RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RUDOLF A. BEHRENS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Rudolf A. Behrens in Danbury, Connecticut, on September 20, 2006, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. To begin, Mr. Behrens, first, let me thank you for having me on such short notice. Tell me, for the record, where and when you were born.

Rudolf A. Behrens: I was born in Rochester, New York, August 14, 1928.

SH: Great. I understand that you also go by the name Rudy, in case anyone should ask.

RB: Absolutely. [laughter]

SH: Can you begin your story by telling me about your father and his family background?

RB: My father came over at the behest of his uncle, who needed some cheap labor from Germany, when my father was about eighteen or nineteen and [he] went to Rochester to work. His uncle had a commercial German bologna factory kind of a place and needed, again, some cheap help. A year or two later, my father got my mother over and his uncle actually was a lay minister at the Protestant church that they belonged to, New Apostolic Church of North America, and he married them. Then, as young people are, they wanted to be independent. They moved to Newark, New Jersey, where my father worked for Swift & Company, a large meat-packing house, because that was then his trade.

SH: What year did your father come over? Do you remember approximately?

RB: 1925, I believe it was. I was born in 1928, so that makes it about right.

SH: Were there other members of the family besides this uncle who came over? What part of Germany did they come from?

RB: From the Rhineland, a little north of Cologne, Koln, and south of Düsseldorf, but right on the Rhine, in little towns called (Elberfeld?) and (Blanc?). I think they still exist.

SH: How had your parents met? Did they know each other prior to coming over?

RB: Boy, back then, they didn't tell. The discipline on kids was, "You don't tell them anything, you just beat them." Well, I didn't get beaten, fortunately. Of course, I was such a good kid.

SH: Right.

RB: Right, and, anyway, they didn't elaborate much and I didn't have the presence of mind, later, to really ask details. I know that they lived in neighboring towns; they possibly went to school together.

SH: Could it have been a church affiliation?

RB: No, my father was Episcopal and my mother was Catholic. So, I don't think that was it, unless there were social events that brought them together, or friends, perhaps, common friends.

SH: They moved to Newark. Can you tell me a little bit about your mother's family and her background?

RB: Yes, my grandmother was an opera singer in Europe, went all over Europe, made the mistake of getting married early and that ended her career, of course, but she was very disciplined and raised her four kids--my mother, one of two girls and a boy, four all together. My grandmother disciplined all the kids to be musical, to study music, and my mother sang a beautiful alto, had a beautiful alto voice.

SH: Was she older or younger?

RB: My grandmother?

SH: No, your mother.

RB: Oh, my mother.

SH: You said that there were four.

RB: Oh, yes, she was the oldest of the four, yes. Unfortunately--well, fortunately for my mother--she came over early and what caused them all to come over, not only my mother and father, but my uncles and aunts and grandfather and grandmother on my father's side, was the horrible inflation in Germany, which was intolerable in the mid-'20s. My father was so happy to be in this country, he wouldn't let anyone talk against the United States for all his life [laughter] and he really appreciated the opportunity to [come here]. Later, he had a little mom-and-pop grocery store kind of a business.

SH: In Newark as well?

RB: In Newark, yes. The neighborhood changed and, fortunately, at that time, then, they retired and came up to Connecticut, in New Fairfield, a little cottage they lived in, and brought my grandmother after she got on. She was able to come out of the war--I had one cousin and my grandmother, everyone else died. I had two aunts, my mother's sisters, were killed in bombings. Their husbands were killed on the fronts, East or West, whatever. Her brother had a traumatic illness or epilepsy, so, he was in an institution and Hitler killed him, couldn't handle anybody who wasn't perfect, I guess, for the Aryan race.

SH: Did they talk at all about it? I am assuming that some of the family, as you said, came after the war. As a young man, did you hear these stories or was it still very closed?

RB: I heard more from my Aunt Frieda. My father was one of a bunch of children and everyone from that family came over here. So, it was all on my paternal side that I heard the stories. My Aunt Frieda was the oldest from his siblings and she was more of a historian than anyone. She

knew that we were, on that side, Huguenots [French Protestants] and were thrown out of France, I guess around the 1800s, early 1800s. Some migrated to the US; some migrated to Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, even England, because of religious persecution. I've learned since that there are four Presidents whose heritage was Huguenot-related, including Teddy Roosevelt, I believe. So, that was interesting. I'm learning now, recently, from some of my cousins who were my Aunt Frieda's children, some of the details she'd told them and I didn't hear, which is very interesting.

SH: It is fascinating to hear this.

RB: Oh, yes. Well, I'm a student of history now, for sure, part of it. [laughter] I go to the classes here and I sit there and they talk about it. I said, "Yes, that was almost the way it was; actually, a little different, yes, because I was there." Sometimes, the teacher likes it, sometimes, he says, "Well, that's not what it says in the book." [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Behrens attends classes at the Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut.]

SH: Okay, that is why we are doing these oral histories, I believe. All of your father's family was able to come prior to the war, because of the inflation.

RB: Oh, yes, in the mid-'20s, right, exactly.

SH: Your mother's family stayed through the war.

RB: Yes.

SH: None of them came, her brothers or sisters or anyone.

RB: No. Well, I have a cousin on that side, she's still in Germany. She was a young girl at the time, during the war.

SH: Did you ever meet your grandparents on your mother's side?

RB: I only met my grandmother. When I was five--I'd just turned five in Germany--my mother took me before kindergarten here for two months. Apparently--they told me this, my mother told me when I was able to understand--that I was like a shark, I have to keep moving to live. So, as a little kid, I was four years old, I scooted off to the park, not speaking any German, and I came up with a phrase that all Germans think is very funny, because it's not good German. I said, "(*Ich kann mein Heimat nicht verfinden*?)." My mother used to tell that story and everybody laughed, but, here I am, a little kid in the middle of Germany and didn't know how to get home.

SH: Obviously, you found your way.

RB: Yes. The other quickie on that was, on my way back, we were ready to get off the boat in New York Harbor and whoever clears you asked this little kid, now just five, "Speak English, you're an American." I couldn't think of a word in English. I had learned German so well in that short period, I couldn't remember. So, he said, "Oh, you can't get off the boat. All right, you've

got the passport, but you need the birth certificate." So, my mother went to the railing, waved to my father on the dock, says, "Go home and get the birth certificate. They won't let us off the boat." [laughter]

SH: Oh, my word. This would have been in 1933.

RB: Yes.

SH: The height of the Depression in this country as well.

RB: Yes, right.

SH: How was it for a little kid to cross then? Obviously, you were on a ship over and back.

RB: I remember being seasick a little bit, the first couple of days maybe, but, then, nothing's coming back at all.

SH: Did any of your other family members go with you or was it just your mother?

RB: Just my mother. I remember visiting my uncle in sort of row houses or apartments; they would be maybe condos today. There were some kids that were singing on the little dirt road behind the building, oh, maybe a hundred or two hundred of them. They pushed me to go in there with them, and so, I did and went to a big, open area there. They gave us--I could swear it was a little carton of milk and some graham crackers back then, I don't know if they existed--but it was all part of the Hitler program, Hitler Youth program. I think I'm quoting correctly, that Hitler said, "Give me your children to the age of five and I'll have them forever." So, that was a major, major thrust back in those days. Unfortunately, people were drawn into that and thought it was honorable and good, until it went so sour.

SH: After the war, just to reiterate, who came then from Germany to the United States?

RB: Only my grandmother.

SH: Only your grandmother came.

RB: Everything she owned had to be left back. All she had was a little thing to carry what she could carry. It went to what's called the *Winterhilfe*, the Winter Help, for all those living there who were bombed out, had no furniture or whatever else she had in her little place, apartment.

SH: She was just south of Koln then.

RB: A little north of Koln and south of Düsseldorf.

SH: Okay.

RB: (Elberfeld?), I think it is. Now, that's very close to the world headquarters for Bayer, the big chemical company.

SH: Did she learn to speak English when she came?

RB: Well, some, and she was so proud of me being *Universität*, for Rutgers. I never said I had a PhD or anything and she'd say, "Well, *Herr Doktor-Professor*." I said, "Grandma, come on." So, I'm visiting up here in New Fairfield, living in New Jersey, and I wanted to watch a basketball game. I think Rutgers was pretty good that year or whatever. So, she would be so proud to say, "Seventy-three, that's the guy who runs from left to right and the number is on his back, seventy-three." She knows English. [laughter] She was a wonderful, wonderful person that had such a terrible, terrible life because of Hitler, period. To digress a little bit, but maybe it's related, we had a diplomat representing Germany here last semester.

SH: Here at Western Connecticut.

RB: Yes, giving a lecture. He's saying, "Well, the people in Germany don't really like the Americans anymore," and so forth. Then, he's saying that what we should do here is to rise up against our government and make sure it's right. Then, I raised my hand and I said, "You mean like the Germans did when Hitler was in power, to rise up against Hitler before he did the damage?" He's apparently an anti-Bush guy. Then, I said, "Well, it looks like in Iraq, for example, it's a matter of the old expression, 'Let's you and him fight.'" People have to think about that sometimes. [laughter] Let us, you and him, fight while Germany sits back and gets all the rewards from this; they don't put in any effort.

SH: All those big contracts and everything, yes.

RB: Yes, and France even worse.

SH: Did your grandmother bring over anything that you remember, as far as traditions or customs, to your home?

RB: Well, the music, yes.

SH: She continued her love of the opera.

RB: Oh, yes. In fact, my mother used to--her aunt and uncle came up from Koln, Cologne, and took her down to the opera once a week, for culture. That was the main thing then. That's why I joined the Rutgers [Glee Club]. I was in the Rutgers Glee Club and the Choir the four years I was at Rutgers and was able to play at the Music House. Dr. McKinney and I had [a relationship]--in fact, McKinney, he was a very quiet guy. I used to play the piano and improvise a lot and he'd hear me right up there. One time, he went into [a room]--this is the old Music House--and he opened the pocket doors to see who was playing. He had started with a smile on his face and he saw it was me again and frowned. He didn't say a word, he just closed the pocket doors. I thought, "Gee, how do I interpret that?" A few weeks later, I was invited into the Music Club. Only ten students in the University--and you had to be invited--were

allowed into that. I was so honored, I couldn't believe it. You'd go to Dr. McKinney's house once a month and his cook would make us a nice Sunday dinner. We'd sit there discussing music and picking out the five concerts for the next season.

SH: Wonderful.

RB: For Rutgers, yes, among other things. I didn't know how I fit, and then, later on, it probably came to me that I did have a talent for improvisation, both classical [and modern?], and I still do that today.

SH: I was going to ask if you kept up your interest in music.

RB: Yes, people actually pay me for playing. [laughter] I have an open invitation to play at the Waldorf Astoria, on the Park Avenue side, on Cole Porter's piano, which to me is an honor. I don't need money for that. I played at the Hyatt on 42nd Street, I've played at the DoubleTree in New Orleans, the St. Francis in San Francisco, a whole bunch of places all over. I even played here for what they call the West Café, doing cocktail hour stuff, and other groups ask me to play, and so forth. I'm not interested in money--I just love to play and I'm happy that they appreciate it.

SH: Do you have a nice piano that you play at home?

RB: I have an outstanding piano, that I decided, instead of buying two new cars, I would buy this piano. [laughter] Now, I know, I think the retail value is something like sixty, seventy thousand [dollars], if you buy a new one today. I just had it appraised. The wholesale value is twenty-five thousand.

SH: Fantastic.

RB: It hasn't been moved since it was delivered, I'll tell you. [laughter]

SH: I will bet not, and faithfully tuned, right?

RB: Oh, yes. It's just like a cowboy and his horse--that's my horse.

SH: Do you also continue to sing?

RB: No, I haven't. I did have a radio program in New Brunswick, though, for eight weeks.

SH: You were five years old when you came back from Germany in 1934 or 1933. Do you recall any discussions about what was going on in Europe? You, as a young man, had seen this, but you probably were not aware of it, other than the graham crackers and milk.

RB: Well, my father went off to work with Swift & Company. We were in Newark. Mother was a housewife. I know, during the Second World War, there were German--well, he belonged to a German singing society, totally apolitical--but there was the pressure, I think, to go to the

camps or whatever, but we never went into that. We did our own little picnicking with friends, and so forth. [laughter]

SH: You did not attend the *Bund* meetings or anything like that. [Editor's Note: The German term "*bund*" means "association" and was used by a number of German-American political, social and cultural groups. The German-American *Bund* (based on the earlier Friends of New Germany) operated from 1936 until December 1941, when it was outlawed, as a pro-Nazi group.]

RB: No, no. Well, again, my father was so pro-American. He was almost denying that [he was German], he was ashamed almost to say he was German.

SH: How did the Depression affect your family and your father's profession?

RB: My father was aggressive--maybe he was like a shark, had to keep moving to live--because he always had a job. Well, during the Depression, he had a flower shop, didn't work out. Of course, businesses were horrible; went to selling encyclopedias, anything, but he would not sit back and do nothing. Some close friends, in fact, of my mother and father's, the wife of the family, I called her almost my second mother after my own mother died, they were that close, but, anyway, the husband was an upholsterer and he had no [drive]. Something was missing, that he couldn't even go into New York to get a job, try something, and so, his family's virtually starving to death. They had two young boys, and so, my mother would, with the help of my father, get boxes and fill them full of food and put it in the front of the door of the apartment, ring the bell and run like hell kind of a thing.

SH: Oh, my.

RB: So, I never knew this until after my mother died and I had (Erma Snyder?), that was her name, over. She had this little place in New Fairfield also. She almost broke down, to tell me the story of what my mother used to do to help, that these two boys had canned milk at least to keep them from starving to death, and whatever else they could afford. In fact, I just learned today, in one of the philosophy classes I'm taking, about the Greek tragedies, where a tragedy brings out the best of men, use "men," and the comedies bring out the worst. If you relate that to good times and bad times, in the Depression, people helped each other and there was such a camaraderie, that as long as you weren't starving to death or suffering, people didn't need that much. I didn't think I was a poor kid. If you never saw it before, it's out of your sight, but those times were good. Now, times are so good that maybe the comedy comes into play from the Greek tragedies, of bringing out the worst in men, of greed, where they don't really need it and all these perversions that are spread around.

SH: Did any of your father's siblings come from Rochester down to Newark as well? Were you there alone?

RB: No, they all came to Newark directly. Well, actually, no, the first one was my father's [father, my] grandfather, his sister, the oldest, and another sister, I think.

SH: Of your father?

RB: Yes, and they went to Brooklyn. It was because of my Aunt Frieda, the oldest, who, on the boat, met a promising guy. They fell in love and got married. He did very well for himself, and so forth, that they lived in Brooklyn and had five kids, and then, got a place out in the North Fork, Long Island, a huge thing. In fact, we just came back from there and [he] sort of helped the rest of the family that weren't maybe as talented, lucky, whatever it was. Again, the camaraderie, that I remember in my growing up as the most important thing in my life.

