

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD BELFORD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Richard Belford on July 16, 2001 in New Haven, Connecticut with Shaun Illingworth ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak ...

Greg Kupsky: ... and Greg Kupsky.

SI: Mr. Belford, first we would like to thank you for giving us your time and to begin, could you please tell us a little bit about your family; your mother and your father and their backgrounds and your early childhood in Paterson?

Richard Belford: Okay, I was born in May of 1927. I was born in New Haven, Connecticut and I was here for somewhere around five years, at which time my parents got divorced, so, I took my mother to New Jersey, where her mother was living, and the three of us lived together, my mother and my grandmother in Paterson, New Jersey. So, from about the time I was five years old, from that point on, I grew up in Paterson, New Jersey. In fact, I was living in Paterson when I was going to Rutgers. My father was born, I think, around, it's either 1899 or 1900 and my mother was born around 1902. My father was born in New York. His parents had emigrated here from Poland, where they had lived and their ancestors had lived for years. My mother and her family emigrated from Poland. My mother was born in Poland. They immigrated when my mother was about three years old. She was the youngest of a number of siblings and her siblings and her parents came over to this country from Poland around, since she was born in 1902, so, she came over around 1905. So, my mother, she was the youngest in her family so my grandparents were really, what they then called the "old country" and had been there well into their adulthood, and then I lived in Paterson, New Jersey until, actually, until I grew up, all that the time, I was in Rutgers, plus my first year of law school, so I lived there until 1950. I graduated from Rutgers in '49. I lived in Paterson until 1950.

SH: How did you come to choose Rutgers?

RB: I'm trying to think. You know, I really don't remember. We didn't have much money, my recollection is that Rutgers was not a state university at that time, but it had some kind of affiliation with the State, so, that it wasn't completely a private school either. Probably, I'm guessing, probably had some kind of subsidy from the State so that the cost would be reduced by virtue of that, I think, and again, I'm not clear on my recollection, I don't recall if I got a scholarship or not. At that time, again, my recollection is there was no such thing as a scholarship based on need. They call it scholarships now, it is based on need, but at that time it was based on scholarship. I don't recall if I got a scholarship then or not, or whether my father paid for it. My parents were divorced, as I mentioned. But I worked for my schooling. But I probably went there because it was close to where I was living and, probably, it was cheaper than the other colleges that I could otherwise would have gone to.

SI: You were in high school when World War II broke out and you were also in high school when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Could you tell us a little about what you knew about the war in Europe and Asia and then where you were on December 7th?

RB: I lived a very provincial life at that time. Pearl Harbor was in 1941. At that time, I was still in high school. I graduated in 1943. I have a vague recollection of hearing the news. Of course, when I say, hearing, it wasn't on television because I don't think television actually existed, but if it did, it wasn't for consumers, maybe some businesses may have had some kind of television. So, we got our news from the radio and from the newspaper and, of course, we heard about it. I don't recall specifically where I was when I heard about it. Interestingly, I don't recall it having any impact on my life, except in the sense that we were going to war and there were blackouts we had to observe. Practice blackouts where the lights were, everyone had to have their lights out and there were civilian, I forget what they were called, but there were civilians who were authorized to walk around. If anyone had their light on, they banged on your door, rang your bell, "Shut your light off," as if we were being bombed, and there was rationing of many products. Gasoline was being rationed, butter was being rationed. I don't recall the other things. So, to the extent that those things happened, it affected me, as it affected everybody. But we were poor anyway. It's funny, not only do I say this, but other people that I know who lived at that time say the same thing, "We knew we were poor but we didn't feel poor." We ... weren't paupers. We lived from hand-to-mouth but, somehow, that was kind of the way of life. You didn't feel that you were suffering. You just, what you had, you had, and you made do, and life went on. So, to the extent that there was rationing and stuff like that, I guess, it affected us. I never really felt in danger from the war. I, personally, was unaware of the whole holocaust, until many years later, and even though I'm Jewish, I just wasn't aware of it at that time. I learned about it later. That's about it.

