, so that changed a little bit. A fun story, so I had a car senior year, and I would just park illegally and get

tickets because there was no enforcement. Ten years later, I decided to go back for my master's and Ph.D. I have to get a transcript from Rutgers. I call the registrar. They said, "We'd be happy to send you a copy, Mr. Simon, except for the thirty-three parking tickets that you still have." [laughter] It turns out they were only three dollars back then, so that was ninety-nine dollars. I was happy to spend that and send that into my alma mater and get my transcript.

WB: You graduated undergraduate in 1975.

JS: '74.

WB: What did you do after you graduated?

JS: Having started a school newspaper and then the radio station and then doing the communication thing, I was really well prepared for the real world. Livingston also filled you with a confidence, but there were no internships back then like there are now. After graduating, I didn't think about a job. There would just be a job for me. I graduated in May, and in June, I went up to Boston because I had some friends who went to Harvard and Tufts and I could crash with them. I knocked on the door of nineteen news media organizations, cold calls without any appointment, and said, "I'm interested in working here." The nineteenth one was the Associated Press. It was raining on a Friday afternoon. The person felt sorry for me, said, "Take the AP test. See how you do," liked my story of starting a school newspaper, I was entrepreneurial, waived the normal requirements of two years of experience, and they hired me right out of college. I spent one very happy summer in Boston. Again, this was a different time. [I] turned down a permanent job after the summer, because I wanted to go back and party a bit more at Rutgers and I was hired to go back and run the rock concert series. I was actually paid as a full-time person in the student affairs office to bring music groups to campus and then came to my senses after that year. I went back to Associated Press and had ten very happy years there.

WB: What was your initial impression of Boston?

JS: Just this incredible youthful energy. I think the numbers were it's a city of 400,000 but then 200,000 college students or roughly those kind of proportions. I had friends at seven or eight different colleges up there. [laughter] This was an era of hitchhiking. I would hitchhike up there, so it would be free and just try to get back for class on Monday. That was always the challenge.

WB: When you went back and spent ten years there, can you walk me through that? What were your roles? What kind of stories were you working on?

JS: Sure, okay. The summer of '74, you're just a summer fill-in person. When someone's on vacation, you do their job. Back to Rutgers in fall of '75 to '76 [fall of 1974 to 1975] doing the concert series. Then, [I] went to Albany, New York, filled in for a summer there for AP. There was no opening, but there was one in Newark, New Jersey, so it was back to good old Jersey. I worked there. After a year there covering a wide variety of stories, there was an opening in Trenton covering the state legislature. I'm a politics major. I really love that. I went down there for two years. Back up to Newark, New Jersey, which was still recovering from the Newark

riots from [1967]. There was still a lot of scarred landscape. I became the boss. At age twenty-four, I was the news editor of the Associated Press of New Jersey, in charge of the statewide operation, plus the Atlantic City bureau, plus the Trenton bureau. I hated being the boss at twenty-four. You have to do the budget. You have to do the scheduling. Someone's always [ticked] off if they have to work Saturday night. Someone has to be there at midnight to eight a.m. because the news doesn't stop. It was far too soon for me to be the boss. I did that for a year or two. I went back to Rutgers as an adjunct professor. I was hired as a full-time teacher without a master's or doctorate in the communication department teaching journalism with Jerry Aumente. I'll tell you more about him in a minute. Then, I decided, here I am at twenty-six, and I'm telling students war stories about my great exploits as a journalist. Well, I thought, "I hope I have more exploits in front of me." I went back to AP for another eight years or so, covering the legislature in Providence, then covering the legislature, the courts and politics in Boston. Should I keep going chronologically?

WB: Let us stop and talk about your time back at Rutgers. Were you at Livingston or Rutgers-New Brunswick?

JS: Livingston.

WB: Livingston.

JS: When I came back for the extra year.

WB: When you were an adjunct.

JS: I was an adjunct at Livingston, right.

WB: Now, you were on the other side of it.

JS: Right.

WB: Had Livingston changed in the way students and teachers interacted?