SH: The families got together for all the holidays.

RB: Oh, yes. [We] went to a wedding recently in New York and a table of young people, ten of them, five couples, they were right next to the dance floor. So, my wife and I, we go out, we're dancing away the first dance. They're looking like this--every dance and they're sitting there. [laughter] So, I was feeling all right and I tapped a guy and I said, "Why don't you go out and dance this? Your girlfriend here, I'm sure, would like to dance," and so, finally, in a joking manner, I finally ended up [saying], "I guess you must be a computer nerd." "Oh, yes, yes," but the point is, those that were introvert could become less introvert years ago, but, today, they're driven into total introversion, I think.

SH: Did you go to visit your family in Brooklyn or did they come to you in Newark?

RB: No, mostly, we went there, yes, and my grandfather started a little mom-and-pop grocery store. That's a cute story. My uncle, well, my father's brother, the youngest, worked in that store before he was drafted into the Army during the Second World War, Uncle Walter. I worked there also. "Grandfather," I said, "Grandpa, what do I get? How much you paying me?" He says, "You're getting something worth a lot more--experience." [laughter] So, my uncle, when he was there, across the street in Newark, there was a little diner and my uncle would send me across the street to get a cup of coffee, half-and-half and full of sugar. [laughter] He became wealthy and, later on, he started one of the first supermarkets in Portland, Oregon, being German and knowing the language well. He was [at] a prisoner of war camp, I think, in Minnesota where he met a Swedish second-generation gal. They moved to Portland, Oregon, and he did a lot of good out there.

SH: Your uncle was a German prisoner of war.

RB: No, no, he worked in the prisoner of war camp.

SH: He worked there.

RB: Yes. He was born in Germany, therefore, was a German citizen, but he was able to get in the [US] Army. They needed interpreters, I guess. So, he did that. He just died last year, at eighty-eight from lung cancer, after smoking three packs of cigarettes a day for most of his life, eighty-eight, but he's a very strange guy in a way. His fortune, I don't know, somewhere from four to six million dollars, he bought a house or allowed his sister, my other aunt, to live in it, brought her out, brought another aunt out from Germany, so [that] the family would be together,

whoever was left. They both--well, one died, and then, when he died, had it all arranged that if she, my one aunt, left the house for a nursing home, rest home, whatever, that house would go to the foundation that he set up, same way with his wife's house. If she leaves, she doesn't get the house, but she gets a good salary or amount of money every year. His son, unfortunately, had schizophrenia. So, he became a ward of the state then and all of his money went to this foundation, which was set up for the education solely for Lincoln City, Oregon, Board of Education, to provide field trips, anything, for the kids; a lot of Indian [kids], from American Indian tribes, out there and they didn't have that opportunity. Also, what he did was--it's on the Internet--called Readingrewards.com, I think reading is a capital "R." Anyway, that's set up to pay the kids for reading a book. If you read a book, you get five bucks. Of course, the teacher has to sign off, that kind of thing, to encourage kids to read.

SH: Fantastic.

RB: Yes. In fact, [former First Lady] Barbara Bush sent him a letter, and so did the Governor of Oregon, thanking him for that kind of thing.

SH: Wonderful. You were ten years old when Hitler invaded Poland. Were there any discussions then, that you remember?

RB: No. I remember reading a little; certain things, I remember during the war. Well, during the war, I wanted to be in the Boy Scouts in the worst way. I cheated--I lied about my age, at age eleven, instead of twelve. I think it's eleven today. [laughter] I have this big, heavy steel hat, still, and I was a bicycle scout, to bring messages in case we get bombed, take messages. [laughter] I forgot now what that was called, but it was a service during the war. The victory garden, I didn't do too well in that department. I don't know how I ever got in the College of Agriculture.

SH: You were still living in Newark then.

RB: Yes.

SH: Which part of Newark?

RB: Twelfth Street, which is off of Springfield Avenue. It was only four or five years ago that Springfield Avenue became a very important thing for me. I started piano when I was eight or nine and I used to go down to [Dorn &] Kirschner's Music Store, walk from one direction to the other. I learned at a major jazz educators' convention in New York City that two award winners, who are now in the [Down Beat] Jazz Hall of Fame, Wayne Shorter and James Moody, went to the same music store around the time I was [going]. So, we could've seen each other in the store and not known it. They came from the other direction to buy music for their relative. Well, one is a composer, very well [known], both, well, obviously well known in jazz, because they're Moody, James Moody, because of being inducted into the Jazz Hall of Fame. I'm thinking, "Gee, I didn't amount to anything." [laughter]

SH: Obviously, music was of great interest to you and the Boy Scouts. What else interested you as a young man?

RB: Oh, I was into everything I could think of, took as many majors [as] I could in high school.

SH: Were there any extracurricular activities you were involved in?

RB: Yes, I ran the mile, I dabbled in the high jump, in the pole vault, in the broad jump, but never [too seriously], just for curiosity.

SH: What high school?

RB: It was Irvington High School. It was two thousand students, had split session. In fact, we didn't get in there until tenth grade. I was in the junior high school until ninth. Well, I was "big man on campus" in junior high school. [laughter] I was in the play. I was the male lead in the play, where half the school was in the play. It was, I think, five or six performances. Miss Winter, my music teacher, followed me around like a, whatever, to make sure I was healthy, because there were no understudies and I had to sing ten songs. So, the weekend before this whole thing happened, I went on a Boy Scout Jamboree and I came back with a sore throat and she was panicked. [laughter] So, she was really following me around with honey and lemon mixed, "Here," out of the class, "here, take another dose." So, I think Wednesday was the first performance and I lasted until the last song on the Saturday night. I cracked on the last song and, oh, never again is she going do this, but it was so much fun. [laughter] It was a town--a town, it's as big as this city, actually, back then, sixty-six thousand people in Irvington--and we were on the front page of the big *Irvington Herald*. I still have that somewhere.

SH: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

RB: No, only child.

SH: Did your mother and father get involved in the war at all? You talked about having a victory garden. Did your father work in one of the war related industries?

RB: No, he was in the meatpacking company.

SH: He stayed there the whole time.

RB: Yes, and it was essential, of course, for people to eat.

SH: What about your mother? Did she talk about saving things or collecting scrap?

RB: No, actually, but life to them was what happens today, I guess. We rented an apartment, one of these railroad type things. She did go to work to get me a new piano. When I was twelve, she got me, from her work mostly, I think, a baby grand Baldwin piano. That was memorable, to say the least, because they started me off when I was about eight or nine. My father said, "You've got to practice an hour a day. You promise?" "Oh, yes." Three weeks later, I'm out

playing ball and he came home, "You practice?" "No," pulled me by the ear and sat me down. So, I look at the piano, the piano looks at me, and I finally figured it out--either I'm miserable looking at the piano and making noise or I'm going to turn it around and start making it sound better. So, I picked up on that, and then, they figured I was progressing all right and they got me another old upright, better condition. [laughter] Then, finally, at twelve years old, they got rid of that piano and got me this baby grand, which was incredible to me.

SH: Amazing.

RB: It was second-hand, but it was a lot of money in those days. It was four hundred dollars, I remember that, and it was 850 dollars for a new car. So, that's quite a sacrifice for my mother. She worked in a defense kind of a place.

SH: When you would come home from school, what did you?

RB: I opened the refrigerator and opened a quart of milk, put some chocolate in there, shook it up and drank it down. That was before I could think about anything else. [laughter]

SH: Then, you went to practice.

RB: Yes, yes, well, I pitched in baseball. I enjoyed sports a lot. Yes, I guess I was all around, not fantastic in anything, I suppose.

SH: What year did you enter high school?

RB: Ah, the tenth grade, how old would I have been? seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen, somewhere in there. That would've been '43? yes, 1943, three years left. One year was from eight to twelve-thirty, and then, the other two years were from one to five-thirty PM.

SH: It continued to be split sessions.

RB: Yes, and I took advantage of the half days by working. [laughter] I worked in an optical lens factory, I worked as a stock boy in a brassiere and whatever, undergarments, factory and I took the bus to get there. [laughter] I worked at a butcher shop; that was really interesting. I started off as a delivery [boy], that was my earlier job, as a delivery boy, and ended up cutting hindquarters of beef and chickens. They really moved me along, right. [laughter]

SH: Maybe that was because there was a shortage of young men around. You sound like you were kind of tall and big for your age.

RB: Yes. Well, whatever, yes, I guess I proved that I was able to handle [it], little by little. To actually give me the responsibility of cutting a hindquarter beef is enormous, because you could cut it wrong and, suddenly, it becomes chopped meat or stew beef or something.

SH: For sure.

RB: Instead of roast beef.

SH: Did you go into New York City at all?

RB: With the reward?

SH: Did you have relatives out there?

RB: Oh, well, I'm just thinking. Yes, that was incredible. I thought of my cousins as rich and I wanted to emulate them and that was excellent for me. In fact, my older cousin went to Rutgers, and so, that's why, I guess, one of the reasons, I went to Rutgers.

SH: That will be one of the questions that I will ask.

RB: Okay, but, yes, out in Long Island, just being out there and having all these cousins running around, instead of being alone, that was healing for me, I guess. They were helpful. One time, I think, I went to New York was when Miss Winter took the major groups of this play, this musical that I was in, to New York to see *Die Fledermaus*. I think it's *Die Fledermaus,* the mouse, a beautiful operetta. That was another major, important thing.

SH: Being part of the music scene at school, I thought that New York would be a natural draw.

RB: Yes, I was so diverse, I guess I did some of this, some of that. I guess I sang in the high school, also, in the glee club.

SH: How did students your age keep track of what was going on in World War II?

RB: Newspapers, that was all there was, and radio.

SH: Was this discussed in your school?

RB: No, I don't think so. Today, in our high school where I live, we have 245 courses offered, imagine that, and 152 are being run, actually run. When I was going to school, there were far fewer. I mean, they're taking Accounting I and II; I can't think of it being very much in depth and that's a whole other ballgame. So, we had math and English and I had debating, five majors I had and an elective. I don't remember politics--oh, Problems in American Democracy, PAD, that comes to mind. So, that's where it would've happened; yet, maybe I thought I was doing what I could, riding my bicycle in the Boy Scouts, and that's all I could do.

SH: I wondered if your father was involved in being an air raid warden or if it was just you.

RB: No, just me, yes, and both as German citizens, they were sensitive. When I graduated from junior high school, my full name is Rudolf Adolph Behrens, okay. So, we got these empty diploma things with a ribbon on them, just go up the stage at the graduation in ninth grade. [laughter] I'm walking up the stage and the principal announces my name and I go sheepishly

down the steps, because Adolph is not a good thing in those days. I don't know many people named Adolph today, do you? So, that was a little traumatic. I remember that well, yes.

SH: I am sure. Your parents never talked about being investigated because of their family members or anything.

RB: Oh, no. There was one, I think on my father's side, a distant aunt or something, lived in New York City, that was supposed to be a Communist. [laughter] Nobody knew much about it or cared, really. If she wants to be whatever she wants, that's her business. My Aunt (Hanni?), Johanna, her husband, Hans (Schroeder?), was a little guy and smoked a big cigar, a very political type. He and my Uncle Henry would discuss politics, and so, I'd listen in the distance, I guess, to him. My Uncle Hans was sort of weird. He even had the mustache--he almost looked like Hitler--and nobody paid any attention to him, either. [laughter] Of course, all my male cousins went into the service, so, their commitment was clear.

SH: Did you correspond with them? Do you remember people in your school who were corresponding with sailors or soldiers or airmen?

RB: No.

SH: On your street, did you notice any of the blue stars or gold stars? [Editor's Note: Service Flags, displayed by families with children serving in the US Armed Forces, featured a blue star for each living child and a gold star for each deceased child.]

RB: Oh, gold stars, I remember that, yes, and that, of course, was always sad. Talk about a united country, holy smokes, I think we had, what? three hundred thousand Americans killed in that war. My mother would send CARE packages, when she could, later, until she got my grandmother out of there. Everybody hated Hitler. My grandmother came over and she just couldn't handle even thinking about it, because she, like so many others, were helpless. First, you couldn't say anything or you're out of business. Second, what's an older lady going to do, fight Hitler? [laughter] So, everybody had to keep quiet. In fact, I went on a business trip one time, went up the Rhine River to visit my cousin for the first time, my young cousin. Well, he's not young anymore, but, anyway, I was sitting there in the car and here's this fellow. I say, "Excuse me, my German's not good, I'm from America." "Oh, yes, we didn't do anything wrong. We didn't know anything about it." He's in total denial of everything. [laughter] I say, "It's okay, don't worry about it. It's over, it's gone, but don't forget it altogether," next time, maybe you should remember what this diplomat was telling us to do to, to make sure we don't get bad leaders.

SH: You talked about having a cousin who had gone to Rutgers. Let us talk then about your graduation and your plans. Did you know you would go to college?

RB: Yes. Oh, I had to go, because they went, my cousins. I'd visit in Brooklyn, 1855 East Ninth Street. I can remember it today. [laughter]

SH: Amazing.

RB: It's just so important in my life, my young life, to have them as a reference or to emulate. My cousin, Henry Koehler, K-O-E-H-L-E-R, went to Rutgers first, and then, one of my girl cousins went to Douglass, and then, another male cousin's wife went to Douglass. They were older than me. So, it was important to me, and then, I didn't have any money. So, I had to figure out how I'm going to get in. Well, is this too early on this?

SH: No, please.

RB: Oh, good. On my application, they asked me, "What are the three preferences?" I said, "Rutgers, Rutgers, Rutgers." I was convinced and that, plus, being in the College of Agriculture, again, which was seven dollars a credit hour, a lot of money, versus eleven dollars for the Arts and Sciences. So, I took all the Arts and Sciences, to become a chemist, really. Agriculture was good, I didn't mind that. You had to take a few courses, of course, to get through it. It was a scientific curriculum.

SH: Did you apply to any other schools besides Rutgers?

RB: No, that was it. I was working on a chicken farm for three summers, including the summer before my being accepted in '46. I got the notice two weeks before school started that I was accepted. [laughter]

SH: Oh, my.

RB: I remember every part of that day after that letter was opened. I was the happiest kid on Earth. Oh, God, there was no more privileged guy in the universe.

SH: Where was the chicken farm? Were you close?

RB: It was near Lakewood, New Jersey. Actually, it was in Lakewood, on the outskirts of Lakewood.

SH: How did you come to go all the way from Irvington to Lakewood?

RB: Because there was some program in high school where they asked--they needed help, because they hadn't anybody to get to work on farms, because all the young men or whoever that were usually doing it were in the service, yes--and that's what happened. Actually, a couple of these guys that I worked with, they put us in separate houses, huge chicken [houses], seventeen thousand chickens, something like that, and about ten thousand hens that lay eggs. So, they had two guys that were actually veterans and were discharged from the service because of trauma, whatever. They had told some pretty horrible stories.

