RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JARKA BURIAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Jarka Burian on May 14, 1999, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Could you tell me a little bit about your father and mother?

Jarka Burian: Yes. … Both my mother and father came from what later came to be known as Czechoslovakia. It didn't become Czechoslovakia 'til 1918. Before that, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father was born in Brno, which, in German, was Brunn, and my mother was born in Prague, in a section called Vinohradz, which literally means, "The Grape Fields," or something like that. … Essentially, they came to the States separately, in different eras. My father came perhaps around 1908 or ['0]6, I'm never quite sure when he came, exactly, but, my mother came maybe about five years later. I think it was somewhere around 1911 or 12. … They each had his/her own life; each, in fact, was married. My mother had already married in Prague. My father went to Chicago, was there for a number of years, met another Czech woman, married. She died after, who knows? maybe ten years. I'm not sure, but, I know virtually nothing about his first wife. My mother, in fact, was married to an orchestra conductor, but they divorced, again, after eight to ten years. My mother and father met each other in New York City, I guess in the Czech district, where they had a Czech cultural, social community of some kind. That's where they met [in] about 1924. They married in '25 or ['2]6, I'm not sure, and I was born in '27. My father died in 1940 and he was considerably older than my mother. He was sixty-two years old. He was born in 1878. She was born in 1893. He died in 1940, so, when I was thirteen, my mother continued [on]. She didn't remarry, and I had no siblings, so, therefore, it was just, essentially, the two of us. I went on to high school, came here to Rutgers, and, … without going into that at the moment, she lived until 1964.

SI: Your father emigrated in 1906 or 1908, but, he was born in 1878.

JB: '78, yes.

SI: So, he lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

JB: He was in different parts of Europe. In fact, I think he was even in Denmark. He acquired a kind of trade of one kind or another. For instance, he acquired the craftsmanship of, what do you call it, the person who repairs books? I'm not sure. What are they?

SI: Bookbinder?

JB: Bookbinder, for one thing, a special skill, but, he also, maybe even more centrally, … became rather skilled in … textile, wool, worsted wool, manufacture, and he became a fairly highly skilled worker whose specialty was the finishing of wool and textile manufacture, although he also did bookbinding. In fact, you might say he moonlighted with the bookbinding, particularly in the Depression, while he kept his main job, in either Forstman-Hoffman, it was called, up north, or Botany Mills; it was all in the Passaic-Clifton area. What else I can tell you? My father was, … I guess, rather instrumental in my becoming interested in theater, which became a kind of strong thread in my life, because he did an awful lot of community theater, amateur acting, in the New York area. They had their own kind of theater groups, you know.

My mother, on the other hand, was more, what shall I say? proficient with music and particularly piano. She studied for, I don't know, X years, and then, she, to some extent, in that Depression era, particularly, taught piano, privately, you see. She would, now and then, give a recital, but, she was more a teacher, a private teacher.

SI: Did she raise you to play the piano?

JB: … She tried, but, I just really wasn't interested and she was permissive, at least to the point of not insisting on it. … No, we had one or two lessons, and I [learned the] very basic aspects of certain scales, and so on, but, … that was it. My heart wasn't in it.

SI: Where would she perform?

JB: It was in local places. I'm not sure, … maybe at the Music Society of Passaic, or something, and … she would [perform] both [on the] piano and vocally, but, … there was not too much of this, just, intermittently, some of this, maybe even in Long Island, particularly in that Czech cultural, social kind of organization, or more than one of them. Now and then, they would have an evening of music and she might be one of several performers, that sort of thing.

SI: Was your father involved in a specific genre of theater?

JB: Well, no, just as acting, and, as I became aware, much, much later, of a couple of the plays he did, they weren't only Czech plays. They were, for instance, some well known Russian things. Of course, they were translated into Czech. It was always … with the Czech language text, but, I don't know what else to say about [this], except, he did a lot of it, you know, … or poetry readings, particularly … [during] the '30s, leading up to Munich and all of that. There were, every now and then, meetings of patriotic Czechs, and he might be part of the program, reading some stirring Czech, national poetic statement or another. … What he did, in terms of me, was to create a puppet or marionette theater. You could send back to Czechoslovakia and they would ship you, according to a catalog, the scenery for these little theaters. In other words, … they would have had [a scene] in the 19th Century, you know, the painted canvas, except, this was miniaturized and on paper, and he would then apply the paper to cardboard, so that the things would be standing, and then, also, [we had] little figures that you then manipulated from above, and, somehow, that caught my imagination. It was … his presenting me with this and my response to it that, I guess, was fairly important in what … I went into later.

SI: Just out of curiosity, how did that lead into your career?

JB: Well, you see, my professional career was essentially academic: roughly speaking, half-and-half, teaching theater history, dramatic literature, *et cetera*, but, then, also, production work of directing plays in the university. As I was studying here, at Rutgers, Rutgers had no theater courses, as such; New Jersey College for Women did. They had an established theater/speech discipline or program. Well, I simply took a couple of the courses, but, the main thing was that I was performing in their plays there. They put on three full, fully staged, productions each year. All of this was headed by a rather remarkable professor over there, a woman named Jane Inge,

and the name of the theater was the Little Theater, on what is [now] Douglass Campus. The building still exists and I think the Mason Gross School now uses it as a rehearsal space of some kind, you know, but, in any case, in my own education, in my own going to college, … I was an English major here, at Rutgers. I started as an engineer, because it seemed a practical thing to do in those war years, but I just reached a kind of limit of being able to handle those things, like calculus and so on. I mean, … it just didn't do anything for me, exactly, and I simply, enormously, liked the idea of literature, and reading, and studying, and so, … I shifted to an English major, and, of course, now and then, some drama courses, although there weren't too many of those, but, it was essentially literature, but, over there, at NJC, three times a year, those productions, rehearsals. … I suppose I took two or three courses there; essentially one or two were acting, and then, one or two were directing. It was a kind of [basis for me]. Then, when I went on to Columbia for my Masters, I split my work, again, between dramatic literature and drama production, for a Masters, and, ultimately, after a break of one kind or another, I went on to Cornell for a Ph.D., and, although it was in the English Department, it was with an emphasis on dramatic literature, and my second field was in the Drama Department at Cornell, taking courses in … drama theory, and, again, history of theater, and so on, and, also, acting in at least three or four productions while I was there at Cornell, and, even at Columbia, doing some acting in the university productions.

SI: You credited your father with inspiring you in this way.

JB: Well, … that certainly, somehow, planted a kind of seed, I guess. … Who can say? Maybe even if he had never done that, I might have been attracted to it anyway, but, certainly, this helped things along, a kind of impetus, right.

SI: What was your household like while you were growing up? Was Czech spoken in your home?

JB: Yes, yes, indeed. I spoke, probably, really, nothing but Czech for about the first three years of my life, I would say, roughly, three, maybe four, I don't know, but, we were not living in a Czech community at all. This was in Clifton, New Jersey. I was born in Passaic, but, … before I was a year old, we moved to Clifton, and that was it, speaking virtually nothing but Czech, although I'm sure I was hearing English, here and there, because we were … not in a Czech community. I did go outside and play with kids, and that's where, I guess, I began to pick up English, but, my mother knew English. … She was, let's say, … more fully expressive, … and grammatical, and fluent in English, although my father, you know, was adequate, certainly enough to function and have the job, but, my mother simply had a fuller grasp of the language. So, she, in particular, began to read to me and all of that sort of thing, so that by the time I started school, I certainly knew enough to function, but, even after that, at home, it was still largely Czech, although, obviously, one began to mix English [and] Czech in the same sentence even, and so on.

SI: How did your bi-lingual upbringing affect your life once you entered grammar school?

JB: Well, I don't think it had any particular effect, because I do think, by the time I really started school, I knew English well enough. I don't think I stood out as, you know, having a kind of odd accent. At least, I have no memory of that. I think that really just wasn't a problem.

SI: Your family was the only Czech family in your neighborhood.

JB: Certainly, there was no other Czech [family] … within a square mile or more, but, we did know a Czech family that had a bakery in Clifton. Otherwise, the nearest Czech people were, I don't know how much you know about New Jersey geography, but, Ridgewood is not too far, maybe … ten, fifteen miles from Clifton. There, we knew a family very well, a Czech family, but, I really don't know if there was anybody else, except, then, in New York. By this time, my mother's sister had married and had a child. They lived somewhere in New York, and we saw them at least once a month, so, that was a kind of steady Czech input. … Now and then, … they would have these Czech social, cultural lecture things in New York, so, that kept the Czech language thing somewhat alive, as well, but, ask me something else. … Maybe I'm missing something.

SI: When did your aunt come over from Czechoslovakia?

JB: She came somewhat later than my mother, also met her husband-to-be in New York, you see, and, I'm not sure, married maybe a year or so after my mother.

SI: Did either your mother or father still have relatives in Czechoslovakia?

JB: Oh, yes. My mother's whole family was [there]. Her mother was still there. Her father had died long earlier, but, her mother was there, and she lived until about the mid-'30s, in Prague, and a brother of my mother's stayed in Prague. He may have traveled over Europe; he may even have visited the United States, but, … not during my years of awareness, but, no, he simply stayed there. On my father's side, a similar situation, his brother, with whom he was very close, stayed there with his family. One interesting thing, there's another brother of my father, [who], I guess, may have, … it's a little fuzzy, but, … come over just about the time my father did, a year earlier or a year later, and, for awhile, my father was in touch with him, but, then, this brother disappeared. I think … the last reference was, he was … maybe going to Texas or maybe going to South America, but, … that was it, nothing more. Otherwise, there was no other relative here, except this sister of my mother. My father, in fact, had not only a brother over there, in Brno, but a sister in Prague. So, in other words, my family, if you want to talk about family, … relatives, my relatives, [were] virtually entirely over there, with the exception of my parents and this one aunt and her family.

SI: Was there a lot of correspondence between the family in Czechoslovakia and the family in the United States?

JB: Oh, a good deal, not that I was doing it but my mother kept in touch, particularly; my father, too, with his family, to some extent. Now, since we're on this, … shift to another subject anytime you want to, but, I was born in '27. In '29, my mother and father went back there for a

visit, during the summer. They somehow managed to take their car over, in fact, and they drove through Germany, and then, to Prague, Brno, and so on, for the summer. So, that was one contact, going back there. Of course, I remember nothing of that, except some [little things].

SI: Did you go with them?