SH: Did your mother or grandmother work?

RB: My mother worked. My grandmother kept house. My mother worked full-time and my grandmother sort of brought me up.

SH: What did your mother do in Paterson?

RB: Well, she was a, though there was a time that she had some jobs in New York, I believe she was doing bookkeeping type of work. I was never sure of that, but then she became, I guess, I don't know what the title was, but she sort of was the office manager of a hospital in Paterson, called the Barnard Hospital. She took care of the way the office ran and bookkeeping and stuff like that. Later in life, she had other kinds of bookkeeping jobs, but for many years she was the principal bookkeeping person, office manager, in the hospital there.

SH: Was there anyone that you knew at Rutgers that would have showed you around campus before you went as a student here?

RB: I really don't recall. I just remember being there. Rutgers, at that time, I believe, I don't know the statistics, but, I believe the total, Rutgers was an all-boys school at that time, but I forget the name of the girls' school that was nearby in New Brunswick.

SH: NJC, New Jersey College for Women.

RB: I think so, yes, and never the twain did meet, except they did sometime, and I think, at

Rutgers, I bet you there weren't more than, you would know this better than I, but I bet you there weren't more than five to eight hundred students in the whole school, the whole four years. I could be wrong on that. It was a very informal place and my first period of time at Rutgers, before I went into service, I was living, I never joined a fraternity. I am kind of philosophically opposed to fraternities. But there was a fraternity house, I don't even remember the name of it, on the main street of the campus that was converted into a dormitory, but it wasn't a dormitory style in particular. It just was used as a dormitory. There were, as I recall, two students to a bedroom and there were a lot of bedrooms because it had been a fraternity house, which had previously been housing fraternity people, but those who were there were not members of a fraternity, and then, there were also some dormitories there, some low-rise, maybe two stories high, if I remember correctly, brick buildings, where there would be a number of bedrooms and so on. But that was about it, at that time.

SH: What were your interests when you came to Rutgers? What did you want to study and ...

RB: I had lived a pretty, not exactly a secluded life, but a protected kind of life. So, my main interest was to get my wings and fly away and I fooled around quite a lot there. I somehow managed to pass the courses, but just about. I mean, I was not a serious student. There was a lot of playing. My mother was poor, so what I did for spending money, I worked while I was at Rutgers. I grew up with a work ethic, as many people did at that time, and actually, my father was sending me some spending money. What I did was, I kept the spending money, then the money that I earned working, I would send home to my mother to help support the family. So, I worked, but I played a lot, too. There's an awful lot of card playing and, you know, we were gambling with each other, students, and there was a fair amount of beer drinking. There was a place called the Corner Tavern and there was one fellow there who was a perpetual student and I think he was an athlete as well, and he drank a lot, and he would tell the story that when he first came to Rutgers, there was an orientation. The Dean gave an orientation, and then in the orientation, he said, "Make sure you stay away from the Corner Tavern," and he thought it was just an expression, "a corner tavern." Then he went out, he went on the street, and he said, "Oh, this is the name of the corner tavern that the Dean purposely picked that one out, that's the one I want to go to," and he spent a lot of his time there. But I played a lot and I changed my major a number of times. A lot of it was a waste of time, academically, for me, and it was a way of getting away from the constraints of living with, well, not parents, with my mother. I'm not criticizing when I say that, but being able to be on my own for the first time, you know.

SH: What did you think of mandatory chapel? Did you still have that when you came to Rutgers?

RB: I don't recall mandatory chapel.

SH: A lot of alumni have talked about it and some had said that's how they got information. They were required to go every two weeks, or on different days in the week, and they had to sign in and they also talked about what they did to get around it, or couldn't get around it.

RB: Is that right? Knowing, me, I think I would have, I don't think I would have gone. I think I would have resisted if it was mandatory, even if it weren't mandatory. But, I mean, I wouldn't. I

grew up really with very strong feelings of religious freedom and not having anyone tell you how you have to worship. I don't even remember there being such a thing. Was there actually such a thing as mandatory chapel?

SH: Yes.