SH: Did they talk about it?

RB: Yes.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

SH: Please, continue. You were talking about working at the chicken farm.

RB: Oh, yes, one of them was on the USS *Hazelwood*. I think it was a destroyer or destroyer escort. They were hit by a *kamikaze* and he's describing--not [for] very long, he couldn't take it after a little while--the kids without legs, arms, whatever, happening up on that ship. Apparently, it didn't sink--I'm not even certain of that--but he got through it anyway. I think they discharged him after that, because of that trauma, and that was interesting.

SH: You worked in Lakewood on the chicken farm in 1944, 1945 and 1946.

RB: Yes, exactly, getting sixty dollars a month.

SH: You were housed there, I am assuming.

RB: Oh, yes, and we had six eggs for breakfast every morning. We had chickens for lunch and dinner. I don't ever remember anything but chickens for lunch or dinner or eggs for breakfast.

SH: Who did the cooking?

RB: It was (Ship Cagle?), was the name of the family. They were very prominent, actually, in Ocean County--I think it's Ocean County--farming. They were 4-H presidents, whatever, the family.

SH: Was there any affiliation with Rutgers that you know of?

RB: No.

SH: Through any of the poultry?

RB: No, I don't. Well, if I get into the Rutgers story, then, there's some others.

SH: Okay. You were already working in agriculture because of the need.

RB: Yes, and that helped.

SH: During your sophomore, junior, senior years.

RB: Yes, that helped, I guess, get me into the [College of Agriculture], and then, learning, of course, that it was cheaper. Then, when I did get in Rutgers, I got three scholarships, which made the difference. Then, I still worked, had to work and cook in my room; don't tell anybody. [laughter]

SH: In your high school, was there anyone encouraging you to go on to college?

RB: No, only my cousins.

SH: Okay.

RB: Guidance was virtually non-existent back then. I hope it's better today.

SH: Had you visited campus before you actually went down as a freshman?

RB: No, I don't think so.

SH: Okay.

RB: In fact, I remember the first trip was a bus down to New Brunswick, to Camp Kilmer, where I was supposed to be housed. A big man on campus, I got out, starting rough, I'd never smoked in my life, and so, I had to smoke a pipe as a college guy, right? I got so sick by the time I got to New Brunswick, I never smoked again. That finished me fast. [laughter] Then, in the barracks, there was some guy that came from Las Vegas, I think, young, of course.

SH: Were most of them veterans? You were just this eighteen-year-old high school kid.

RB: Yes, right, exactly. In fact, all my friends I developed over the four years are three, four years older than I am. I just joke about it, but I'm the kid in the bunch, nowadays, "How you holding up?" and this and that.

SH: What was it like to be a freshman, just eighteen? Those two or three years, after what they had been through, must have been like a lifetime.

RB: Oh, yes. Camp Kilmer was a special experience. I pity these guys getting everything in the private room here at Rutgers or whatever.

SH: Tell us about Camp Kilmer.

RB: They doubled up. Oh, Camp Kilmer, it was barracks. Somehow, I seemed to have a room at the end, I can't understand why, but, anyway, I had my high school class ring; within two weeks, that was stolen by one of the cleaning ladies. That wasn't good; that's one of the highlights. Then, another one was this kid from Las Vegas who [said], a veteran, obviously, "Play a little poker." Oh, yes, well, I didn't know how to play much poker. "It's only a penny," or whatever, and so, I don't know, in ten minutes, I lost a week's allowance. I didn't get an allowance, but that was the end of that, although I remember that one time playing there and we're at the other end on the first floor and there's a window behind me. It's stormy out, thunder and lightning, and there was a lamp back here on this side, I think.

SH: On your left side.

RB: Yes, leaning back, and, all of a sudden, lightning comes in. You can see the lightning circle the lamp and back out again. [laughter] I thought, "Wow, I don't know if I'm supposed to do

this. Somebody up there is telling me, 'Forget this game.'" [laughter] So, I never played again in college.

SH: Gave up the pipe, gave up gambling.

RB: Yes, oh, God, I got over it fast. [laughter] Somebody was watching out for me.

SH: Were you the only eighteen-year-old on your floor?

RB: I don't remember; yes, I didn't have friends that were [my age]. Well, wait a minute, later, there was one guy, Dick Vanden Heuvel, a very bright guy, who was out of high school, but that's the only one. If I remember right, and who knows if it's accurate? but the records will show it, that they took something like seventy percent of the freshman class, or more, were veterans and twenty-eight, thirty percent, something like that, were from high school.

SH: You talked about being given three scholarships. When you first went to Rutgers, you did not know you had any financial aid like that.

RB: That's correct. I saved from the time I worked. I started working at eleven years. I was determined. At eleven years old, my paper route, I'd get up at five-thirty in the morning and I'm over in the school by eleven; by eight, rather, eight-thirty. I got two dollars a week and I put one dollar and ninety cents in the bank and I got ten cents left over--it was a candy store I was working for--and I got a nickel Drake's cake and a nickel plain soda, chocolate soda. That was my reward and I was so happy. Boy, I really just bellied up to the bar and guzzled that, or nursed it, I should say, to make it [last], but I had that determination, I think. Then, I worked for all these other places and, by the time I got out of high school, I had eighteen hundred dollars saved, which was a lot of money.

SH: That was a fortune then.

RB: Yes, and my father asked me, "What are you going to do now, Rudy?" I said, "Well, Dad, I've been working since I was eleven--go to college." He said, "Why do you want to do that?" So, he really didn't understand things about college. It's not like today, where parents are really close to you. I never got beaten for anything, except my ears pulled to play the piano, [laughter] and my dad wasn't around. It wasn't actually an easy childhood. My father had a problem with drinking and was a violent type guy. That was pretty bad and that was very limiting. I felt sorry for my mother, because she was virtually stuck in the house and I was able to get out and do a lot of things. She never stopped me. I was independent very early, even at age eleven.

SH: She was the one who encouraged you to think about college.

RB: No, she didn't know anything about it, either.

SH: Okay.

RB: Yes, and then, I hear about people, "Oh, if your parents aren't [telling you], you're never going to go." Maybe today, I don't know, but, [if] it wasn't for my cousins, and they didn't even tell me--they were just talking to each other about going to college and I thought, "Gee, that's good." I would get maybe a question in there once in a while and I never mentioned it to anyone.

SH: Were they still on campus when you went as a freshman or had they graduated?

RB: My cousin Henry graduated in '48 or '49, I'm not sure now, but he was in the service, came out and finished his [degree]. I think, yes, he was supposed to be Class of '46, I think, but, because of service, he went back to finish as an electrical engineer, Phi Gamma Delta.

SH: Did he look you up when he came back to campus?

RB: Yes, sort of, yes, but we didn't relate that well. He was, again, in a fraternity. He was a little older and I was so busy. I was taking an average of twenty-one credits every semester for the four years. So, I ended up with a 164 credit hours, which is kind of stupid.

SH: As a freshman, coming into Camp Kilmer and being in the barracks, was that in the Raritan Arsenal?

RB: Yes, Raritan Arsenal.

SH: Raritan Arsenal Barracks.

RB: Isn't that Camp Kilmer? no, maybe not. [Editor's Note: Rutgers utilized former prisoner-of-war barracks at nearby Raritan Arsenal (known colloquially as the Raritan Campus) to house students during the GI Bill era of the late 1940s, when housing was in short supply, as well as barracks at Camp Kilmer.]

SH: Did you take the bus to College Ave?

RB: Yes, College Ave, I think. Oh, no, I think I walked. Well, first year, I don't remember. I think that was just the bus; yes, it was always to College Avenue.

SH: You took the bus to College Avenue, and then, if you needed to go to Cook …

RB: Yes, I walked to Cook Campus.

SH: What social things were you able to be involved with?

RB: Glee Club, and Glee Club, and then, the Glee Club.

SH: It is very consuming.

RB: I wasn't much into social fraternities. I didn't think I had time; I was too busy taking courses. [laughter] So, what I did was join the National Service Fraternity [Alpha Phi Omega] and that was, you put things on bulletin boards, you did whatever. I'd always look for a job on the side, in my spare time. I was a short-order cook for a while; I washed.

SH: Where did you work?

RB: Oh, there was a little diner right under the railroad station. It's gone now, I noticed.

SH: Thode's?

RB: Yes, I don't remember the name of it, but, early on, with maybe starting at eleven, I decided I was going to try every job out a little bit, to see what I'd like. [laughter] I didn't quite get through them all.

SH: You also talked about being involved with WRSU [the Rutgers University radio station].

RB: Yes.

SH: Did you start that as a freshman?

RB: No, no, I think maybe junior or senior [year]. What happened was, I was in the Music House, doing my thing, and somebody else opened the pocket doors. He said, "That's not bad; you want to have your own program on the radio?" I said, "Gee, well, it's a long time before exams. Let me try it." So, for eight weeks, I made up my own fifteen-minute program, playing piano and singing. A lot of it was Hoagy Carmichael, the romantic type stuff. The light would go on, the piano, I knew I was on; I'd made up my own theme song. I faded in and I faded out fifteen minutes later. It was a lot of fun. So, eight weeks, I've had it with the entertainment industry. [laughter]

SH: Gave it up after eight weeks?

RB: Yes, it was too much. [laughter]

SH: Was ROTC also mandatory?

RB: Yes, it was, except I had an out. I had a hernia. So, what'd I do? They put me in something different. So, I didn't stay with the ROTC.

SH: You did not have to even do the first year. You were exempt.

RB: Yes. I knew I shouldn't have had that operation and I didn't, until later, until I graduated, as a matter-of-fact.

SH: Obviously, then, athletics would have been out for you as well.

RB: Yes.

SH: Did you, as a freshman, attend football games?

RB: Oh, yes, I was really involved. I loved the football [team], Bucky Hatchett and Hank Pryor and Herman Hering. I met one at a reunion a couple of years ago. I said, "Wow, you're my hero." We were beating Lehigh 55-6 and all these other [teams]. It was really wonderful. I enjoyed that a lot, not much else, just football.

SH: Did the Glee Club perform at other places than Kirkpatrick Chapel? Where else did you perform?

RB: Oh, did they. We performed, I'd say almost twenty-five concerts a year and that's another thing that really was wonderful for me, to go to all these different places. I stayed at the vice-president of Eastman Kodak's home in Rochester when we sang with the Rochester Philharmonic with the Rutgers Glee Club and the--well, then, it was not Douglass, before it was Douglass, NJC [New Jersey College for Women], the girls. We went by train and got off the train and this reporter is ready to take a picture of these two gals next to me. I said, "You know, I was born here in Rochester." "Oh, wow, that's great," took a few [quotes], couple of sentences. The next day, the paper had a big thing with our picture on it, "Rochesterian Returns for Concert." [laughter] So, that was cute. Those things, you can't forget.

SH: Right.

RB: [We] went to Lake Minnewaska as our training camp for one week before the start in the Catskills. What was really good was that the waitresses were the girls from some of the colleges around--I forgot now, Vassar, or whatever they were--waiting on us. We had a grand time and singing, we had to have our practice, morning and afternoon, of course, but that was our reward.

SH: You talked about going to Rochester along with the choir from NJC. How much interaction was there between Rutgers College and NJC?

RB: Not a lot. Again, I didn't have much time for relaxation. It was busy for me, anyway. One interaction I remember with my cousin from Phi Gamma Delta was, for some reason, he had invited me to come with his close friend, Dave Moss, who was this automotive engineer, or going to be. He had four antique cars--a 1909 Cadillac, a '28 Cord, a Pierce-Arrow, and a Rolls Royce, I think, four. So, he invited me to come ride with him in this Cord to the Cook--maybe I was going to Cook College for a class or something, but that was memorable also. Anything was a big experience for a kid like me, that really came out of the blue, living alone, no brothers or sisters. So, my cousins really did a lot for me, I think, indirectly. They didn't really go out of their way a lot. [laughter]

SH: Do you remember any of the concerts or other social things on campus your freshman, sophomore, junior year?

RB: Oh, yes. Also, the Rochester Philharmonic came down to us and I have a picture of me with Eric Leinsdorf, then one of the most famous of conductors, since actually--he's dead now--but [standing] right next to me. We have our own set of tails, which I had to buy, and a blazer, which I had to buy, probably given now. We didn't have any "angels" helping us out with money. So, after the concert--there were how many? the auditorium held two, three thousand maybe, whatever, a mass of people, the orchestra and the choir, the Glee Club, and so forth. So, after we retired to the Music House, actually, the same room I had played piano, we were all sitting there and Dr. McKinney was there and Soup Walters, Glee Club Director, was there and only a few of us. [Editor's Note: From 1946 to 1983, F. Austin. "Soup" Walter, Rutgers Class of 1932, served as Director of the Rutgers Glee Club.] I don't know if I was in the Music Club at that time, but there was always five, six or seven at the most of us, of the students. So, I sat next to him and I asked him, "Gee, aren't you nervous with all those people in the audience?" His answer was, "Well, ninety-five percent of the people don't know what I'm playing from good or bad, indifferent or whatever. They're just here for their status or whatever, and the other five percent are critics, they're going to criticize you no matter what you do. So, how can I get upset?" So, that was good. [laughter]

SH: The man knew his math. Was the Glee Club made up of veterans as well? Did they participate in the Glee Club?

RB: Oh, yes, and I heard some stories from veterans there, too, things you don't want to hear--well, encounters with young ladies that were out to make money, I guess. Then, one guy in particular, I remember, they stole his wallet or whatever, hit him on the head or something. So, I'm glad that I heard it; I didn't have to worry about going through that anytime soon. [laughter]

SH: A real education.

RB: Yes, right, secondarily.

SH: What did you do between your freshman and sophomore year?

RB: Oh, that's an interest, to me--I worked at the (Lattimore?) Hotel in Belmar, New Jersey, an old wooden hotel. They had two--could be comedians today--black chefs. I asked one of them--I'm a waiter and these people come here for a week or two, right on the ocean--so, I asked the waiter, "What do you do on weekends?" No, I'm sorry, the cook, one of the cooks. He said, "Well, we go to Asbury," with the heavy accent, dialogue. He said, "We go to Asbury Park to this place and we slips in and we slides out," a bar, obviously. That's what they do for the weekend.

SH: Did you try playing the piano at the hotel?

RB: They didn't have one. [laughter]

SH: How did you find out about a job at the Shore like that? Do you remember?

RB: Oh, I don't know; yes, from Rutgers. I interviewed down in Atlantic City. That's where I remember vividly--I didn't get anything--but I vividly remember getting my first ever oyster stew, at a little place for, I don't know, twenty-five cents or something. That was memorable, but I didn't get the job, but, again, I was rather aggressive in pursuing getting jobs.

SH: Do you remember some of the veterans that were housed with you at Raritan?

