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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARVIN APSEL

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an interview with Marvin Apsel, on November 27, 2018, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interviewer is Kate Rizzi. Also present is ...

Gail Apsel: … Gail Apsel, his wife.

KR: Thank you so much for coming in today to do this interview.

Marv Apsel: You're welcome.

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

MA: I was born on January 18, 1948. Presently, if you do the math, I'm seventy years old, but in about seven or eight weeks, I will turn seventy-one.

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

MA: Well, I do know a number of things that have been handed down to me through the years about their history. It is quite diverse and quite different when compared to my father's side of the family, but I'll tell you this about my mother. My mother, her name was Frances Apsel. Frances B. Apsel, Frances Bernice Apsel, and she was born in 1923. She was one of four children, and her mother was named Elsie Marder, her maiden name. Her father's name was Samuel Marcus. They had quite a difficult life, and as I have eluded to before, her upbringing was demonstratively different from that of my dad.

Growing up, my mom was a little bit of a mustang, you might say. She is the third child of four. Her father was a shoemaker, and from what I understand, he was a very strict disciplinarian, obviously could not have availed himself of reading any of the books by Dr. Spock and so he did not conduct the affairs within his family with a great deal of compassion and love. In fact, he used corporal punishment, and today, you would consider that abuse. So, she grew up in that environment. As I said, she was the third child of four. Her older brother, Izzy Marcus, bore the brunt of much of the abuse that happened in that family. Sam, the father, may have been a drinker, and also, like I said, was very physical. So, because Izzy, who was the older male in the family, took most of the brunt, I'm sure that it affected him in his growing years and in his maturing years. The next child was her sister, her older sister, who she adored and who she looked to for guidance. She was also a bit of a mustang. Then, there was [my mother] Frances and then her younger brother, whose name was Morris. [Editor's Note: Dr. Benjamin Spock was a pediatrician and psychologist who studied parenting methods in the twentieth century. Dr. Spock wrote the best-selling *Baby and Child Care*.]

Very interestingly, Morris passed away just two or three months ago, and while it happened quite suddenly, he had been suffering from Alzheimer's. One little aside about that family is that at his funeral, laid out on a table, there were medals of his service during World War II and they stood there in stark contrast to the pictures of major events throughout his life. I was looking at the medals and his son Steven asked me if I would do the eulogy, a eulogy for his father because there were not many people there and unfortunately they had been estranged with each other in the last several years. So, I did know a number of things about how he was awarded those

medals and his service during World War II. At the funeral, during the eulogy, I spoke about this man who received a Purple Heart. He also had a Bronze Star and several other citations that his son and his two daughters were unaware of. They were unaware of anything that had transpired militarily in this man's life. That is part and parcel of many veterans that I've spoken to or have known during that period of time. They did not really fully disclose what had happened. However, during my youth, I had had some time with this man and he was able to explain to me that he got the Purple Heart in Europe while positioned during the winter at an outpost and suffered frostbite so severely that it warranted the awarding of a Purple Heart. So, it was very apropos later on at the cemetery that this man received military honors while he was being interred. I felt good that, although late, his family finally had an awareness of what it took to be awarded those medals, that they are not given out haphazardly or frivolously. They are given out because of merit. I think it helped a little bit in giving the children and Morris's wife some comfort.

So, my mother grows up in this environment with her dad, who is, like I said, very strict. They grew up in New York, on the Lower East Side, eventually, moved to New Jersey, to a place called Perth Amboy, and from there onto Brooklyn. Before I was born in 1948, my mother's father had already passed, so I did not know him. I only have one picture of him, and when you look at him, you can see a sternness in his face. The way he postures himself in the picture sitting depicts a man who I could believe was capable of the discipline and physicality that was manifested. I'm sure that he disciplined my mother, and I'm sure it affected my mother.

My mother, you might call her a person who was street savvy. She did not have a large amount of formal education. She went to high school, and she graduated and worked. She worked in clothing stores and cleaning stores. When I look at her interventions, she tried to raise her kids to always be aware of where they are and who they are with. She was a little bit more aggressive, actually much more aggressive, than my father was, and when I tell you a little bit about my father's history, you'll see the comparison in demeanor and in the way they led their lives was stark.

My mother married my father when she was twenty-three years of age. My father was a lawyer, and he was educated. He revered books and study, and he was reflective of the atmosphere that existed in his household--I'll go into that a little bit later. Here, we had two individuals, one a college-educated, erudite individual, who, as a Jewish man, went to St. John's University and then to Fordham Law School. Let me underscore that; he came from a religious, observant family and yet he went to St. John's University and received a fine education taught to him by the Jesuit priests who conducted classes at that time. He came from a relatively, I wouldn't say poor family, but they were probably lower middle-class. The thinking of that time, in my father's family, was that he was the oldest of five children, and so it was thought that all resources should be put together to send the oldest child to college first before all others. That occurred, and he went on to become a lawyer. To the credit of that family, the Apsel family, his siblings eventually went on and also received degrees--the brother went on to college, became an eminent mathematician, and the next brother went into business. His sister, Gertrude, was an active housewife and community leader. I will tell you another story about his younger sibling George, who perished at age six.

Getting back to the relationship, so you could see we had a highly-educated person marrying a woman who was more of a street-savvy individual. How did this come about? It came about because my dad's younger brother had already become married, and that was just something that didn't happen. The older one got married first and then successive siblings followed in line. So, there was an all-out effort to get my father, his name was Hyman Apsel, married, and so Gertrude, his sister, brought them together and eventually they were married.

The secret that existed between them that I never really fully was aware of, but I found out on the day I received his death certificate, was that my mother was twenty-three years of age when she got married. My father purported to be four or five years older than her, when in fact he was actually thirteen years or so older than her. He was a man of thirty-five, and in those days, there was sort of a, I'll use the word, *shande* or something that you're not proud of, with regard to an older man marrying a much younger woman. [Editor's Note: *Shande* is Yiddish for embarrassment or scandal.] Today, it's commonplace, but in those days, it brought about some suspicion. In any event, they did marry, and so when I was born two years later, he was thirty-seven years old and a very hard worker--and I'll go into that in a bit--but a very hard worker. When I looked at other fathers who were actually ten, fifteen years younger than him and were more involved with their kids, playing ball and having a catch and going here and going there, my dad did not have the strength or the inclination to do those things, possibly because he was very tired. He held down several jobs.

In the relationship between them, it had its ups and downs, and it produced three children. I am the oldest. I have a sister that is two years younger than me, and I have a brother that's two years younger than my sister. So, there's a four-year gap between myself and my younger brother Gary and a two-year gap between my sister and myself. So, that is the family structure, a little bit about my mother and father, and certainly their personality traits to some extent rubbed off on each of the individuals in our family.

I wish I could say I was as erudite as my dad, [laughter] but that was not to be. Actually, my younger brother did very well in school. In fact, at a very early age, we used to call him the "little professor." He was somebody that availed himself of the extra teaching that was provided to him by my sister and myself, and so that extra amount of input, albeit from people within his age range, I think assisted him in doing well in school.

When I say my father was an attorney, he actually grew up in the Apsel family business, which was that of tailors. Everyone in that family was a tailor, and they had a shop in East New York, Brooklyn, called the Apsel Coat Company. All the brothers would work in that factory. Even though my dad was going to school and became a lawyer, he would still, on the weekends, come back to that shop and assist his father and his brothers in the making of ladies coats. It was sort of a demonstration of the love and respect for the contributions and to give recognition to his family for the sacrifices made for him so that he could succeed. Sometimes, Dad would bring work home and, in our basement, he had a sewing machine and a cutting table, he would work in his spare time to do whatever needed to be done to help his father and brothers.

Now, I knew his parents, my grandparents. They were Sam and Sarah. My grandfather was a very pious individual, lived in Brooklyn, on Warwick Street, and had this shop, in which the

family produced these ladies coats. He lived across the street from an orphanage, and he was also helpful in the work performed by that orphanage. By saying that, I am telling you there was a feeling that you needed to repair the world. We call it [in Hebrew] *l'dor va'dor*, from one generation to the next generation. Basically, those sentiments were infused into all the children.

Now, my grandparents, who were very calm, very mellow people, honored education, but while they were kind and helpful and obviously adored their grandchildren from all of the siblings, there was a great sadness that they bore, and that sadness was borne not only by my grandparents but by my father and his siblings. My father had a younger brother, George, who I indicated had passed at age six years old. He passed because he was out of the reach of his mother in the house and had gone into the basement. As young children would do, he was playing. He sat down against the basement wall, and he may have just dozed off. Maybe he was tired. In those days, the delivery of fuel, basically coal, came through a window that was at street level. There would be this truck that had all this coal and a chute that would go through the basement window, and the coal would be deposited in the basement to be used as fuel. Well, unfortunately, George was at the base of that wall when tons of coal cascaded on him, he suffocated and he died. A once vibrant lady, his mother, my grandmother, who, by all indications, was a very loving lady, felt immediately responsible for the accidental death because she didn't have George in her eyesight, not that he was off a great distance, but he was out of her eyesight, and she took responsibility for his demise. That sadness permeated all of them, and I think it's something that shaped their future relationships with their children. I noticed that in that family there was more of a close loving type of a relationship. Although my dad wasn't demonstrably loving in the way you would think, kissing and hugging, there are many different ways you can manifest love in a family, and this man, by his actions, demonstrated to me a special love for his family and exceptional support for his children.

He worked in that shop, and he was a lawyer. He was a good lawyer working for Corporation Council in New York, but he also opened up his own business, a dry-cleaning store. He gave it a go in the business world, but it obviously did not work out. In an effort to increase his income, even though he was a lawyer working for the City of New York, it didn't pay a lot of money and he added another job to work for the post office at night. After doing a full day's work in the law department, he would do four hours at night and then come home at eleven, eleven-thirty, in the evening. He would be out of the house by seven, seven-fifteen, in the morning. Obviously, he was a person who honored the work ethic, and that work ethic has passed itself onto his children. I look at myself and my own life, [which] we'll go into, and I look at my sister and my brother, we would all be considered industrious people who never let any grass grow under our feet.

Coming all the way back and going around, the relationship between my mother and father was a complex one. We had two individuals coming from two different worlds, one from a street-type environment, the other one from a more business, intellectual, loving, religious and spiritual world. Those are my parents and grandparents. I must tell you that the only time I saw my father cry was when he lost his mom. Here's a man who was stalwart, the center of our family. My mother was loud, and she would play cards, canasta and poker and mahjong. My father would say to her, "Frances, if you're going to gamble, you can go out and get a job, and the money you make, you can use for your activities. However, I am not going to take the monies that I'm working and use them for that purpose." That's a pattern that occurred, and she did that.

She went out, and she got a job. She basically did what she needed to do, but that was part of the complexity. Did they have in-depth, intellectual conversations about world events? Probably not. It just didn't happen. Was my father instrumental in assisting me at different points in my own education? Yes, and, like I said, the activities of his life indelibly are imprinted on me, and I think whatever success I've had is in part due to him and my mother, because she had certain attributes [laughter] that were very interesting.

I look at Gail, my wife, who's sitting next to me, the first time I brought Gail home to meet my parents, we had a dinner. At the dinner, it was the routine where the men would stand up and go into the living room to talk about whatever, sports or the world, and the women stayed behind to clean up the kitchen. My mother put a broom in Gail's hand and said, "All right, you take care of the floor." I said to Gail, "Please, do it." [laughter] "If you never do it again, that's okay, but do it now." [laughter] So, she did. Like I said, Mom could be a forceful woman.

My mother garnered great loyalty from the people in her neighborhood. Upon her demise, I found out things about her that I didn't know. I know she had a lot of friends in the neighborhood, which was essentially a mixed neighborhood. It could be considered blue collar or middle class. People would come to me, one lady, Pat, who told me that when she was down and out and she could not make the rent, my mom would be there to help her out with getting her through difficult times. Pat, whose son was a thug and a drug runner was also involved in many neighborhood burglaries, Pat's husband was abusive, she found friendship with my mom. Without bravado, without any telling about this one and that one, she would help people like that. It's something that I'm proud of. I actually also received similar letters, when my father died, from people in his office or people that he had influenced in the field of law. They were nice letters about how he was a mentor to them and had helped them navigate through the system. That is a small snapshot of my family.