RB: Is that right?

SH: They talked about how they signed each other in. The worst thing was the names were assigned seats alphabetically and you would have sat right in the front. Did you have any dealings with the administration, like Dean Metzger, or any ...

RB: Dean Metzger, I remember. I had cut a lot of classes and I don't know whether he was exaggerating or not, but he called me in at one time, I had been there maybe a year or more and he said, "This college has been here since 1766," or something like that, he said, "You've made a record for cutting classes." I laugh now, but I was shaking when he said it. Somehow, I managed to get through. I changed my major a lot of times and ...

SH: Do you remember how the changes went?

RB: I ended up, getting my Bachelors in Psychology. When I went to the head of the department for some kind of recommendation, he not so subtly told me that I ought to be looking at a different field. It's funny, all the time after that, going to Law School, I was a very good student, but up until then, I just didn't take it seriously.

SI: Does any professor, stand out in your mind, as particularly interesting or influential?

RB: It seems a little, facetiously, I didn't see the professors enough to have that kind of recollection, but none that I can recall, no.

SH: Were you involved with the *Daily Targum* or any activities on campus?

RB: Not really, not really. I really played most of the time.

SH: What were your jobs when you were at Rutgers?

RB: Well, I played piano, so I played in a band. You know, we'd get one or two jobs a week. I worked a little bit in a restaurant there. I can't think of the name. It was on, is there a street College Street? College Avenue? I forget the name, it was a mom and pop restaurant, I worked there a while. It was a little short order work and waiting. It was owned by, the son-in-law's name was Jim (Wapner?), I think. His wife was like the daughter of the owners. I don't recall their last name. It's a Jewish name.

SI: Is it (Stohlman?)?

RB: It could have been. I'm just not remembering. But it was a father, and a mother, and a son,

and a daughter, and a son-in-law. That's my recollection of it. You always went there. I mean, many people ate there, kind of a hangout as well. A very nice hangout. It was a restaurant.

SH: Did you play for dances at the University itself?

RB: No, I think they were mostly, I didn't know if they had dances at the University. I think they were in town, if I remember correctly, because there just weren't that many students.

SH: What was campus life like then, as compared to before the war, and then after?

RB: Everything was so informal that, you know, you have obviously made friends and my friends and I played cards a lot, and we'd stay up late at night and oversleep classes in the morning.

SH: Do you remember who your roommates were?

RB: My first roommate was a fellow by the name of Kurt, with a K, I think, and I can't remember his last name. Other people in the house, there was that house that had been a fraternity house, was a Joe Finelli, I think, Keith Yates, Nathan, I can't think of his last name. He lived up in the Catskills. Oh, Eddie Beers. Eddie Beers, he had some kind of disability. I think, he had brittle bones, or something, and he walked with crutches and then I had a couple of good friends, Jack McCall, John McCall, we called him Jack, and Craig MacMurray. The fellow that told the story about the Corner Tavern was Greg McKenna, I think he was an athlete. Then a cousin of mine was there, Stan Rosenthal, and a very good friend of mine, who was a classmate in high school, Arthur Jacoby, who I still have contact with. Of course, my cousin, Stan Rosenthal, I still have contact with. I'm not remembering at the moment any other names.

SH: Did you attend football games? Were they still trying to maintain some sort of sport programs?

RB: They were doing sports. I really didn't have the kind of pride in the college and the school that so many people did. I didn't have that kind of patriotism to the school.

SH: How often did you go home?

RB: Every few weeks, for a weekend. Another fellow there, in fact, he taught me how to drive, (Cye St. Liefer?) a very unusual name for a Jewish person, St. is in his last name, but he taught me how to drive. So I was there during two different periods because after I was there a while, I then enlisted in the Navy, and after the Navy, I came back under the GI Bill and then during that second phase, I took a leave of absence, because I was going to see the world, you know, and got as far as Miami Beach. My thumb took me there. Then either I got tired of the world, or it got tired of me, I came back to school. So, I was there three different periods, but all those periods including my time in service was only about six years, from '43 to '49, and part of the reason it could be done in that period of time is that when I was finished with the service, I think, they had trimesters, if I remember correctly, so you could go twelve months of the year and get credit for a year and a half. Whether it was that way before I went to service or not, I don't recall. I don't

think so.