RB: No, no. Oh, I'm sorry, there is one. They came to me later. It happened to be a neighbor long after, two houses up, and happens to be the president of the bank, our local bank in Peapack-Gladstone, New Jersey, which is a rather prominent [bank]. Jackie Kennedy lived there, had a place there; maybe Caroline still owns the place, I don't know. He worked for Malcolm Forbes. Malcolm Forbes owned the bank and he worked for Malcolm Forbes. He was also a biker, like Malcolm Forbes, and he'd go off for two, three weeks on his own, leaving his wife and daughter at home, [laughter] but, at Rutgers, he was a veteran. He was a pilot and he would buzz over our heads, occasionally. [laughter] He also had the--I don't know what you'd call it, a snack bar. He had a concession for the snack bar. [laughter] He was experienced as an entrepreneur, I guess.

SH: This was at the stadium, where the football games were.

RB: No, this was at Raritan Arsenal.

SH: Okay.

RB: Yes, that first year. Of course, they frowned on it later on, I guess, but things were kind of wild. The University could hardly handle the influx of people.

SH: It was amazing how many people did not fall through the cracks.

RB: Oh, I had calculus. I think I seemed to have gotten through other things pretty easily, but this fellow was from India--you couldn't understand a word he said. There were eighteen in the class; seventeen flunked and it didn't bother him at all. I was afraid to ask him, because even when I asked him a question, it got more confusing with how he answered it. So, there's a case where they couldn't find teachers, I guess, that would be reasoned in today's environment.

SH: What was the gentleman's name that was the veteran?

RB: Oh, he actually died. I've got a mental block on that right now.

SH: That is okay. Did you go home often to see your family?

RB: Not much, not a lot, because, again, my home environment was not great, although, in '48, my father, I guess they're doing that a lot today, gave him really early retirement. So, he decided to do what a couple of others in the family did, to have a little store. So, he got this store in Newark on Seventh Street, which is not [the best area]. Well, at the beginning, it was a Polish neighborhood. It was fine. Then, later, it deteriorated. So, I'd help him in the store on

weekends, that kind of thing, but the apartment wasn't much and my grandmother, my mother and my father were there. I sort of felt a little alien, but [I would go] in order just to help. Well, later, when I got married and I needed to work two jobs, even though I had a job as a chemist, I would work there and he'd give me a basket of food or something, that kind of thing. [laughter] So, I helped during that period.

SH: When you went back for your sophomore year, were you able to maintain the scholarships?

RB: Yes, I think I had them throughout, yes, and they weren't for being brilliant or anything, I think just being a poor guy. Oh, I think the reason I really got them was because there were so many veterans that the scholarships, they actually went begging, because there weren't that many kids coming out of high school.

SH: Because of the GI Bill that the veterans got.

RB: Yes. So, I remember the (William Herbert?) Memorial Scholarship, a general scholarship and the State Scholarship. Even those three didn't pay for a lot. I still had to cook in my room. [laughter]

SH: Did you cook in your room at the Raritan Arsenal or was that your sophomore year?

RB: Oh, no. Yes, it had to be the sophomore year.

SH: Where were you housed in your sophomore year?

RB: Ford Hall. Yes, I remember that, and then, I think [the] last two were quadrangle; was there another name for that? I mistook it one time and called it Gibbons. They said, "No, it couldn't be there." [laughter]

SH: That was across town.

RB: I said, "I may have wanted it, but it didn't happen, no," although we sang, as Rutgers Glee Club, at Christmastime, we sang at Gibbons, outside, in front of the girls' dormitory.

SH: Did it work?

RB: No. Well, they smiled at us. That's about it.

SH: Your sophomore year, was it any easier academically for you?

RB: No. If I had a guidance counselor that said, "Why are you taking all these courses? They're not going to do you that much good," I probably [took] over twelve credits the rest of the three years. I don't know, but whatever it is, I just thought I could handle it. I could've done a lot better in my average, although I got through it all right.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the administration at the University?

RB: No.

SH: Like the Dean of Men?

RB: Oh, well, Mason Gross, of course. He was following the Glee Club around in those years. We had a fair amount of interaction with him.

SH: Do you have any Soup Waters stories? You talked about Dr. McKinney a bit.

RB: Oh, yes. Again, Dr. McKinney was a very stoic kind of a guy, getting me [into] the Music Club, even when I was going to his house with the rest of the guys and having this wonderful dinner by a cook, an actual person.

SH: You were not having to cook it in your room.

RB: Yes, boy, wow, I made sure I ate everything. [laughter] The interaction there was good. He allowed us to each come out with our own expertise and, again, mine, I was classically trained in piano and I did play some rather difficult [pieces]. I played *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* when I was maybe fifteen or sixteen and I studied under the Alexander (Chiapeneli?) Pianoforte School of Music in Newark. He'd have fifty-five students in a big, huge house and he'd have professors coming in from NYU on Monday night, I remember, for sight singing and composition and other things. Then, we gave concerts at Fuld Hall in Newark. Eight hundred people would come.

SH: This is as a high school student.

RB: Yes. One of the concerts I played with a young gal with long, skinny fingers and mine are short and fat. It was a scherzo in D minor by Chopin, a very fast number. We were both very nervous, two pianos. So, she was going like a bat out of hell and I'm trying to keep up. So, at the end of it, went backstage, I said, "Boy, you almost beat me that time, but I kept up with you." [laughter] Wow, I was so thankful that was over.

SH: Poor kid. It has to be frightening, I would think.

RB: Oh, yes.

SH: You had not had that piece of advice from the conductor at that point.

RB: No.

SH: As a sophomore, did any of your extracurricular activities change or did you continue on?

RB: Yes, I toed the mark. I spent a lot of time in the library, reading, studying. At Ford Hall, instead of two guys, they had a room in the back for each guy, and then, a little living room in front. Well, they put four of us in there. I happened to be in the front section and everybody's

walking out to the bathroom. There's no privacy at all, forget about it. So, you put the sheets over your head and think you're somewhere else. I did cook in my room at times there. I got in trouble twice. Once, I had cabbage. It smelled the whole place up--they were ready to throw me out the window. [laughter] Another, I was rewarding myself for getting a good mark or something, maybe I got an "A" in Physical Geology, maybe that was it, and I bought some shrimp, but that stunk out the place, too. So, I was very careful after that. I had a little mess kit from Boy Scouts, a very simple thing. You open it up, you turn it out and it becomes the thing, but I didn't use the frying pan, I only used the little pot. It was about that big and two to three inches deep, aluminum. Then, I had a hotplate, and so, I'd turn it up for soups or any of that, I'd do it the right way, but, if I wanted to broil a pork chop, which was rare, I'd put the pot on the bottom and I'd put the hotplate on top of it. So, I had myself a nice broiler oven. It worked like a charm; oh, I still remember it. It was wonderful. [laughter]

SH: Necessity is the mother of invention.

RB: It was so convenient and, of course, I left the windows open. It was very close to the window--no fan, though, I wish I had a fan.

SH: Who were your roommates there?

RB: Oh, one was taking geology as a major. Him, I remember, because he asked me to go on a blind date up to Keuka College, one of the Finger Lakes. I said, "Well, I don't know if my dad's going let me borrow the car. How far is it?" "Oh, it can't be more than seventy-five miles," and, "Well, I'll ask him." So, my father says, "Well, you're this and that. Okay, you can have it for the weekend." The only car he had was second-hand, and so forth. So, we climb in the car and we go seventy-five miles. I said, "Gee, we're not here yet." "Oh, yes, I think I made a mistake. I think it's another seventy-five miles." Okay, another seventy-five miles--oh, God, I think it took eight hours of driving and, I don't know, maybe two hundred and something miles before we got there. The two girls, his date and my blind date, were in a play. We were supposed to be there before eight o'clock. We get there, it's almost over. We just climb into the auditorium and, "Hey, it's all over," and clap. [laughter] So, he sees them backstage and we introduce and all that. So, I'm driving, right, and so, "Where do you want to go?" We've got to go someplace, out, to a bar or a restaurant or whatever. "Oh, why don't we go to," I forgot now if it was Rochester, some other place, or Buffalo. "Well, how far is that?" "Oh, it's only fifty miles." [laughter] So, I'm driving, I'm doing all the driving. We spend an hour, an hour-and-a-half, none of us really drink much, just for a social thing. I get back and they have a place for us to stay overnight. The next morning, we had breakfast and [had to be] getting back. Oh, well, I don't remember her name by the way. I don't think I had time to hear it.

SH: It was a long time.

RB: Yes, him, I remember. Another was a ceramic engineer. He was a brilliant guy. That was the thing to be back then, ceramic engineer, for chips, computers later on and all that. They were pulling them out. Anybody that graduated with that discipline really had a future ahead of him.

SH: What about your chemistry background? Were there professors that you felt were mentors to you and helped you along?

RB: Yes; well, not personally, because our classes were so huge. I remember William Reiman, III, in quantitative analysis. We're in the auditorium with the steps, these seats going up, graded up. He's down there and plunks his book down on it, first thing, and says, "I'm going to teach by this book. That's my book, everything in there." He almost reads it to you. Then, we have laboratory, which was good. It was good discipline and I certainly learned significant figures for the rest of my life from that course. It was excellent. I'm trying to think of the general chemistry the first year; that was good. There was somewhere in there where I'd gone through that. Then, there was a terrible article in *The Newark Star-Ledger* that, I don't know, (Zayanuchi?) or whatever the kid's name was, it was in the chemistry lab, he put two (paper putts?) oxidants in a paper cup and it reducts the chemicals in that, in the sink, turned them over on each other and he blew both his hands off. Oh, gee, yes, that was a big deal back then. So, I was careful. Of course, I'd gone through that. I don't venture where I am totally lost too much.

SH: After your sophomore year, you continued with the Glee Club.

RB: Yes.

SH: Were there other things that you ventured out to try on campus?

RB: I had a date once in a while. Oh, this poor girl, I don't know how I ever met her, maybe in the library, but she was an art person and she wasn't going to Rutgers. Her family lived just down the road on Route 18, I believe, in a modest house. So, I asked her for a date and went out and pulled up and she came out. Oh, wait a minute--oh, I had to come in to meet the mother, fine, and I explained what [we would do], and so forth, and this and that. So, I drove back. I don't know if we were going to some event or something that night; I never got there, because I got a flat tire. [laughter] I'm not sure how I ever got it fixed and my hands were full of grease. It was three hours later or something and I got her back later than the mother wanted. I pull up and the mother's on the second floor, screaming at me and telling her to, "Come in, you whatever." Oh, she was so embarrassed and I was embarrassed, of course. I couldn't help it. I did the best I could. Poor thing, I hope she turned out all right. I didn't see her again, because I was afraid of her mother.

SH: I bet so. What did you do between your sophomore and your junior year?

RB: Oh, in the summer? Gee, I worked someplace. I wonder if I worked at home. '48, my father had the store. I possibly worked there. That's blank to me right now, and '49 as well, those two years, would've been three years, actually, summers. Oh, the final summer would be after I graduated.

SH: When you came back as a junior, many juniors talk about being quite full of themselves. Did you feel that way as well?

RB: No, I don't know what that means, but I was anxious to do better and get better grades and make sure I did. One of the things I have to tell you, in the freshman year, if you're in the College of Agriculture, you have to take something called Agriculture, which is a one-credit course, Introduction, maybe it was, to Agriculture. I enjoyed it and all that, but I didn't know that much about it by the time I should've. [laughter] So, on the exam, there was a question about, "Who did this?" and I regret it, because I think I flunked the course because of that one answer. The question, instead of putting Mister or Doctor So-and-So as the answer to the question, I put, "*Zwiebelkuchen*," which means "onion cake" in German. The professor thought, "He's taking my course lightly," and I thought that was a very good experience for me, in a way, because it was only a one-credit course and I really did well after that in that course.

SH: Was that Professor Helyar? Is that name familiar?

RB: Peterson is very familiar, [from] the Philosophy [Department]. I took that.

SH: Was he your favorite professor?

RB: He was one. Well, we had 350 in the class, I think, in some big room. He changed my whole philosophy on religion, opened me up to dialectic materialism and a bunch of other things that just were so important to me. Yes, as a young kid, I went to church, where my family wouldn't, to try and learn as much as I could about it. I was always accused of being a "Doubting Thomas," "Don't ask questions," [laughter] whatever they tell you, to have faith, right. So, I could never get through that, and so, this really opened up in sophomore year. Someone I talked to recently, who had gone also during that time, just mentioned his first name and I've really forgotten it [Houston].

SH: This was Peterson.

RB: Peterson, yes. I did well in Physical Geology, but I can't remember the name of the teacher. It's amazing.

SH: Did you ever think you might change your major from chemistry to anything else?

RB: Never, no. Science, I was always interested. I play piano, but I thought I didn't have enough time in my lifetime for fantasy or fiction, fiction books, reading a lot. People [say], "Oh, you've got to read, read, read." It depends on what you're reading, I guess. If it was fiction, I just didn't think I could afford the time to do it. Of course, I had to in high school, and so forth, and, before that, do book reports and that was fun. I wrote and I did pretty well in writing stories and things like that, but, yes, I wanted to spend more time learning "real" things.

SH: In your junior year, what were you looking forward to and what were you doing?

RB: Maybe I was looking forward to my senior year. [laughter] I just kept bulling my way through it.

SH: Did you stay in the quad? Did you continue to live there?

RB: Yes, that was third, fourth years, second year Ford Hall, and then, Raritan Arsenal.

SH: Did you continue to cook in your room in the quad?

RB: Yes. I fortunately had a room in the corner, where the wind was right. [laughter]

SH: Did you have a roommate still?

RB: Yes, I must've, but it wasn't four, it was only two. I think--gee, did I? I'm not sure now. I can't remember that part. I would guess, by then, maybe. I'm not sure.

SH: By then, you were probably involved in the Music Club and planning concerts and things.

RB: Yes.

SH: Were you still doing the same amount of traveling? You talked about Rochester.

RB: Yes, small ones, Maryland, Centenary Junior College--oh, White Plains, New York, that was an experience. We were dressed in civvies, I guess, maybe our blazers. Soup took us to this wonderful, big restaurant in White Plains, which is intermingled with everybody. You sit there, there's other guests, or people from outside; it wasn't all us. So, at the end, when we're pretty well finished, our student director, whose name I can't remember, we passed around that we're going to sing *Brothers, Sing On*, a very stirring piece. So, none of the other patrons of the restaurant knew that. So, everybody had to see where the student director was, and so, he put his hand above, had his elbow on the table, put his hand up. The signal was, when he put his hand down, we would come into four-part harmony, singing *Brothers, Sing On* from all these different positions. It was beautiful and the people were so startled listening to this. [laughter] It was just stirring; I wish I had a tape of that one. The acoustics must've been good or whatever. It just was terrific and they clapped. Again, as a kid [from] a modest environment, having people think you're doing something right, nobody ever said you're really good at anything. In fact, even Dr. McKinney never said, "You play piano well," or, "You've really got a creative bent there," or something.

SH: He just let you into the club.