JS: Yes, good question. I became much more appreciative of how overachieving a lot of the students of color were given the rotten education they had gotten in Camden and in Newark. These kids would come up with really bright ideas but just not be able to put sentences together very well, really needing remedial work in the "Intro to Journalism" course. Again, there was no core. There was no freshman writing course. You just jumped into whatever your major was. I did a lot of handholding. I remember students who came up with really good ideas for stories. I remember a black girl from Newark was saying in the projects there was a new dance called the bump, which was really big back circa 1977. She had quotes from her friends, but she couldn't put sentences together. As a teacher, we often joke that there were lots of students with a combined SAT of four hundred and of fifteen hundred at Livingston and nothing in the middle. It was a challenge as a teacher to have kids with really bright ideas but didn't have the basics, but then have a lot of, frankly, Jim Simons, who had really good writing skills but not a lot of creativity necessarily. [laughter] It was an interesting challenge to marry those two. You can

pair people. That's one teaching technique you do. This was the typewriter era, so this was way before computers. There was no Internet. I was proud of the job I did.

WB: I have heard from other students and faculty that there was an intentional lack of rigid structure at Livingston. Was that the case while you were there either as a student or as a teacher?

JS: Sure. Again, almost every school, including the one I'm the dean at right now, has a core curriculum, general education requirements consistent with a liberal arts education. You want a really broad undergraduate education, where you taste a lot of different things and get exposed to different disciplines. It probably wasn't a good idea in hindsight, but I did ten courses in com [communications], ten in education, ten in politics, there's thirty, but you don't hear me saying literature. You don't hear me saying philosophy or religious studies. Almost all the other courses I took were in social sciences. I had five psych[ology] courses, some history courses, because I just love social sciences, but I'm sure this was replicated times almost a hundred percent of the students that they just chose courses that sounded cool or was a good time slot to allow them to party before and not get up at eight a.m. [laughter] The faculty advising was very hit or miss. If you asked for it, it was there, but one of the ironies of higher ed[ucation] is the students who need the advising are afraid to ask for it. The "A" students come to your office; the ones who need the help actually don't. [laughter] It was a little bit too loose perhaps, but that was in the spirit of the times. It was an experiment.

WB: When did you ultimately return to Boston and start working with Michael Dukakis?

JS: I did the teaching as an adjunct in '78-'79. Around 1980, I was in Providence for a year, covering the legislature there. I was in Boston from '81 to '86 as a reporter, mostly in the state house covering politics, Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill, Dukakis. Then, in the Dukakis Administration, I was the assistant secretary of the environment in '87, '88 and '89 with a presidential race in the middle of that.

WB: One thing I wanted to ask about, because you have this background in journalism, during the presidential race, there was this whole Willie Horton story. How did you process that?

JS: Yes, we would basically just keep saying they, the Bush people, are so much better at this than we are. [laughter] Mike Dukakis thought it should be an Oxford [Union] Debating Society and the winning person would accumulate more points on debating style. It wasn't. It's warfare in the trenches. Dukakis is a really admirable person. I've stayed in touch with him, but he would be asked a question at a news conference, say, on pollution in Boston Harbor and say, "I'll get back to you in a day or two on that." Well, if we just fast forward to today, within ten seconds, someone will have something up on a blog [laughter] about the issue. Even back then, you didn't have a couple of days to respond to something, because your opponent will jump in there and create some friction. Dukakis came out of the Democratic Convention up seventeen points. I was actually thinking about a job in D.C., [laughter] what I'd like to do. I'd probably be a low-level functionary there but loyal to the president. It was just a disastrous fall campaign. The first George Bush became one of the few people who after eight years of one party in the

White House succeeded again in keeping that party in the White House for four more years. Hillary [Clinton] is, of course, trying to do that this year as well.

WB: Did you think that the way the Bush campaign used the Willie Horton story was unfair, or did you, like you said, just think they were better?

JS: Yes, I guess I'm struck by the old phrase all is fair in love and war and I guess I would add politics as well. It wasn't officially the Bush people. I think it was a third party who actually did it, but you're only as strong as your weakest link. In general, he didn't pardon a lot of people, but they found one pardon that went askew, that blew up in their face and they were smart enough to focus on that and not pay attention to all the hundreds of other cases that went well. It's just bare-knuckle fighting. Chris Matthews calls it "Hardball" for a reason. [Editor's Note: During the 1988 presidential race, the National Security PAC sponsored a television advertisement about the rape and stabbing committed by convicted felon Willie Horton while he was on a weekend furlough from prison, a program inherited by then Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. The Bush-Quayle '88 campaign paid for an advertisement called the "Revolving Door," which criticizes Dukakis for opposing mandatory sentencing and the death penalty and for allowing prison furloughs. George H.W. Bush went on to defeat Dukakis in the presidential election in November 1988.]

WB: What were some of your specific duties in the roles that you had working with Dukakis?