KR: I have a few follow-up questions.

MA: Sure.

KR: I am curious about your grandfather's tailor shop in East New York.

MA: Yes.

KR: How long was that in operation for?

MA: For many, many years. My father went on to become a lawyer. The next son, Max, became a schoolteacher, and then the third son, Abe, eventually took over the Apsel Coat Company and that became his primary occupation. Still, even with the brother Abe running that Apsel Coat Company, my father, would go in every once in a while to help him out. One of the rituals that we had, if you recall, Gail, once a year or so, the ladies of the Apsel Family would all assemble in the shop to pick out a winter's coat of their choosing.

GA: I still have it. I still have one!

MA: You still have one.

GA: The red coat.

MA: The red coat, right.

GA: It's still in the closet.

MA: What's interesting was that my father had those skills. He had a talent, like I said, with skills that were taught to him at a very early age. He would look at a coat in a store, and if you liked that coat, he could buy the material, rolls of material, and make that coat. What a wonderful talent that was. My father would teach me things that were considered aside from reading and intellectual discussions of worldly events. He would teach me how to sew. My friends were amazed that I could do a baste stitch, and I could make a cuff and I could sew on a button. My mother didn't teach me those skills; my father did. He taught me those skills. He wanted his children to be self-sufficient.

I must say, he was not a loquacious individual. He was a quiet man. He didn't speak a lot, but one of the things that he loved was to see his children in situations, where, as adults, they were able to speak to large groups of people. Whether it was my sister, who was teaching a class, or me, giving an address of some nature, he derived great pleasure from seeing that. He would've loved to have been a court lawyer and argue cases, but what he did was work for Corporation Counsel, basically performing real estate functions.

The Apsel Coat Company went on for many years, throughout the '70s and '80s. Eventually, my uncle Abe had a small store, which was the outlet for some of these coats. He once gave me a job; my job was to open up the store at eight o'clock in the morning. I think I was seventeen or eighteen years old, and it was summer job. I would go in and sell coats to the people, not that I knew a lot about coats, but I'd sell coats.

KR: What neighborhood did you grow up in Brooklyn, and what was it like?

MA: I grew up in a neighborhood called Borough Park, Brooklyn. Borough Park was, like I said, a middle class to lower-middle class neighborhood that basically was a neighborhood that was diverse as diverse can be. They talk about America being a melting pot. When I think of that term, I think of my neighborhood. Having said that, I must say that each street was almost a world unto itself and that you knew your neighbors across the street and everybody on the block. You knew people on other blocks, but they had a character of their own. Every street had a feel of its own. Those were the years, growing up in the '50s, where you could walk from one neighborhood to the next as long as you stayed on the main streets. Once you got on the side streets, people would challenge you, "Who are you looking for? Why are you here?" There was a feeling that your neighbors looked out for all the children, and if you received an admonition or a directive from one of the people living on your block, you did it. You just did it out of respect.

I grew up in Borough Park. I think the makeup was heavily Jewish. There were Polish, Asian, Italian, Protestant and Catholic people who were from Europe. They were all on that block. We

lived in a four-family house that my father bought. Now, he was a little bit more entrepreneurial than some of the other people who were renters of their homes, but he saw the value of investing in a house and eventually that did well for him. We lived in a four-family house in Brooklyn, very small rooms. I don't think there were more than 750 square feet for the entire apartment. There were three rooms and a kitchen, and there were five people in my family. So, I slept in a room with my brother. My sister had, we'll call it a room, but it was really a glorified closet. My parents slept on a Castro convertible that opened up in the living room. Then, there was the kitchen and bathroom. That was part and parcel of how everyone lived in that area. In those days, families were very nuclear, and so your relatives all lived within shouting distance of where the grandparents lived.

My mother's mother lived in this four-apartment building that my father had purchased, and she lived downstairs. She lived until--she was in her early sixties when she passed away. She was from Europe. She was a very superstitious lady, and she was known for sitting by the window, at the street level, looking out at the world. When she saw things like a television--it was considered an amazing invention--she would watch *Playhouse 90*, see actual acting that was going on and somebody would be shot, she was amazed that, "How can they shoot somebody on television?" She was old world, but not very sophisticated. My parents, obviously, helped absorb the cost of Grandma's living there. We all lived in that house. My uncle Morris, the one that passed, lived around the corner. [Editor's Note: *Playhouse 90* was a television series that aired on CBS from 1954 to 1960.]

My father's family lived in East New York, about a half-hour away. In that family, they were also very nuclear. The parents, brothers and sister all lived in close proximity to one another. My father moved a half-hour away, obviously, to Borough Park.

When I hear people talk about the good old days, I'm often amazed because the good old days, when I actually sit and I think about what the days of the early '50s (I was born in 1948) was like, I remember there was no air conditioning. It was hot as Hades in those houses. People would leave their house during the summer to go outside and sit in the coolness of the evening and just talk with one another. Yet the concrete had absorbed so much heat. It would just rise up and envelop you. People wore open shirts and swim shorts.

There were so many neighbors and their kids who all played in the street. We played punchball. The sewer cap, that was home plate. The Johnny pump [fire hydrant] was first base, the other sewer cap was second base and the fender of this car over here was third base. We would punch the ball, and we'd run the bases. We were playing in the street, and we loved it. Then, when our parents, at six o'clock or so, called us back to dinner, we vacated the street and came back later to continue to play, especially on the weekends when there was no school the next day.

Brooklyn was an interesting place. I think of the personalities of the people I knew. The names come across my brain right now, Mendy and Alan and Larry and Donny and Johnny. What a mix of people, but in that mix, we didn't always all get along well. It wasn't all kumbaya. There were fights, and there were conflicts.

There was one person by the name of D. who was the bully. He was a very heavy guy, and he threw his weight around. He would make life very difficult for you, and he was the conventional bully. He would bully me. To the extent that he did that, he outweighed me by about sixty pounds. It was very difficult dealing with D.

An interesting story is, as we grew older in that neighborhood, I eventually moved off that block. My parents moved to another house and eventually to a third house, but I was away from that group of people. Some of those guys on the block were engaged in a life of crime. Some of those guys were pretty tough *hombres*. This one individual, I'll call him Donny, was the bully. He comes back into my life at a certain time, and that certain time was when I was inducted into the Army. I was at Fort Hamilton about to raise my hand to take the oath, and standing close to me was this guy D., the bully of 42nd Street. He had his hand all bandaged up. What D. had done was he didn't want to go into the service, so he took a knife and he cut his hand so hard and viciously that he would not be accepted into the service. His father, who was an old Italian gentleman, who was a proud individual, was there, and he was full of disgust at what his son had done. It became very clear to me that here D. the bully was what I considered a coward, a person who didn't accept his responsibility for being called, like those others standing around him. Basically, D. faded into the background. He did not serve for whatever reason, because of that injury, self-inflicted. I understand that he went on to become a barber. He found some work in the neighborhood. Our paths never crossed after that, but I look at [that] event and you draw some things from life, and it's interesting how life turns out sometimes. Here, the guy that for many years bullied people with his weight and pseudo-toughness was in fact a weak individual, and that's sometimes the way it goes. [Editor's Note: Fort Hamilton is an Army installation in Brooklyn that has been in operation since 1825.]

That was the neighborhood of Brooklyn. By the way, in Brooklyn, my public school was on the corner, at the top of the block, and I went to that school from kindergarten through sixth grade. I loved my teachers. I still remember them, Mrs. Carmen in kindergarten and Mrs. Weissler, Mrs. Pinto, Mrs. Malone and Mrs. Bateman. They were loving people who generally love their students and help guide them through the system.

Strangely enough, the principal was a man by the name of Mr. Pearlman. Mr. Pearlman, years later, when I became a physical therapist and had to do my first patient at Maimonides Hospital as a student therapist, here I was, a therapist, but still not official, my first patient was Mr. Pearlman, my principal of my elementary school. He had had surgery, a procedure, for cancer. He was very debilitated and essentially out of it, but I felt that he was my principal and I was going to make his last days, to the extent that I could, comfortable. [Editor's Note: Maimonides Medical Center is a hospital located in Borough Park, Brooklyn.]

That was Brooklyn. The other personalities, I mentioned this one guy, the bully, but there were other individuals who came out of that neighborhood who distinguished themselves in Vietnam during that war. One person I knew was Kenny M., who became a Marine captain and perished in Vietnam. What a wonderful individual he was. He came from a very strong family, I thought he was a very smart guy, distinguished himself in school and sports, he had a quiet demeanor and powerfulness and accepted responsibility. When I think about the people that were lost in that conflagration, that war, police action, or whatever they call it, it's sad.

I may mention this later on, when I went into the Army, when I went to Vietnam, it's interesting that many of my friends lamented, "Oh, how terrible. What a bad break you got, Apsel. You're going into the service. You're going to go to Vietnam." I was probably one of the only ones in my group, going to Vietnam, from my general neighborhood, although later on there were people from high school that I knew that I met in the service. What is strange and you [do not] know how life is going to unfold; many of the people that stayed back in my neighborhood who lamented about the tough break that I got, that I was going into the service in Vietnam, actually succumbed during those years and in later years to street violence, to drugs and to crime. I, who went to Vietnam and went through difficult times, eventually came out and had the government pay for my education, and also assisted me in a number of different ways, making a pathway for me to continue my life. The Army helped me with securing employment and with future relationships that I was able to develop because of my time in the service. I contrast that to some of the people who were lamenting what a tough break I was getting. That is a little bit of the nature of Borough Park, Brooklyn. I went to work in my school that I attended as a child.

KR: What school was that, for the record?

MA: P.S. 164 was my public school. Later on, after the service, I became a school teacher, a New York City school teacher, and it's because of your friend, Gail, my wife's friend's mother, who was a school secretary, who told me there was a job available at P.S. 164, the public school that I attended as a child. I went in for an interview with the principal; I got that job. It was interesting. I did get that job, and I worked there for about a year or so before leaving teaching and going on to physical therapy school. Gail and I, interestingly enough, were seeing one another. I've got to tell this story.

GA: I went there as well.

MA: Gail worked there at P.S. 164, as a teacher, and we were dating. There was a guy by the name of Phil C., the music teacher. He basically says to me, not knowing that Gail and I are dating, he says, "Oh, that Gail Kempin over there in the first grade, wow. I think I have a chance with her. I think I'm going to ask her out." I remained silent, and I'm just listening to him and actually probably encouraged him a little, "Yes, why don't you go ask her out and see what happens?" He did. She rejected him, thankfully. He came back not very happy after learning that we were secretly seeing each other. Phil went on to become a music teacher at a different facility, and his life went on. He got over it, and I'm glad it worked out the way it did.

KR: Was that how you met, at the school?

MA: No.

GA: We just knew the same person.

MA: I went to New Utrecht High School and Gail went to New Utrecht High School. I graduated in 1965. A year or so later, I was asked to go back to New Utrecht. They were having a reunion of different years. They would bring all these people together from the previous

twenty years, and there were tables designated as 1965, '64, '63. Gail, who was still attending that school, was a cheerleader and host at the event.

GA: A booster.

MA: A booster. She was wearing that little uniform, and, obviously, she caught my eye. I think I said something really prophetic, and, really, it was profound. I think I said, "Coffee, tea or me," or something like that.