RB: Yes, right. [laughter]

SH: What about Soup? It sounds like he was almost the opposite personality from McKinney.

RB: Dedicated, oh, God, yes, almost like he's in a dream world or something, the way his actions [were], a wonderful teacher and disciplined, and so forth. He really organized all this stuff for us. It just made our lives so good doing these concerts. Oh, yes, some of it, of course, was at high schools and, again, all the Rutgers Glee Club guys, the gals, local gals, would want to dance with us and this and that. So, there's another elation of, "Gee, somebody wants to dance with me? Wow."

SH: Was there much interaction between New Brunswick locals, the "townies," and the "gownies," so-to-speak?

RB: Not much, except for this one gal I remember, who was an art student somewhere, I'm not even sure where.

SH: Did you go to any of the social activities at NJC?

RB: Involving Glee Club, perhaps, but that's about it. I'd walk to the Cook Campus, right through NJC, to take classes.

SH: You came to Rutgers as a true minority student, as the eighteen-year-old freshman right out of high school, but, now, you were getting ready to graduate into a market that had been glutted with returning veterans. What were your prospects as a senior looking at the job market?

RB: Well, if I could interrupt and answer something different, just before that--I will segue into that.

SH: Sure.

RB: My senior year, I suddenly wanted to be a microbiologist, because of Selman Waksman. I took a course and I did research with Selman Waksman. He had already won the Nobel Prize for the discovery of streptomycin and all the actinomycines. I did that and that was so elating to me that I did want to get into that field. Of course, when I graduated, it was announced that he's starting the Institute of Microbiological Research, the first in the world, and that he was going to take three students. I applied, of course. One was from France, one was from Japan and there was a Rutgers guy, Tony Romano, who was in the Glee Club, and he was smarter than me. So, I didn't get the job. So, I applied to Cornell, naively thinking, "Maybe there's somewhere else, something like this." [laughter] They didn't know what I was talking about, but they said, "With your resume, we'll accept you in veterinary school," which would've been an honor, if I'd wanted it, but I didn't. So, coming out of that, I tried to get a job as a chemist and I did get one. Now, I'm draft bait for the Korean War, 1950, end of '50. In fact, I got in the service in January '51. So, between June of '50 and January of '51, I think the first thing I did, actually, was Professor Schermerhorn, who was at the College of Agriculture …

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

SH: This continues an interview with Mr. Rudolf Behrens in Danbury, Connecticut, on September 20, 2006. Please, continue.

RB: Yes, I was talking about Professor Schermerhorn, who was a professor at the College of Agriculture at Rutgers and who developed the Rutgers tomato, was famous for that, needing somebody to work at Campbell's Soup Company in a cooperative program with the US Department of Agriculture, the National Canners Association and a bunch of other interests, some union. Anyway, I accepted it gladly and it lasted only three months or so, but my job was

to go down there and work on figuring a way to make--how do I put it? The farmers, tomato farmers, were bringing in tomatoes and were unhappy that they were not getting a high enough price for it. They were grading them into three groups, "one," "two" and "cull," and doing it by hand, a hundred pounds of tomatoes out of a truck of thousands of pounds. So, they were unhappy about that. So, they wanted to make this more of a scientific thing. They had a colorimeter and some other new procedures that I'd worked with and developed a little further, went through a season, a tomato season, and I had to report. As a young kid, never having dealt with these high people before from the National Canners Association and the Department of Agriculture, I'm there giving my first interim report at Campbell's Soup Company and I'd had the secretary type up my report and it turns out she left out a couple of sentences. I got so flustered, I had trouble continuing. So, that was a horrible experience, but, anyway, it turned out very well. I'd written a nice report, and then, the head of the Food Technology Department, Dr. (McLean?), used my paper and put his name on it. Then, I learned what plagiarism was about, early on in my career. [laughter]

SH: This was down near Camden.

RB: Oh, yes, the Campbell's Soup was at Camden, right. They had huge lines of trucks and what they'd do is, if they didn't get the percentage of number ones, the best, that they wanted out of that hundred pounds, because that was the whole price for the truck, they'd go in the back of the line and try again, which would mean they might stay there for another day or two in line. So, it was very difficult. They needed something which was less subjective, more scientific, to be fair to all of them. So, I hope I contributed something at that point.

SH: This was just in that interim.

RB: Yes, and then, another little interim of a couple of months, I worked in a chemical environment, doing qualitative analysis, for only a couple of months. Then, I was either drafted or joined something--got the wrong advice there and I joined the Navy, instead of going into the Army for two [years].

[TAPE PAUSED]

RB: Instead of being drafted for two years in the Korean War in January of '51, I took the wrong advice, went to the Navy for four years. Then, I figured out, "Gee, what can I learn in the Navy?" and I thought, "Well, maybe something in the medical field." Well, the only thing there was hospital corpsman and what I didn't realize when I decided to go into that was that the hospital corpsmen, in those days, were trained for five months, then, sent to a hospital for a couple of months, and then, immediately sent to the Fleet Marines. Then, two, three months after that, they're over in Korea and the North Koreans would take great--they'd aim to get the hospital corpsmen first, instead of going after the Marines. So, that was a poor decision, but, because I already had a degree and I played the piano at the Hospital Corps School [for] the CO [commanding officer], and then, I had great marks, so, I got the hospital of my choice, which was at Bainbridge. The whole thing is in Bainbridge, Maryland.

SH: You did your boot camp at Bainbridge, Maryland.

RB: No, boot camp was at Portsmouth, near Newport, Rhode Island.

SH: Did you have any option for Officer Candidate School?

RB: Yes, but I was supposed to be in the Reserve for another four years after that and I decided I really wasn't interested in that kind of career, for some reason. [laughter] Anyway, at Bainbridge Naval Training Center, after Corps School, I went to the hospital there and I went to work in the laboratory, taking blood and doing all kinds of things, even autopsies. I was a pathologist's assistant for a while. So, the CO, the commanding officer, of the Hospital Corps School came in for an annual physical and I was, at that time, taking blood from people. He said, "Rudy, would you like to come to teach?" I thought, "My god, this is unbelievable," because I knew, in a week or two, we were going to be going to the Fleet Marines. I said, "Of course, I would." Well, it wasn't because I had a degree--it was because I played piano.

SH: He had heard you playing somewhere.

RB: Oh, yes, I played the whole time I was there, whenever I could.

SH: Were you playing at the club?

RB: No, no, this was in Hospital Corps School. They had an auditorium there and a piano and, any minute I could, I was on that piano. I just spent that much time on it, and so, everybody knew I played the piano. So, he wanted me to direct the choir for the graduation ceremonies. I remember, in retrospect, that it's the Navy, you're supposed to play *Anchors Aweigh* and I never saw the music to *Anchors Aweigh*, and so, I played it. Boy, it turned out to be a pretty good arrangement. Everybody is hyped up, singing the song, and it was terrific, but, later on, I felt so guilty, because, in a serious note--I even started graduate school, actually, while I was there--but I felt very badly, in a way, because all the rest of my class of fifty students, except me, and you had a couple girls in there, WAVES, that didn't go, but the rest went to the Fleet Marines. As I was teaching, they'd be coming back and saying, "Hello," and this and that. "What's going on with the rest of the guys?" again, the camaraderie is high, and it turns out, out of my class of fifty, eighteen didn't make it back. Ray (Caniff?), the fellow in front of me for the whole time, was only there four days and died and the fellow to the right of me, a terribly, really happy-go-lucky kind of a kid, got a Congressional Medal of Honor, but he lived. Then, there were two effeminate kids, that nobody paid any attention to them--they minded their Ps and Qs--and it turns out that one of them was wounded twice and wanted to go back in again to help out. The other fellow was wounded also, and so, they proved their bravery beyond belief. Here I was, going to graduate school and teaching and, again, playing the piano at officers' dances and other things. Luck for me was that, one time, I was relief band for Les Brown and his Band of Renown, the band that went with Bob Hope all over the world. That was an honor, and a lot of other good experiences.

SH: Where were you going to grad school?

RB: University of Delaware, which was about thirty-five miles away. In fact, I didn't even live on the base. I had had duty every fifth day, as a teacher, to be in charge, overnight, be in charge of everybody, make sure everything went well.

SH: What was your rank at that point?

RB: I was a non-commissioned officer. I ended up as a second class petty officer. Again, I refused a commission, because I didn't want to stay for another four years.

SH: What were you teaching? Did it change? Did it vary?

RB: I taught chemistry and I taught *materia medica* and they even gave us, I think, a one-week training course on how to be a teacher. [laughter] It was pretty cute. I had to give a little story about my [life] and I gave the story about being a senior at Rutgers and, at the Christmas break, I went to get a hernia operation, how I couldn't afford to get one, right. So, I met this young lady and I said, a young guy, "I had a couple, three girlfriends, just dates, nothing serious or anything, but the first time I met her, she was head nurse and she gave me this bedpan and closed the curtain. The curtain went all the way around and there I was, looking at the lady across the hall and I'm supposed to be doing something. A young kid especially, it's about as embarrassing as you can possibly think of anything." So, then, I later ended the story with, "Well, the old adage about that is a '3H enema.' If you don't like the patient, you give him a 3H enema--high, hot and a hell of a lot." Well, I wasn't in that category, but, anyway, so, I said, "Yes, I guess I got married by the process of elimination--I picked her over the other gals to get married to."

SH: This was the nurse you met when you were a senior at Rutgers.

RB: At Rutgers, yes.

SH: What hospital?

RB: Hospital of St. Barnabas for Women and Children in Newark and, now, they're in Livingston, I think, a beautiful, big facility, magnificent expansion, and so forth.

SH: This is your senior year.

RB: Yes.

SH: You had not graduated yet.

RB: That's right.

SH: You were dating a young woman.

RB: Yes, and we got married while I was out of boot camp, between boot camp and who knows where you're going, of course, and so, we did that.

SH: Where was she from?

RB: She lived in Hillside, New Jersey, off of Bloy Street somewhere.

SH: Where had she gone to nursing school?

RB: St. Barnabas, yes, that's where. She was the nurse there and she had already graduated. Interesting, today, they're always talking about nurses shortages--that's perennial. Back then, they did the same thing. Generation-to-generation, they think it's all new--keeps the price down, I think.

SH: Do you want to talk about your senior year and your graduation?

RB: Oh, yes, the graduation. I was so proud to graduate, June 4th. Who'd let me out of school with a degree? June 4, 1950. My father never went to my high school graduation, wasn't important. He didn't go to my five performances of *Rings in the Sawdust* in the ninth grade, where I was chief cook.

SH: The star?

RB: Yes, right, the male star, but he was intimidated to close the store and, with my mother, come to the college graduation.

SH: Was your grandmother here at that point?

RB: Yes, yes, she was and I'm sure she was there. So, he took that time off. For my graduation present, he gave me a little, I don't know what it was made of, but it was a cigarette lighter, looked like a knight. Well, Scarlet Knight--he didn't know that and it was given to him by, I think, the Keebler guy that delivers Keebler stuff to him. So, he got a free thing and he brought it with him, "Here's your graduation present." [laughter]

SH: You quit smoking three years before, after your first year.

RB: Yes, the first time, right. It was prophetic, though; there was this knight, actually. Anyway, I hardly even thought of that, but, later on, people said, "Oh, your father put you through college?" I said, "No." Actually, senior year, I asked him, "Dad, could you give me a little money to eat, so [that] I could buy food?" even though I went to the store. So, he gave me, in my senior year, ten dollars a week to live on. That was what he'd contributed to my college education, [laughter] but, anyway, it wasn't his fault. It was just the way things were back then.

SH: Do you remember who spoke at your graduation?

RB: No, isn't that amazing? I was so high that I'm actually [graduating], with all my outfit on, I was in the graduation, I got the clay pipe--that's the cincher right there. I still have it, never got rid of it.

SH: Did you really?

RB: Oh, yes.

SH: Did you have to wear the dink as a freshman?

RB: I was a senior, graduating.

SH: I mean, as a freshman, was there a dink that they wore?

RB: Oh, no, there was nothing. Back then, the guys coming out of the service wouldn't stand for anything plebe-ish.

SH: Do you remember going to celebrate or what you did after?

RB: Oh, no, that was it. He went back to open the store before he lost any more money, couldn't handle it. [laughter] I don't know where I went. I still didn't have a car, of course.

SH: You talked about then going down to Campbell's Soup and working. You obviously did not commute from Newark to Camden.

RB: No, actually, somehow, I'd found out about a family who lived nearby--oh, God, I'm trying to think of some of the names, some of the towns around Camden, a little south of Camden--and I stayed there. I think I must've had my own car by then. My first car was a '50, cost me two hundred dollars. It was a beautiful car, very dependable, didn't look like much, black. I think I must've used that and stayed while I was working during the week, and then, went back home for the weekend. They had a daughter who had graduated then and I guess maybe one of my friends knew this girl or something. She found it and said, "Yes, you can ask my mother and father." She's away during the week and that's when I needed it. So, I did that, and then, later on, I guess the parents liked me, because they said, "Can't you stay for the weekend, when our daughter's back?"

SH: By then, you had already met your future wife.

RB: Yes, oh, yes. That's right, of course, six months before.

SH: You had your surgery at winter break then.

RB: Yes, winter break, December something.

SH: You said that you got bad advice about going into the Navy, but what kind of a shock was it to find the country back in a conflict again in Korea?

RB: We didn't even think about [it]. I didn't even know at that time that there were other countries involved. It was a UN thing. In fact, it wasn't even called a war. Thirty-eight

thousand young kids, Americans, were killed during that. It was only two-and-a-half years and it was called a "military conflict," no.

SH: Police action.

RB: Police action, you're right, yes, that's it. So, now, they're calling Iraq a war, after three years. I mean, nobody should get killed, but, let's be fair, it's twenty-six hundred or twenty-seven hundred [killed]. The media is doing a lot of damage, I think, to the country in their emphasis sometimes.

SH: As a corpsman, still in Bainbridge, did you ever think that there was any chance that you would be sent? Were you getting reports?

RB: Oh, yes. I was in a carpool, only it wasn't being sent to Korea at this point. In my fourth year--you see, apparently, they'd picked me. I was the youngest, I was only seaman apprentice, going to teach and everybody else was a chief petty officer or warrant officer or ensign teaching. These guys had sixteen years duty to get this privileged duty for three years, and so, after my three years were up and I was in the carpool going back and forth, living in New Castle, Delaware, near Wilmington, and going to graduate school at University of Delaware, and so, these guys in the carpool were teasing me about, "Your orders are going to come in. You're going out to sea for the last year," this and that. So, one morning, I was sleeping in the car, somebody else had driven, "Gee, where is everybody?" So, momentarily, I walked out to go up the steps and there they were, acting like sideboys. One of the guys who worked in the office handed me my orders to go out to sea. I said, "Oh, boy, here it goes," and it turns out that, a week later, the orders were canceled. So, they tried to find somebody else, because they couldn't send me to sea without getting a replacement for that duty. That was important, and so, six months went by, and then, finally, they said, "It's too little [time]. We can't get you out to sea." So, I never even went to sea. [laughter]

SH: I was just going to ask if you ever set foot on a boat.