JS: Yes, so I'm on the full-time payroll, but at night I'd go over to their office, which was near what used to be called the Combat Zone in Boston, where all the porn clubs were put together. They were in an office building off of that. I was on the environmental issues committee. A fun story is we went into it thinking, "Let's prepare white papers and let's prepare an encyclopedic briefing memo for Dukakis on every environmental issue in the world." After a day of working on that [laughter], we went to a much more prudent system of waiting for people to ask for stuff and then pulling it together. Later, in my Ph.D. program, I have a Ph.D. in public administration, you learned that people's first instinct is called the rational-comprehensive method, where you gather all of the available information and then you sort it out and then you talk to all the stakeholders and come to a conclusion. The real world never works that way, because you never get pure information. By the end of the process, new stuff has already started. Everything is done in time and incrementally in governments, and I saw a lot of examples of that in the campaign. There was a lot of resentment that the people who got Dukakis the presidential nomination were then pushed aside by nationally-known Democratic bigshots, who in hindsight didn't do a very good job running the campaign. Dukakis was famous for Greek phrases, such as, "The fish rots from the head," meaning whoever's in charge of something bares the ultimate responsibility, and he bares the ultimate responsibility for not hiring good people. Pushback is hard. Four years later, the Democrats had people like James Carville, who were kind of alley fighters. [Editor's Note: James Carville is a Democratic strategist and media personality. As a member of Bill Clinton's campaign for the presidency in 1992, Carville helped Clinton defeat incumbent President George H.W. Bush.]

WB: What was behind your decision to get your Ph.D.?

JS: That didn't go all that well for me. I didn't move to Washington with President Dukakis, and instead the economy tanked. In Massachusetts, it was really bad in 1989. My wife is a corporate turnaround expert. She goes into companies that are in Chapter 11, which is being reorganized and seeking protection from bankruptcy courts, and tries to prevent them from going to Chapter 7, which is liquidation. We had an agreement if Dukakis won, we'd move to Washington, but if not, I would move with her all the way out to Arizona, where she had a chance to become vice president of the world's second biggest convenience store chain called Circle K. There's 7-Eleven, and then Circle K is the second biggest one. She was making more money than the president of the United States at that stage. It was my chance then to sneak back to college, because I still loved going to school. The Cronkite School of Journalism happened to be at Arizona State in Tempe, Arizona, right next to Phoenix, where she was based. Arizona became a state during the Progressive era of the 1920s. The Progressives believed in education as a way of solving the world's problems, so the Arizona Constitution says that public education through the university level shall be as close to free as possible. For my master's and Ph.D., I paid one thousand dollars a year, once again lucking out. I paid three thousand dollars for Rutgers as an undergrad. I only paid one thousand a year to go for first a master's at the Cronkite School. I interacted with Walter six or seven times. Then, [I] did my Ph.D. in the public administration program, writing about how people use information from the press in presidential campaigns. Walter Cronkite copy-edited my dissertation. I still have it. People say I should put it on eBay and make some money. He said, "You academics have to learn to write in a shorter manner." [laughter] He's certainly right about that. I got a kick out of him. Seven years later, I'm at Fairfield University in Connecticut and able to bring a class to meet him at the CBS Headquarters in New York. That was really cool.

WB: Can you walk me through your career at Fairfield?

JS: Sure, so after I got my Ph.D. in public administration at Arizona State, my wife got a job as a president of a chain of farm stores right smack dab in the middle of California, where Cesar Chavez and the farm workers organized in Modesto, California. Nearby was the University of the Pacific. They needed a journalism professor and hired me at the grand sum I think of twenty-seven thousand dollars a year. I spent three very happy years there learning how to teach, because I was a research assistant doing public opinion polling during my master's and Ph.D. days. [I] never taught a class. It was just a different way, [being] a research assistant rather than a teaching assistant. I had to learn a lot, and I learned it on the ground at University of the Pacific in California. Our son our third year there was born and at age one and a half was diagnosed as being autistic, and one of the things you want to do is get home to family and friends as quickly as possible and build a support network. My wife quit her job, her very high-paying job, and we moved back East. I was able to get a job at Fairfield. They wanted a journalism professor for the first time, and [I] started in the English department, because that's where the courses were. Within two years, it was the biggest unit in the English department. There were twelve literature professors and only one journalism professor, but I had three times as many students doing journalism. I was proud of that. I spent eighteen happy years at Fairfield, including five as the chair of the English department. All those lessons in public administration were useful. [I spent] two years as associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and one year as the interim dean while we searched for a dean. I was a candidate. The search failed. They told me, "We definitely want to hire somebody from the outside," and that

was a signal to me to hit the job market. I took a job starting in October of '15 at the New York Institute of Technology as the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

WB: You started the journalism program at Fairfield.