JB: Yes, oh, yes, yes. Then, in '37, I guess because there was at least the fear that there was going to be another war, if not the certainty, my parents decided, well, for a number of reasons, but, one of them being, perhaps, they wanted me to have some further, direct sense of things Czech, as well as, of course, my mother wanting to see her relatives. My father couldn't go at that time, because [of] the economics of things. I mean, they could swing my mother and my going, but, not [him]. Also, in the meantime, in the Depression era, that sister of my mother, and her husband and their daughter, went back, because they had a better chance of a livelihood there than here, because [of] the mass unemployment, and so on, and so on. So, they had gone back around 1933, and so, my mother, of course, wanted to see her sister. In the meantime, my mother's mother had died, but, at least that one other sister's family was there. So, my mother and I, in the Summer of '37, went by a Polish boat, by the way, … in fact, it was [its] … maiden voyage, virtually, called the *Pilsudski*, [which] was a twin ship of the *Batory*, referring to significant Polish people, and it landed in Gdynia, I believe, up in northern Poland. We took the train down to Czechoslovakia, first to Brno, where my father's folks were, and we stayed with them for, who knows? a week. Then, to Prague, where we stayed, really, most of the summer, not so much in Prague, but, at this kind of summer place, but, nothing fancy, a kind of summer community, where one would rent a room, or a room-and-a-half, if you had a bigger family. … That's where my [mother's] sister, and her husband and their daughter, spent every summer, and so we also went there for what must have been six to eight weeks, just a lovely place on a small river, and you had your little bathing cabins, you know. It was a small, small town, a village practically, but, it had its restaurant and other few things, so, it was a very pleasant summer, and we also did some traveling and [saw] some historic sites. I was ten, but, I still remember lots … of that. Then, my third contact, which gets into another era, in the military; without going [there], let me just stick with this Czech connection.

SI: We can move back and forth.

JB: Well, the next time I was there was in 1947, as a US Army soldier on leave from Germany. In other words, I was [in] what came to be known as the Army of Occupation. I had enlisted. I'd started Rutgers in '44, was here for a year-and-a-half, and, in March of '46, enlisted for eighteen months. You could do it, at that time, … for twenty-four months, whatever, but [I chose] eighteen months, and, … after basic training and a somewhat advanced training in a certain area, I was sent overseas, with many others, and, finally, stationed in Frankfurt. … The larger administrative unit was the Judge Advocate General's Department, but, it was the Machine Records Unit; in other words, the earliest IBM machines, keeping all the records of the troops, wherever, the punched card system. So, I became trained at working these things and in Frankfurt was the headquarters of the whole damn US European military operations, at the time. Anyway, I was on duty there from December '46 'til August '47, and, during those six months or so, or eight months, I took two leaves to Prague. So, in March of '47, I went to Prague and saw

who was to be seen, these relatives, both in Prague and Brno; saw some theater for the first time. I, even in '37, remember going to the theater with my mother, … in Prague, but, in '47, I really could appreciate [it] somewhat more, and I saw some, historically, very important productions. You know, in retrospect, one can look back, because there were some people who became really important theater directors and designers, and I just happened [to see them], without knowing who they were, but, going to several productions and seeing the work of these people, I remember being very impressed, without fully understanding it. Anyway, I went for about a week or ten days in March and for about the same time in June of '47. So, I had built up this fairly definite, linguistic, cultural, whatever, association.

SI: Were you still fairly fluent in the language?

JB: Yes, reasonably enough, conversation. I never studied the language formally, and, therefore, beyond a certain elementary level, … if somebody were looking at, particularly, what I wrote, there would be all kinds of mistakes of grammar. … It's a more complex language than English. It's got many more cases and more use of gender in the structure of words, but, my hearing, understanding of it, and speaking it, is still pretty good, within, you know, its limitations, … and I can read it, not as well as I can hear and understand it, but, still well enough, and … my weakest aspect is the writing of it. … In any case, I had retained enough of it, … right from my earliest years, enough of it stayed with me, so that I could, in effect, [communicate]. You know, progressively, after many years [of] coming back to it, even after '47, really, it became one of the real important elements in my scholarly activity, once … I was already teaching. I drew on that knowledge of the language to begin to go back and really read, and study about, and, eventually, do research on modern Czech theater, which led to a number of publications, and so on, and so on, … while I was in my active career of teaching.

SI: This was while you were a professor at SUNY, correct?

JB: … Well, yes. I left Cornell; I was at Cornell [for] four years, got the Ph.D., and there were one or two, a few, job possibilities, but, things were very tight, even at that time. You know, these things fluctuate. At that time, it was kind of tight and there was an opening at SUNY-Albany. I almost went to a smaller college, Washington and Jefferson, I think it's outside Pittsburgh, if I'm not mistaken, but, then, in the middle of that Summer of '55, I somehow got a response to, what? I had written a letter, put in an application to SUNY-Albany, and they wanted me to go for an interview. Actually, that summer, we were in a summer theater, my wife and I, acting, outside Pittsburgh. So, they wanted me to go to New York and have an interview with the dean, somebody like that, which I did. I took a "red-eye flight," … because we were performing. After a performance, I flew into New York, the next morning, met the dean, flew back, and performed that night, and that led to an offer from SUNY-Albany in, again, the Department of English, and we decided [that] the location was good, brought us back near to New York, and so on, and so on. … We've been in Albany since 1955, although I have not been there constantly. I was a guest professor in one place, and took off a year here, a year there, and so on, for research.

SI: Before we return to your childhood, I would like to ask, since you were in Czechoslovakia in 1937 and 1947, just before the Munich Crisis and the Communist takeover, respectively, during each visit, did you have any sense of what was in store for the nation?

JB: In '37, no. At the age of ten, I, at least, was not aware of this German threat. I mean, there were vague references, you know, … generally negative, about Germany, but, I wasn't tuned in on them, really, no, but, in '47, the Communist potential was being referred to, and I could, more or less, absorb some of that, or I understood some of that, but, very superficially. In other words, I was not a student of history or political science and so on. … During the whole war, the alliance between the United States and Russia, Soviet Union, they were all together in this fight against Hitler, so, the alarm about Communism was almost a bit startling, in fact, to me. When I was in the Army in '47, in Germany, … there was a daily, English-language Army newspaper, and I remember reading in it about some very significant Congressional action, or bill, or something, which, in effect, if it did not outlaw the Communist Party, at least made some strong provision that restricted the Communist Party, as such, in some important way. … I remember … feeling, "Well, how can they do this? How, in America, can you say you will not, you know, tolerate [this]?" … or it may have been, simply, that if you were a Communist, you could not have a job in the government. I'm not sure what it was back there, but, so, to that extent, the whole Communist thing, at least I had a certain awareness of it, that way. … In Czechoslovakia, some of these relatives and people I met through them would be discussing this sort of thing and … what I absorbed of it was simply that, "God forbid that we go Communist." That was what I was getting from the people I was meeting and it's not that we were talking about this, you know, for hours, because, again, … really, my interest wasn't in that. I was naive and ignorant about many aspects of this, but, what I remember … were some of these discussions. … Although … the odd person might say, "Well, maybe it's a good thing, you know," for the most part, the people I was in contact with were making jokes about the Communists being more ignorant, and primitive, and all of that sort of thing, and that was about the extent of it.

SI: Was this the opinion of the artistic community?

JB: No, ... it was more the opinion coming from the middle and upper-middle class. I didn't really have any particular, direct contact with people in the theater. …

SI: At that time, you were only participating in the theater as a spectator.

JB: Yes, I simply went there and took in what I saw on the stage, but, did not, at that point, really meet these people.

SI: When you were visiting Czechoslovakia while on leave, did you stay with your relatives in Prague and Brno?

JB: Yes, I always lived [with them]. … It was always with the relatives. For instance, … you see, by '47, it's interesting that, I remember, the sister of my mother, with the husband and the daughter, the mother and daughter came back here in '46, as I was in the Army, and she, the daughter, in fact, went to NJC. My mother helped, somehow, … getting the letters to the right

place and so on, before they came, so that when she came, she already knew she was going to be a student at NJC. … In fact, I think, … she got sophomore placement, because, … you know, over there, their equivalent of high school is really an extra year more than ours, and they gave her credit for the freshman level, and so, she was there from '46 to '49. She graduated the same year I did, because, after I came back, I was originally Class of '48, because I entered in '44, but, then, a year-and-a-half in the Army, and so on, and so on; finally, I graduated in June of '49, as she did. So, in 1947, I stayed in Prague with the father, … my uncle, in other words. He had a small but decent enough little place. He was in business, export, again, textiles, really, but, it was more … the selling of it and so on. So, I stayed with him both times, and, when I went to Brno, briefly, to visit my father's people, of course, I stayed with them. …

SI: Turning back to your childhood, how would you describe your grade school experience in Clifton?

JB: Yes. It's hard to know … what to focus on, really.

SI: Even then, were you particularly interested in English and literature?

JB: I suppose more so, although, I was reasonably good in most of the things we were being taught, not exactly top of the class, necessarily, but, no problems with it, other than maybe having to do an extra half-hour of homework now and then, and so on. … I mean, as I look back on it, … it simply was … all very conventional, traditional. You had your class 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, and so on, and so on. We changed; we moved from one place in Clifton to another, and that meant changing schools. You see, when I was a child, my father was doing quite well. As I remember it, he was making five thousand dollars a year, which was considered quite good, and so, he had his own house. They owned a house. Of course, it was mortgaged, but, they owned this house in Clifton, [in] a nice, residential part, but, that was '26, '27, '28, '29, and, "Boom." Then, the stock market crashed, and it didn't instantly affect everybody, but, within about two years or so, my father was let go. You see, … my mother's sister and her husband [went through the] same, similar situation, and they went back to Czechoslovakia, but, that, I don't think, was ever a real issue for us. My mother and father, for whatever reason, were going to stay here. So, there were a couple of very rough years. My father was looking for any kind of work and, eventually, the people who owned the mortgage, foreclosed. So, we had to move. We moved … twice, for a year, … just about a year, to one place in Clifton, a large flat, but, kind of cold, and not very cheerful, and then, we moved to a house where we were for, I don't know, God knows, twenty or more years, in another section, still a nice section, and it was the second floor of a two-family house, and so, all right, those were the living accommodations. Well, I changed schools from where I started, Public School 10 in Clifton, and, as I say, it was pretty routine, conventional. I was interested in it. I had nothing against going to school. I kind of liked it, but I suppose my main energies went into playing with my fellow students, you know. After school, it was either football, touch football, or improvised baseball in the spring, and then, each summer, this is socio-economically interesting, even in that Depression, you see. When they were doing well, in those mid-'20s and when I was an infant, they had already bought … two lots of land up near, very close to, Greenwood Lake. Do you know where Greenwood Lake is? Greenwood Lake is that lake that stretches from the New Jersey over to the New York side of the border.

SI: Oh, yes.