RB: Oh, yes, I did, actually, in boot camp. [laughter] In boot camp, they found out I played piano, so, I played for a church service on a destroyer. They got me up on there and the little tiny organ and I was playing hymns or something for the church services. That was the only time I was on a boat or a ship in the Navy.

SH: This was outside of Bainbridge.

RB: No, that was in boot camp, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Wait a minute, Portsmouth, New Hampshire? yes, it was near Newport, I remember, Portsmouth, I'm sure it was. [Editor's Note: Portsmouth, Rhode Island, is adjacent to Newport, Rhode Island.]

SH: What about boot camp?

RB: Oh, that was an experience.

SH: Before, you had been the youngest of the group and, now, you must have been one of the older ones.

RB: Yes, and some of these kids were really, inherently, a major problem, where they just loved to cause trouble and look for weaknesses, if someone was a mild-mannered kind of a guy, whatever.

SH: What time of year was this?

RB: January, yes, it was cold. Our platoon, or whatever it's called back then, happened to win the honors. We'd competed in all kinds of things and we won first prize, so [that] we were able to get a week or two leave. None of the others got that, and so, that's when I went to get married, March 26th.

SH: How much notice did you have to tell your bride you were coming home?

RB: Oh, I don't know, a couple weeks maybe, not much. We got married in Kirkpatrick Chapel.

SH: I was going to ask where you got married.

RB: Yes, oh, yes, and Reverend [Bradford S.] Abernathy, he was wonderful, and I'd go on Sunday nights. His wife would open up the cellar door and everybody, all the kids, would go down. First, "What's your name?" give your name. Then, later on, she'd play the game, "Okay, you get up, never saw you before except entering," and she'd know your name. It's remarkable.

SH: Really?

RB: Yes. Abernathy was such a wonderful guy. So, that was a privilege, of being married in Kirkpatrick Chapel.

SH: Did the Glee Club sing?

RB: No, I don't think so. That would've been nice. I've never thought about that. It was a simple ceremony. For a time, we had our rehearsals in Kirkpatrick Chapel on Monday night and, one night, we were all waiting outside because somebody was getting married. So, as the bride and groom are coming out, we decided we're going to sing them a song, and so, we sang *Hail, Mother of Stalwart Men*, etc. It was a lot of fun. [laughter]

SH: How many people came to your wedding, with such short notice?

RB: Gee, I don't remember, actually. I was too nervous to think about it, [laughter] although my boyhood friend, Paul (Unger?), sang, had an outstanding voice. He sang for us--oh, and my best man was a Rutgers graduate at College of Agriculture. He's the one who's the apple expert, on fruit but mainly apples, and stayed a while. He was a professor at several universities, University of California-Davis, Washington.

SH: What is his name?

RB: Robert Norton, Robert A. Norton. He was prolific. He and his wife had six kids and they spent their time out there where there's a lot of food. [laughter]

SH: Lots of apples.

RB: Yes. He ended up as what they call a superintendent over an experimental station with a hundred acres and thirty people working for him. He still, today, retired, goes all over the world. Barons of the Rhine River will come or call him and ask him to come give them advice on apples. I remember, we happened to visit there one time and people, twenty-five farmers' sons, they're probably wealthy people, came up from Chile. He's giving them an itinerary, "Learn here, do this and that," and so, this happened to be a party at his home. Well, he's not overly paid and he has a small place, and so, these guys are, I think, wealthy young men whose families owned half of Chile. He has a little box wine there for them and some hot dogs or something and they're bringing imported French wines as a gift. It was so funny. It didn't bother anybody. [laughter]

SH: That is very interesting. Was her family affiliated with Rutgers or NJC?

RB: My wife's family? no, nothing. Her father went to Pratt Institute, I guess. He was hit in the Depression. He started a little sheet metal business. Nobody'd pay him, so, he couldn't do that. So, then, he worked for Public Service Gas and Electric, which was a steady job, to survive.

SH: How difficult was it to ask for her hand in marriage?

RB: Well, I'm the shy type. In fact, I think her older sisters gave her advice about how to catch a guy and she told me, "Oh, I went to a friend's house and they had a," I don't know, these people that do a séance.

SH: Fortune teller?

RB: Fortune, yes, and the fortune teller told her, she said that she was going to marry a man from a men's college, all-man's college. Well, I suppose I felt that I had to fulfill the obligation or something, I don't know. [laughter] I remember--this is interesting--one of the fellows I used to ride back and forth with, my senior year especially, had a '27 Studebaker, Dictator Model, huge thing. You could almost walk in without bending down. He sold it to me for fifteen dollars. Well, it took a quart of oil every ten miles, and so, I don't know if anybody ever wanted to redo that engine, but, anyway, I'd go thirty miles and stop and put oil in it. It turns out my girlfriend's house was thirty miles away, or a little more maybe, but, anyway, I should've been putting oil in it before I left, at the house, and I forgot. So, two-thirds of the way back to Rutgers, the engine blows and I'm clunk, clunk, clunk. No other engine would ever keep going except this one, and so, I got back to the dorm, this quadrangle, and that was the end of it. I said, "Well, I've got to take it to a junkyard," and it actually drove to the junkyard and the junkyard guy gave me ten dollars for it. So, I didn't lose too much. [laughter]

SH: Just what you paid in oil.

RB: Oh, but that car is worth a fortune today, I'm sure, incredible.

SH: Where did your wife stay then? You had to finish boot camp still.

RB: Oh, yes. Well, we actually rented a little apartment in New Castle, Delaware, in a house.

SH: Your orders took you from Portsmouth, New Hampshire …

RB: To Bainbridge.

SH: Okay. When you got awarded the weeks off, you were actually finished with boot camp.

RB: Yes.

SH: Your honeymoon really was delayed.

RB: Well, no, we went to Florida. I didn't know how much we were going to get, so, we were going to go as far as it would take us and make sure we got enough to get back. So, we actually ended up in Daytona Beach and the people that owned this little--I can't hardly call it a hotel, a little place out right on the beach--I guess felt sorry for us and gave us the honeymoon suite for almost nothing. It was interesting.

SH: This would have been in March.

RB: Yes, well, March 26th. It was good down in Florida by then.

SH: Then, you come back to Maryland or Delaware.

RB: Yes. I had to find an apartment and we got an apartment, a little, tiny thing. The bed, I guess I made a bed. I don't know how I did it, but I got a box spring and a mattress and I got an old couch from someplace and a chair. It was really tiny, but it worked.

SH: Did she continue nursing?

RB: Oh, yes, in Wilmington, Delaware, and took the bus, which was sometimes a problem if she had the night shift, because [there was] hardly anybody on the bus and with a nurse's uniform, that doesn't work for some guys. So, I was a little nervous over that.

SH: Did you have pretty set hours on the base, especially since you were now teaching?

RB: Well, every fifth day, I had to stay overnight.

SH: It was basically a day job, because you were teaching.

RB: Yes, oh, yes, right, and I remember everybody knew me while I was in the Corps School, all the teachers. So, when I came back from working at the hospital, going back to teach, I went into the staff room and that staff room was strictly only for staff. So, I went in the staff room, a seaman apprentice, and sat down in a chair and relaxed. The guys who were coming in said, "Get out, Behrens. Only staff are here," and then, the shock of their lives, I said, "I am staff." [laughter] They nearly flipped, after spending sixteen years trying to get something like this, here, this greenhorn with a seaman apprentice gets in to teach.

SH: The Navy is known for being hierarchal. There was a real division between officers and enlisted men.

RB: Well, the worst was with the nurses, because they had nurses teaching also there, of course, and the nurses felt that--a lot of them, I'm sure not all of them--they had their own line to get paid and everything was for them and we'd be subservient. Some of the nurses, I think, overdid it as far as class consciousness. "We're nurses, we've gone to school and you're just swabbies," or whatever, but I didn't pay any attention to that.

SH: There was no real interaction.

RB: No, no.

SH: Between officers and enlisted?

RB: No, absolutely right.

SH: How integrated was the Navy at that point? Officially, it was supposed to be, but in reality.

RB: I don't remember any blacks; maybe they just didn't like to be a hospital corpsman, I don't know.

SH: Do you remember, going back to the end of the war, any kind of celebration?

RB: Oh, the Second World War? oh, absolutely. I was working on the farm. It was August 14th, which is my birthday and V-J Day, same day. Of course, I was born a few years before that, but, yes, that was a big deal. Oh, yes, we walked three miles into town, all of us walked three miles into town, to buy some ice cream. That was a big deal. [laughter]

SH: Into Lakewood?

RB: Yes, simple pleasures, but everybody in town was whopping it up. It was great. Oh, yes, that was important.

SH: You talked about your family not really being involved in politics, or at least the discussion about Hitler and what was going on in Europe. Were they involved in local politics? Were they Democrats or Republicans?

RB: No. I think Franklin Delano Roosevelt was everybody's hero, probably, back then, especially immigrants, and so, I'm sure they voted for him.

SH: Did you see anyone working in the WPA or in the Conservation Corps, any of those New Deal programs that Roosevelt had?

RB: No. I wasn't involved with any of that, yes. I was a little young for that, actually.

SH: No, I know you would have been too young, but did you know of others that did?

RB: No, I don't know of anyone that was. Seventy-five percent of the people in this country were working at that time, that wanted jobs. They may not have been in the best job they wanted, but at least they were being paid something. So, all these other programs, WPA and Civilian Conservation Corps, were for those that couldn't get jobs, I guess.

SH: Were you, as a young man, confident in Truman? After the bomb was dropped, was there any discussion about that or is that something that happens as history goes down the road?

RB: Well, it was so obviously the reason that Japan surrendered that that was good news. Of course, Oppenheimer and some of these other guys, even Einstein, had great misgivings over unleashing something so powerful and that it ever get into the hands of people like this Ahmadinejad, or whatever his name is, in Iran. That was a huge concern back then, I remember.

SH: There was discussion even then.

RB: Oh, yes.

SH: It was so secret up to that point.

RB: Yes, well, right, and it was, "Thank God we got it," and, "Look what it did, but now what?"

SH: There were discussions in the late 1940s, early 1950s.

RB: Oh, yes, I think so.

SH: Do you remember any discussions about ever using nuclear weapons in Korea?

RB: No, I don't think that was ever a consideration. I never heard of it, anyway.

SH: I did not know whether the servicemen talked about it.

RB: No.

SH: Because the war went on so much longer than anybody thought, the police action, as they called it. At Bainbridge, did you ever have to train anyone other than US Navy corpsmen?

RB: No, both the men and the WAVES.

SH: Were the classes coed?

RB: Yes.

SH: They were?

RB: Yes. Of course, the dorms were not, but, yes, the classes were. There weren't that many, and then, when I taught, well, one of my proudest times of teaching chemistry was to a class that had a gal in it, who happened to be a blonde, pretty gal. Her name was Dora. She flunked the exam and I wouldn't let anybody cheat. That was the other thing. The other guys let them cheat and I thought, "Look, if it's going to be important to learn it, you have to respect what you've learned," and so forth. "If you let them cheat, then, they don't have any respect for that." So, I did it that way and I even got called down because my class flunked more than the other classes, but they got a makeup exam. So, Dora flunked and she made it up and she squeaked through. I didn't make exceptions. So, a couple years later, she came back and I was on my way to the chow hall and she tapped me, "Mr. Behrens, Mr. Behrens." "Oh, Dora, how you doing?" "I just wanted to tell you, I came here to tell you, that I'm out of the Navy now and I'm going to Clemson University. I'm going be a chemist." I said, "Wow, oh, God, I've got a career, I think." [laughter]

SH: That is amazing.

RB: Oh, I was so happy over that, that one [event], and I presume she had a good life as a chemist. I hope she made it through. So many kids, if there's somebody that only holds out long enough for them to get past the work part of this and get over the hump on this, so [that] they can go on their own, so many more kids would be saved, I think, in this country in education. I'm so alarmed about our education that, in my local town, for sixteen years, I've been needling to try and improve it. I'm faced with what I think is probably the greatest specter we have in this country and that's the teachers' union/administrators' union. Both are, to me, on the same side, at least up here, and so, finally, after all these years, I finally have seen some things that are changing now, that are actually improving, as long as you keep making sure that there's accountability, because they hate it.

SH: Did you have to stay in the Reserves?

RB: No. I could've been an officer at that point, much earlier on, if I'd gone for that, yes, and I opted not to.

SH: How were the women who were in the Navy, the enlisted women, treated?

RB: There was no social interaction, really. They were fine, answered questions in class and did their tests and whatever, and there weren't that many, actually. I would've guessed that, for nursing, that would be the place for them to get into, but, amazingly, there weren't that many.

SH: How many women were there?

RB: Oh, a handful, I would say, at that point. Of course, they knew it was a war and they'd have to volunteer, you see.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the doctors that had been drafted during that time?

RB: Yes, only [when] I played dances with the band. We had a Big Band. I played major programs, where we had twenty-five hundred seats filled and we had our fourteen-piece band, Big Band, playing and that kind of thing. It would be an officers' dance, and so, the only interaction was that one of them would say, "Gee, I play sax--you mind if I sit in?" "Fine," until they were tired of doing that. Nobody came in to play the piano, actually, on me, but others, and that was it. It was always separate. I don't know if they knew that or thought they had to be that way. I don't think they felt, "Everybody's inferior." I think doctors were [more] understanding than maybe even the nurses were. There were some nurses I had heard others also had some problems with, a feeling of superiority on their part, which I thought was unjustified. They were teachers, the nurses, not students.

SH: Are there any other stories about your time in the Navy that you want to share?

RB: Well, I was separated out from my going to graduate school and that part of my life, and then, my little home life in the little apartment.

SH: You stayed at Delaware and finished your master's.

RB: Yes.

SH: Did you get your PhD?

RB: No, actually, I got all the credits for a PhD, course credits.

SH: At Delaware?

RB: Yes. Then, my wife decided that she wanted to go home. She was homesick, and so, I felt, "Well, let me go. I'll call Rutgers." They'd accept six credits out of all my credits and I said, "There's something wrong here," because it didn't make any logical sense, except somebody wants to make some money on you, keep you in longer or something. That was really an anathema for me. So, what I did, I got my PhD by doing research at a company, which the universities hate, but I had all the course credits. It was American Cyanamid Company in Bound Brook, New Jersey, which is now Wyeth Laboratories, but they hired me on the middle of the PhD scale. I said, "I am a PhD." It's the money that talks and not the--pardon me for this, I'm getting in trouble, I think, saying this--but it's not the university that dominates and makes sure they have enough business coming in from year to year.

SH: Your PhD is from Delaware.

RB: Yes.

SH: Okay. From the time you left Delaware, how much longer did you have to wait to finally get it?