SH: Tell us a little bit, please, about how it came to be that you were in the service and how the war was progressing?

RB: It was a time of very strong patriotism. You know, we were attacked. It was almost, everybody considered it a very justifiable war. There were no protests against it. You had your, obviously, your conscientious objectors, but there were no protests in the community. Most people were for it, even to the point that when you were in service and went out on a liberty, or a leave, and on furlough, and you were in uniform, you were a hero. Everyone in uniform was a hero. People would pick you up if you were hitch-hiking. People would take you home and give you a meal and you would sleep overnight and it was safe to do that at that time, too. So, there was that type of atmosphere in the community, in the country, I would say. I got out of high school early. I just turned sixteen in May of 1943. I graduated high school in June of '43 and then went back to school to Rutgers in September, if I remember correctly, and then in '45, April of '45, I enlisted in the Navy. I was almost eighteen, April of '45. I was going to turn eighteen in May, so I finished some time at Rutgers, about a year and a half or so, and I enlisted in the Navy. I was getting close to draft age and, frankly, I wanted to be in service but I didn't want to get killed either. I didn't want to be sitting in foxholes, and stuff like that, so, if you enlisted you could have your choice of whatever service you wanted to go in, whereas if you were drafted, then you went wherever they sent you. So, in order to avoid going into the army, I enlisted in the navy, and interestingly, I enjoyed it in the navy. I had a great time. I was one of the few people there who actually liked navy food, and I went there on April 11th, 1945. At that point, President Roosevelt realized that since I went in the navy, the war was probably going to be lost so he up and died the next day, April 12th, if I remember correctly, and I was in the navy for about fifteen months, to July of '46 and then back to, I'm trying to think whether I, I said earlier I did it in three steps. It may be that I decided to see the world before I went back after going in service and then only went back, a second time rather than the third time. I think that might be more accurate than what I said earlier in this interview.

SH: Where did you go to boot camp?

RB: In Buffalo, New York, Camp Sampson. It was an eight week basic training, what they call the boot camp. I was an apprentice seaman, as everyone was when they went in, and when you graduated from it, eight weeks later, you were automatically a seaman second class.

SH: What were you sent for training? Were you sent to school?

RB: I got shipped to different places in the country. At one point, I asked to go to radio school and they sent me to it and in the middle of the course, the war ended, and at that time, you could enlist either for a four-year term or you could enlist for what they called the duration and six months. I had enlisted for the duration and six months, so, at that point, people like me were given the option of either signing up for a full four year hitch, in which case you could stay in school, continue training, or insisting of your duration and six months, after which, the duration had now arrived, so, then they had to let you out after six months, so, they wouldn't spend the time and money to continue training you. So I didn't want to sign up for a hitch, so, I was taken

out of school, put on a destroyer escort, and interestingly, when you got discharged, you were entitled to a two hundred dollars discharge pay, but if you served overseas, you had an extra hundred dollars. Well, the destroyer escort that I was on was stationed in Key West, and for some reason, that was considered overseas duty. I think we went out in the ocean, once or twice. The time I remember being out there, I ended up getting sick, you know, throwing up over the rail into the ocean and so on. That was my overseas duty, so, when I got discharged, I got the extra hundred dollars for overseas duty, and then like many people at that time, servicemen getting discharged, I joined what was called the 52/20 Club. At that time, the minimum wage was fifty cents an hour, if I remember correctly, and your unemployment was fifty cents an hour, it's twenty dollars a week. And service people were automatically entitled to unemployment compensation for fifty-two weeks, so they called it the 52/20 Club. Like many people, I joined it. Unlike many people, I didn't last long, because many of us had such a work ethic. I mean, I played a lot, but I also had the idea that you have to work and earn your pay and, so, after a period of time I got a job, you know. Then I was going to school also, a bunch of things were going on. As I say, I left home to see the world, using my thumb. I worked various jobs in the factory, and stuff like that, and then went back to school, and so on.