JB: Right in the middle of that straight line border, there is a four-mile long lake, it's Greenwood Lake, and they bought, at that time, [two plots] in a new development. They were the first people to buy anything there, on the creek that fed into the lake, and my father bought a, what do you call it? a kind of modular garage, Sears Roebuck, and laid his own foundation, and put this garage on top of the foundation, and that became the core of this bungalow, you know. Then, he added a porch in the front, and added a porch in the back, and a little side kitchen, and a teensy, little porch, where we ate our meals. And so, they had this place, and I was two months old when they brought me there for the first time, you know, and spent three or four months, the whole summer, there, and every summer. Then, came the Depression, and they, somehow, I guess they had bought it outright, there wasn't a mortgage. … The curious, interesting thing, because they weren't the only ones, this whole, little, what became a four-street colony of bungalows, I don't think any of them, at the time, were year-round, strictly for the summer, working people, proletarians, really. I don't think there were any shopkeepers. I think they were all working people of one kind or another from Passaic County, basically, I think. … Right through the Depression, every summer, I had this wonderful outdoor [experience], playing with another bunch of kids, of course, that I didn't go to school with. Nobody there was from Clifton, that I knew, or went to school with, anyway. There might have been one or two people from Clifton, but, [from] a different area and a different school. … Well, then, I suppose what we were talking about was … my main interest; I loved to read, early, just on my own, far beyond. It wasn't particularly high class, you know. I wasn't picking up Shakespeare and reading it. I was reading pretty junky stuff, when you come down to it. I loved the Robin Hood stories, I remember that. That much, I remember. What else? I remember becoming almost addicted to reading pulp fiction, but, of a special kind, of World War I aviation, pulp fiction. You know, there was *Daredevil Aces*, a monthly, with about five short stories in it, about various aspects of these aces, and [the] Germans, and the French, and the Americans, and so on. So, I became almost a little expert on World War I vintage aircraft, in a sense, 'cause they had these little drawings, you could trace them, you know, and so on. And that reading, I mean, I just ate that kind of stuff up. By the time I got to high school, my tastes had risen up to some Sinclair Lewis novels and Sherlock Holmes. I read every single Sherlock Holmes story and, what else? There was a very witty, or at least he seemed comic and witty, English writer P.G. Wodehouse. … My family was very much into reading, even though neither my mother or father had a university degree. They simply were big readers. My father loved reading westerns and my mother [read] lots and lots of things. …

SI: You mentioned that you were fascinated by aviation. Did you ever pursue that interest in other ways, such as going to the airport?

JB: No, but, incidentally, … my father, for some reason, he was … more the kind of adventurous spirit, at least to some extent, and, right about the time [that] Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, right in that era, my father decided he wanted to learn how to fly. Now, he would have been … almost fifty years old at the time, but, he decided to take flying lessons, and he did take flying lessons, from a man, the name may not mean anything to you, but, … who almost flew the Atlantic first,

[who] was named Chamberlain, and, somehow, it didn't work, but, he was giving lessons, and my father took lessons. … He wanted to take me up as well, but, my mother wouldn't allow it. So, at least I got as close as his putting me in a little flying uniform of some kind, [with] goggles, and he, at least, sat me on the wing, and I have a photograph of that, but, … I never pursued it beyond that, actively. In fact, … it took me a long time to really get over a really neurotic fear of flying, … you know, that sense of, "Good God, I don't know what I'm doing up here," you know. "Why am I in this thing?" but, I've gotten a little better with that.

SI: You mentioned that your father was very adventurous. He actually went to France to fight during World War I.

JB: Oh, well, that's very true. You see, during the First World War, there were, I guess, thousands of very patriotic Czechs here, particularly in the Mid-West, [and in] New York, too, but, what they did, at least some of them, in fact, from Chicago, from New York, they somehow formed these voluntary groups that called themselves the "Legionnaires," the "Czech Legion," and they were doing that in Europe, too. In other words, if Czechs in Italy, Czechs in France, formed units, small units, … [they] somehow got, what's the word? integrated into the Allied forces. So, he headed one of the contingents of, who knows how many? twenty or thirty people, from New York. They, somehow, got uniforms, and, because they were serving in France, they were, essentially, French uniforms, which he later had around the house, and, every now and then, wore, when … there was a kind of reunion or patriotic event. He went over to France. I don't know that he saw any combat, but, he did some service in France during the war. Again, I really don't know whether it was for one year. Of course, this was after America got into the war, so, it would have been somewhere in 1917, '18. So, that was that, and he was very proud of that, and joined the American Legion, later, even though only technically, … he was an American citizen, but, was not in the US Army. In any case, he got into this voluntary service, and, I remember, … when they were giving pensions to the soldiers of the First World War, he looked into it, but, was not eligible, you see, because it was not really part of the US Army. But, in any case, … he joined the American Legion. He made a point of my becoming a junior member of the American Legion. I went, maybe, six or ten times to these little marching drill things and so on, at a certain period in my life.

SI: I noticed that you used the word "proletarian" to describe the people that lived in your Greenwood Lakes neighborhood. It sounds as if your father had a rather liberal outlook on life. Is this an accurate assessment?

JB: Well, I'm not sure what you mean.

SI: Was your father interested in or involved with any unions or the labor movement?

JB: That's an interesting thing. You know, … the best that I could recollect would be that my father probably had mixed feelings about unions. I think there was something about him, enough of a, call it an individualist attitude or spirit, that, perhaps, didn't like the idea of becoming part of a union, of being told what you can do and can't do. … I do vaguely remember that kind of talk, maybe, but, I don't remember it too sharply. By the same token, … I guess he probably was

in one of the unions, probably had to be, and I'm sure he, perhaps, appreciated some of the advantages of it, but, it's not something that I grew up sort of oriented to this, one way or another. It somehow didn't penetrate to me. …

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

JB: [Regarding my father's attitude towards Communism]: Leading up to Munich, whereas the English and French completely tossed the Czechs on the sacrificial altar, the Soviets strongly supported the Czech cause. So, that might have contributed to his having a kind of, maybe, positive attitude, but, … I absolutely don't recall his overtly saying that he thought Communism was either a good thing or not. I remember virtually nothing about his saying anything about the Communists. It was all the Germans, negatively, Hitler and all that. That was clear, that was absolutely clear, but, as far as the Russian or Communist thing, I don't know.

SI: You were in high school for most of the war.

JB: 1940 to '44, 1940 to '44, yes.

SI: What was your high school experience like?

JB: Well, it was primarily academic. It was, more or less, a continuation of grammar school, except that I became more overtly interested in literature, let's say, although, again, I enjoyed most of the courses, science, math as well. Once I felt I got over the hump with certain things in algebra, geometry, and so on, then, I kind of enjoyed it and I was good enough at it to do well in those areas. As far as extracurricular activities, it wasn't until, maybe, my third year that I really became aware that there was a drama club, so, I did get involved with that. I was in a couple of one act plays and so on, but, again, as far as my free time went, it was either sitting at home, reading, and thoroughly enjoying it, or being out, again, just kicking a football around, or playing touch football, or sandlot baseball, and so on. I did go as far as to go out for the cross-country team in high school, and I was accepted as being a member of the cross-country team, but, [I] wasn't very good--good enough to be able to run the course, whatever it was, but, I don't think I ever placed in the first three, not even the first five, maybe, but, at least I was, … you know, on the team. At that time, they gave you your numbers. If you were on the team in 1942, you got your, I'm not sure, maroon or gray numbers, "1942." I was going to do it in my senior year, but, then, either they didn't have the team or I became involved in other things, so, … my sports experience was only that. Somehow, in that final year, particularly, … I don't know what effect, really, it had, ultimately, but, my father died in my very first semester of high school, and, I mean, … it was not traumatic, you know; it didn't throw me or what will you. … In a sense, I guess, speaking for myself, emotionally, intellectually, my development was such that I felt the loss, but, I don't know whether I stifled it or whatever. In other words, … it did not seem to have any enormous effect, really, on me. My mother was there and very supportive and all of that sort of thing. You know, … we're going as if this was a psycho-analysis, talking on a couch to somebody, but, … maybe in another session if you want, [laughter] but, … just talking on an existential level, my high school was quite normal, that I can remember. Looked at from some other points of view, today, you might say, well, it was really abnormal. I mean, for instance, I

don't think there was a single black family living in Clifton, or at least having its own house in Clifton. There might have been a few renting. In my high school, among the high school students, it was a rare phenomenon to have a black student, although there was one particular black student with whom I became very close, who was a very unusual, influential person. I'll tell you about that shortly, but, you know, that was simply one aspect of it. Otherwise, it was a kind of ordinary high school. In this Littleton context, [Dr. Burian is referring to the 1999 school shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado], of course, you know, … it would have been inconceivable. I mean, something like that simply was something that would never have happened. There were all kinds of reasons for that, I guess. First of all, there wasn't the kind of bullying that, … presumably, was going on in Littleton. Sure, there were the jocks, and they … were, in a sense, respected and looked up [to], but they didn't force themselves [on everyone], and there were odd kids, too, to a certain degree, but, not odd to the point that anybody would bother harassing them for being odd. It was, I suppose, a more homogenous bunch of people. … I mean, some of them might have come from homes whose families, in terms of income, might have been well off, but certainly nothing [extravagant]. It was, again, fairly a kind of norm there. We shared; in other words, we shared an upbringing and a society. … We all came from the same, similar sort of situation. …. That's, in retrospect, what I recall. High school, to shift to another thing entirely, is where … my interest in Shakespeare started. … I was ready to be affected by it, and I remember thinking, finally, "This is really great stuff," you know, and combined with my kind of interest in acting and so on, … one thing fed into the other, so that, really, … I don't think I was known for anything until the senior year. … I was never into student government. I simply wanted to go home and play ball or read. That was it. … Where I grew up, we were in a stable residence, a second floor flat, as I was telling you, a stone's throw from the grammar school, in terms of, you might say, social [groups], there were the "kids on the block." There were the kids on the block, maybe six to eight of them, and then, you also sort of played with the kids on the next block or two, but, your world … maybe consisted of these five city blocks. Elsewhere, there was another kind of, what? tribe here, or there, and so on, you know. In high school, of course, you then started … to mix here, but, I, … maybe this is the connection, … would always go back to my own, as everyone did. Everyone went back to his own neighborhood and did whatever they did, but, in the senior year, partly because of that drama club and partly because of my heightened interest in reading, and literature, and all that, I then became, … I don't know how or why, … the literary editor of the yearbook, and that led to some interesting … contacts, and I had my very first date in high school in my first semester of my senior year. That was another thing, I think, at the time. Of course, kids were dating and they were dancing. I never learned to dance right and that was it. I just wasn't that interested. … Of course, girls were girls, but, who cared, you know, but, … I was invited to a girls' high school event. They called it the Hi Y, it had something to do with the YWCA, … and the girls were supposed to invite the boys. Well, this one young woman invited me, and, of course, it was all a little bit awkward and so on, but, anyway, I was coming out a little and getting into these other activities, which culminated, because we wanted to raise a little money, (although I think the main reason is, we just sort of enjoyed the idea of it,) we were going to put on a high school kind of variety/review show, which we did, somehow, and I was one of the key people. A very good friend of mine, who was the editor of the whole yearbook, and this black fellow, who was maybe a year or two older, but, was very sophisticated, in terms of his family contacts with music and even theater in New York, but, he was also a very direct guy. I mean, there wasn't anything artsy

about him at all, but, … he simply had had exposure to show business, among other things, and he [was] also into writing. He already had his own column … in the local newspaper. He wasn't a very good student, at least academically, because he would cut classes and this and that. … He was also in sports, a very sort of sophisticated [man]; he was one of the assistant managers of the football team and the baseball team. Anyway, he, I, and about two other people organized this show. You had the satiric skits of this kind and that kind, and a couple of people sang, and this and that, and I and this editor of the whole yearbook, not, [the] black [student], did a scene from *Macbeth*, which we were studying as seniors. I played Macbeth and he played Lady Macbeth. So, in other words, … it wasn't serious, but, neither … were we completely making a mockery of it. I played it as pretty straight melodrama, you see, and he, however, took it more broadly. Anyway, that was a kind of culminating, psychological, coming of age sort of thing, in its own small way, in high school. So, I don't know what else I can tell you about high school. [I have] some very … close associations, positive feelings, about many people there. In other words, I never got into a situation of being part of a clique that was somehow at odds with another clique and so on; it was all … quite positive, coming together, in a sense; of course, again, focused on sports to a great extent. I mean, we just went to every football game and to, at least, a lot of basketball, and at least some baseball, but, that was also part of the mix.