GA: It was just that. [laughter]

MA: Therein, the light was lit, and we started going out and dating. It was the best thing. You never know--I may have not gone to that party that night. I might have gone with the guys someplace else, but I did go, thank goodness, because the single most influential, effective individual in my life has been my wife, and without her, I would never have accomplished some of the things that I have. I loved her then. I love her still. We have a beautiful family. We've done a lot of things together, and hopefully that continues. We've been through some difficult times, medically this and that, with family, all the travails that families go through over the course of a lifetime. We've dealt with every situation, and I'm going to say that I think we've done a pretty good job with our kids and our grandchildren. So, that's the story, and thank goodness she didn't like Phil C. [laughter]

KR: During your childhood, what role did religion play in your life?

MA: When I was a boy of about six-and-a-half, seven years old, my parents enrolled me in Hebrew School. I would go to school during the day, get out at three o'clock, and at a quarter to four, I would walk the seven or eight blocks to Hebrew School at seven years of age. Amazing what we did in those days, traversing through neighborhoods. I would go to Hebrew School and basically stay there from quarter to four until five o'clock or thereabouts. I would learn how to read Hebrew, chant prayers, a little bit of history, and a little bit about the Jewish people. I belonged to the choir at that time, and it was overall a nice education. I must say that my brother went through the same process, but my sister did not. For some reason, there was this role assessment that was done in those years. Boys were on a certain track, and girls, you learned the domestic skills to maintain a household and my sister essentially did that. While I and my brother had availed ourselves of an education, a religious school education, my sister did not.

Now, my parents, remember, my father came from a religious family, a pious family, a spiritual family. They actually knew how to read Hebrew. They went to Shabbat services on Friday and Saturday, but my mother did not and so I must tell you that our house was not what you would say kosher, a Jewish household. Yet, there was a feeling of spirituality. We certainly celebrated the holidays, but we did not go to temple. We were aligned with a more Conservative temple. My brother, as a matter of fact, went on to a more intensive Jewish education than I did. He continued on through junior high and high school, after he was confirmed at age thirteen. He continued his studies. I did not. I picked it up much later in life, but I think we had a nice foundation of learning about our history and who we are. When I talk about *l'dor va'dor*, of

repairing our world to the extent possible, this generation that you're living in repairs for the next generation was something that was addressed early on, but now we follow more intensely.

Our family was not overtly religious. We did not keep a kosher home. We did mix milk and meat and things like that. My father had a difficult time with that. When we went to a Chinese restaurant, my father ate, while we had wonton soup and egg drop soup and pork fried rice, my dad was having a glass of tomato juice and chow mein, vegetable chow mein. He would go, but he was not happy about it. Many of the people in my area, even my friends who were not Jewish, who were Christian, did not practice their religion, as far as I could see. They went to holidays. There were holiday celebrations but not to the extent that I see today. There was no Reform movement in the various disciplines that I could see.

KR: Where did you go to Hebrew School? Was it at a synagogue?

MA: No, so, I went to a public school, and then, like I said, I'd come home from public school, change my clothes, and walk to a free-standing Hebrew school. It was on 47th Street and 14th Avenue, called Machzikei Talmud Torah. It conducted classes during the day for other individuals who were using it full time, but it also had a program for kids like me, who were, I'll call them, secular Jews, who basically came in to receive this religious training, starting at age six or seven years and lasting until after I was bar mitzvahed (until after thirteen). During the summers, I would go to their religious camps for three weeks. I'll tell her about camp.

GA: Yes.

MA: I would go to these religious camps. At age seven or eight years old, it was three weeks out of Brooklyn, out into the country, in a place called, the first one, Deal, New Jersey, Deal, New Jersey, which now is a very affluent community, but fifty years ago it was considered the hinterlands and so land was cheap and available. There were a few Quonset hut-type buildings, and that's where we would lodge for three weeks. There were three camp seasons during the summer, three three-week stays, and I would go on one of them. It was a wonderful experience. I got to go and play ball and I was out breathing fresh air. Trees, I saw trees and grass. It was really nice. However, it was a religious camp. It was organized and administered through the temples.

In the morning, you got up at seven-thirty and you went to temple, and for forty-five minutes, you prayed the morning prayers. In the afternoon at four o'clock, there was another time to pray. The first one was in the morning. It was called *Shacharit*, morning prayers. In the afternoon, it was called *Mincha*, it was the afternoon prayers. It took about a half hour, from four to four-thirty, and then you got ready for dinner. Then, at eight, eight-thirty in the evening, you went back to the temple for *Maariv*, the evening prayers. That's how the day was set up. On Friday nights, there was Sabbath, and on Saturday, you did nothing. You were in temple morning, afternoon and evening, on Saturday.

Now, here I am, I'm a kid of nine, ten years old. In my home life, I'm not overtly religious. I'm being exposed to didactically learning a new language and reading, but I don't live the discipline to the degree that existed in that camp. My mother, unknowingly, sends me to camp during

maybe the second trip, the second three weeks, I'm happy, but the second three weeks included a holiday, a nine-day holiday, called *Tisha B'Av*, which is a holiday in which it's a very sad time. They remember the destruction of the first temple in [587] BC and then again in 70 AD, the destruction of the second temple. When you go to Israel, you see the Western Wall. There was a temple, a grand temple, built by King [Solomon]. Essentially, this nine-day period called *Tisha B'Av* is a time when you don't do anything. You can't enjoy yourself. It manifested itself at camp, where instead of going out and playing baseball and punchball and swimming, we would go to this room where we would study and pray. It was not my idea of having a good time. [laughter]

There was one time during *Tisha B'Av* where we were allowed, on a hot day--it must've been ninety degrees--and we were taken to the pool in our bathing suits and we were not allowed to go in the pool. We were allowed to sit on the edge of the pool, and since we were not thirteen years old, we had not been bar mitzvahed, we were not considered adult men. We were still children. We were allowed to dangle our feet in the water. Now, Marv Apsel is a little bit of a street kid. I turn to the guy next to me, and I say, "This is outrageous. This is not going to go. Here's my plan. You're falling in the water and I'm going in to save you." [laughter] With a little push and a little encouragement, my friend goes into the water, and I go into the water after him. Actually, it was very relaxing, but there were calls during this *Tisha B'Av*, "Oh, what are you doing? What are you doing?" We sort of pulled one over on them. It was a little bit too much for a seven or eight-year-old, nine-year-old kid to endure.

To show you also that it just wasn't old secular me, some of these kids that came to this camp were from religious schools. They went to yeshivas. They spent their whole day learning in these yeshivas, and so they learned with more intensity and more closely than I. Now, you have a contest at night. They divide the camp up into two groups and this contest between group one and group two, "We're going to ask questions. We'll ask a question, and if you answer right, you get a point. Whoever has more points gets ice cream," or whatever the prize was. Eventually, it comes to me, and they said, "Joseph's son was named Ephraim, but his other son was who?" People are going, "What an easy question. Oh, my goodness. I can't believe they gave him such an [easy question]." [laughter] By the way, it's [Manasseh]. Anyway, I didn't know that at the time. I didn't know what they were talking about.

GA: You didn't fit in.

MA: I didn't get it. That was that camp. After that, I said, "Mom, I don't want to go to Camp Deal anymore in Deal, New Jersey." I went to another camp called Surprise Lake Camp during the years of eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen. That was a camp sponsored by the Educational Alliance, a group in the Lower East Side of New York. It was made up of secular people, who were non-denominational, and I had a wonderful time, mainly because also I discovered girls. There were girls on the other side of the camp, girls on one side of the camp, boys on the other side of the camp. Occasionally, we'd come together for activities. The hormones were going, and basically, I enjoyed it. I had a good time. I went back two or three years.

By the way, my brother, who was, I call him, a *Talmud hakham*, which is a learned person of the Bible, went to Camp Deal with me also during one of those years and he hated it. He didn't want to do it, and so he cried, "I want to go home." Actually, my parents had to come and drive down to Deal to pick him up to take him back home because he didn't want any part of it. Strangely enough, he's become more observant [laughter] and more of a student of Judaism than myself. That was camp.

KR: You referred to your bar mitzvah.

MA: Yes.

KR: Did your brother get a bar mitzvah, and did your sister get a bat mitzvah?

MA: No, my sister did not. My brother did. Those were the roles. You didn't see a lot of girls in those days being bat mitzvahed. They didn't go to Hebrew school. They didn't learn the didactics of what to do in the temple. Remember, their role primarily was at home. When I was at temple, talk about roles, all the men were downstairs, all the women were upstairs. They kept us separated. Even if it's a one-level building, there'd be a curtain dividing the men from the women, and ostensibly it was done because you're praying to God and you should only be praying to God and that should be the only thing on your mind. You should not be diverted by certain thoughts involving the opposite sex. That's why, to this day, you see in more religious Orthodox circles the separation of men and women.

Even at the Wall, at the holiest place in the Jewish world, the Wailing Wall, there's this demarcation, men over here, women over there. There have now been actions and demonstrations by a group called the Women of the Wall to ameliorate that and allow for a section of that wall for everyone. The Orthodox community in Israel still holds sway, and while they've given a little, it has not been universally accepted throughout Israel. The world's changing, thank goodness. [Editor's Note: The Western Wall, or Wailing Wall, is located in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is the only remains of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Over the centuries, Jewish people have made pilgrimage to the Western Wall to pray.]

KR: What were the Jewish holidays like when you were growing up?

MA: The Jewish holidays growing up, the most adoring one, the one that--well, they're all important--but the most festive was Passover, and Passover was like Thanksgiving. At that time, in the 1950s and '60s, it was conducted at my grandmother's apartment and the tables went all the way down through the rooms, and all the children were there around the table and there was a lot of food and stories were told. The parents and grandparents were not Reform Jews like we are today. They were more Conservative, almost Orthodox, and so all the readings were done in Hebrew with very little English explanation. While the activities and the eating and being with your cousins and singing was nice, it lost a little bit in understanding the full meaning of the holiday. While my brother and I understood some of the symbolism because we were going to school, Hebrew School, I think some of it, for my cousins, especially the females, may have been lost.

It's a tradition that has been going on and on for seventy years, as long as I've been on this earth. It's our holiday that we invite the family, we have twenty-five, thirty people come, and we have taken the book that we use to explain the symbolism and tell the story called the Haggadah, which is a book that's been around for hundreds and hundreds of years, telling the story about how Moses was picked out of the waters by the Pharaoh's daughter and basically his efforts to take the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom. Basically, we tell that story and all the machinations associated with that and all the derivatives that come from that story, and we adapt it to what's happening today. If we talk about slavery, we may be talking about what's going on in Africa and how history can repeat itself. It's very instructive to the younger people at the table, but it's very comforting to perform those rituals for the older people. The food is fantastic. [laughter] It's great. That's Passover.

There are other holidays that are major, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is the Hebrew new year. Usually, on the English calendar, it happens around September. It lasts for ten days. The ten-day period between the new year Rosh Hashanah--Rosh means "new," "the head of," "the beginning," and the Hashanah, "the year," new year, and Yom Kippur, which is at the end of the ten-day period. It's the day; Yom means "day." Kippur, day of atonement. You are supposed to, during that ten-day period of time, be introspective, reflective. You go to services that are designed to help you evaluate yourself, periods of times where you should ask for forgiveness, and you ask to be able to be written in the Book of Life at the end of the ten-day period for the next year. On that day, Yom Kippur, it's a day of fasting, and you're in the temple all day. It's a long day but at the end of it--it's almost akin to what other cultures do. The American Indians who went into a tent for three or four days and they deprived themselves of food and water and they used certain elements, cannabis or something like that, to evoke feelings and gain insight, it's almost like that. You basically reevaluate your status. We go through that process. I look forward to it, and it's a very intense time. We pay homage and give respect to our loved ones that are no longer with us. At the end, we bring up all the babies that have been born in the last year--it's one of the last things to happen on Yom Kippur--for a special blessing, and so you'll see these infants up there with their parents. It's almost a feeling of experiencing the cycle of life. There it is; the cycle is starting over again. It's a beautiful part of the day. Everybody starts their diet the next day. Passover, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah are major holidays.