SH: Just for the record, what was the name of the destroyer escort you were on?

RB: I think it was called USS *Sarsfield*, if I remember correctly.

SI: What were your duties?

RB: Like other seaman, second class, you know, I was using the mop, cleaning up, and I was assigned to the radio shack, because I had a little bit of radio training. So, at that time, you didn't have the technology you have now, it was done with Morse Code, you press down on that little thing with your index finger and you're giving things in code and with all proper deference to the interview, I'm not going to indicate the types of words that we were taught in the radio school, which, that's what was ingrained and I remember it to this day. I can tell you Morse Code of different epithets. So, I was assigned to that, to help the radiomen, which really meant that I went out and got coffee for them and kept the place a little clean, and that's about all I did on the ship.

SH: Did you consider going anywhere else, at that point, to finish your education, rather than Rutgers?

RB: No. No.

SH: Tell us a little bit about Rutgers, when you come back, I assume this would be in the fall or winter of '46?

RB: Well, it was probably around that time. As I think about it, before going back to Rutgers, I think I decided to take a leave of absence. Actually, I was planning just to never go back, but my mother and her fiancée talked me in to it, and they brought my father into it also, and they talked me into doing it by way of a leave of absence, so that I could keep my options open, and I'm glad they did talk me into it, obviously. But I don't think it ever occurred to me to apply to any other

school.

SH: When you came back, what was the campus like compared to the six hundred or so that were there in '43?

RB: I'm not remembering specifically, but I have a vague recollection that there were more people there.

SH: When you were there in '43, when you entered, do you remember if the ASTP program was still going on at that point?

RB: Yes, that had to do with the Army reserve? Yes, yes, in fact, my cousin was in that at Rutgers, yes. I didn't join it, but he did.

SH: Was it difficult to find housing when you came back then after the war was over?

RB: No. The University provided housing for us.

SH: The veterans are in the majority, are they not, when you came back then in '46?

RB: Could be. I don't know if many of us particularly identified ourselves as veterans. I don't have that clear a recollection of specific events and given some of the general things. I don't recall about any particular emphasis on whether you were a veteran or not.

SH: When did you decide to go to law school? When did that become of interest to you?

RB: When the head of the psychology department suggested that I look for a different type of graduate work. My father was a lawyer, here in New Haven, and somehow, I decided, well, maybe I ought to go to law school. It really wasn't a very well thought out decision, and yet as I look back, it's one of the best things that happened to me in my life.

SH: Where did you go to law school?

RB: NYU, and interestingly, when I interviewed for, everyone who applied, got an interview and this professor that was interviewing me said, "You have a terrible record, why should we take a chance on you?" and I said, "Well, I played a lot when I was there, and I'm not just saying this because of the interview, but I really am taking it seriously now or I wouldn't go through it, apparently, it's going to be the rigor of law school, unless I was serious about it," and my marks in college weren't that good, they weren't that bad, kind of mediocre, I guess. I did very well on the LSAT. I did very well on that so, "I'm asking that you give me a chance to do it," and they took me on probation, and that was it. As I recall, after a year or so, I got an academic scholarship for part of it, also. I really started taking education seriously at that point. In fact, I got married after my first year in law school.

SH: Where had you met your wife? Was she at Rutgers or NJC?

RB: No. She lived in Paterson, where I did. I met her ice skating one day and that was the first and last time I ever ice skated. I spent more time on my backside than on the skates and then a bunch of us went out for hot chocolate and there we were.

SH: What did your family think of FDR and New Deal policies?