SI: Why did you decide to come to Rutgers?

JB: I was, again, very naïve about the whole idea of going on to college. I never really thought about it until, maybe, the senior year. … I had the idea, as I remember it, that … maybe the idea of being an accountant wouldn't be bad, because I was pretty good with math, and arithmetic, and so on. At the same time I was really getting very interested in literature, and Shakespeare, and so on, and then, there was the war and the fact of facing the prospect of having to earn a living. Of course, just in passing, I had various part-time jobs in high school, not anything systematic. In other words, it wasn't like going every day after school and working at wherever. … I mean, I did some gardening work, not as an expert, but, just doing what they told me to. My mother, I must say, encouraged me to get a job in my last high school summer, that is, before my senior year. … After I got the job, she, at some point, told me why she wanted [me to get it]. It was in a factory, in a factory like the kind of factory my father worked in, but there it was a regular job. I was on the shift from three in the afternoon to eleven at night and she felt, I guess, it would be good if I had the exposure to that, not only the idea of being a regular job [holder] and getting at least some money from it, but, the idea to get a sense of what that life is like, I suppose, maybe to encourage me to try to do something that would result in something better than that. So, anyway, that summer, it's about the one real job I had during high school, other than these incidental little things. Maybe for six weeks or so, five days a week, I rode the bike back and forth, and maybe it was a mile from where I lived or so, and, of course, to some extent, I liked it, because I could use my salary to see major league baseball. … By this time, I'd really become excited about baseball, major league, going to see major league baseball. I guess, … my first major league game, in the Polo Grounds, I saw when I was fourteen, the spring after my father died, my very first. Now and then, I'd also go to a college football game. I got caught up in that idea or image, not really college … academically, you know, studying, but, "Gee, it must be fun to be in college, and there's the football." … So, when it came to my senior year and the idea of college, I really didn't have much of a clue. It wasn't the way it is these days and it

wasn't, I don't think, [that way] for many of the kids. It was still unusual, I think, to go to college. It really was still rather unusual. Most kids went directly to work, or else, maybe, went to a technical school or a business school, maybe. Some went to college, but, it was the exception, and I remember a student, who was a year ahead of me, having gone to, I think, Wesleyan, and, somehow, maybe because he was in the drama club and I knew him slightly, … he was more or less [saying to me], "Why don't you apply to Wesleyan? It's nice, it's fine," and so on, and I reacted to this. I'm not sure I applied to Wesleyan, but, I did apply to Rutgers, as a state school, because the idea of a scholarship seemed attainable. At least I took the tests that were involved in it, and what really, of course, decided it was, I'm not even sure about that Wesleyan thing, it's … completely dim in my mind, but, I do remember getting this very nice letter from some New Jersey Congressman saying, "Congratulations, you have been awarded a State Scholarship," and so on, and so, I felt pretty good about that, and so, … that's really why I came here, when you come right down to it. I mean, had I had a kind of wide open choice, I would have gone to Yale, you see, because Yale was, good grief, … all-Americans in the '30s; they had Larry Kelley, Clint Frank, two all-Americans [in] the same year, you know, that's when I was most receptive to that sort of thing. So, Yale, to me, had a kind of mystique about it. But, I came here, and then, we enter this phase of what Rutgers was like. First of all, … if you haven't heard this before, (I'm sure many other people [are] talking of this time), this accelerated wartime program and the way it was set up. First of all, the Army was here, as students, the ASTP, I think it was, or they called them ASTRP, the "Ass Traps," and they had their own separate existence, their own dorms, their own classes; we never mixed, really, except in some sports activity. … Otherwise, I think there were a grand total of, I would say, less than three hundred students here, and I entered in the Summer of 1944. There was a quarter system, and, if you really were here four quarters of the year, I think you could finish in maybe even two-and-a-half years, certainly in three years, and there wasn't any other option. I mean, you couldn't choose a semester option. You were taking about five courses, meeting two or three times a week, including required gym, including required ROTC, and then, about four, if not five, academic courses, … because I came as an engineer, I was taking, I still remember, English comp, American history, college math, physics, and chemistry, and ROTC, and so on. … It, I think, must have been one of the hottest summers on record, because I remember the dorm room in Winants Hall; I was in Winants Hall, had my own room, a nice, large room, with … a little cubbyhole addition to it, in fact, originally designed, I guess, for two … students, but, we were so few of us here that I had that whole space to myself. Now, some students had roommates, and they had a much bigger room, but, I think most of us had our own single rooms. That first year, Ford Hall was, I think, strictly for the Army college guys. Winants, I think, was the only non-Army dorm, really. I'm not sure if, up here, [the Bishop House area], there might have been a dorm, but, I think Winants was it. Otherwise, students commuted or lived in fraternities, which is a whole other thing, fraternities, but, anyway, that summer was terrifically hot. [I remember] sitting in my room with the sweat pouring off my arm, making the paper wet, and, in class, lectures, the same thing. Now, obviously, not every day was quite like that, but, that summer was rough, and that was it, nothing … else. I don't remember. Well, that summer, didn't we have a kind of track activity? Maybe we did, on a kind of semi-organized basis. I know, the following fall and winter, I got on the swimming team, but, it was also partial, fragmentary. It was wartime, but, … still, I suppose, there were schedules. There was even a football schedule. I think there were three or four

games, maybe, Lafayette, Lehigh, and maybe that was it. Maybe they played these Army fellows, too.

SI: Did they put any of the ASTP guys on the football team?

JB: … Well, not to my knowledge. What I meant before was that you might compete against them. Now, I don't remember even doing that, particularly, but, as far as mixing them, … that I have absolutely no sense of. So, that first year was four quarters in a row, and … the first two quarters, I was strictly in the engineering curriculum, in which, other than the math, science, physics material, you had liberal arts courses of English comp or lit and history or political science. So, I was taking that, but, at the end of the second quarter of this, that's when I reached my limit, when we were beginning to move into analytic geometry, and … I never quite tuned in on that. I just didn't know what was going on. So, that's when I bit the bullet, persuaded my mother that … my heart wasn't in this, but, if I could really study the English, and then, the other things, like philosophy and this and that, [I would do well]. So, I did and, from then on, I was an English major. In the meantime, I had also gotten involved in the Little Theater over at NJC, that Fall of '44, and was in, as I say, … the three plays they always did each year. I was always in three of them … during the whole time. So, that became the kind of mix, of the dorm life, the occasional sports activity, on a very low key basis, shifting majors, getting involved in the theater up there, coming into the spring, when there was a somewhat more fully organized track team that I went out for, and became a member of, and managed to earn enough points for my letter, actually, varsity letter, and I felt very good about that. I did not do as much … that previous winter with the swimming. You know, I was barely into it. I had swam from infancy, … but, never in any trained way. I had to be taught the real technique of swimming freestyle, and the timing, and all of that. So, I … was on the team, you see, but, again, simply got my numerals, but, that spring, I did get my letter for track. Also, what I'll never forget, of course, that spring, after one kind of workout, walking home and hearing the news that Roosevelt had [died], which still shakes me up, very funny. He was such … a figure.

SI: How did his presidency affect you?

JB: Well, you know, … he was, somehow, always there, as a figure that you could look up to and respect, whether rightly or wrongly. If you're analytically looking back, it's clear, let's say, he had his weaknesses and even, maybe, shady legislation, who knows? but, as far as you can imagine a president being a positive authority, leadership, impressive force, it was Roosevelt, and we never knew that he had this crippling [disease]. I mean, I never knew it. I knew he had a cane and so on, but, this whole thing of braces on his legs [was unknown]. So, you know, his death was quite a blow. Also, though, really, at the same time, it was also a wonderful time, because we had just won the war, the war in Europe, V-E Day; [they were] very close to each other, really. He died, I think, before V-E Day, before, wasn't it? and who knew who Truman was? I mean, you vaguely knew there was a Senator, previously, Truman, named the Vice-President, but, that was it, and I remember, then, one of the few times I cut classes. I mean, I hardly, rarely, ever cut a class, simply because that was not my style, but, I do remember cutting, maybe, one or two classes to go to New York and see the return of the [soldiers], at least one of the big parades of Eisenhower, you know, down in Times Square and so on. I thought, "Well, I