Hanukkah is actually a minor holiday. It has a story associated with it, and we tell the story about the miracle of the lights. I read, "How do you explain the miracle of lights?" It's like having your iPhone and the battery is down to next to nothing, and it lasts seven days or eight days. [laughter] That's the miracle of the lights in modern terms. It talks about Mattathias, his family, and how they basically defeated a people who were trying to do them in.

There's a very brief adage to all these Jewish holidays. Essentially, it comes down to this. They tried to kill us, we fought, we won, let's eat. That's it. [laughter] That's it. So, those are major holidays. There are other holidays that happen during the year that tell stories, Purim, and then the holiday in which we give thanks for the harvest and our foods. [Editor's Note: Purim is the holiday that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people, according to the Book of Esther.]

GA: Sukkot.

MA: Sukkot, where we remember that the Jews, when they left Egypt, wandered for forty years and they lived out in the elements and received bread from heaven. Look, you know something, I'm a scientific guy, I have a scientific orientation in my life. Do I believe all these things that I read about in the Bible? I regard the Bible as poetry and reflective of a concept that they're trying to get across. You tell me that the Red Sea opened up, I say, "Well, yes, scientifically, there's a little low tide once or twice a year where the wind currents are able to allow you to walk across the Red Sea," although it's not the Red Sea. That's a misnomer; it's called the Sea of Reeds that was misinterpreted as being the Red Sea.

The holidays are meaningful. They break up the year, and they bring the family together. They're a social action and focus on the awareness of other people in your life and in the world. It is very important. It's a central element of who we are. They talk about Jews as being the chosen people, and some people would say, "Yes, chosen for a Holocaust, chosen for anti-Semitic attacks," but I like to think in terms of chosen to assist others in the world to make changes for the betterment of the world.

GA: She asked you [about] growing up.

MA: Yes.

GA: You practice all these now.

MA: Yes, the major ones, and the most important one of all, the Sabbath.

KR: When you were growing up, did your family observe the Rosh Hashanah into Yom Kippur time?

MA: Yes, yes, those holidays, Passover, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah. I also made out a Christmas list, as all my friends who were not Jewish were getting gifts and I didn't understand the symbolism, "Here's my list." My parents would give me Christmas gifts. [laughter]

In my family right now, the kids make out very well. We have so much intermarriage in our family that we celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, and so the kids get gifts for Christmas. The kids get gifts for Hanukkah. They make out very well. We've stopped giving gifts to adults now. We basically just give gifts to the kids.

KR: Yes.

MA: So, it's a happy time. It amplifies your life. I think it basically makes your life more meaningful. I find myself at night reading--I read every night until two, three o'clock in the morning--lot of spiritual books, a lot of things that I wish I had read years ago. I didn't have the time.

GA: Maybe you should tell the story of when you were in the Army and how you celebrated the holidays. Why don't you tell that story because that is an interesting story?

MA: The holidays.

GA: For Rosh Hashanah.

MA: Oh, yes. I'm trying to stay chronological, but I can jump all over the place. When I was in Vietnam, I did experience a number of different things, and they contrast significantly. I experienced a little anti-Semitism, but I also experienced a wholesomeness and a respect for my faith as well. I'll tell you both of those instances.

When I was in the service and going through basic training, it was a very difficult time, obviously. It's very physical, and, basically, I was down in an Army fort called Fort Gordon, which was in Georgia. Many of the drill instructors were from that general area. We were northerners. We were the guys from New York, so there was a little bit of backlash with regard to that.

On one particular day, we were going through the obstacle course for training, and you've seen pictures of those exercises in movies, where it involves jumping over barricades, climbing ropes, taking the ropes and traversing over bodies of water. There's also a part where you get down in the mud, and you have to crawl under barbed wire on your belly or on your back. All these maneuvers were time sensitive, so you had to get through them quickly, or, if not, you might find yourself redoing the training for another eight weeks.

During one of these training exercises, I was going through the mud, and I wore a medal around my neck. This is a medal that is familiar to many people now, but, in those days, it was probably less identifiable. Here it is. [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel shows his necklace with the Chai.] I lost it during my traversing this obstacle course. I didn't have it, and I lost it. I may have said to somebody that I wanted to go back. "You can't go back. Keep on going, move forward." I continued going through this obstacle course.

A little bit while later, I'm called, "Apsel." Maybe they used that name, or maybe they used something else. I go up this hill, and standing there was the officer and a sergeant. I go up there and report, "Private Apsel, reporting as ordered, Sir." The lieutenant is holding this thing. It's called a Chai. People are probably familiar with the Jewish star or maybe a crucifix, but this is not something that was identifiable to them. The lieutenant says to me, "Apsel, is this yours?" I said, "Yes, Sir, it is mine. It's my religious medal." He said, "Religious medal? Apsel, what is it really?" I said, "It's a Chai, Sir, a Chai." He looked at me, and he said, "Apsel, do you belong to a cult?" I said, "No, Sir, it's a religious medal." He said, "Apsel, are you a Communist?" I said, "No, Sir, it's a religious medal. It's a Chai. I've worn it since my bar mitzvah." I got it at my bar mitzvah, and I've always worn it around my neck. So, he gave it back to me. [It was] not grossly anti-Semitic, but it may have been more reflective of a lack of awareness and knowledge, especially from somebody raised in the deep South. It was obvious he didn't have the slightest idea what this was.

I compare and contrast that to a year later. I find myself in some God-forsaken place in Vietnam. I'm in triple-canopy jungle. I can look up and you can hardly see the light coming through the trees, and I am, at that time, either a [squad leader or a] platoon leader. I think I was a sergeant. I was told to move to a clearing. We went to a clearing, and in that clearing, a helicopter came down. I was told, "Apsel, get on the helicopter. You've been called to the rear." I listened to the order. I go to the rear. I don't know what's going on.

I go to the rear area, which is miles and miles away, Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, and I'm told that I'm going to be celebrating Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. There must've been maybe sixty or seventy people, Jewish guys, there. It wasn't the full ten days. It might have been two days before Yom Kippur, and the Army had services and celebrated Yom Kippur services. It was very nice. I couldn't believe it. They even had a break the fast meal. They had little kosher TV dinners. [laughter] I don't know where they got them from to give us an opportunity to break the fast with that type of kosher food.

In one respect, I've seen some anti-Semitism, and, believe me, there were more incidents that I'm alluding to. There were times when there were overt incidences where I actually had to engage in some physicality, but there are other times like the Rosh Hashanah celebration and the Yom Kippur celebration. So, I really had to respect the Army's effort. It was very much appreciated.

While we're on the topic, in advanced infantry training, after basic training, I spent another eight or nine weeks at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I get there, and essentially, there's a whole new group of people there now. These are people who are coming from different areas of the country. In basic training, most of the people were from the New York area. We came in as a group. They wouldn't train us up North. They trained us down in Georgia, but we were from New York, Philadelphia, that area. At Fort Jackson, they were used to being with people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, now there was more of a mix of people from other areas of the country. So, they were more exposed to Jews. There was one guy who, when we got to our barracks, says to me, "Hey, Abey, Abey." "No, my name is Marv." He kept on calling me Abey, Abey, and that was his term for anybody who was Jewish. He was from Chicago, strangely enough, a big black burly guy. Marvin Apsel is not too hard to detect as being Jewish. Anyway, he was doing that, and I'd correct him and correct him.

One day, we're out marching, the whole company is marching, and he's standing behind me and he's taunting. He says, "Abey, hey, Abey." I stopped and turned around, and we got into a thing. I basically coldcocked him. They stopped marching the company, and they broke it up. They said, "All right, if you guys can't get along with one another, you're going to go through this! Everybody on your backs." The whole company had to lay down on our backs with our hands up in the air and our feet in the air. They said, "We call this the dying cockroach, and you're going to learn to work together. If you let your feet come down, whatever liberties you were going to have this weekend will be cancelled. Stay in this position until I say the exercise is over." The dying cockroach meant that after two or three minutes in that position, [laughter] with you trying to hold your hands up, you look like a dying cockroach. That was the exercise. After that, we started to work together, the sergeant ended the exercise and we were able to go on. That punishment of, "You're going to stop this nonsense or else we're going to continue

doing things like this," I was risking my own physical safety by fighting because this guy was big, it worked. That was an example of an incident that became physical.

Another example occurred while I was in Vietnam. Some captain is giving orders. Here, I am, now a staff sergeant or a platoon leader or whatever I was at that time, receiving instructions from this captain about this village that we're going to go through. Basically, in his assessment, he says, "Now, you're going into the village, they're going to try and sell you and your men stuff. Do not bargain with them. You don't want to get Jew-ed." That's the first time--I came from Brooklyn--I hadn't even heard that expression, but it's the first time I heard that expression. I realized, "This guy probably doesn't know what he's saying." There were other smaller incidents. That's the way the Army was. You experienced stuff like that. Look, I'm not the only person in the Army who because of their religion experienced prejudice. Believe me, there were others because of their race or sexuality--and that became known, too--they suffered significantly.

KR: What other incidents of discrimination did you face or did you witness other people facing?

MA: Yes, so there were people who may have been bisexual. Every night, you had guard duty, so I think if you went to bed at eight o'clock, every two hours another person would have to get up, somebody was designated to get you up and continue to walk around the outside and inside of the building. They called it fire watch, because you were in these wooden Quonset huts. Everybody wanted the eight o'clock, eight to ten, so you could sleep continuously until five o'clock in the morning. You didn't really want to get the twelve o'clock to two o'clock or two to four because it threw you off. You knew who the next person was, and you had to wake them up. If there was an individual who woke the next person up by touching them inappropriately, it resulted in--he did it a couple times, even though he bore the aftermath--actions taken against him, not officially, but things would happen.

There was one guy in our training company who had an accent, a very thick Jewish accent, he was from Brooklyn. I don't know how he found himself in the Army, but he was picked upon significantly, did not make it through basic training. If you didn't make it through basic training, the eight-week period, you had to go through another one, another cycle. They would put you through another, and then if you didn't make it through that, they would put you in something called the fat-boys platoon. You would be subjected to all this extra physical training and grief.

KR: In terms of the soldier who might have been bisexual, your platoon basically disciplined him.

MA: At that time, I was just a soldier, a private, like everybody else. We had guard duty, and so the men themselves would make it known to the individual that there wasn't going to--I'm trying to be appropriate--but they would be very physical with that person. It certainly went on, but it was below the sightline.

GA: Why don't you take a break? Why don't you take a five-minute break?

KR: Sure.

MA: Yes, let me just say this one thing.

KR: Sure, please.

MA: The Army, in those days, and their approach was very machismo, very machismo, there were certain roles people had and it was demonstrated by the marching songs that we did when we were marching up and down, left and right. They would have these chants, "One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four." They would sing these songs, and they were always very sort of negative towards women. There would be a chant, "I know a girl who's dressed in black. She makes a living on her back." "One, two, three, four, I know a girl who lives on a hill. She won't do it but her mother will. One, two, three." Over and over again, always very derogatory towards women. There were others. Everybody had a responsibility while you're on this fifteen-mile march to take up the chant and come up with some chants. Some people would make up pretty nice ones, but most of them had sexual overtones or gender overtones.

There was one containing the word for the person who was courting or dating your girlfriend, wife or significant other back home while you were in the Army; the name that they had ascribed to that person was Jody. "Jody's back there dating your girl and he's probably doing this and that with your girl." So, they would come out, and there would be a lot of Jodi-isms. "I'm going to get me a three-day pass. I'm going to kick old Jody's ass." "If Jodi is six feet tall, I ain't going to do anything at all." That type of chant, over and over, and you had to come up with something. You'd better come up with something because they would be on your case. Like I said, always gender negative, nothing very patriotic or uplifting. That was the thinking in 1968- '69. I don't know if you would see that today in the training, especially now when they're coed.