JS: Yes.

WB: What were some of the challenges of getting a brand new program started at a university?

JS: Almost identical to the challenges of starting the school newspaper at Livingston all those many years ago. Where does the funding come from? Who's going to print the thing? How do we get enough classes of students so that some of the students will catch the journalism bug and want to do this? It was not yet the era of convergence, the coming together of print and broadcast and Internet, and generally you still had separate tracks then. I'll do the print. Who's going to do the broadcast? Who's going to worry about the Internet? I [had] to hire adjunct professors, because I was the only one. I couldn't teach all of the courses. I set up internships for students. I [wrote] letters of recommendation, and I just thrived in it. I absolutely loved it.

WB: Did you feel like your previous experience prepared you for that?

JS: In every way, going back to starting the school newspaper to the administrative experience I gained at the Associated Press being the news editor those many years ago to studying public administration from afar and then putting it all together in my current job, and it all goes back to Betsy Ross in ninth grade.

WB: Describe for me for people who do not know what the New York Institute of Technology is.

JS: Sure. It's a school that was set up to help returning war veterans get jobs in technology. Back then, they were called teaching machines. We call them computers now. We were very early into that. We have a big computer science program, a big engineering school, a medical school for doctors of osteopathy, which is treating the whole patient, one of the biggest schools in the country, a big business school. It's my job to be sure every kid gets a well-rounded general education as well by taking the liberal arts courses, which I think are the key to success in college and success in the future. One of the challenges though is we're sitting here in Manhattan. This is one of the campuses. We have another huge campus in Old Westbury, Long Island, so twenty miles away. I'm forever schlepping back and forth. Then, [we have] two campuses in China. I've been over there. [We have] one in Abu Dhabi and one in Vancouver, so we definitely do the global thing as well.

WB: Are there any new campuses coming?

JS: [laughter] I think that's enough for now.

WB: Do you miss being a journalist?

JS: Yes. I'm still a political junkie. I can't take my eyes off of Donald Trump on TV. I'd love to be writing about him. Of course, in the age of blogs and *The Huffington Post*, which doesn't pay you, it prints anything that you send them, I certainly could be writing. I'm not rewarded for doing it, but I just remember all the bad days as a journalist when you're writing about, "It's ninety-eight degrees out," or, "The little animal died in the forest fire," or all the boring human interest stories that don't float my boat. I don't want to forget about those things as well. I don't want to forget all the years of working four p.m. to midnight, which is just awful, working midnight to eight a.m., and a lot of sacrifices that go with it as well.

WB: It is interesting you mention that now with so many outlets, there is so much content. I know this is an overly broad question, but how would you characterize the state of journalism now versus when you were either in school or practicing?

JS: Sure. Back in my heyday, which in some ways is kind of a golden era of journalism compared to now, you were conveying information, but now information is generic in that people almost don't care whether they got it from *The New York Times* or just from flipping on their cell phone or booting up their desktop computer. Information, again, is a commodity, but what's really valuable is analysis and really good writing. There's a resurgence of long-form writing. People like to dig into a twenty-thousand word story in *The Atlantic*, in *Vogue*, in *Harper's*, those kind of magazines. They're reinventing themselves with the longer form. I love the fact that I was with the Associated Press, which is a cooperative or collective. All the newspapers basically chip in, so they can send AP reporters to Paris and the papers don't have to have somebody in Paris. I had liberal newspapers, I had conservative papers reading every word of politics that I wrote, keeping me right in the middle, and it was in some ways a much easier era to operate in, a much more intellectually honest one than now. We have the partisan divide of the country now. We have the blue media, and we have red media. My advice is just be sure you're reading five or six different varied sources, which are going to create some cognitive dissonance in you. That's, again, critical thinking. You want to juggle competing views and try to figure out what the truth is.

WB: Is there anything I have not asked you about that you would like to talk about?