had to see this," so, I did. As one thinks about it, the recollections of the Spring of '45, those events, and even on a … completely trivial level, it was also my first date in college. I asked the girl who had asked me in high school to that initial thing. In the meantime, I had had a date or two or three with some other high school girls and, … I mean, it was all, shall I say, compared to today's terms, it was, you know, [laughter] naïve and innocent, but, anyway, … I also invited her to come down for a weekend. … Just to touch on the fraternity business, I had encouragement from two, three, maybe even four fraternities, "Come on, why don't you pledge? Are you interested in pledging?" I, somehow, maybe because of the reading I had done, certain models, role patterns, somehow, being in a fraternity just somehow didn't attract me. I preferred being on my own, to that extent, being an individual, although I didn't go around proclaiming, "I'm an individual," but, something about that appealed to me. I liked the guys in the fraternity, I went to some of their functions and all of that, but, I never felt drawn to it, really, to become a member, but, … there was a good feeling between [us]. There wasn't any hostility, so that this girl, when she came for that weekend, … was able to stay at one of the fraternities. … She stayed there a night or two; there was a big dance the first night. The next day, in fact, being on the track team, I had to go to Lafayette, we had a meet with Lafayette, but, came back, and … there was a dance, I guess, at the fraternity, that's right. Going out to eat somewhere and so on. This was a major kind of event of that kind in my whole college career. I mean, that was it, and there was an interesting little angle to that, though, because, at that time, we're talking about black students, Afro-Americans and so on; in high school, there was that one situation, and that fellow is still alive, by the way. … He was very successful in an advertising agency, quite a high position, vice-president and so on. Anyway, he's retired, he's living in Philadelphia, I'm still in touch with him, I'm glad to say, but, here, at Rutgers, there were maybe three or four blacks at the time, and, one of them, I think he came, not that summer, the first summer, but, I think that fall. His name was Carl Thomas, Carl Allen Thomas, and he was the nephew of Paul Robeson, but, not at all like Paul Robeson, in the sense of being an athlete and so on, but, he was the nephew of Paul Robeson. I think he was the son of Paul Robeson's sister and, of course, [was] very friendly with Paul. … In any case, this was a very sophisticated man, eccentric, colorful, slightly strange even, … a good enough student, but, … very worldly, in terms of the world of art, and so on. You might say it was, to a large extent, surface, but, … not really completely. In fact, it was through Carl that I had a brief face-to-face meeting with Paul Robeson himself. Carl and I went to a matinee performance of Robeson's *Othello* on Broadway—either in 1945 or perhaps 1947—and, after the performance, were able to go backstage, where I had the enormous pleasure of shaking the great man's hand and exchanging a few remarks with him. His sheer size and his great voice were impressive, and he was genuinely gracious to me, a stripling admirer. … I also recall, definitely in the Spring of '45, a Shakespeare production in New York, *The Tempest* on Broadway, in it, playing the two clowns, were these two Czechs who emigrated in '39; … I mean, after Munich, October, September, October of '38. They had their own theater in Prague, fantastically successful, satiric, original, musical productions that they wrote, played the leads in, and organized. They were enormously successful in Prague from 1927 to '38, but, their number was up, because they had been very satirical about Germany and Hitler and so on. So, they left and came to New York, and I remember seeing them in January of '39 in New York with my parents, because … these were big celebrities, especially for the Czechs, and they came to New York their very first week or two, and they put on a kind of improvised performance, just the two of them, in the Czech district of New York. … Of course, we went to see them and I still

remember, even though I was only, what? twelve or so. Well, they stayed in the States and they managed to do some work. They even went out to Hollywood, but, nothing clicked there. They played mainly for Czech audiences in Cleveland, New York, wherever else, but, they managed, by '45, to have learned enough English and to have enough talent, particularly comedic, to be hired by this full-fledged Margaret Webster production of *The Tempest* to play the two clowns. So, in the Spring of '45, this was going on and I remember getting to see it. It's funny … how I'm piecing it together. How did I manage to get a free ticket for it? Because this Afro-American black fellow from high school that I was mentioning, Leslie Nash, was very close to the black actor named Canada Lee. That may not mean [anything to you], but, he was a talented, strong actor. He was also a boxer and a professional, good boxer, but, he was a very good actor, and he played the role [of], I don't know, do you know what *The Tempest* is?

SI: I have never seen the play.

JB: Well, Caliban is a kind of half-human, half-animal creation by Shakespeare in that play, and Canada Lee played that role, and because I knew this black student, who knew Canada Lee, I got a free ticket to go see it, and in this play were these two Czechs, you see. So, that was quite an [experience]. Really, that Spring of '45, as I think back on it, you know, some of these things, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, this …

SI: … Great intellectual time?

JB: Anyway, … by the way, just these two Czechs, once the war was really over, they went back to Czechoslovakia, but, … they couldn't just revive this theater they had, but, that's a whole other story. So, where are we? in '45. …

SI: Could you tell me about how you came to join the Army?

JB: All right. I joined the Army … at that [point], not before then, because there was only the draft, but, at a certain point, I guess in '45, somewhere in late '45, they made it possible to enlist for a fixed period. As I say, I think it was eighteen months, two years, or even three years, and you could choose Navy, Army, whatever you wanted. I deliberately did this because I liked the idea of being able to know when I'd be out. Also, there was at least talk about the GI Bill.

SI: Yes.

JB: So, that seemed very attractive. So, rather than stick around and maybe get deferred because I'm in school, but, then, … get drafted and not know how [long I would be in], because, when you were drafted, there was nothing saying, "Okay, you're going to be drafted for a year," or what[ever], you know. … It was not defined. So, I volunteered, went into the Army, [at] first, here in New Jersey, until they decided where to send me. I went [through] basic training in Camp Lee, Virginia, quartermaster basic training. It was not infantry basic training, for who knows [what reason]. You took certain tests, they looked at your educational record. To some extent, I'm sure they had their reasons, but, some of it, let's say, I think, is purely accidental, too, I don't know, but, anyway, I went into the Army. I had had the ROTC, which sort of gave me a

little leg up, so that I was, I think, a squad leader. Temporarily, because, about a week before I entered the Army, I was in Clifton. … By this time, I had dropped out of Rutgers, because [of my] knowing [that I was going], and I spent the last week simply in Clifton, seeing my friends and so on. When I went out with my friends one evening, I was smoking then, and, as I lit this one matchbox, not the wood stick match, but, the kind that comes in the little folder, what do they call that? [I] can't think of the word for it.

SI: Flip book?

JB: Yes, I guess so. Anyway, somehow, in doing this, I set fire to the whole bunch of matches and burned my thumb, and I thought, "Oh, shh---," you know, and so, … it wasn't bleeding or anything, but, the next day, a big blister [formed] and so on, but this is the way I entered the Army, and, within a few days, literally, well, within a few days of getting to Camp Lee, which may have been ten days after entering, I'm not sure, this thing had really become infected. So, here I was, in my first few days of … real basic training, and I had to go to the infirmary. They sent me to the hospital, … in-the-office-surgery, they lanced it, but, the upshot was, I was in that hospital for a week or two, or maybe even longer, until it all healed. I don't know, they were being very protective or something at the time, I don't know why, exactly. Well, maybe there was a reason. Anyway, you see, I was out of my normal sequence of … that basic training. What was the basic training, six or eight weeks? I'm not sure, at that time; for quartermaster basic training, either six or eight weeks. … There I was, with one unit, I had begun to get to know the people in the [unit], and this knocked me out of that sequence, and I was, then, arbitrarily, sent to another beginning group, and I stayed with that group, as the normal thing, and, there, I met a person who became among the very closest friends that I had, who went on to become an MD doctor, and so on, and so on. [We were] very close, until he died, five years ago or so. Anyway, … I had no complaints about being in the Army. Let's face it, the fact that the war was over made an enormous difference, you know; there's no doubt about it. … Of course, one beefs and bitches about this or that, the Army KP and all that, but, I mean, fundamentally, I look back on it as a very positive experience, getting to know these other people, all different types. Of course, it was all segregated. We certainly weren't mixing black and white, but, within that, call it a limitation or whatever, it was very good, very good, how to get along and handle yourself in this kind of situation. So, six week basic training, then, you hang around, assigned to, they had a name for it, [the] replacement something or other. You have nothing much to do, except try to avoid duty, like KP or whatever else, but, otherwise, for a week or two, you sit around. Then, I was sent down, along with this friend of mine. We were sent, both of us, to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, for advanced specialist training. I went through this, … again, six week thing, where, in effect, I learned, to some extent, the operation of these punchcard IBM machines, the key punch, and the sorter, then the reproducer, the collator, the tabulator, and so on. He, this friend of mine, because he had already started pre-med, went into the psychological branch of the Medical Corps, but, we were both there, so, … our bonding, as it were, went on for another six weeks or so, and there were a couple of other guys I was very close to, in a little group we had. Anyway, that was all fine, and at least getting a taste of the South, and going to see a little bit of Chattanooga and the Civil War battlefield there, Lookout Mountain. So, that was all fine. Then, ... we were given two weeks of leave, or freedom, or what will you, because … my crowd, at least most of us in … this IBM, machine records unit, … was going to be sent overseas, and I

think it was clear, fairly early, that it was not to Japan, … although, by this time, of course, the war with Japan was over, too; it was 1946 we're talking about. So, I knew I was going to Europe, I guess, but, we had this two week leave, so, I went home, you know, saw all my old friends, high school and so on, fine, then, to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and, there, again, sitting around for who knows how long. Of course, I was there a little longer and, why, for some reason, was I there, maybe, a little longer? Oh, I know what it was, I went to the machine records unit at Kilmer, because I was really bored after a while, and I said, "Look, … I've finished this advanced training in machines and so on, records, IBM. Maybe I could do something here?" They took me on. This was partly military, partly civilian, this kind of thing, but, it was, of course, part of the Army. … So, I was working there and that delayed [me]. One shipment of these guys that I would have been with went and, you know, I think I even had the choice, I probably could have stayed there, never gone over to Europe, but, I think I'm remembering this accurately, … I chose to. "Yes, I want to go to Europe," … in a sense, with some reluctance, because Kilmer was very pleasant. I got to know these people. It wasn't terribly hard work. … It gave a certain satisfaction, because you knew what you were doing with these machines and so on. Anyway, … sometime in December, we went on this troop ship from Elizabeth, or Newark, and [in] about eight days or so, not very comfortable, but, not too bad, over to Bremerhaven, Germany. In the meantime, somehow, by some fluke, there was, also, on this ship, a prisoner of war that was being sent back. He was actually Polish, but, somehow, had wound up in the German Army, forced or something, but, he had been a prisoner of war over here, somewhere, and he, by himself, was being sent back, and, for some damn reason, I was assigned to be the [person] responsible, in charge of him. They even issued me a pistol, you know, which made me rather uncomfortable. He and I were in a separate little room, with a double bunk, you know, and, maybe, because I knew a word or two of Czech which was like Polish, I don't know what the connection was, but, that was a strange [thing]. There's no bigger story to it. I mean, we got along. I wasn't that interested in him. We couldn't really communicate. I was just very glad he was not somehow belligerent or something, [laughter] you know, because … I don't know what I would have done in that case. … He certainly was not in handcuffs or anything, but, he was, in a sense, being guarded. … Anyway, that was part of … that trip. In the meantime, just by the way, in the Summer of '45, when, finally, they dropped the A-Bomb and all of that, after four quarters straight here, I decided, I'm not sure what led my doing this, maybe I felt I couldn't take another quarter right away, I got a job as a waterfront counselor. In the meantime, I had a second season as being on the swimming team, and that got me the job of waterfront counselor at a boys' camp up in north Jersey somewhere. So, that's where I was when V-J Day occurred, you know, completely remote, cut off from all the celebrating completely, which was all right. I practically dropped on my knees and thanked God that the war was over. Anyway, that was that; came into the Fall of '45, [the] Rutgers football team revived. '45, the summer of V-J Day; the Fall of '45, the first full semester, they changed from the quarter to the semester system. So, I had a regular semester, lived in Ford Hall, was an English major and so on, and, in the plays at NJC, but, [the] swimming team, [also], which had an undefeated season, 1945-46. So, that was all … fine. Then, March '46 and I entered the Army. So, I'm in the Army, sent to Germany. After three or four days of almost, not quite boxcar travel, but, fairly primitive rail transportation from Bremerhaven to Kassel, Marburg. … Christmas Eve, we spent in Marburg, Germany, Christmas Eve of 1946, … you know, very interesting, really. The Germans, … the civilians, were a separate world, you know. They were there, you know, … the defeated nation. We were there as

soldiers occupying their country. We were, of course, isolated, but, not prevented from interacting with them; lots of guys, sooner or later, got German girlfriends and even became part of some German families, to some extent. …

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

SI: This continues an interview with Dr. Jarka Burian on May 14, 1999, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Please, continue.