There were women being trained who were some of the toughest women I ever saw. When you would listen to their drill instructors drill the women--this was at Fort Benning--they were equally as demonstrative and caustic towards males. They had one chant that, this lady would call out--she was probably a sergeant or sergeant major with the women, Women's Army Corps, WACs--so, they would say to them, "Girls, there are twelve miles of 'dick' on this base, and you girls aren't going to get a quarter inch of it this weekend." They were tough. [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel went to Non-Commissioned Officer School (NCO) at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Women's Army Corps was created in 1942 and disbanded in 1978, when women were fully integrated into the military.]

That toughness was displayed in the first person I had as a supervisor when I became a physical therapist. She was a lady by the name of Dawn H., and she had been a career Army person who had gone into physical therapy. When she left the service, she became a therapist. She was my supervisor. She was one of the toughest women I have ever known. Once we were at a picnic playing ball, having a catch, she would burn it in there. One day, I asked Gail, "Please, do me a favor. Call up Dawn, tell her I'm not feeling well. I can't come in today. I'm sick. I'm not feeling well." So, Gail reluctantly called up Dawn, and Dawn would say, "Put Marvin on the phone. I want you here, you understand? I want you here. You get out of bed and you get over here." She was tough.

She ran a militaristic department, and we had a responsibility, you had to do recordkeeping at the end of the day, billing. If you made one mistake on the billing, your punishment for the next day was to do the billing for everybody in the department. She was tough, a tough lady, and she held no quarter, very militaristic. She was a gay person. She was a lesbian, and her lover was B. I got along very well with Dawn because she was tough, but you honored her toughness. She was really a person who devoted herself to the total care of people. She was tough, with a lot of rules and regulations, which everyone was expected to follow. No exceptions!

Later on, years later, I left that place, New York University & Rusk Institute, and I worked at Bayonne Hospital, where after many years I became their Chief Operating Officer at Bayonne Medical Center. Now, I had the responsibility of taking over the local visiting nurse service. Who worked for the visiting nurse service in Bayonne, New Jersey, Dawn. I invited Dawn in for coffee one day. I said, "Well, Dawn, the tables appear to have changed now." [laughter] We joked and laughed. But in my heart, I was always grateful for the real-life work experience she gave and all her staff. I always had enormous respect for her, and still do. I always respected her for the work that she did. Sexuality, I'm sure in the service she lived her lifestyle, but it was kept quiet. She was a special lady.

KR: Do you want to take a break?

GA: Yes.

MA: Yes, all right.

KR: Sure, let's take a break.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on. We are recording. What was your interaction like with chaplains when you were in Vietnam?

MA: Okay, let's see, back in the States, while I was going through training, there would be services that were open to my Christian brethren that were conducted on Sunday. There was little or none for Jews to go to for a Sabbath service. It just wasn't put together. When we did occasionally have the opportunity--and I'm talking about maybe once or twice during my entire training period over the course of six months at three different forts--I believe maybe at Fort Benning, the larger fort, there was an effort. There was a rabbi there, probably a Reform rabbi. I found out a couple of things, one, that on Sundays, while my friends were going to church for services, if I remained in the barracks, I was susceptible to some type of duty, clean this, guard this, go here, go there. I very quickly learned, "I have to get out of this place on Sunday." Occasionally, there would be, like I said, maybe once or twice, at the larger forts, a Jewish service that was conducted in an office. There was not a chapel, and at most maybe there were six or seven individuals who were present and of the Jewish faith. When I talk about a Jewish service, it was not a service that I could compare to anything I had attended when I was back home. There was no *bimah*. There was no Torah, so to say it was essentially sitting around a table with books, maybe pamphlet-type books, modified books, to read certain prayers, and most

of it was obviously conducted in English because, quite frankly, they, I would say, had a very Reform, easy-going type of approach and demeanor to the service. I enjoyed it because it was a break from the normal routine of training and going through what one had to do to learn how to become a soldier. There was not a lot of time to talk one on one with a rabbi, but there were other chaplains there that were open to speak with, if you needed to meet with one, you could arrange to have that. That was in the States. [Editor's Note: *Bimah* means platform in Hebrew and refers to the platform or table from which the Torah is read.]

Now, in Vietnam, occasionally, a helicopter would come in--and as they offloaded maybe a hot meal that was served from within big containers, which we regarded as sort of a gift, that we were going to get something hot to put into our little plate rather than eating C-rations--occasionally, during that process, a man of faith, a chaplain, would jump off the chopper. In an impromptu situation, we would have a service. Whoever came off of that chopper, whether it was a minister, whether it was a priest or any person of faith--I never saw a woman serve in that capacity--but whoever stepped off that chopper and was going to conduct a service, I would attend because I wanted to hear some inspiring words, even at that time some words from the Bible, something that was reaffirming, something that was reassuring, something that gave me comfort. That would not happen often. Like I said, there were probably a limited number of chaplains available, and there were a lot of people and it was a big country.

I will tell you one very important conversation I had with a chaplain, and at this moment I'm hard pressed to tell you which discipline, which faith. It could have been Catholic. It could've been Protestant. I was aware of certain procedures that occur in Christian life, namely, Last Rites, and hearing a person's last confession. There would be situations when I was in a war theater and people die. Sometimes people were dying in front of you, and you would be in a situation where you would be with a person in the last moments of his life because whatever efforts to save that person were not sufficient enough or could not be done. I felt the need to be with that person for the minutes before the inevitable end. My question to the chaplain was, "Can I listen? Can I give this person Last Rites, or can I accept his confession if he's willing to do that in those moments? What do I have to be mindful of? What do you want me to do? Am I doing something that is so egregious that it would be an affront to that individual at that end?" His words to me--and I've mentioned this at temple to our own rabbi--were very powerful. My question essentially was, "What do I have to do? What can I do for this person?" The Army chaplain's response to me was, "You have to be human. You have to be human. Yes, listen to what that person has to say and remember it, and if it's anything specific, you can act on it later. Give that person the comfort that they need at that moment in time." Unfortunately, it had occurred several times in the last moments of somebody's life. It's a profound experience, something that always stays with you, but that's what I did. In some small way, I was honored to have been there to do that compassionate service for another person.

That was part of my input with the chaplains in Vietnam. They didn't come a lot, but occasionally they would. What I'm trying to get across is whoever came off that chopper, that's who you would sit with to hear the word. I did not see a rabbi come off of a chopper. It would always be a minister or a priest or someone else.

KR: It sounds like your faith really developed during your time in Vietnam.

MA: Well, the experiences were significant, and being home in an insulated neighborhood of Brooklyn, with people or friends, I did not deal with death. Certainly, I was never in that type of situation to bring that type of action about when somebody's life was ending, not in Brooklyn. I was a kid of nineteen years old. I was a street kid, and the things that were important to me in life at that point in time were very different, when I look at it now--they weren't as meaningful as the things in my life while in Vietnam. There is a greater emphasis on other elements of my life now; on family, on learning and being aware of our history, and trying to impart what I have learned to the next generation. That was not my makeup at the time when I was eighteen or nineteen years of age. I was more concerned with playing basketball and being with the guys, going out with women. It's a whole different mindset, but we grow.

I went into the rehabilitation profession. Basically, my experiences in Vietnam ran the full gamut of emotions and feelings, and, interestingly, it had an impact on me and others in my profession with similar histories. Some of the people I worked with later on who were in the military served to establish bonds between us.

KR: You told the story before about when you went to Tan Son Nhut, when they took you by helicopter to Tan Son Nhut ...

MA: Tan Son Nhut, yes.

KR: … And you had the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur service. Was there a chaplain conducting that service?

MA: I believe there was a rabbi. There was a rabbi there. It was probably the first one I saw in Vietnam, for the entire theater, and I don't know from what branch of service he was. He may not have been Army. He could've been Navy or Air Force, but he was there and he was conducting the service. Do you know something? It was quite meaningful to me. He put me in touch with what my experiences had been back home, what we termed as the real world, and it was very positive. It was a very positive experience.

Of course, when I left and I had to go back to be dropped off in this--I call it a jungle; it's triple canopy vegetation--the men said, "So, where were you?" "I was at religious services." Some of them were not aware of my faith. They just weren't. We didn't talk about that a lot. We talked about other things. Some of them said, "You're Jewish? Are you kidding?" You heard the whole gamut. Some of them, in a cajoling way, would say, "Where are your horns?" that type of depiction that comes somewhere from the Midwest or wherever, and I don't think they read the anti-Semitic books that were prevalent in the '30s and '40s, *The Elders of Zion*. No, they picked that stuff up through living in certain circles. Believe me, in Vietnam, even after they realized I was a Jewish man, they had a certain respect for the individual who was getting them from point A to point B safely, the person that was reading the maps to get from here to there and getting them through this thing safely. I had some men there who were probably mildly anti-Semitic or just not knowledgeable, but their relationship with me was appropriate.

I talk about my friend Roy M. from Shreveport, Louisiana, a guy who was also a sergeant, a buck sergeant. Eventually, I think he became a staff sergeant. I was a staff sergeant. So, he was a squad leader with me, and he's from Shreveport, Louisiana. Jews, no, he never saw any Jews, but, like I said, he had the respect for the position and getting him through. He was one of the fiercest fighters I have seen and I won't go into specifics, but in a situation which was, "It's that person or me," that's the person you want next to your side or behind you. There are elements of his life that I just had no way of dealing with. A drinker, he would drink a bottle of liquor like it was nothing, [snaps fingers] like nothing. Me, I'm coming out of Brooklyn, New York. If I had a little bit of Manischewitz wine in a thimble, it was a lot. We didn't drink in our family. Nobody drank beer. Occasionally, they'd have something. To be with a person who is, "We're going drinking." "We're going drinking? I'll have a drink," a drink. He was drinking the bottle, drinking two bottles. [laughter] When he got drunk, he was vicious, and he needed to be settled down. However, in Vietnam, when the shit hit the fan, that's the person you wanted with you.

After the war was over for me, I left Vietnam first; he stayed. I have a letter here somewhere; he stayed another two months, I think, to finish out his year. Eventually, he came up to visit me in Brooklyn. I lived in Borough Park, Brooklyn, which at that time was not only a Jewish neighborhood but a Hasidic Jewish neighborhood with guys with the *payos* curls on the side of their heads in black jackets with hats with fur. So, Roy M. came to my house. I was living at my mother's house at the time, and he came. He's looking around this neighborhood, and he's seeing these people.

GA: He had not been to New York.

MA: He had never been to New York, and he says, "What the hell is this? Where am I?" It was a complete mind-blow for him to see religious Orthodox Jews or to see minorities there. To go into the city and to see interracial people in a romantic situation was for this man an anathema. "Calm down. You're in the real world right now. You're not in your world of Louisiana." He lived his life and went back to Louisiana. It was interesting to see the two sides of Roy M. When I introduced him to Gail's mother, "This is Roy M. He's a friend and he was a soldier with me." I'll never forget, he took your mother's hand and said, "Mrs. Kempin," and he kissed her hand, "It is an honor and pleasure to meet you," with such southern charm that it stood in stark contrast to what this person was capable of. [laughter] On one hand, he was Rhett Butler from *Gone with the Wind*. You would think, "Wow, what a gentleman." This guy could kill you in a different set of circumstances. Eventually, he went back into Louisiana and married.

Do you know what R&R is? R&R was rest and relaxation. Once during the year, you would get a week off and you could go, if you were a married individual, to Hawaii or someplace on the coast of the continental United States. Hawaii was the closest spot where your wife or loved one could meet you, and you could spend a week together there. The rest of the unmarried men would go to other areas. They would go to Singapore, Hong Kong, and, like me, to Thailand, for the one week. Then, you would come back, and you would talk about your experiences with your fellow soldiers. It was revealing. It was different from the normal day-to-day boredom and military routines. You were talking about different things, women. The Army called it R&R, which is rest and relaxation. The men called it I&I, intoxication and intercourse.

Now, when Roy M. came back from wherever he was, I believe Singapore, he talked. Now there might have been other guys who had a woman, and she would be his guide and take him around and maybe even be a sexual partner. Roy M. came back with photos of three or four women at one time. [laughter] I said, "What?" Roy went far beyond what anybody else had done. That was Roy M. He lived by a different set of rules than the rest of us. He's a product of the environment that he grew up in. He had characteristics in him that were very good, loyalty and respect, but when the drink got to him or his temper got to him, he could be a vicious person.