JS: Yes, one or two things. I was invited back to Livingston four years ago. The founder of the journalism program was Jerome Aumante, and he was retiring. They were doing a retrospective on him, and I was able to reminisce on a lot of these stories. Livingston gets credit under Jerry Aumante for what was viewed at the time as guerrilla journalism, that is, give anybody a video camera and just let them go out and shoot and see what you come up with to empower people. It can be viewed in power terms of empowering poor people to use this way of getting their views out there and not just letting the elites dominate the news media. I think he really gets a lot of credit for being way ahead of his time, but he certainly had the print courses that I thrived in as well. It was another way that Livingston tried to be different. I wrote a piece for *New Jersey Monthly* ten years after it opened in '69, so you will probably find it in 1979. It was a sour story. I think the theme was [laughter] the problem with experiments is sometimes they fail. You can go back and Livingston was gobbled up by the Rutgers University system. It's homogenous now. I think the dean tries to play up its past distinctiveness. It would be fun for you to go back, I hope you do, and talk to people like Gerry Pomper and the people who kind of put the college

together to see what percentage of their goals they feel were accomplished. [Editor's Note: Gerald Pomper is a Board of Governors Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. In 1962, Pomper came to Rutgers College and taught political science. Pomper served on the Livingston College planning committee under the leadership of founding dean Ernest Lynton. When Livingston College opened in 1969, Pomper joined its faculty, serving as the first chair of the political science department. In 1981, Rutgers University centralized the faculties of the New Brunswick undergraduate colleges, Rutgers College, Cook College, Douglass College, University College and Livingston College, and formed the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. In 2006, the University merged the undergraduate colleges into the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences.]

It certainly worked out well for me and my friends. [laughter] We all have done really well. My closest friend works for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and gives out tens of millions of dollars a year. My second closest friend is the director of the entire Maryland legislature. He can only be fired if the governor and the senate president agree. All my friends have done really well. We were energized. The goal was to have people involved with public discourse. Livingston certainly succeeded on that level. I fear a lot of students of color who needed remedial education didn't get it there and probably graduated with a degree and weren't all that well served, because it was a brand-new college. The support structure, there was almost no advising to find students who needed help, to look for the students who were getting a "D" and say, "You need help." None of that was set up. I think a lot of students slipped through, and I feel sorry for them. I think there was a variety of well-known people. I think Buster Soaries is a well-known black minister who worked with [former New Jersey Governor] Christie Whitman. He certainly would be worth seeking out as well. One more thing, when I'm at Associated Press, I'm the news editor in 1976-'77. At the same time, I got a fellowship at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. I spent a very happy year there with Alan Rosenthal, again, studying legislatures from an academic perch, right after I had worked covering the Jersey legislature and right before I covered the Rhode Island and Boston, Massachusetts legislatures. That was another segue for me and another way that Rutgers really has helped me be well-rounded.

WB: I am curious because you were a student and a professor, some of the shortcomings that you described for Livingston, particularly as they affected students of color, do you think those were unforeseen consequences or do you think that the people who put the college together should have been able to anticipate some of those problems?

JS: I think the central administration delegated the Livingston planning too much to this core of really bright professors and didn't come back, after their plans were announced, didn't come back and say, "Well, how about A, B, C, D, E, F, and G?" They kind of just let them do their own thing. If you talk to Gerry Pomper especially, he was one of my advisors and was one of the architects of it, he remembers the planning in 1967 and 1968. By [1967], the Newark riots erupt. He's literally at a meeting like this, and everyone's saying, "Oh, shit. Now what do we do?" New Jersey was going to need someplace for really bright students of color to have a chance, and I think Rutgers College and Douglass College were rather elitist and frankly didn't want them there. Livingston, in some ways, was a safety valve, but it wound up making my experience there all so much more interesting. [laughter] The diversity was a lot different than Clifton, New Jersey with a ninety-four percent white population.

WB: You talked about your wife a little bit. Can you tell me her name?

JS: Sure, Karen, K-A-R-E-N. [We were] post-high school sweethearts. [She is a] corporate business turnaround person. [She] was amused by Livingston. It's always great to have a girlfriend who does all the driving. She went to Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. I was in New Brunswick. She had the nice car, so she did most of the driving down. She found Livingston people to be very cliquish and kind of clannish, so she was kind of the outsider, maybe just showing her insecurity, never felt fully appreciated. I don't know if that's a Livingston thing. She was the only one who didn't go there, so perhaps it's not at all surprising. She's certainly a part of this group that comes down to the Jersey Shore, and we reminisce about our Livingston days.

WB: You mentioned you have a son.

JS: My son Christopher, right. He's twenty-one. He's really an artist. While I was at Fairfield, he exhausted all of the fine arts classes, had a one-man show, was really well regarded. He's autistic. He will never be able to survive in a philosophy class. That conventional college education isn't right for him, and we're just trying to figure out what the next step is for him.

WB: Thank you for agreeing to sit for the interview. I really appreciate it.

JS: Sure.

WB: Thank you for taking the time.

JS: Great.

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Transcribed and reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 3/20/17