JB: I guess I was particularly speaking about being in the Army in '46, being sent to Europe, Army of Occupation, spending Christmas Eve in Marburg, Germany, going to a Midnight Mass, which was in an ancient church there in Marburg, a really old church, but, an Army thing; we weren't mixed with, you know, the German civilians. This was simply something arranged for our Army people there, and a chaplain led the service, but, I remember coming out, after that midnight service; this was a kind of medieval town, high hill, cobblestones, very full of atmosphere, and it was slightly snowing, you know, so, it was a very rich moment. We were there, anyway, for a few days, and then went on to Frankfurt, where we took up normal, daily, routine duties in this machine records unit. When I first heard that term, machine records unit, I thought, somehow, this meant major machinery that we were supposed to keep records of, but, of course, it means this ... Adjutant General's Department, which maintains the personnel records of everybody in the Army. These machines records units, or MRUs, are strategically placed at various sites. I think we were the only one in Germany; there might have been one in Italy for the remaining American troops and so on, but, we kept track of every single unit remaining in Germany, of whatever kind. They would send their daily morning reports, these little slips of paper, on which they filled in how many people [were present], who's on sick leave, who's this, who's that. Every morning, those reports came into the machine records unit in Frankfurt. People, including German civilians, [were] hired to be the keypunch operators, to put this on the punchcards, and we would be processing these cards, and that was our job. We lived in the barracks, marched to work every day. Civilians, American, English, French, probably, were all around the place, working for the Defense Department. So, it was, again, a very rich [experience]; I'm terribly glad it happened to me, ... [this], in the broadest sense, intercourse with these different, varied kind of slices of humanity, you might say. The one point I started on before, about the Germans, because, I guess, of my racial, not racial, but, ethnic background, the Czechs and the hostility there, I chose not to have anything to do with the Germans, or the German language, or so on, and, in retrospect, of course, I think this was stupid. I could have fairly easily, being there, learned the German language, you know, at least a significant start, but, I deliberately just didn't want to do this. Much later, when I went on to do my Ph.D. work and had to learn German, as a requirement, I regretted my avoiding German earlier. Anyway, it was during this time that I took those two leaves to Prague. So, all in all, that experience of about eight months over there was, again, very, very positive. It's hard for me to try to remember a bad experience, really, or something negative. Frankfurt had been heavily bombed. The ruins were still around, but, the debris was pretty much sorted out. So, you weren't walking through rubble, but, the rubble was there, but, fairly neatly stacked, here, there, everywhere, the ruins of buildings, the brickwork, the few remaining walls. I think the opera house, of course, was not functioning, because it had been partly bombed; the shell of a building, that was still around.

The railroad center terminal had been bombed, too, but, was functioning. When I went to Prague, for example, you took the train from Frankfurt, essentially, to Nuremberg, and then, to Prague, finally. So, ... it was really a terrific experience and I'm awfully glad about it. So, I then came back in the Summer of '47, back to Camp Kilmer for a few days, maybe a week, was discharged, and, within a week or two, (my mother had remained in Clifton, no change there), I simply came back to Rutgers, English major, again, and again living in Ford Hall. [I] took some fascinating courses in philosophy, aesthetics and art, and even music, and picked up with the swimming team, not the track team anymore, I guess because I wasn't that interested at the time, wasn't that good, [and worked] with the Little Theater over at NJC. So, those last two years really ... were fine. I even made, I must say, I was surprised, very pleasantly surprised, ... Phi Beta Kappa. ... I felt, of course, very good about that. I remember going to the initiation ceremony, [which] was over at NJC. I don't quite remember the speaker, but, he was a well-known philosopher/theologian of some kind. So, all in all, my experience here was very positive, you know, as a student at Rutgers.

SI: I noticed that you listed Mason Gross as one of your favorite professors on your survey.

JB: Yes, several courses, philosophy courses, with him. ... The earlier philosophy professor was still here, who had been here much longer, … Houston Peterson, who was a legendary sort of figure, slightly eccentric and so on, but, I took one or two or so philosophy courses with him, and then, Gross came, I think the same year, '47, perhaps, just as a faculty member, as far as I know, but, ... he had a marvelous charm, and wit, and sophistication of a kind, but without being in any way ostentatious about it, really a remarkable teacher. So, I was terribly glad to have had some courses with him, which reminds me, this is just a little side note, about a year ago, maybe less, in the alumni magazine, there was an insert from Gross's daughter asking former students if they had some recollections that they'd like to share about him, and so on, and so on, to write and send it to her. So, I did, because ... I felt very good about having Mason Gross, and it was very nice when she wrote a very gracious letter back, saying [that] this was exactly the kind of thing she hoped she would get and so on. So, yes, my contact with Gross was really fine.

SI: Could you sum up what you wrote in your letter to her?

JB: Well, just what I've been saying here, you know. He had a certain presence. ... You respected his learning, but, you weren't feeling you're in the presence ... of simply an academic expert. He was very gracious about it. You know, he had a sense of humor, not that he would crack jokes, but, he had a very nice, light, elegant touch that made it ... kind of fun. ... That's not the best word, fun, but, you wanted to read these things he was lecturing about, about these Greek philosophers and so on. Yes, somehow, ... he managed to turn most students on, very, very positively. There were ... many other good teachers. There was another philosophy teacher here, with whom I took one course in ... aesthetics, Kaiser, the philosophy of aesthetics, that was very good. I mean, just to ... approach literature, drama, literature, whatever, art, not so much in terms of what it's talking about, but, the way it does it, the whole question of form, and structure, you know, and verbal imagery, and so on. To some extent, you get this in the lit courses, but, never quite to that extent as in this aesthetics course. ... There were other fine teachers, a

Chaucer teacher, yes, what was his name? God, I can't think of his name, [Alfred Kellog]. Did I mention another teacher there?

SI: McGinn?

JB: No, that was a Shakespeare teacher who was also very, very friendly, very influential, [with whom] I became ... more on a friendly basis [with] after college, but, there was ... a man named Alfred Kellog, who taught Chaucer, who, again, had his own sort of slightly laid back, low key [style], but you felt he was wrapped up in his subject, and, again, with a certain edge or touch of humor about it, and so on, very effective; a very effective teacher. So, I felt good about all of that. I took a music appreciation course, also, art appreciation, but didn't go further in that, but, felt good about having had them.

SI: Looking back at your own career, do you believe that these men influenced your style of teaching?

JB: ... You know, I'm sure they did, I'm sure they did. Who knows to what extent? You find yourself, maybe, patterning certain things you do or the way you approach giving certain kinds of assignments, or, putting it the other way, remembering some less than positive teachers, not because they were bad, but, somehow, you know, there wasn't quite the spark there, so that, maybe, without thinking about it, you chose not to do this lecture or this course that way, but, let's try it this way. It's hard, you know. I couldn't say, but, I think it's inevitable that there would have been some lasting effect or influence, yes.

SI: Could you tell me about your post-graduate education, your Masters and Ph.D. work?

JB: All right, that makes a kind of package. I had a choice; when I left here, I applied both to Yale, which had a high powered, very highly regarded school, the graduate school of theater, MFA, three year course, in theater. I applied there and was accepted into the acting program, and ... I felt, you know, a sense of having accomplished something, getting accepted there, but, I also applied to Columbia, which also had a drama component. It was a one-year Masters that ... would involve a combination of, again, the dramatic lit and ... taking course in directing, or stage craft, and so on, but, all in one year, whereas the other would have been three years and would have been much more concentrated in the sheer doing of theater, namely acting, maybe with a little directing, but, mainly acting, of taking acting courses and, of course, doing a hell of a lot of acting. In the meantime, though, [in] the Summer of '49, I had applied for and been accepted [at] ... Tufts College, [which] had a summer theater program. They did about six productions in the summer, a week each, and the ensemble ... were people like me, from college, some from there, but, some, like me, from elsewhere. You could apply there for college credit, you could get credit, and ... I had the GI Bill by this time, which, of course, was very nice. So, I spent the Summer of '49 there, directly after Rutgers. Actually, one of the directors there was imported, too, from a theater in Texas that was started and run by a woman who was quite significant at the time, Margo Jones. ... I met her at Tufts, and so, I had contact with one of the higher persons in American contemporary theater. Anyway, during that summer, I acted in about six things. That was also a very nice experience. Everything went well there. In the meantime, somehow, I

began to feel that being in New York, at Columbia, I could, maybe [make] a few contacts with professional theater or whatever, and one year, somehow, seemed an advantage, rather than getting into a three-year program. Also, my mother was living in New Jersey, and it's not that I felt I couldn't tear myself away from her, because ... I'd been in the Army and so on, but, somehow, I don't know; also, still, that contact with my hometown and still some of the people that I knew out of high school and all that, I think that played a role. Anyway, I decided to go to Columbia. So, I did go to Columbia for that one year, finished the requirements, including a thesis, which ... ties in with this woman that I mentioned, who was a professional theater person, professional director. She had started an arena type theater in Texas, Dallas, which became kind of a prototype for professional arena theater staging. Instead of [being] behind a curtain and so on, you acted in the middle of an audience seated all around. I decided to make that the subject of my thesis, because the Tufts experience was all in that kind of theater, this arena theater. So, I did fairly extensive research on a number of community and professional theaters scattered across the country that I dug up information on and wrote them letters with a little questionnaire. Most of them responded and I worked up this data and wrote, who knows? maybe eighty pages, … approaching the subject historically, and then, sketching the experiences of these groups, in responses to my questions, you know, and so on. That became my Masters thesis at Columbia. Well, in the Spring of '50, just as I was getting my degree, or shortly before, among the Masters students at Columbia were some who were already professionally acting, part-time at least. Some had already done some movies, roles in small things, filmed in New York and so on. A small group decided to launch a kind of "off-Broadway," quote, professional theater, Thirty-Fifth Street and Eighth Avenue, roughly, in a church that had a large, former basketball court, which they converted into an arena theater. So, they launched the Circle Theater. At the time, it was one of the very earliest, at least semi-professional, arena theaters in New York. So, it had a certain, you know, little extra zing. I was cast in their first production, which was a combination of Moliere's play, called *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, and a play by Anatole France, another French author, called *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, dumb meaning, "Couldn't speak." So, these Columbia students, one of them at least, integrated these two texts and came up with a play called *The Doctored Wife*, and, you know, we were reviewed by the *New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *Daily News*, and so on. So, although we were not making any real money, I mean, it was, maybe, ten or only five dollars a week, nevertheless, in a sense, we were [on] the edge of professional theater, getting reviewed and so on, and I managed to get a nice, brief mention, positive, from one or two of these critics. That first play ... was fairly well received, you know, but not so well that it could keep running for the whole summer. So, they had to come up with another play. They had another play ready, an original play, a play by William Saroyan, *The Son*, and this would be the first production of it, the very first, you know. That got a fair amount of publicity, and I was in that play. There was a bigger cast, a much bigger cast. I had one of the secondary roles, but, the play did not get good reviews, and the whole thing went belly up, but, it was a very nice, fine experience, not the least reason of which was, that's how I met the woman who became my wife, you see, because she was cast in the first play as well. She played the dumb wife, who was cured, but, then wouldn't stop talking, and it was fairly funny, but, anyway, that's where we met, and, to put the story in a nutshell, we married about a year later, but, what happened in the meantime? What happened was that the Korean War broke out; also, that I started [my] Ph.D. at Columbia, ... again, trying to make it, mainly, dramatic literature, but, trying to get some practical theater into it, too, but, I didn't quite know how that