RB: Interestingly, my father was very political but I didn't live with him. I saw him, like once a month and he was an active Socialist at that time, and before that time, in fact, in the First World War, he was a Socialist, and he was a teenager, but he was, he got active in the Socialist politics. But he never discussed politics with me, as such, but his political philosophy and his way of looking at social things, and so on, social action things, was very strong. But he never discussed with me, Democrat, Republican, or Socialist, or anything like that. My mother and my grandmother never discussed politics with me, but in the world in which I lived, we all, that is the people that I knew, we all just assumed that Franklin Roosevelt was the hero of the universe. It was sort of taken for granted, without getting into political discussions. Later in life, I became fairly political, but we just all loved Franklin Roosevelt. I still do, as a matter-of-fact.

SH: Did you ever hear Norman Thomas speak at Rutgers?

RB: I never heard him speak there, but at first when I got old enough to vote, he was the first president I voted for, which is why he didn't win, of course. That's the story of my life. If I vote for you, you don't stand a chance.

SH: Did you run for political office? You said, you became very involved politically.

RB: When I was up here in Connecticut, I was already a lawyer, I ran for Alderman in the City of New Haven. I had one term as Alderman.

SH: How did you find that?

RB: Oh, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it, and then I worked in politics with other people that were running for office and whom I agreed with their philosophy, and so on, so, I used to be active in that respect.

GK: Going back when you enlisted, what was the reaction of your parents? Did they support the decision of you going to the Navy?

RB: I needed a parent's signature to do it. I think they agreed because they didn't want me to be drafted. That's my sense of it. They didn't give me any trouble on that. As I mentioned before, all of us were patriotic, but everyone didn't enlist completely for patriotic reasons. It was practical and patriotic. You wanted to do your share. You didn't want to get killed. You had practical reasons. As I mentioned, I want to be able to choose where I'd go, but I went, it wasn't that I reluctantly chose going into service, I kind of looked forward to it. I suppose my mother didn't, wasn't happy about it, because who wants her son to go in service, you know, in times of war?

SH: Were there any instances for you of Anti-Semitism in Paterson, or Rutgers or in the Navy?

RB: I had a few instances in my life, not that it tore me very badly, but you knew it existed. Most of it wasn't overt. I remember as a kid going to Hebrew School, some kid across the street threw stones at me, you know, "dirty Jew," that type of stuff. Interestingly, I think of it to this day. When I was in service, they were first starting to integrate racially, religiously, it was becoming integrated so far as I know, and that was due to President Truman, if I remember correctly, and one fellow came up to me one day, we were casual friends, and he thought he was giving me a compliment. He said, "You're a white Jew," and that was supposed to be a compliment, you know. I see that as an anti-Semitic thing, but it wasn't directed at me, because I was going to be, for him, the exception. It was things like that, but, other than that, I never experienced any significant anti-Semitism.

SH: Did your grandmother keep a Kosher home?

RB: Yes, yes, in the universe in which I lived, everyone in the whole universe was an Orthodox Jew.

SI: Since your father was strongly Socialist, did he also lean towards Zionism?

RB: No. He, I never heard him say anything about Israel, or Zionism. He was a secular Jew. He had no particular religious beliefs, but he identified as a Jew, as a member of the Jewish people.

SI: How was Zionism viewed in your community or among the other members of your family?

RB: You know, I don't recall us ever getting involved in it or talking about it, but we're going back to the '30s and the '40s and I don't know too much about the history of Zionism at that particular time. My sense is that you had a very ardent activity going on, I believe, in the, maybe middle '40s or so, because, I think, Israel got its independence and its statehood in '48, if I remember correctly, so all the fighting and so on, obviously preceded that. But that wasn't a significant period in my life. It was in my lifetime, but not in my life.

SH: When you were in high school, and you would have been in high school when Hitler invaded Poland, do you remember what was this discussed at all in your school?

RB: I don't recall that. I don't recall that being discussed at all. I lived a very insular life.

SH: Were there war bond sales going on?

RB: Oh, yes, war bonds.

SH: Did you participate in any of that?

RB: We knew about war bonds and people bought them, if they could afford it.

SH: I just wondered if you knew any veterans on your street or in your community who would have been upperclassmen that went off to war and then came back?