RB: Oh, to get that was nine years. I really earned it earlier, but, I mean, that was the way it worked out. It was only because I gave my resume to American Cyanamid and I said, "I want this much money," and so, the research director, who's the final interviewer, said, "Well, that's a lot. That's high on the PhD scale." I said, "Well, my goal was a thousand dollars more." "Oh, okay." Next day, they sent me a letter accepting me. So, I was happy. They got their money's worth. I developed four or five new products of my own, with patents, and so forth. So, I ended up with patents. To me, it's the products that are commercial that are important, not the patents, but I ended up with my career of thirty US patents issued and nine more in the hopper when I left Novartis, which is a huge chemical company.

SH: You were at Bound Brook with Wyeth or American Cyanamid. How long did you stay with them before you left?

RB: Seventeen years.

SH: Then, you went to Novartis.

RB: Novartis. Well, Novartis is a merger between Sandoz and Ciba-Geigy and I worked for Ciba-Geigy in Ardsley, New York.

SH: In Ardsley, okay. I have seen a plant in Summit; I was thinking it was there.

RB: Oh, no, that's pharmaceutical. My expertise was on polymer chemistry, and then, later, photochemistry, which sounds like photography--it wasn't. It had to do with protecting plastics. For example, car paint, that's probably my biggest blockbuster, something that I invented that came on the market. After about a year-and-a-half, it'd already made eleven-and-a-half million dollars and that was just the beginning. That was only with one customer in the early stages. It's probably in every car and truck in the world right now and, without it, if I may, a little story on that is that the Federal Government says, "You guys, paint companies, are using twelve percent solids, paint binder and all that, pigments, eighty-eight percent solvent. That solvent's going in the atmosphere. You're polluting the whole country. You can't do that. So, we're raising it up to seventy percent solids and thirty percent solvent, at the most." Well, when they technically did that, the paint was so poor, if you painted a panel and sent it down to Florida, car paint, say, it would last less than three months. So, I knew that and I came up with an idea about something and I asked one of the organic chemists, "Would you synthesize this for me?" He was interested in (the warhead and the whatever?), and so, he did. So, I put in the first experiment at Ciba-Geigy, and then, went down to Florida against the control, which was the state-of-the-art, and, after three months, the state-of-the-art was shot and the car company says, "We need five years."

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

SH: Please, continue.

RB: Yes, they needed a required five years in Florida before they could accept the paint to go on the car. Otherwise, they couldn't change. All right, so, eighteen months went by and there was no change, it didn't degrade at all. Then, our vice president of our division, head of our division, came in--he'd love to come and needle the lab guys, say, "Hey, come up with anything new?" I'd say, "Yes, watch this, look at this," and I showed him the chart. He got so excited, he planned a trip--it's a Swiss company--he planned a trip to Switzerland to show them. "Look, these American guys are inventive, too. Look what they came up with." So, of course, the "not invented here" NIH syndrome came into play and they said, "Oh, no, that's no good. It turns pink." Well, it didn't. It was in an acidic atmosphere. It was fine, and so, later on, it took eight years--and I had to even fight my boss on this--it took eight years to get that first product commercial. It was a class of chemical compound and the first one, it took eight years, and so, the top management, in a big thing in Stanford, Connecticut, we had international, everybody was there, and the director of research said, "Look, here's our new *gung-ho*, wonderful, new, first-line product here." The first in the history of it was my name, of course, and then, people next to me, "Gee, I didn't know you came up with that." Well, the management was angry, because they said, "It took eight years for this to come on to the market? What are you talking [about]?" It was all NIH that was causing it, and partly due to the Swiss. In fact, our vice president was so insistent that this was so good, they actually fired him, which was horrible.

SH: The one who had been backing you.

RB: Yes, right, yes. That's how bad it was. That's human nature and, of course, you learn these things. I still would like to end up my life naïve and not get into all that nonsense, but that's the way it was. So, now, what it does is protects--see, the coating with the little solvent, the most important thing is when you spray a car, say, it has to flow properly, so [that] it looks good when it dries. That's key. In order to make something with the high solids flow well, you have to reduce what's called molecular weight. The molecule has to be small and you put solvent in it, it swims around and it flows better, but, if it's a long molecular weight, it requires a lot more solvent to have these molecules slip over each other. Okay, so, when you do that, make the low molecular weight, it hasn't got any stability from light. It just degrades so quickly. So, what this does is prevent the light from hurting it. So, it lasted so far over five years, they didn't care anymore. They cut the test out. [laughter]

SH: You never did find out how much longer.

RB: Oh, it lasted five years and it was perfect. It didn't change. So, it was an immediate success. The other good thing about it was, they all were also interested in adhesion promoters, a separate topic. Well, I had done some work to show, actually, that this is not only an incredible light stabilizer, but probably the best adhesion promoter there is. So, big companies like PPG--I'm sure this is old art, I can say it now--PPG, which was huge in car paints, tried it out and, now, they're using it and I'm sure others are doing it, too, in electric coats, so [that] the whole car goes into that primer and it's got this light stabilizer in it. Even though it costs a bundle for them to use it, it's that good. Many car companies had major, major losses, millions and hundreds of millions of dollars, because of peeling of paint and that sort of thing. So, this avoids all that.

[Editor's Note: Mr. Behrens earned a national award for this invention, presented to him at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, and the product earned billions of dollars for the company over the life of his patents.]

SH: What year was this?

RB: Well, I came up with it in '83, and then, it took until '92 or '91 to be commercial, something like that. Coincidentally, at that point, my eyes, my second eye went bad and, as soon as the company found out that I was legally blind, they set out to get rid of me. So, they demoted me, gave me a young boss, put me on the bench to do things that were unsafe. So, I felt I couldn't [stand for it] and I hired half the department at that point, of our group, and so, I felt I had to do something about it. I went to sue them and even the company doctors said that, "The company is shooting themselves in the foot. They don't know what they're doing." The new Americans with Disabilities Act came into play a month before. [Editor's Note: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) was signed into law on July 26, 1990.] So, they sent me down to the Lighthouse for the Blind in New York, because they had to show reasonable accommodation. What could they do? The only thing they could figure out is, "Learn how to type. You're blind, now, learn how to type." Well, I'd been doing the computer, so, that wasn't a problem. It was, "Why do I have to learn how to type on a computer?" Even the Lighthouse stood by me on this and said, "Gee, what are you doing to this guy?" In fact, they said, "Okay, we'll get you a CCTV at your desk." I had people working for me; I wasn't doing the lab work anymore.

SH: Right.

RB: So, they got me a closed circuit TV and I asked the guy that put it in, I said, "Did they buy it?" "Oh, no, they rented it for three months." So, they knew, in three months, they weren't going to waste their money on that, because I wouldn't be there no matter what I did.

SH: With all of this wonderful research?

RB: That wasn't the only thing I came up [with]. There was another major thing where one of our light stabilizers was being hit by a competitor, because our light stabilizer, in the presence of iron, which is devastating to polymers, a pro-oxidant destroys it in the sun, would turn color, but the competitor's did not. So, they asked me to come up with something. Well, I came up with a very simple answer and I even figured a way to patent it, to make a new product that had that thing in it. Well, they decided they were going to give the art away, but it saved that business, which was our bread-and-butter business. Yes, so, that was the second thing, and a few other things.

SH: You worked for American Cyanamid, and then, for Ciba-Geigy.

RB: Which became Novartis when they merged.

SH: You were transferred then from Bound Brook.

RB: Not transferred, no. At Bound Brook, in '82, the company had some real finance [problems]. It was a major recession and they had some major problems. They wiped out 115--the entire research building was wiped out.

SH: Then, you left the company.

RB: Yes. They were number two in that business. There were only two competitors, Cyanamid and Ciba. Ciba was number one, and so, I interviewed at Ciba and I'm a little proud of my not being overanxious at interviews, and so forth. The young guy that I worked for, of course, didn't want an older guy working for him, but the vice president who gave me the ultimate interview was older. I said, "Well, I have another offer," when the young guy was over in Switzerland and he didn't want to make a decision. So, I said, "Gee, I have another offer. I really need to know within a week or so." Sure enough, they made the decision before he got back, and so, I got the job and, at age fifty, it's not easy, no matter if you invented the most important things on Earth. They don't care, really don't care, because managements are so different from the technical people in their philosophies.

SH: That is true. When you went to work with Ciba-Geigy, where were you sent to work? Did you have to move?

RB: No, no. Well, I worked in Ardsley, New York. I commuted for three years, and then, we bought a place up in New Fairfield. That was a forty-mile commute, which is better than sixty-five miles.

SH: Since then, what have you been up to? What are your passions, besides going to school?

RB: Yes, after this semester, it'll be eighty-three courses here, in only thirteen years. I tell you, I play piano and Mary's supposed to be my agent, but I keep threatening to fire her, but I do get some.

SH: Is she still nursing?

RB: Oh, no. I think about nursing; there's a nursing school here and I play cocktail piano for them. I play at different occasions. I played at a wedding in Baltimore, which happened to be a relative. Mary's nephew married into this extremely well-to-do family, let's put it that way, and so, I played at their home, which was more like an institution. They cleaned out the tennis courts in the backyard to put up a tent that held four hundred people and there was still plenty of room. You walk into the front door and it's bigger than the first level of our house. That's just the entrance and to the right is the sitting room, same size, and to the right of that is the library, same size, etc. They have a nice piano, so, I did that, and then, I played for the other nephew's wedding on April 1st at a national historic site in Margate, New Jersey, two blocks south, in an elephant [Lucy the Elephant].

SH: You played in the elephant.

RB: In the elephant. I couldn't get a piano in there, so, I got a little keyboard and it was fifty people fit in this thing, six stories high. It's right on the ocean. I don't know if you've been there.

SH: I have seen pictures of it. It is part of the preservation of New Jersey's history.

RB: Yes, and so, these kids are bizarre; everything is elephants after that, well, before that even. He's a producer for QVC, she's a lawyer and they go their individual ways, whatever. In fact, she had a very busy week and he said, "I think I'll go on a trip to Arkansas or something, take a vacation." He could be easily a historian. He's an expert on the Presidents and his mother is a graphic arts person, very unique individual, Mary's sister. She's involved with someone who has done an awful lot to the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

SH: A beautiful facility.

RB: Yes, and all the detail. In fact, they even called us up to get us to do research at one time, way back.

SH: My compliments to them. I was just there last week.

RB: Oh, yes, isn't that well done? yes.

SH: Do you and Mary have children?

RB: I have a son, yes, but it's not Mary's. It was the nurse I married and she passed away a long time ago. Mary came into the picture about twenty, twenty-five years ago, a long time.

SH: I am sorry. The woman I met downstairs, I thought was the nurse.

RB: No.

SH: I apologize. I did not realize.

RB: No. Well, I try to live in the present more. He's in Arizona. He's done extremely well. Poor guy, age sixteen, he got leukemia and went to the world's greatest hospital, in my book, Philadelphia Children's Hospital in Philadelphia. At that time, the head of the hospital was Koop, Dr. Koop, Everett Koop, who was Surgeon General, and he ran that so beautifully. [Editor's Note: Vice Admiral C. Everett Koop, MD, served as Surgeon General of the United States from 1982 to 1989.] In the cafeteria downstairs, the doctors, nurses, patients, visitors, anybody can go in, there's no discrimination, as in so many hospitals. That's a whole book by itself, I guess that story. He was, of course, critical for a while and he was in the hospital for three-and-a-half months. [I was] sleeping in a cot next to his bed for a lot of that, and so, one night, three, four in the morning, it couldn't have been that late, but my son complained of his toe. He had an ingrown toenail, even though he was in bed for so long, couldn't get out. So, the intern came in and he said, "Oh," looked through the window, "there's Dr. Koop, let me ask [him]." So, he went out, he asked Dr. Koop, came back, "Oh, we have a solution to that." He said, "Don't tell this to any chiropodist. They'll lose their entire business, their bread-and-butter

business." He said, "You take a rubber finger kind of thing, put some Betadine solution in it, put it over the toe and leave it there for three weeks. It grows out. There's no surgery necessary, nothing like that," and it worked like a charm. So, that's one of his [tricks]. He wrote a book on nontechnical--I forgot the name of it now.

SH: Almost like a common sense medical book.

RB: Yes, right, but he didn't put that in a book, because he would've ruined the chiropodists' business, I'm sure of it, politically couldn't get away with it. That's life again. [laughter]

SH: Your son recovered.

RB: Yes, and, now, he's got his wife and my little grandson, (Dylan?), lives in Arizona, in Carefree, Arizona, and he's a director. He was--maybe he's more than that now, but that's good enough for me--a director at PricewaterhouseCoopers. I think one of his things that they promoted him for was a compliance solutions program, just at the time when Enron and these other guys were in trouble. Now, everybody's scared out of their boots to do the right thing, make sure they don't get in trouble with the law. [Editor's Note: In October 2001, news broke that the Enron Corporation, in collusion with its auditor, Arthur Andersen, had engaged in accounting fraud to hide its financial failures from investors. This led to the collapse of Enron, the dissolution of Arthur Andersen and the investigation of other firms serviced by Arthur Andersen, such as WorldCom and Sunbeam, resulting in further prosecutions and bankruptcies. The federal government responded with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, enacted in July 2002, aimed at regulating corporate boards, management and public accounting firms.] So, he's living fabulously well, two new Mercedes, one is a SUV, and a great Jeep Wrangler. I think he's doing that to spite me or something, I don't know.

SH: Because you are green?

RB: Yes, and he deserves it, because he was on chemo every day for three years. I have to tell you, educators should know, well, they should know this, but, in high school, last two years of high school, Bernardsville High School, he couldn't go. So, they had to send him an English teacher and a math teacher, tutors, and so, the English teachers couldn't handle it. They'd quit on him right and left, because he had to go to the bathroom and regurgitate.

SH: Right. It is very violent, the way the body reacts to it.

RB: Yes, and he didn't do chemo very well at all. Every day for three years this happened, but the math teacher stayed with him, because her sister died of leukemia. She stuck with him through the whole thing and that's why he did so well in math, got, I don't know, a 720 or something like that in math and only a 530 in verbal. He went to Drew University. He didn't go to Rutgers--I tried, but it didn't work. It's like when I go to reunion now, every year, because of our Class of 1917 graduate who does the presidential …

SH: Walter Seward?

RB: Yes, Walter Seward, and some of the other people I've gotten to know. We go to the dinner as well. It's "old home week" every year now. Well, one of them that we talked to, Ellis and Julius Robinson, the father, Class of '32, and the son, Princeton class of much later, his mother wouldn't let him go to Rutgers, say, "You go to Princeton." So, he got his BS at Princeton and got his Harvard medical degree and became a neurologist. Oh, well, he could've done better, I guess, [laughter] but, anyway, we talked and have a great time. Mary, having gone to Douglass, had the same teacher, somehow, chemistry of some sort, that they know between them, that he did. I don't know if he went from Princeton to Rutgers or back, who knows? but, so, suddenly, they're in a harried discussion. He's trying to advance the art of this and that and he's into math and he does music as well, in a quintet, all that. So, we relate very well.