KR: For how long did you keep in touch with him?

MA: Obviously, during the time in Vietnam and maybe for a couple years after, and then our lives sort of went into different directions.

KR: On the topic of R&R, tell us about your R&R in Thailand.

GA: Maybe I shouldn't be here. [laughter] He didn't really tell me.

MA: Before you went to R&R in Thailand, you got into your civilian clothes. Then we were stored at the base camp that I was in, Cu Chi. We had our duffle bags and they were stored in this Quonset hut. Those duffle bags would be accessed only when you went on R&R to get your civilian clothes, or if you were wounded and you were moving to Japan or going someplace else, or if you died. If you were killed, they would come and get your belongings to be sent to your loved ones. My R&R started in Cu Chi, where I was able to get my civilian clothes, two or three shirts and a pair of pants, and get out of my fatigues.

Then, we flew to Thailand. I was excited to get out of the Thailand Administration building and away from the Army people. They had put us in a room and there you receive this lecture, and the lecture was essentially, "You're in a different country. This is how we expect you to conduct yourselves and you also have to be cognizant of the fact that they have different mores and regulations." They would go through those mores and regulations. For instance, "When you're talking to somebody and you're sitting in a chair, do not cross your foot with your sole facing that person you're talking to. It's a sign of being disrespectful. Do not get into their space and look them straight in the eye. It's a sign of being disrespectful." There were subjects like that that needed to be conveyed to us soldiers. They also told you information about the real world. "You're in this country and you're going to be out on the town. There are people who may look like women who are not women. They're dressed like women. They look like women. They have perfume on. They will come on to you. They are not women." To a guy from Brooklyn, "What? You're talking about transsexuals, transvestites." It was a concept in 1968-'69 that I was not familiar with, but I'm listening to all this stuff.

There would be hotel arrangements made ahead of time that you had a selection. You could go to one of ten or fifteen hotels along this strip, and so this bus would take you from the base, wherever it was in Thailand, and bring you to your hotel. Two or three guys would get off at each hotel. Another two or three at another hotel. After that, you got dressed, and you needed certain guidance and rental services. What do you know about Bangkok, Thailand? You don't know anything about Thailand. You don't know where to go, but you could get a car. I rented

out a car and a driver and had that person at my beck and call twenty-four hours a day for what amounted to maybe fifty dollars for the week. I came to understand the term "the ugly American" throwing money around. I mean, I would go into a restaurant in Bangkok and eat soup to nuts, and the cost was seventy-five baht. I don't know what a baht was worth; maybe a nickel or a quarter. It was like monopoly money to me, and, obviously, you had a lot of cash or money, their type of money. This person would drive you around, and he would stay with his car in the parking lot and wait. When you're ready, you come down, "I want to go here or there." The driver would also suggest a lot of places to go and visit.

Now, the first place I wanted to go to was this center where I could call home. There was a telephone company in the middle of town. I asked the driver to drive me to this place. Now, I don't know what time it was in the afternoon, but whatever the time difference was between Bangkok and Brooklyn, New York, it was significant. I had to wait in that place for two hours, two-and-a-half, three hours to get my call into my home. I wanted to speak to my parents and my family and tell them where I was. Finally, finally, the call started going through, I'm holding the phone, and somebody picks up the phone in my house. It is my brother, my younger brother, Gary. I said, "Gary, it's Marv. I'm in Bangkok. Quick, everything's great, I'm having a great time. Put Mom on the phone." He said, "Mom just left for work, and Dad just left for work. They're walking to the train station. Hold on. I'll get them." [laughter] He drops the phone; he goes out. The clock is ticking. I only have so much money. It's pretty expensive calling at that time. It wasn't through a military connection. It was commercial. I'm running out of money. Finally, he gets my mother back to the house. I said, "Hey, Mom, everything's great. I'm having a good time. I'm fine. I have a great job." I didn't tell her I was in anything that involved conflict. I think I told her I have a job at a bridge or something like that. "I'm going to be here for a week. I'm having a great time." The phone call was over, and I ran out of money. That was the first thing I did, called home.

The next thing we did was we went to--how should I put this--a massage place. The massage place was a large room with a swimming pool, glass windows, and women dressed in bathing suits. "Would you like to have a massage?" "Fine, yes. I want a massage. That's why I'm here." You can pick your number, twelve, eighteen. Roy M. would take the whole group, I'm sure, if he was there. They would give you this massage. Look, it was all well and good.

Then, at night, we went to a nightclub. We'd go to many nightclubs. Now, I'm not married. I'm a single man. There were women there, and these women had a function, they could be sexual partners, but they were also tour guides as well, like that taxi cab driver. They would be with you for the full week. They would take you to different places. "I want to see Marco Polo exhibits over here. I want to go to the zoo." They would take you to those places. When we ate, we ate. I'd bring the taxi cab driver in to eat as well. Money was nothing. With what I had and with what things cost, money was nothing. That's how the week transpired.

Look, for those guys that wanted sexual release, many of them did. These mama-sans that ran these nightclubs would show you the shot record card to say, "See, this girl's been inspected by Dr. …" They're signed off. They don't have any disease. The week went on.

There was a fellow at my hotel, who had been, I guess, he'd been on a couple of tours in Vietnam and had a romantic relationship with one of these girls. He met her as a call girl. He'd come back to Thailand and they would meet every time. It was his intention to eventually bring her back to the States. They had an intense romantic thing going on.

Bangkok was beautiful; Thailand is a beautiful country. Now, today, people go to Bangkok on honeymoons. My own nephew went there on his honeymoon and agreed it's beautiful. Of course, you really did need somebody to take you around. You would think it's pro-American, but there were dangerous spots to go in that city, if you were not guided through, it could be detrimental to your safety.

KR: Did you hear about that from other soldiers in your unit?

MA: They would tell you stories in this orientation about this and that happening to people. Look, there were also workers at these bars who were American, American women, who basically were prostitutes. They were there working and they were charging a lot of money for a night, and people who wanted to be with an American woman would go. There's an old song by Simon and Garfunkel. It's called *The Boxer*. He talks about being lonely in New York City, and he talks about, yes, sometimes he was on the street and he was so lonely that he took some comfort there, talking about the women of the street. Who's going to be judgmental about that? Certainly no one I knew at the time.

KR: The New York City winters, he talks about.

MA: Right. That was my week in Bangkok, and it seemed to go by like that [snaps fingers]. The week went by like that, but we saw a lot. It was actually a beautiful country, and the food was different. Then, we went back, and everybody showed pictures of their time. Roy M. had some crazy pictures.

KR: For the record, I just want to ask you some dates.

MA: Yes.

KR: You were in Vietnam from when to when? When did you go on R&R?

MA: Okay. I got to Vietnam on December 31, 1968. How do I know that? Here I am, I step off the plane, and, basically, the Army would put you in a sort of holding area for a few days to let you acclimate yourself to the weather and a different climate. When I stepped off that plane, I'll never forget, it was like a wall of hot air hit me. I felt, "I can't even breathe." I mean, this humidity, it was very difficult. They would put you in this area, and then you were basically told what unit you were going to be sent to over the next few days. You spent a few days waiting. Here I am, on December 31st, I've got a cot, I'm in a tent with twenty other guys who will be going to different places throughout the country. I fall asleep, and all of a sudden, the world starts [makes the sound of explosions]. I think I almost wet my pants because I got up, and I ran out, "What the hell is happening? What's going on?" It was New Year's Eve, and so everybody was shooting off ordnance all around the place. Who's thinking New Year's Eve? I wasn't

thinking New Year's Eve. For me, it's just another day, but that was the first time my heart rate increased.

Then, I learned a couple days later that I was going to the 25th Infantry Division, the First of the 27th, Wolfhounds. When they mentioned that, there were guys in the area who said, "Oh, my God, not the Wolfhounds." As I remember, that was the second time my heart started going like this [beating faster]. Those comments made it sound scary and difficult. I was, basically, over the course of the week, getting used to the weather. [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel served in the First Battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division.]

I eventually went to Dau Tieng. Dau Tieng was a small village, not as big as Cu Chi. Now, I'll never forget the first time I was with my men, and I was introduced to them, "This is going to be your squad," ten, twelve people. I take off my shirt, and I'm as white as snow. They're going, "Oh, my God." I suffered. I very quickly got a sunburn. I couldn't move. "Oh, let me get some Coppertone." No, it just wasn't to be had. It was a very difficult week or so, until that burn wore off and until I got used to the sun. That was the first time I met the men. [Editor's Note: Dau Tieng Base Camp was an Army outpost in Binh Duong Province in South Vietnam.]

I met the men. I'm sleeping in an area that is a sandbag encampment, a circle. The sandbags were from the ground maybe eighteen inches up, and they went on for about twelve, fifteen feet. You had to go in there, and that's where you were going to spend the night. That was the cover, because it was a very open area. I felt very claustrophobic. I said, "Hey, I'm going to be in this?" There were mice and there were rats, because there's food around there. It was a difficult time. I slowly got used to that.

My first mission in Vietnam as a squad leader was when a helicopter had gone down in some area, and we were supposed to go out there, secure the area, and take whatever was on the helicopter off. The pilot had already been picked out. So, we were going to do that. Sergeant Wright, he was a master sergeant. Here I am, at that time, I was a buck sergeant; I had a squad of ten people. Eventually, I would become a staff sergeant. He was a master sergeant, so he had four groups of thirty, and the sergeants reported to him. He was debriefing us about this area and this mission. His words resonate in my head to this day, and he's talking about the mission and what we have to do when we get there. He says, his last words were, "This is going to be a hot LZ," which means a hot landing zone. It means expect hostiles in the area. Then, he says, "Some of us are not coming back from this one." Are you kidding me? Are you actually saying that to us? The emblem on the unit that I was with says, "*Nec Aspera Terrent*," which means, "No fear on earth," in Latin. I was fearful. I was very afraid, but you can't show this. You go out there. Actually, it turned out to be a very routine mission. There were no hostilities. He dressed this up, getting us to a fever pitch. We went out there, created a circle, got the information we needed, chopper came in later on, and then we were taken out. It was uneventful. [Editor's Note: *Nec Aspera Terrent* is the motto of the 27th Infantry Regiment.]

The first time I was in combat where somebody was shooting at me was on January 18, 1969. Why is that an important date? That was my birthday. On my birthday, I was in my first firefight, [makes the noise of a weapon firing] back and forth. I have responsibilities, but the only thing, as I was down, face down, on the ground, the only thing on my mind was, "I'm going

to die on my birthday, and on my tombstone, just think of the symmetry. It'll say, 'January 18, 1948-January 18, 1969.'" That was on my mind. I couldn't shake that, but we got through that. For that, I got my first award a few weeks later. There's a citation, it's called the CIB, Combat Infantryman's Badge. It's worn above all other medals and the little ribbons that you have on your uniform. It's like a blue rectangle with a rifle going across and a little decoration. It's given to an infantry person after their first real combat mission. I qualified for this thing, the first of many, but that's the one meriting the award. So, weeks later, I received this first medal. I thought, "What am I going to do with this?" That was the CIB. That was for the first firefight action in Vietnam.

KR: That first firefight on your birthday, what mission was your unit on? What was going on?