would work. Anyway, I started a Ph.D. study for maybe three or four weeks. Meantime, the Korean War broke out. I had joined the inactive Reserve when I got out of the Army, mainly to avoid being drafted. There was no law saying, "If you'd been in as an enlisted man, volunteer, [for] eighteen months, you therefore cannot be drafted." The draft was still on, but, if you joined the inactive Reserve, you knew you weren't going to be drafted. You did not have to train, you know, every month or summer, no, it didn't involve any of that, but, what you committed yourself to was that if some kind of emergency came up, they could call you back, which they did, you see. October of 1950, I was called back to active duty, not knowing where I would be sent. In the meantime, I had become quite close with Grayce. [I was] called back, sent to Fort Monmouth, and, within a week or two, [I] realized that I was going to be assigned to Governor's Island, not to Korea, God forbid. Governor's Island, [do] you know where Governor's Island is? Fort Jay, do you know where that is? I mean, that's the little island right off Manhattan, you know, a ferry ride, twenty minutes, and there was New York, ... the theater, and so on, and so, I went back there, ... to active duty, and, of course, that was our courtship, our real courtship. When I was in the Army in Fort Jay, I'd get off every evening. We had, of course, barracks there, ... and, actually, I lived in the barracks, that's true, but, I'd be off virtually every evening. We'd be going to see theater, [with] free tickets, because you're in the Army, ... to Carnegie Hall concerts, to theater, and we had these friends we had made in that theater group the year before. So, again, ... look, all in all, I'd have to say I've had an extremely lucky life, really. I mean, this is just one part of it. Anyway, I was in the Army the second time, my call back, from October to about August, ten months, by which time they had instituted a system of points. If you earned enough points, because you were in eighteen months before, because of this, because of that, if you made enough points, they let you out, finally, and I didn't join any more Reserves, but, I got out. By this time, we had decided we were going to get married. ... I was still in the Army when we did get married, married in New York, in "The Little Church Around the Corner," where theater people go to get married. [We] honeymooned in New England, because she was from Boston, Cape Cod, [came] back to finish my tour of duty, and, ... well, she was an ... actress, too. She was even a professional actress by this time and [we faced] the decision, were we going to stay in New York and try to make it, as it were, in the theater? or would I follow-up on what I had already done, ... through the Masters, and go toward a Ph.D.? which would somehow involve the theater, and that's really what happened. We decided to do that. I applied to a couple of places, was accepted at a couple, ... among them Cornell, ... and we decided to go to Cornell. [We] could have gone to farther to the Mid-West, I think Wisconsin or Ohio, but we both still had very strong ties to New York, New Jersey, Boston, so, Cornell seemed much more logical. That was it, we went to Cornell. She worked hard, as a secretary, as a waitress, you know, ... at the same time, all those years. I mean, she wasn't a waitress all those years, but, the first year, certainly. Actually, for our last years there, she worked for a local radio station. We were there four years. I had a teaching fellowship, which meant that I taught one or two courses of freshman comp while taking Ph.D. courses. ... In my last year, when I had passed a major exam, they made me an instructor and I taught two or three courses, I remember. Anyway, I finished the whole requirement in the four years, including the thesis, the dissertation. I wrote about Greek tragedy, not really on Greek tragedy, but, on the 20th Century adaptations of it, ... like *Morning Becomes Electra,* and there were about eight others, French, German, American, and so on. That was my dissertation. Meantime, there, I did more acting. ... I split it up, as I think I mentioned much earlier, between the academic, literary courses in the English Department and the production type

acting, directing courses in the Drama Department, and some theater history, and so on. So, my degree was, again, an English Department degree, but, with this definite split between theater and English, and that, then, comes back to the business of getting this offer at SUNY-Albany. At SUNY-Albany, ... there was no theater department, there was theater activity, a few theater courses, but, it was all within English, as was speech and so on, at least for a few years. So, my first years of teaching involved teaching five or six courses, heavy load, but, some of them were just two credit courses. Some were three, some were two, and directing at least one production each year, and that was the pattern, you know. Finally, as the whole place expanded, ... there was a split between the English Department and Theater, [which] split off as a separate department, and I went with that, rather than staying in English, but I still was teaching a mixture of dramatic lit, modern drama, and, now and then, Shakespeare, and directing plays, and teaching either an acting course or a directing course, and that was my essential career. ... Other than Albany, I was invited to go for a year to the University of California at Berkeley, through, obviously, someone, a former fellow colleague, a student, a Ph.D., at Cornell had gone there, in the Drama Department, suggested that they might want to have me out there. I went out there, I directed a play. Again, sociologically speaking, this was 1961, [the] Fall of '61, they had decided they wanted to do the play called *A Raisin in the Sun*. Do you know that play?

SI: Yes.

JB: You know, the black family. They assigned me to direct it. In those days, it's true, it caused a little ripple; … this was before the big Afro-movement and the whole free speech movement. It was just before it, but, there was already a kind of definite consciousness-raising in certain black student organizations, CORE and another one. When we had the auditions, and the casting was open to the whole community, students and the whole community, a university production, [we] got a fairly good turnout. I was able to cast it pretty well, but, one, not militant, I wouldn't say that, but, one politically oriented black, male, older student said, "How come you're directing this play?" you know, the idea being a white directing a black play. I said, "Well, I simply think it's a very good play." In other words, he was trying to feel out, "Was this going to be a kind of thing that would somehow present the play in a negative way?" or something like that. He was trying to feel me out and I think I satisfied him. In fact, he actually wound up playing a role in the play. It all worked out well, and there were big audiences, black, white, townspeople, students, and it was very successful, and, some of the people in it, I kept in touch with for a number of years, the adults, you know, older people as well, … but, you know, again, … maybe today you could do it, do a black play and [have] a white person direct it, although I think it's still a little shaky, but, certainly, there were ten to twenty years when it was inconceivable that this would happen, but that's interesting. You see, at that time, it was still possible. In fact, even two years later, … I was there a year, came back to Albany, and, by that time, I was also doing the summer theater there. They had an interesting summer theater, started by an earlier person, but, I took it over, for a couple of years anyway, and, in 1963, I did a Chekhov play, directed a Chekhov play, and directed Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, which is, you know, [centered on racism], … but, again, still, even then, one could still do that, I, a white person, directing. Of course, many people today would say, you know, "*Emperor Jones* is hardly ever done, because it presents a kind of ambiguous, at least, if not more than ambiguous, image of a black man." Of course, Paul Robeson, it was one of his great roles, but, in any case, in 1963, one could still do

this, get a mixed audience, have a mixed cast, and, you know, it was acceptable. That's a whole other kind of broader cultural question, but, anyway, I was out there for a year, then, at Albany, including some of the summer theater work, and then, around 1964, '[6]5, my mother died in '64; in '65, by this time, my wife had also re-entered college. She had taken some courses in Boston, college courses, but, then, she, in effect, was working while I was getting my degree. She had done radio work, so, the first few years in Albany, she was doing some radio work, but she decided, in '59, that she would want to finish her Bachelor's. So, she became a full-time student. By this time, my salary was enough … that we could do it, you know. … So, '65, … it was my first sabbatical, and we went to Europe for eleven months and revisited, well, Prague, of course. I gave some lectures. … Actually, I [had] applied for and gotten a State Department grant to give a series of lectures in Czechoslovakia, in the universities and the drama academies, on American theater. I worked up about six or seven chapters on American theater, the major dramatists, Broadway, what it implies, the whole professional theater system, the amateur system, the community theater system, and so on, a kind of overview of what was current American theater. It's not that they didn't know anything about it over there, but, … it was fragmentary. So, I had that … set project in '65 over there, but, the rest of the time, for eight months before then, we criss-crossed over Europe, France, Germany, England, Italy, even Spain, just at random. We'd gotten a car, sort of an adventure, but, then, in the fall, I gave these lectures, came back to Prague, of course, renewed whatever contacts were there in the family and all that, and, also, through a set of circumstances that's not worth going into, I had met the head of a professional theater about twenty miles outside of Prague. They had a whole network of these theaters, professional theaters. I had met him at a theater conference in Germany on acting; they had invited people from Poland, Czechoslovakia, England, and so on. He was there with a … cluster of young Czech actors, more or less explaining, demonstrating, how they teach acting courses and so on. He, somehow, knew that I was going to be in Prague on this State Department exchange, and he approached me, realized that I did know Czech, and wondered if I'd be interested in directing an American play in his theater, in Czech. So, I said, "Well, maybe." It turned out that he had scheduled *The Glass Menagerie*, you know, the Tennessee Williams play. By this time, I had already been in that play, played a role in it. So, I knew the play and I thought, "Well, all right." Anyway, that became part of the experience, that first full year back in Europe, directing this play for about two months, working with Czech actors, in Czech, within that system of theirs, and being, again, very glad to have had that opportunity. I suppose that led me, really, to pursue the whole subject of Czech theater even more. I began really to read about it, about the history of the Czech theater, modern theater, who were the leading people, you know, all that. I found out … the whole story of these two men that I had mentioned, these Czechs who played in the Shakespeare [play] on Broadway in 1945. … Just for the record, their names were George Voskovec, [in] American, his name is Jiri, but, it's George Voskovec and Jan Werich, those were the two, Voskovec and Werich. They're still a legend over there. Anyway, I think I met one of them there, really met one of them, at the American embassy party, because this was kind of an "event" for the American embassy, to have an American there directing a Czech play. It's the first time it happened, really, I think. … So, anyway, that was all, … really, just great, but, then, as I say, [it] led me into much closer touch with Czech theater. In fact, I wrote up my experience there, … because I saw much of … their own theater, in Prague, and also touched on this experience of directing this play, and I sent it to one of the drama journals, and they published it, and that, you know, just triggered me to pursue