SH: Wonderful. Mary Behrens, who I met downstairs, where did you meet her?

RB: At American Cyanamid Company.

SH: She was a chemist as well.

RB: Yes, she's got a degree in chemistry and an MBA at Fairleigh Dickinson, while she was working, I think. She was the first woman in the United States to get a job as an industrial salesperson. She decided, like the president at the time, that the lab was dullsville. A young woman, she needs to move around and see people and she was so determined to do that. Her story's much more interesting than mine. She'll kill me for this, I think--maybe I shouldn't, but, oh, well. She's so persistent. She was in the lab and she decided, "I don't want to be in the lab." So, she got herself transferred as technical writer for the International Division at the headquarters down in Wayne, New Jersey, to meet top management. Then, every time a sales job opened up, she applied for it [and was] turned down. So, the president at the time said, "As long as I'm president, no woman's ever going to get into sales." Okay, well, she kept after it, after it, after it, after it, until they got tired, and then, the tide had turned a little bit with women's lib. So, he became a hero by hiring her. He's the one who gained from it. "Wow, you got a woman in sales? Yes, that's terrific. I guess we will," and all the others. So, DuPont and other companies started doing the same. Her job was to call Kodak, Eastman Kodak, people up and say, "I'll take you out on a fishing trip off the coast of something or lunch," could see this little thing with these huge guys as they're going in the car to take them to lunch or dinner. "No smoking in my car," she says, that's it. [laughter] She tells me the story, the first one that said, "Oh, I should pay for this lunch. Women don't pay for anything, right." She said, "You can pay, but the company's paying for it anyway." "Oh, oh, all right, okay." Yes, she's an individual. I really got lucky.

SH: You worked with Selman Waksman. Do you have any anecdotes about Dr. Waksman?

RB: Well, there was also a (Starkey?) that worked with him at the time. So, I took, it was a course in research and what I did was strictly help the program by getting samples of soil and looking, isolating out what they call actinomycines, which was where the streptomycin came in. The first test, I remember, was such a simple test and that's how it develops, I guess. You take an agar plate--maybe you know this already--and you gather up this isolated actinomycine enough so [that] you could put it in pill form. You stick one of those in there and another one,

and then, well, before that, before you put the pills in, you streak it with bacteria of different varieties, so [that] you know what it's capable of doing. Well, the big deal was something called zone of inhibition, which means, by that pill, if there was a clear area where the bacteria wouldn't go near, it shows that that was effective in taking out that bacteria. If it climbed all over the pill, then, you knew it wasn't good. So, that was what we did. We isolated it and I had the flasks and microscopes and all this stuff, and so, it's essentially free labor, [laughter] but it was great--I mean, what an experience.

SH: Did he interact with you?

RB: Not a lot, little directions here and there, no lectures. I missed that and had I got to know him closer, by then, he was already famous, in '49, '50. In fact, I don't know how old I was when I was home listening on the radio to Paul Muni, the actor, before television, do the life or the story of Selman Waksman and streptomycin.

SH: It was on the radio.

RB: Yes. That was a big, big deal. Then, he'd go all over the world. They'd give him honors in Spain for saving thousands, millions of people and all this. Yes, it's huge.

SH: I imagine, as a young undergraduate, that must have been really exciting.

RB: Oh, God, yes. What else could you do but that, if you were in science? [laughter]

SH: Real Rutgers pride there.

RB: Oh, you know what? I got myself into trouble a little bit. Our new, illustrious President, at the last--I missed this reunion, because that's another little quickie story, with me dancing with a famous movie actress at the VA [Veterans Administration], Joan Leslie--but, anyway, the year before, at the dinner, not Walter's, the President, as he does at reunions, comes by to all the different places.

SH: Was this when you were inducted into the Old Guard?

RB: No, this was after, two or three years after.

SH: I see what you mean.

RB: Every year I go now, because of seeing Walter. How can I miss it? [With Walter Seward at] 109, I'm going to be there.

SH: I bet you are in chapel that morning, too.

RB: Oh, yes. I forget what I was talking about.

SH: You were talking about the President coming by.

RB: Oh, yes. He does his thing, "Today, we have brilliant people doing this and that and other. It wasn't like the olden days, where we had less." I raised my hand and I said, "Well, when I went to Rutgers, in '46 to '50, we had a Nobel Prize winner. How many do you have today?" He didn't like that at all. Oh, that really hurt him, but I couldn't let it go. He sort of seemed like he was a little bit--I mean, Rutgers pride is good, but, if you can throw in a couple of Nobel Prize winners in your talk, I think it impresses you a lot more. [laughter]

SH: Was this the current President or the one before?

RB: Yes. I was at Walter Seward's thing when the previous President, we'd just learned what had happened to him, and we talked a little bit about that at the party. He came to honor Walter and I don't know the whole details of why it happened. Well, these guys are paid pretty well. They don't have to worry about the next job, I don't think, too much. Starvation is not on their horizon. [laughter]

SH: Are there any other anecdotes or stories?

RB: I'm working on two books. One is called *Running Between the Raindrops*, which is probably something that'd work for a screenplay, and it has to do with the story of Mary and me and how, working for two companies that were direct competitors, only two companies that worked on this highly technical patented line of products, if either company knew that we were emotionally involved, we would be instantly fired, both of us. That would be the end of it. Yet, [in] my work as technical manager, I had to be social and have somebody and, if you have a wife, it always makes a lot more sense, right. So, she'd come with me [to] these things and we'd go on trips. She'd come with me when she could. I might even go with her, sometimes, but be very careful. So, I have twenty-seven episodes of what I call close calls and some of them are so hilarious. Oh, boy, I'm going to get in trouble with this one, too, but we were out in Phoenix at the Camelback Inn. I was at a convention and working, I guess, customers are there, even though I'm technical. So, Mary came with me. How can you miss a five-star resort? She didn't know that there was going to be a major ball on Thursday night. It was for five nights--five days. So, on Thursday night, they had a ball and 350 people in tables of ten around and all this and a big deal. She had no dress. So, what she decided to do was--I'm going to [say] this, I don't care what happens--she got a nightgown, which happened to be flannel, so, it's not flimsy or anything, and she got a patent leather belt, a wide belt, she put a pin here, a scarf or whatever you do. We went like that and here are the five couples at the table from all over the country and we're from the New York area. So, the women are, "Wow, that is stunning. Is that the latest from New York?" "Well, I don't know how many others are doing it, but I guess it's in vogue." [laughter] That was incredible. There's the gal that persisted to the president and, later, by the way, that president asked Mary, "How are you?" She mentioned whatever and he said, "I'm so glad that we allowed you to be the first." He recanted. So, she got her way, because women mostly do, I think. [laughter]

SH: May I ask, did the mother of your son pass away before he got leukemia?

RB: No, it wasn't much after that, right.

SH: You stayed overnight in the hospital; I wondered if you were a single parent at that point.

RB: No, no, but not long.

SH: Did you have to raise your son then?

RB: Well, he was in college then, and then, after college, he had a girlfriend. I said, "Live in our house, in Gladstone," and so, he did that. He called me up--gee, I lose track of time, maybe five, six, he was thirty-seven, well, four or five years ago--and he said, "Dad, you can sell the house now." I wish it were now or last year, and so, we did and I said, "Gee, why? What's happening?" He said, well, he and his wife were both commuting into New York. She's an accountant working for an accounting company. He said, "Oh, my boss lives in Pittsburgh and my people live all over the country." He's thirty-seven years old and a director. That's a big job, by the way, for that company. He's well into the six figures and I'm so proud of him, except that I hope it wasn't leukemia that pushed him into the math. That's where, again, you drive a kid long enough into something where they have to work hard and, once they get through that, that hard labor, then, they start getting it on their own and they take off.

SH: They get that little bit of confidence, that praise, acclimation for what they have done.

RB: Yes, exactly. They start realizing they know what they're talking about, and then, they look to go further.

SH: What is your second book that you are working on?

RB: Oh, that's my fun book. It's called *Philidioms*. It's a new word. You won't find it anywhere and that's a contraction

SH: *Philidioms*?

RB: Yes, it's a contraction of philosophical statements and idioms I've written over the decades, and there are jokes in there. I found out how you know when you're old. I was playing tennis the other day. As I looked up to serve, I saw vultures starting to circle over my head. I've got 340 entries so far.

SH: Are you going for a full year, 365?

RB: Oh, I don't know. I just keep thinking of them. I says, "Well, I can't go get it published or whatever," and, actually, I whittled it, a lot of it, all that out. So, it's fairly, fairly pretty good, philosophical statements, and you almost have to read this. Some people think that more is better--I think that better, capital Better, is more.

SH: You have to have a really good editor that will get the right shape on the word.

RB: I sent one to [news commentator] Bill O'Reilly. It's political. I've taken seven political science courses here and, as everybody knows, [at] universities, almost everybody's left wing. In fact, I have to be very careful--my two best friends, oh, I can get in deep trouble with them--but the one teacher went over the line on me. She said to the class, or suggested to the class, that 9/11 was a Bush conspiracy and I was so upset over that. I went home and I said, "Forget cholesterol--what may be more harmful to our nation's health are 'academia nuts.'" I tell everybody here, they know me, they know I take things in a light vein anyway. [Editor's Note: Mr. Behrens has since published *Philidioms and Other Thoughts to Live and Laugh By* and it is available on the Kindle (since 2014), in paperback on Amazon (since 2015) and through Barnes & Noble.]

SH: I enjoyed this interview immensely. Are there other anecdotes that we should put on tape?

RB: All of them. [laughter]

SH: Please, do not hesitate.

RB: I'll get an apartment down there. [laughter]

SH: Come on down. Tell me the anecdote about the veterans' hospital.

RB: Yes, I'm part of the VA Healthcare now, because I'm legally blind. So, I [was] going there one time, there was a fellow passing out leaflets and I noticed, in a month or so, they were going to have, as a guest in a major gala, I guess you'd call it, Joan Leslie, the movie actress. For those that aren't old enough to know, she was a starring role with Gary Cooper in *Sergeant York*, starring role with Humphrey Bogart in *High Sierra*, starring role in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* with James Cagney, yes, and so on and on and on. She started it. The movie *High Sierra* was at age fifteen, she was [in a] starring role, and, of course, I've seen them all since again. Anyway, there was a contest on this flyer that, if you wrote a letter and won, you can get to dance with Joan Leslie. So, I told my little story about the Navy and whatever experience and I ended it with one of her famous songs, a really beautiful song, *My Shining Hour*, and so, I did the verse of *My Shining Hour*. I still have a copy at home of the piano music and I ended the letter with that and it just fit perfectly, "To see you again." So, they picked me to dance with her--what an honor--and there was five hundred people, and so forth. Actually, I was also invited to the press conference a day before, at a major hotel in New Haven.

SH: You could have played the music.

RB: Yes, actually, they had a combo, a couple of guys playing, but this fellow, Roger (Rudnick?), who started this thing, was the press agent and manager for the Charlie Spivak Orchestra, which was one of the major orchestras in the Big Band era. He's fading away, like we all are in time, but he early on said, "Maybe we can have you play as she makes her entrance." I said, "Yes, I'd be happy to." Unfortunately, they didn't have a piano in that room. So, they got these two guys, one with a keyboard and the other doing something else, which was fine. Now, I just received the DVD of the whole event, which is cute. So, to me, that was an exciting moment.

SH: I think you must have had lots of exciting moments.

RB: She was my heartthrob as a kid. Of course, I was little and she's eighty-one now; I'm only seventy-eight now, yes. It's hard to believe. I wake up in the morning--it's sixty-eight, why do I think seventy-eight all the time? She looked terrific. They had a small dance floor and I dance pretty good, actually, I have to admit, and we wow them at weddings. So, the dance floor was so small and I was starting to do like a Fred [Astaire]. Oh, the other thing, she was the youngest dancer to start in a starring role with Fred Astaire, everything. So, I started this and there's no room and she said, "Wow, you really want to dance, don't you?" I said, "With you, oh, yes." [laughter] Oh, that was a thrill. She was such a nice person and she wasn't the kind that's given Hollywood its lousy name over the years. She, in fact--I'm trying to think of the major movie actress who advised her, was older than her. She had her own show on television. Anyway, she advised her to get married to a doctor, "Don't bother with anybody else, just marry to a doctor." So, she did and, now, her name is Caldwell. That's her last name. Unfortunately, her husband died and, if I wasn't connected, I might go out there and say, "Hello, let's dance some more." She was the homey type, you see, and I never had a home of my own as a kid, always an apartment. I would've loved to be out in the country in a home of my own, and so forth. That was a major, major thing for me. So, it was the two actresses, Joan Leslie was one and the woman that just died a couple of weeks ago, who did the commercials for the Pamper-type ads--it was June Allyson, yes--those two were my heartthrobs as a kid, because, there, I thought, "Oh, if I had a girl like that, I could build a house and we'd have a nice family and I'd be a Boy Scout leader and have four kids and all the things I want in life."

SH: A picket fence, the whole bit?

RB: Well, I didn't have a picket fence, but anyway.

SH: Did you go to the movies as a kid?

RB: Oh, yes. Oh, that was important, that Saturday matinee. Life was not terrific back then, but you go in the movies and I'd see a swashbuckler. Well, the most important, actually, was the funnies, the cartoons. That, I just thrilled in. I'd get my Goobers peanuts--that was essential, I'd have to save up for that--and then, I'd watched these swashbuckling movies with Errol Flynn and Tyrone Power and all these other guys. You come out of the movies and it's a whole different world again. The major thing, I was twelve years old, I believe, in 1939 or '40, and I went to the Castle Theater in Irvington, which was on the way, later, I'd go to the high school there, but, so, I went in and I saw *The Wizard of Oz*. I mean, that was so enthralling, and then, I came out of that movie and it had just rained and there was a rainbow. I'm not kidding you, this is the truth. Of course, that stayed with me all my life. That was unbelievable. I thought, "There had to be somebody up there, someplace, that this just can't happen," oh, God, and I played that. That's one of the songs I play that actually get people to cry, with my own arrangements. That's what I do now. I can't sight read music anymore, so, I use my own arrangements. Fortunately, I play for the hospital, the local hospital, and, actually, even the senior center wants me there. I can't do it, and then, New York, I've got to limit it, but I just love to play.

SH: I am so thankful that you shared all this wonderful stuff with us. I am so sorry that we had to do this in the library and I do not get the opportunity to hear you play.

RB: Oh, gee, well, it's getting late here and I thank you for your time and for the interest.

SH: Thank you so much.

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

Reviewed by Lance Weaver 11/6/2006
Reviewed by Hanne Ala-Rami 3/20/2008
Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 7/1/15
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/22/15
Reviewed by Rudolf Behrens 9/15/15