MA: The first firefight, it was an ambush. Basically, we walked into an ambush. We were in an area, and the shooting starts, bullets whizzing above you. You know when you're being shot at, and you know it's their guns because we used an M-16. It had a certain sound to it. They used the AK-47. It had different sounds to the bullets. You knew, "This is not ours. This is theirs." That was it. We called in a support fire mission. Here, I'm calling in a fire mission, which means I'm asking for assistance, either the guns or for aircraft to come in, or a helicopter, and deal with the situation. I'm new. This is my first fire mission. First, what you do is you put out gas, colorful smoke, and you don't identify it. You ask the person in the air, in the helicopter, in the gunship, to identify it, "I see green gas." I said, "Yes. My position ..." You shoot an azimuth, direction on your compass, and I am two hundred yards behind the smoke on this azimuth at forty degrees southwest and they are northeast at approximately two hundred yards. So, he knows where you are. That's the way it should go textbook. This is my first one. My heart is going like this [beats his hand on his chest], and so I think I said, "They're in front of me." [laughter] He said something like, "Listen, you asshole, you better give me a cardinal direction right now." [laughter] It was like that smack in the face that you need to bring you around. That was my first unforgettable fire mission call-in.

KR: What was the fire support? Was it artillery or air support?

MA: No, this was a helicopter.

KR: Okay.

MA: Yes, the exchanges [laughter] could get quite graphic and colorfully verbal.

KR: When you were a newcomer, what were your interactions like with members of your unit who were more experienced?

MA: Yes, well, that's very interesting that you asked that. A couple of things, one, as a newcomer, even though I had rank, there may have been other people who were in the country for nine or ten months and had been through a lot of stuff. At that time, I was pretty practically minded and I saw somebody who was maybe another sergeant, and I said something to the effect, "If you see me doing something that is really off-the-charts wrong, you bring it to my attention. You have an open dialogue over here." Obviously, they're doing something right;

they stayed alive for nine months. Now, it was my job to stay alive and keep these people going and alive.

There were things, comical things, that happened as well. There's always an initiation for a new guy. In Vietnam, there's red ants and black ants, and I forget, I think the red ants were okay, but the black ants would bite. The master sergeant might say, "Apsel," he knew that there were red ants or black ants, the biting ants, under this tree, "Apsel, you set up, that's your position for the night. I want you over there with your men. Disperse them out." Fine, and I would do that. In fifteen minutes, I'd be out there taking my clothes off. I was being bit by ants, vicious ants. They would bite you. That was my initiation.

There were other initiations that occurred during periods called stand downs. Every couple of months, they would take you off line to a rear area, and in that rear area, they would have for you fresh clothes, you could see medical people if you needed it. Then, there would be a barbeque or something like that, and they would mess with you a little bit, [laughter] whether it was taking a bottle of beer and urinating in it and putting the thing back in the case. "Hey, here's a cold beer for you," whatever they did to initiate you. Believe me, it was all done in jest. Everybody went through that. Everybody went through an initiation of some sort.

KR: What rear bases would you be sent back to?

MA: These were encampments that were out in the open. There're just little circles with little sandbags and surrounded with concertina wire. So, you were out there. You were out there. [Editor's Note: Marv Apsel shows a photograph.]

MA: That's me on the throne, all right.

KR: Oh, I see.

MA: Well, you can see. It's open, and there's just the concertina wire around that.

KR: For the record, Marv is showing photographs from his time in Vietnam, and the first photograph he showed was outside of Dau Tieng.

MA: Dau Tieng Base Camp. That was a typical base camp then. Then, we would move from there. The town closest to that, at that time, was a town called Dau Tieng, where we might come back as a place where we would have stand downs and then move out again for weeks at a time.

Eventually, I came back to a bigger area called Cu Chi, and you may have heard of the Tunnels of Cu Chi. They were extensive tunnels throughout the area, and those tunnels were very sophisticated. When you went into a tunnel like that, there could be little mini hospitals where work and planning would take place and the site for their NVA or Vietcong missions to go out from were located in Cu Chi. [Editor's Note: During the Vietnam War, the Vietcong (VC) operated an extensive network of tunnels in the Cu Chi district northwest of Saigon. The Tunnels of Cu Chi extended from the outskirts of Saigon to the Cambodian border.]

The American forces would go to an area of the suspected tunnels, and they would spray Agent Orange over the area. In three days, an area that was heavily foliated would become open. All the vegetation was dead. Then, we would go in and look for these holes that would lead to the tunnels. If you were a person of diminutive size, you were called the tunnel rat, and you would go down into the tunnels, you would go in with a rifle or with a .45-caliber handgun. You would go down and scout it out. On at least one other occasion I remember, there were people down in there, but they had other areas where they could get out and then create an ambush against you. So, people lost their lives in a situation like that. [Editor's Note: The chemical defoliant Agent Orange, which the United States used in Vietnam to clear jungles, causes a number of serious health problems in humans, including cancer.]

Interestingly enough, later on, years later, I am now at Bayonne Medical Center. I'm the Vice President of operations at the time, and I had a very good association with several of the doctors. One of the doctors was a surgeon by the name of Salvatore L., a very good surgeon, who every year would go back to Vietnam and he would conduct clinics and he would do surgeries. He'd often ask me if I wanted to go with him, and at that time in my life, I wasn't prepared to go back to Vietnam. He would bring back pictures of what their clinics looked like; unbelievably, you could not compare them to the American hospital system. There would be two hundred people in a space like this lobby, and it was almost always the responsibility of the patient's family to bring food in along with clean sheets and things like that. You had what sort of looked like a bed or a cot, but their resources were very meager. He would go there and bring a lot of things. In fact, I would, during the year, collect equipment that people donated to the hospital and send that back with him. Sal L., who once gave me close to a million dollars for the hospital to develop the Lorraine L. Cancer Center, was a gracious and charitable man who I was honored to have called my friend and colleague.

He also created scholarships for people to go to Notre Dame University, his alma mater. I think he had thirty-six scholarships. One of my fondest memories was that I used to have dinner with him and another friend, Gene G., every couple of months. We'd go to his house. His wife had passed, and so he loved to make dinner. He would make special dishes like stuffed calamari, the food was deliciously wonderful. After dinner, we would spend the evening talking. One of the things that made him very sad was that he gave many people scholarships, and you would expect that in the years after those people would have stayed in touch with him and call him and thank him, beyond the initial gift giving scholarships. In some cases, that didn't happen, and it made him somewhat sad. That is the state of the way things work. I used to enjoy the dinners with him and Gene, who just recently passed a couple years ago.

KR: I am going to pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording.

MA: We were talking about things that we can discuss going forward. I do have a lot of letters that I received from friends who were back at home, but I also have letters from people who were my friends in the service, who I knew before entering the service, who were in-country in

Vietnam, but in a different sector of the country. I have one letter here from my very dear friend who was killed in Vietnam, and he and I went through the Non-Commissioned Officers training program. When you read these letters, it's sort of a typical letter, and it's probably not a letter I would write today in describing what my experiences were, but I have to think back then we were eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old and there was a certain bravado, maybe even false bravado, that went along with being a soldier. As I look through these letters, some of them are actually hard to read. Since I have a voluminous amount of letters that actually go through the entire time, maybe at a future date I can address some of those letters. Some of the experiences written in those letters alluded to events beyond my awareness at this point in time, but reading the letters will refresh my memory.

For instance, I used to send my mother and father tapes from a tape recorder--I think I still have the tapes somewhere in the basement--but it would be a tape recorder, and I would say something to the extent, "Ma, Dad, you have no idea. I have lucked out. I feel like I won the lottery. I've been given one of the easiest jobs in Vietnam. I've got bridge duty in a very secure area, and here I am, all I've got to do is watch this bridge. I have men here." Look, that may have been a situation for a couple of days, but wasn't my permanent experience. Unbeknownst to me, in the background, you could hear armament going off. It's almost like living near a train station. After a while, you don't even hear the trains coming. You're oblivious to the sound of trains. That may have happened at some point in time that I was oblivious to the extraneous sounds that are going on, of ordnance going off. Later, when I came home, I realized, "Oh, my goodness, here I'm telling them I'm in a very safe area and they're listening to this whole barrage of stuff going off in the background." I tried to protect my parents, my family, from bad news.

When I got to Vietnam, I signed a disclosure form, which said, "Do not notify my immediate family of any wounds that may occur if I'm still living." The only thing I agreed to notifying them was if I met my demise. Now, I was wounded. I'd been wounded a number of times in Vietnam, and I received a Purple Heart. It was given to me in an inglorious type of ceremony. They lined four guys up on a muddy, rainy day in a monsoon, and this officer came over with this citation, he pins it on me, "Congratulations." I took that citation and I wrapped it and I sent it home to my brother and told him, "Here it is. I'm okay. Whatever happened, happened, but no notification is going to go to Mom or Dad. Just keep this. There's no place for me to keep it." This was Vietnam. Where was I going to put a piece of metal? That's how the ceremonies were done.

KR: What happened when you were wounded?

MA: I was in an ambush. It's a very interesting time; you're giving orders and trying to ascertain where it's coming from. It probably came from one of these areas near Cu Chi that were very dense jungle. I got shrapnel in my scrotal sack, which is a private area, and ripped it. Basically, I was able to contain the bleeding, but there it was. I came back, and I was okay. I was all right. I was wounded again a couple weeks later from a Claymore mine. Do you know what a Claymore mine is?

KR: Tell us.

MA: A [M-18] Claymore mine is a structure that is about ten inches by six inches, and it's a piece of plastic that's filled with a substance called Composition C-4, which was like putty. In that putty are six hundred steel balls, and there's a wire that comes from it and a detonator. You would put them in front of your position. You would establish a position and put a Claymore mine in front of your position and hunker down. If you saw something coming your way, basically you could detonate this thing and 590 balls would go out ahead. Ten balls would come back this way, and when you're doing that, I caught one in my butt. I had a Claymore ball in my butt, that's how it happened.

Wounds come in a lot of different ways. One amusing thing was--one of the most precious things to have in Vietnam was mosquito lotion and netting because the mosquitos would eat you up. If you had netting that you could use in the monsoon season, you could put it on. People would rather carry ammunition than netting or food. The mosquito lotion was carried by one individual, usually whoever the leader was, and at night you would pass it around and take some, put it on your face, your exposed skin, and return it and that would be it. I had a couple of these plastic bottles in my pants that I would, like I said, hand out.

Well, one day, this plastic bottle opened up in my pants and saturated my private areas in what is ninety percent alcohol. [laughter] Now, you don't understand what effect alcohol has on that region of the body. It is like somebody is taking a match and lighting a fire. Very quickly, that area blew up into a very large blister. When I say comical, I got on the helicopter to get back, and what I did was drop my pants so the wind could [laughter] come in and circulate around this area. It could give me some temporary relief. It did, but I walked very bowlegged for a little while after that.

The next thing is that I now wear hearing aids. One time, I was in a situation where there was a burl, a little raised area, and I was behind this burl with the men. A mortar round or some ordnance came in and exploded on the far side of burl. The shock of it threw me back, and I had bleeding from the ears. I probably injured something in my ear drums, but I could not hear anything for a couple of weeks. That has left me with a little bit of a hearing deficit. Ten years or so ago, I went and I got hearing aids, because my hearing was degrading a lot and it affected my work and all facets of my life.

I'd be at a board meeting, and here I was in the boardroom of Bayonne Hospital. You see this table over here; that's probably about eight feet. The boardroom had a twenty-foot table, and if somebody was speaking at the other end of the table, I couldn't hear them and it was difficult. I had to bite the bullet and get my own hearing aids.

Eventually, the VA [Veterans Administration] helped, but I never put in a claim for anything associated with my wounds. My thinking was that I came out of Vietnam essentially okay, and I was very thankful for that. My friends, on the other hand, said, "You're a fool. You are a fool for not putting a claim in. Do you know how much money you've left on the table in compensation that they would have given you?" I did not do that for the reasons I just stated. However, within this respect, a bonified situation that was detrimental to my well-being, I wanted the VA to get me hearing aids and I went to the VA for the assessment. Because the event was documented at that time, there was no problem. However, my wife's union also

provided the benefit so to accelerate facilitating the situation. I've been getting my hearing aids from my wife's union and not from the government.

I find it interesting the mindset of friends who would say, "You are," in the most derogatory terms, "are not accessing that pile of money that could've been available to you for a number of different things." Just recently, they did award me a little for this situation, because I did put in the paperwork, for that only. I didn't do anything else. Look, I was able to father children after that situation. I don't think I'm suffering from the effects of Agent Orange exposure to any great degree, and, knock on wood, everything is okay.