RB: Not really. Not really. One of my classmates, from high school turned out, later on, to be a very active person, Allen Ginsberg, the poet, and one of the biggest of the whole hippie movement, so to speak. He and I were classmates. But he was, if anything, anti-war. As a matter-of-fact, in our class, he was our class poet and he wrote the class poem, which was interestingly ...

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SH: Local dances in New Brunswick itself or ...

RB: That, and also in Paterson, I'd go back weekends, if I remember correctly, and there'd be dances there. I started in high school playing in bands, so, at this moment I'm not remembering which things took place during high school and which ones during college, but there was a fellow, who, I guess, was old enough to be my father in Paterson, name of Frank Vivino, and this is during the war, so he started, Viv's Victory Band, and I was the piano player in it and one of his sons was his sax player. He booked a lot of dances, local dances in high schools and in Y's and stuff like that, and I believe while I was in college, I'd come home some weekends and play in his band. A lot of it was pick-up bands and it could be a dance, it could be in a bar, or it could be, Italian weddings, were using, at that time, were using pick-up bands. People didn't have much money and you would have sandwiches and soda and beer and then they have a four or five member pick-up band.

SH: You were married then after the war and after you graduated Rutgers, while you were in Law School.

RB: To my first wife. I'm remarried. I've divorced and remarried.

SH: Was she working while you were going to school?

RB: Yes, when we got married, she was working. I think, she was selling cosmetics in a drug store, if I remember correctly. Then we had a baby and then she stayed home.

SH: Tell us a little bit about your children before we end the interview and Mrs. Belford ...

RB: I have two generations of children. I have, my oldest son is forty-nine, next son is forty-seven, next son is forty-five, and then my daughter is forty-three. My next daughter is thirteen and my son is twelve. Different wives, obviously.

SH: Where did you meet the current Mrs. Belford?

RB: This was during my latter day hippie days. I was living in New Haven. I had gotten divorced or was in the process of getting divorced. I had one foot into the, I was a lawyer, I had one foot into the establishment community and the other one in the alternative community,

people who felt that the establishment was no good and we would have to change society, and all that, and I was living collectively with some people. Some of the people wouldn't stay the whole time. Some of them would move out, some of them would come in, but we usually had like three men, three women and, usually, something like two and a half kids because it would be joint custody type of thing, and I was about forty-eight when I started that, as a latter-day hippie. One of the women that lived in the house, that I was living in, was a very close friend of the woman that I'm now married to. So, she and I, that's the woman I'm now married to, and I had this mutual friend whom I lived with and I joke, every so often, that I lived with her friend before I lived with her. So, I met her through our mutual friend, but, at that time, I was going with a different woman, but then she and I were having trouble with each other. Each one of us thinks that were having more trouble, with the other than the other one was and then I started going with the woman I'm now married to, and that's how we met.

SI: How did you become involved with the counter culture? Did it have to do with the Vietnam War?

RB: It may have, because I went on marches. I was a war protestor. I was involved in a fair amount of social action, civil rights, and things like that, which I still feel very strongly about, and I just kind of met people that way and, you know, I don't remember how I met each person. Oh, I know what it was, I was living alone, that time, and I started to get down to places where single people could hang out. I never took to the bar scene, but there would be a place where people would come in and give some poetry, or play a guitar, and I used to like to hang around places like that, kind of got to know people in that counter culture and then, one fellow, he wanted to start a collective house and not so much that he wanted to live in it, it was a kind of a philosophical thing with him. This was the way people ought to live, he felt, you make your own community, and democratic activity, and so on, and I got involved in that and kind of developed as time went on.

SH: How involved were you with the civil rights movement? What were some of the marches that you went on with?

RB: Well, I went on a peace march to Washington at one time. There were different activities in New Haven. I was a member of the human relations organization, Human Relations Society, we called it. I got involved in city government, with a human relations committee that the mayor appointed and then I became executive director of the New Haven Commission on Equal Opportunities. There were different marches in New Haven. We would picket a real estate agency that was discriminating against people. There was a program in the school system to bring about integration and then, at one point, the board of education came out with a program, a bussing program, in order to achieve racial integration and some people were very much opposed to it, and there were a number of us liberals who were very much in favor of it. People were always talking, "This is good for education," or "this is bad for education." My own philosophy was that this is good for society, for people to be going to school together and living together, and that type of integration and secondarily, probably was good for education. I really didn't know, but I'd like to for social reasons, and a group of people brought a lawsuit to enjoin the board of education from implementing this bussing program. So, a number of others of us, liberals, formed a group of people to intervene in the case on behalf of the board of education.