this subject of Czech theater even more intensely. Well, to make a long story short, that resulted in two or three books and about fifteen to twenty articles, you see, over … the years, and I'm still doing it. My latest project, that, in a sense, I've completed, is two book length manuscripts dealing with Czech, modern Czech, theater. One of them is, essentially, a kind of chronological survey, taking you back to around 1800, the 19th Century, and the big blossoming in the 20th Century, with their independence and all of that. … The fact is that, by mid-century, by the 1960s or so, the Czechs were doing very significant theater work, so that people from the rest of Europe were coming to Prague to see this director's production of *So-and-So*, or see this designer's work, you see, and so on, and so on. All that fed into my interest, and vice-versa, and so on, so that I wrote many studies. Then, finally, I decided to use, as a basis, many of the articles that I had written, but, add to them and revise them, to come up with, on the one hand, a kind of survey focusing on the 20th Century, but, dipping back to the 19th [Century], of Czech theater, taking it up to … two years ago, and the other book, a closer, more full look at about eight or ten of the key theater creators, including [Vaclav] Havel, you know, and so on. … Of course, … just to cut down on the time here, a bit, we were there the whole year of '65. I mean, that was all of Europe, but, three or four months in Czechoslovakia. Moreover, I was there with my wife right after that Soviet invasion of '68. I had gotten a grant that was to start that September. So, … four days before we were getting on the boat, they invaded Prague, but, anyway, it worked out. We simply had to delay our arrival for a week or two, but, being there that whole year, and seeing how that theater worked with those Soviet soldiers there, at least for awhile, and that first year under the whole crackdown, it was all terrifically interesting and exciting. [In] '74-'75, we were there another whole academic year on a grant, and then, often, for anywhere from a week to nine months. It's true, several years would go by before we'd be there at all, but, then, [there would be] some international exhibit or conference, and we'd go there for a week or two. With the longer stretches, in, for instance, '88, we were there for a whole semester. We were there for the fall semester of 1990, after the Velvet Revolution, and then, went back for a whole year of '93-'94, ... and, each time, dipping into it all and getting more interviewing, getting to know these people, these actors, directors, designers. So, anyway, on the basis of all of that, I wrote all these articles and one or two books on a certain designer, and, now, these two books. … One of them has been accepted for publication by an English publisher. … They also accepted the second one, but, then, … they underwent a major restructuring of the whole, big publishing house, and they cut back, cut back, cut back, and my second book was one of those things they just weren't going to do. … So, I'm now, currently, trying to get that book connected with some publisher here. … So, you know, that's it. I retired in 1993, after thirty-seven years in SUNY-Albany, and I've kept busy ever since. Mainly, I mean, all kinds of things, keeping busy, but, including, still, reading and writing about the Czech theater.

SI: Have you ever tried writing an original piece?

JB: Like a play, writing a play?

SI: Yes.

JB: That's just not my [interest]; … whatever I have does not go in that direction. I've thought about it sometimes, but, I've never come up with [anything], just as I've never tried to write a

poem, you know, and … some people just do, do, even though it may not be good, … but, they, at least, do it. I just never quite had that impulse. … Maybe one other thing I might mention, in connection with all the swimming I did here, that, after a number of years, I really didn't swim much at all. I got back into just, what's the word? recreational exercise, swimming, maybe twenty years ago or more, four or five days a week, ever since; if I'm in any decent shape, that's the reason. I smoked a pack-and-a-half a day until 1964, when the Surgeon General first came out with the first major [warning]; everybody knew it was not good for you by then. It wasn't anything new, but, this was a definitive statement, and the reaction of the tobacco industry to that so upset me, so infuriated me, that I decided, "I, at least, am cutting off from this." It was the arrogance of … those tobacco companies. They were saying, "Oh, well, … that doesn't mean [anything]." So, I just cold turkey quit and I haven't smoked since, although I did smoke once, because I was in a play where I had to smoke. So, I got these vegetable cigarettes. You know, for a while, they made something which was not tobacco, it's some sort of other plant thing. It's not marijuana, either, [laughter] but, you know, commercially sold. That was the one exception, for maybe two weeks. So, anyway, the swimming thing, I kept up that casual way, but, then, about ten years ago, I became aware [of] the existence of the organization called Masters' Swimming, which means anybody, technically, over the age of nineteen, up to age ninety or whatever. They organize competitions of swimmers, male, female, any age, and … you sign up for that. You join it, a membership for the year, and that makes you eligible for these meets, anywhere from six to a dozen or more meets, in Boston, New Hampshire, whatever, Rochester, Syracuse, Philadelphia, and, … if you've got the time, for my wife and me, it's an interesting … break away for a weekend; competitive swimming, which gives you a little more motivation and so on. So, I've gotten into that, and, somehow, [I am] lucky enough, because, you see, the results are always in terms of five-year age groups, and I swim well enough to do well in that framework. So, you feel you're getting a little something for your efforts, perhaps come back with some medals and so on. Anyway, that's my life, I suppose. We moved. We lived in one place twenty-seven years in Albany, a townhouse. We loved it, until the whole demographics changed and it became a kind of peripheral, if not main line, drug area, and rock music, boom-boom box[es], car radios; couldn't stand it. So, we moved, still in Albany, but, to a much quieter neighborhood, where we're very happy, since the retirement. So, that's about it.

SI: It sounds like you have a very fulfilling life.

JB: Well, I can't complain. You know, you always have some certain regrets or … you feel certain inadequacies, "Why did I do this, or maybe this?" but, … when you balance it all, I have no complaints at all and I feel very good about a lot of things. [I have been] married for forty-eight years now, no children, though, not by choice. My wife had a few miscarriages, but, you know, we simply kept on, and, simply, there was no child, and we did not feel … whatever the motivation would be to adopt. We didn't have that, maybe because we were both [working]. She finished her college; she got a Masters degree and did work toward a doctorate. Then, she became the one, main person running a theater program in a two-year college, which she did for twenty years. She retired. … Neither one of us had to retire, but, we decided, finally, it's enough. She retired in 1991, and, about a year later I guess, I retired. She … does an awful lot of volunteer work, much more than I do. … You know, my life is mainly my swimming, my keeping up with Czech theater, though I've written about other theater, too, British theater and

some other, but, it's been mainly the Czech theater. … Now and then, I give a lecture somewhere. After retirement, I went down to teach a highly intensive seminar, worth a semester's credit, at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. That was in '95. That's the last teaching, as such, I've done, but, every now and then, … you know, there's the possibility. There's still the prospect of maybe doing a course here or there. In fact, at RPI, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, I may be doing some teaching there this year, one course. I wouldn't mind that; I think I might enjoy teaching one course a year, you know, but, not doing it doesn't really disturb me, particularly, either, because there are enough other things to keep me busy. We're going to Prague, by the way, for four weeks, May 24th. We do this fairly often, you see, still, going there for four or so weeks.

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

JB: … We're doing it again this year, … catching up with the theater, what's going on there now, seeing all the people we know. There is also a theater conference, … and I'm giving a paper on the work of one Czech designer, his very latest work and so on. So, that keeps me, in a sense, in the orbit of the academic. … That's it, that and the swimming and so on. …

SI: I still have one more question. I know that it is getting a little late.

JB: Sure.

SI: You began your career as a professor in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a time when academia was under fire from right-wing politicians. Were you affected by the McCarthy-ist atmosphere at all?

JB: No, I never had any problem with that. What I mean is, I never experienced any difficulty with that. I think the timing was part of it, you know. The people who really got into that, or were affected by it, I think, were in the first half of the '50s, maybe late '40s, when that real Communist scare [was prevalent]. Some people really got caught up in it then, and, of course, I suppose, if I'd been so inclined, I could have, maybe, … tried to be radically this or that, but, that's not … my personality. I suppose, essentially, I'm somewhat conservative. I'm skeptical of revolutionary ideas and so on. I'm a little reluctant to join group movements. I think that's all part of it, and many things enter into it, but, I simply stayed out of that area. … Certainly, for a number of years, it was standard practice, you signed a loyalty oath, I mean, with, particularly, a state school. Although, I think even the private schools [did it]. "I declare here … that I'm not a member of the Communist Party and I'm not in any movement that would overthrow the United States Constitution." It didn't bother me to sign that. It wouldn't bother me today, in fact; whatever that means, I don't know, but, that's the way I am, I guess. I've been lucky, you see, again, because I was never in a position where I was forced to do something that went totally against my grain.

SI: You went to Czechoslovakia on a State Department grant.

JB: Yes, several of them, by the way. These research grants were exchanges on the official State Department level between Czechoslovakia and the United States, which gave us, of course, a certain, in a sense, status and protection in Prague and Czechoslovakia. We weren't merely tourists doing research.

SI: Did the State Department make any attempt to control what you said in Czechoslovakia?

JB: Well, no. No, they didn't at all, but, you more or less … took certain things for granted. Nobody said this, I mean, but, the premise was that … you were going to stay out of politics while you were there. That was the main thing, but, the interesting thing is, it worked the other way. I learned, when I was directing that play there in '65, my assistant, a young man who was going to school at the time, but, was already professionally active, … toward the end of that experience, more or less, confided in me that he had been approached by somebody, in effect, the state police, asking if I might be interested in maybe being "helpful," something like that, and I simply laughed at it. … This fellow understood. That was … the end of that, you know, but, the other interesting angle of that is that never was I, so to speak, debriefed. In other words, nobody here bothered to ask me, "Well, how's the situation seem there?" I mean, from here, from our point of view, and it struck me, sometimes, "What the hell's the matter with these guys? Might there not be something of interest from my experience, my contacts there?" but, never. Now, [if] … that's good or bad, I don't know.

SI: Is there anything that we forgot to mention?

JB: Not at this moment, you know. I'll probably think of five things very soon, "Why didn't I touch on this?" …

SI: This concludes an interview with Dr. Jarka Burian on May 14, 1999, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Thank you, Dr. Burian.

JB: You're welcome. You're very welcome.

[Brief remarks on July 25, 2001, as a supplement to the original transcript:

Just to update a few essentials: My wife and I marked our fiftieth anniversary in Prague on June 15, 2001; of the two "forthcoming" books mentioned in the transcript, one came out in the summer of 2000, *Modern Czech Theatre* (University of Iowa Press), and the other's publication is scheduled for early 2002, *Leading Creators of Twentieth-Century Czech Theatre*, (Routledge); since retirement in 1992, I have directed several staged readings with local groups, for example, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*; I am in the early phases of working on Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* for a fall 2001 performance; and I'm still swimming—two meets coming up in August.]

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/4/01

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/6/01
Reviewed by Jarka Burian 7/25/01