GA: Great union!

MA: They talk about the possibilities how Agent Orange exposure can manifest itself over the years, and sometimes I choose not to go into that because a man of my age, there's a natural progression of age-related illnesses that can occur. It is what it is.

That is our culture, "See what you can get." I'll tell you, to this day, I don't disparage any of my comrades or veterans, but there is a mindset, in some individuals, to exaggerate and gain benefit and advantage through a system that is beset with administrative difficulties. You sustain an injury, an overt injury that's identifiable, fine. But let me amend that. To a larger degree, when people used to tell me that they had these mental problems, post-traumatic syndromes, I used to downplay that. I thought they were not being genuine. I have now modified my position significantly and realized there are times even when I go through some situations where I feel the impact of what I went through and how it's affected my life after Vietnam. Like I said, in time, I have modified my position, but having said that, I still feel that there are some that take advantage of the situation.

GA: The VA paid for your education.

MA: They did. Look, the government did a service to me; they did. When I came out of Vietnam, they paid for my education. I went back to college, and I became a schoolteacher. I didn't have a job, and those payments came from the government to help me further my education.

Believe me, I was not making a lot of money in the Army. My pay, in the Army, as a private, I think was fifty, seventy-five dollars a month or maybe every couple of weeks. From that, you had to buy a U.S. Savings Bond for eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents, and if you did not buy a savings bond from your meager salary, the repercussions were felt with certain duty details, "I'm sorry, you don't get that weekend pass." So, you did buy bonds. They weren't a lot, but when you're making fifty dollars, you take eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents away, you're not making a lot. I wasn't making a lot of money. Even with combat pay and overseas duty pay and the rank I eventually got, it wasn't a lot of money that I was able to save. I was able to save some of it. Where was I going to spend it? I didn't gamble. I came back, and the VA put me through school. I became a New York City schoolteacher and I did that for a while, and then I decided to become a physical therapist.

It's interesting how I did that, how that came about, and that came about because as a physical education teacher I was required to go to a rehabilitation unit and receive exposure to some of the individuals that were there. I went to the Bronx VA Hospital on 237th Street and Kingsbridge Road. I went in and I was doing volunteer work through the auspices of Long Island University. There, in the hallway, was a person who was blind in one eye and was a paraplegic, and his name was Joseph W. In Vietnam, he's a person that we put on a helicopter, we thought he was dead. So, he says, in the hallway, "Sarg, Sergeant Apsel." Watching his rehabilitation process go on instilled in me the idea that, "I may in the future look into this." I remained as a teacher a year, year and half, two years, but then I made the decision to leave teaching. I applied to go to physical therapy school at New York University. I was accepted to New York University and at Columbia University, those two schools, but I decided to go to NYU because it was starting in June and Columbia was starting in September. I was very motivated, that sort of intense motivation, I'm not going to let a whole summer go to waste, and so I attended and graduated from NYU. It's interesting how things spur on other things in your life.

KR: You did not know if he survived or not after you put him on the helicopter.

MA: No. Look, the way I found out about Stephen P., a close friend who went through schools with me and the service, lived in my neighborhood, and was a very good friend. Like I said, we wrote to each other. The way I found out that he was killed was through the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper. That was a newspaper that eventually got disseminated. There'd be a copy in the rear area, and maybe once in a while, you'd get a copy to read. They had stories of what's happening back home and in the world politically. On the last couple of pages, they'd have the people that were KIA [killed in action], and there was his name, KIA, [on April 23, 1969]. So, that's how I learned that he was killed, and talk about something hitting you like a brick.

I look at those last letters, and maybe at some future time I can read them, but like I said, they're filled with that bravado hype, "Here, we're going forward. Here's my assessment of this whole Vietnam thing and war." When we were children, we watched TV and we watched characters like Audie Murphy, who was a World War II, Congressional Medal of Honor winner, and we watched his Army movies and everything happened, progressed and finished [claps hands] in two hours and it was all finished, we saw the story and we were moved. As young minds, we were probably affected by that message that at times tried to convey patriotism, loyalty, honor, and heroics. [Editor's Note: During World War II, Audie Murphy (1925-1971) served in the Army's campaigns in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and France. In the Colmar Pocket in France, he distinguished himself in battle by single-handedly holding off a German unit, during which time he sustained a leg wound. For this, he was awarded the Medal of Honor. Starting in 1948, Murphy began acting in Hollywood films and went on to star in over forty movies in his career. In 1971, Murphy died in a small plane crash in Virginia. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.]

When I got to Vietnam, being a person who had been exposed to years and years of media indoctrination and entertainment, so to say, I said, "My God, this is Vietnam, and war is nothing like what you see at home." There are long, long periods of drudgery where nothing's happened, but your level of vigilance has to be there. It's very stressful in and by itself. Then, there are

moments when it hits the fan, and you can't believe the carnage that's happening around you. Then, there was always this time where you asked yourself, "Why? What's happening? What is the reason for this?" Part of the schooling the Army provided for me in training was when they sent me to Fort Benning, I went to a place called the War College, where I would spend twelve weeks learning tactics and armaments and strategy and some political debriefing. Here, this nineteen, twenty-year old person thought, "Why are we here? What are we doing?" Exposed to what their message was, in later years, when I compare and contrast what I was listening to and what I've now learned in retrospect is starkly different. Something I was exposed to, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which, in reality, may or may not have happened, it may not have been as the way it was initially described. [Editor's Note: In response to an alleged naval confrontation between American and North Vietnamese forces in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 10, 1964, which authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to wage war in Vietnam. Under Johnson, the numbers of American troops in Vietnam increased from 80,000 in July 1965 to 385,000 in 1966 and to the peak of 543,400 in 1969. (Thomas G. Patterson, *American Foreign Relations: A History Since 1895*, pgs. 340-349)]

The next one was the Domino Theory of how Communism is going to move through Indochina and the Middle East, and we need to stop it over here before it progresses to other countries. In years since then, I'm more aware that there are two sides to every story. You weren't telling me about the French presence in Vietnam in the early '50s. You sort of left that out [laughter] and these people's right to self-determination. If they want to live like this under Communism, if that's the model that fits, maybe that needs to happen. [Editor's Note: The Domino Theory was a Cold War theory that shaped American foreign policy. It was a belief that if one nation in a region of the world became communist, the nations around it would fall to communism as well. It was used as a basis for American involvement in South Vietnam.]

Listening to that and keeping it registered, but going to Vietnam and looking at the corruption in the South Vietnamese system, to listen, to see, are these people genuinely motivated to fight for what they want, democracy? I would go out with forty or fifty pounds on my back and two bandoleers of ammunition. Sometimes, we would do missions with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] troops or South Vietnamese troops, and they were out with their rifle and maybe one bandolier and that was it. They were going out for a Sunday walk. I said, "What the heck is this all about? Where's the commitment here?" This is reality, what I'm seeing.

By the way, you talked about a stand down. I'm showing you a picture. It was in Dau Tieng, there was one area. It was a mansion, a French mansion, that had a swimming pool. So, we were there for two days, and we were allowed to use the swimming pool. Can you imagine? This is a picture of the Donut Dollies. Now, have you ever heard that term?

KR: I have actually, but please tell about the Donut Dollies.

MA: So, Donut Dollies are women who volunteered [with the Red Cross] to come to Vietnam, and they would, when men came back to a base camp the size of Cu Chi or where there were fortifications and some degree of safety, they would be there. As you came in, they would hand out lemonade and donuts, and they would gather you around and engage in some type of games or songs to break the tension, to offer something different from your routine. They were much

appreciated. They were breaking the tension with whatever games that they were playing; they were well-intentioned ladies. Of course, the perverse nature of things were rumored that they had ulterior motives and that they were the concubines of certain officers and high-ranking officers. That's what happens among a group of guys who just can't appreciate. Maybe, who knows, there was some element of truth to that in an isolated manner, but I take my hats off to them. They were very important. [Editor's Note: Donut Dollies refers to Red Cross volunteers who went to Vietnam as a part of the Supplemental Recreational Activities Oversees program. American military personnel nicknamed them Donut Dollies because their duties included serving coffee and donuts as a part of their efforts focused on boosting the morale of troops.]

KR: I have a question. I have been interviewing women who served in the Army Nurse Corps in Vietnam. You told us the stories about when you were wounded. What was your medical care like?

MA: There was a time when I was in advanced infantry training--I think it might have been Fort Jackson--and I was a few weeks into the nine-week cycle of training. I came down with a vicious fever. I had a 104-degree fever, and I couldn't even walk. I was told, "You have to go to the hospital to be evaluated." To do that, they played little mind games with you because the upper drill instructors were always suspicious that you were trying to pull something over them. They would have you pack your entire duffle bag with all your things, carry it to wherever you had to go to the hospital, thinking that you're not going to go through that, and you're going to say, "Never mind, I'll be okay." I basically did that and, crossing the quadrangle with this thing, either fainted or went down or whatever. I get to the hospital. I've got a 105 degree fever or whatever it is.

It's very difficult to remember the following sequence of events, but I find myself in a hospital unit. I do remember this. At some point, in the middle of the night, an Army nurse wakes me up [laughter] and gets me out of bed after having taken my temperature and takes me to the showers and puts me under the shower, turns the shower on, ostensibly to get my fever down, but I thought I was going into shock, like, "Are you out of your mind?" [laughter] I don't know if it was policy or on her own volition, but I was in that hospital dealing with that lady for a while. I survived. I got out.

Interestingly enough, the day I got out and I returned to my barracks, I had to qualify on a piece of equipment that I had not been exposed to. If you don't qualify on this, you're out of this. You have to go back and recycle another few weeks. So, I spoke to somebody, "Give me the Cliffs Notes version of this, and what do I have to do?" Fine, I passed the thing. As far as nurses, those were the only time I had interactions with nurses.

All other times, I dealt with medics. I had medics attached to my unit. The first thing I would do with a medic was, "Give me all your personal information," because when the shit was hitting the fan and everybody was down, the only person moving around was that medic. "I'm wounded. I'm this. I'm that." He had to move around, and so that was the medics. I've seen them do some things, a tracheostomy out in the field with a guy who had his face wounded by some ordnance and he had to establish an airway. The medics did their thing.

KR: When you were wounded by the shrapnel and then with the Claymore mine, were you medevacked by helicopter?

MA: Let's see. The shrapnel, yes. Yes, they got me out of that.

KR: Where were you taken?

MA: There was probably a dispensary type of unit. I wasn't taken to a major base. So, there were smaller areas within a large base camp area, definitely not a hospital. Guys who were very severely wounded were there and eventually taken out to go to Japan. If you were severely wounded, you would get stabilizing efforts, wherever you were, in that base camp, which was more than a dispensary, but not a hospital.

KR: What field hospital would men in your unit who were badly wounded be taken to? Were they taken to Saigon?

MA: I don't know. You should understand that here in Vietnam, some guy might come in, he might only be there for three months or four months or he's out. You talked about long-termers and short-termers. If you were lucky enough to make it through the year--I was like a short-termer and somebody says in a letter, "I've got fifty-four days to go." That was actually the two most dangerous times in Vietnam is when you first got there and during the weeks before you left. In the beginning, you were vulnerable because you haven't really done anything real, and at the end of your tour over here, you're being so ultra-cautious that invariably you do something wrong. So, I lost track, after they would leave. Nobody ever wrote back.

KR: This seems like a good place to stop for today.

MA: Yes, good, yes.

KR: Thank you so much for coming in. Gail, thank you so much for coming in, and we are going to continue with a second session.

MA: Okay, very good. Thank you very much, Katie. Thank you, Gail, for listening.

KR: Thank you, Gail.

GA: It's interesting, some parts. Most of it, I know.

MA: Yes.

GA: I hope it didn't prevent you from saying anything. I don't care if you say anything.

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

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