We didn't want the judge to think it's people against the board of education, but it was people against the board of education, but other people with the board of education, and I was the lawyer for them and this is known as the labor of love. I didn't do it to get a fee, and I made my oldest son one of the plaintiffs and I was the plaintiff and other people. We took people from different parts of the city, so we had taxpayers, we had geographical distribution, and so on. We intervened in the case and we litigated it, and we won. Then the board of education was allowed to do it. My son, my oldest son, was being bussed, you know, to school, helping bring about integration.

SH: Has your liberalism affected your children? Do they hold the same beliefs? Are they involved?

RB: Yes. Well, my daughter has been quite an activist. My sons are sympathetic to it but were never particularly active in it. There was a Black Panther trial in New Haven. My daughter was about eleven years old. I'm forgetting his name now, that was being tried for the murder of Alex Rackley, a member the Black Panthers, who was killed by other Black Panthers, because they thought he was an informant. I am getting a block on the name of the fellow that was being tried. He was being tried and there was a big rally on the Green in support of him and against racism, and so on, and so many people were scared. They actually left the town while that was going on. They left town for a few days, they were afraid of violence, and so on, and my daughter, who was eleven or twelve was there on the Green working with people who were providing some first aid and other kinds of help to people, who were getting sick, taking drugs, and that type of thing. So, she was quite an activist and has always been. Still is very interested in that kind of stuff, and then, this isn't civil rights, but there was a fellow who came out with a proposal to build an Olympic-sized rowing course in New Haven, which was going to use 102 acres of park land and we formed a committee against that and we successfully stopped it. We had some kind of a rally, my daughter, at that time, was about thirteen and she was playing the guitar and she composed the song and part of it was, "Can progress be some rare disease?" She's been very active and she's still interested in things like that. Of my first generation of children, she's become very religious. Not religious in an orthodox Jewish sense, but in fact, she belongs to the Jewish renewal movement. Most of the people in that movement, I believe, are secular Jews but she's more of a religious Jew than a secular Jew. Not keeping Kosher, or things of that nature. One of my sons, for years, was a fruitarian, my daughter was a vegetarian. That's the way they were and we're trying to instill some of this in our younger children.

GK: During the Vietnam War, your sons would have been late teens or their early twenties, what did they do during the war?

RB: One of my sons, my oldest son, went to Canada to avoid it. My other sons were not old enough to be in danger of being drafted. That's my recollection.

SH: Were you supportive of his decision to go to Canada?

RB: No, I wasn't. It's interesting because at that time, I had different feelings about it than I did a year or two later. I got involved in the peace movement later. But I grew up as a product of the Second World War and while I wasn't in favor of the Vietnam War, I was in favor of doing

what your country calls on you to do, and I considered what he was doing an unpatriotic thing. I don't feel that way now. But I did for a while. Then I changed my thinking.

SH: We've heard this from other World War II generation men.

RB: Because it was such a patriotic thing during the Second World War, very patriotic.

SH: Were you worried that you would be called back in for Korea?

RB: I think I was too old, if I remember correctly. I don't remember what year it was.

SH: 1950. Had you stayed in the reserves?

RB: You know, what it was, I remember now. I had gotten married in 1950. I was a veteran, I was married. A year later I had a son. I think I was eligible but I was way down on the list. So, I wasn't at risk, I don't think.

SH: We thank you. We have kept you much later than planned but it was a great interview.

RB: I'm glad I could do it.

SH: Thank you so much.

SI: This concludes the interview.

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Reviewed by Adam Pollak on 12/8/04

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/15/04

Reviewed by Richard Belford 8/1/05