RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER D. CRANE

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

JONATHAN GURSTELLE

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Jonathan Gurstelle: This begins an interview with Mr. Peter Crane at the Hyatt in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on May 17, 2003, with Jonathan Gurstelle. Mr. Crane, can you tell me a little bit about your family, your parents, where they came from, starting with your father?

Peter Crane: Okay. I was born in Camden, New Jersey. My father was an attorney. He was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1888, my mother born in--at least in Camden County, her family all from Ireland--and I grew up in a suburb of Camden, Merchantville. I went through the public schools, grade school, junior high, high school, and then, trying to get into college during the Depression, I had an opportunity to get a one-year scholarship to a preparatory school in Pennsylvania called Perkiomen. From that, I competed for the State Scholarships and won a State Scholarship, full tuition for four years at Rutgers from Camden County. So, that was a wonderful thing, but I did have to work most of the time while I was here, at one job or another, and decided that I would major in pre-law, but, in those days, it was called history and political science--maybe it still is--and had planned to go on to law school. Originally, I thought I would do three years at Rutgers and there was a program that you could take after your junior year in law schools--I knew at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville--you could get a law degree in six years total, but Pearl Harbor came and everything was changed. To stay in school, I had to switch to one of the Army Air Corps Reserve programs for Aviation Cadet training, which enabled me at least to get my degree in political science, even though my last year-and-a-half were all technical subjects. I went on active duty in 1943, February, and stayed in various capacities, finishing up as an instructor in the Army Air Corps for what was called the radar-navigation-bombardment equipment that was used on the bombers from Okinawa over Japan, but the war ended before I was called overseas. Through just a coincidence, I was able to receive a discharge in February of 1946. Actually, I hung around Fort Dix for another month, trying to get clearances, and came back to Rutgers to get my transcripts, thinking I was either going into law school or into the Foreign Service, and ran into an old classmate who had stayed at the University. He was a 4-F fellow named Jim McLean and he suggested that I look into summer jobs that might help pay the tuition in law school, or wherever I was going to go. He had a job--not a description, but a contact--with a company in Wisconsin called S. C. Johnson and my wife was from Oshkosh. We had met while I was in training there, and so, we were married in Santa Barbara, we were back living with my family and Lord knows how many other people, [laughter] because housing was short in those days. So, I did get, I think a week later, a phone call. A man wanted to interview me at the Chemists' Club and offered me a position with what was then identified as Johnson Wax Company. We went there for what we thought would be a summer and, twenty-one years later, we left. [laughter] I went into an expansion program in what they were calling product diversification and, very quickly, I went from working and introducing and field-testing new products into writing the directions for use and all the things that had to be chemically and legally correct, and then, went into a position to edit the newspaper media copy and advertising, first, print, then, radio, and then, television, and then, was brought in to supervise all the ad agencies' production of TV commercials. Of course, the company was growing then and we had excellent TV shows, *Garry Moore*, *Robert Montgomery Presents* and we had *Red Skelton* for nine years and, from that, I got into handling all the company's exhibits. The decision was made to go into the New York World's Fair, back in 1964 and '65, and I inherited that project and we had to move. We kept our home in Wisconsin, but moved to New York for about two-and-a-half years. The pavilion that we put together, with a design team, we found what I thought was an unknown talent and were able to get a man named Francis

Thompson to produce a film in a three-screen format, which became the hit of the Fair. Then, we talked Mr. Johnson into giving us some money and we got into the Oscar competition and were able to get an Academy Award for the thing. [Editor's Note: Francis Thompson won the 1965 Academy Award for Best Short Documentary for *To Be Alive!*, an examination of the lives of African, Italian and American children, which premiered at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair.] Well, the bottom line was, I met Walt Disney while I was at the Fair and, when I went out to Anaheim, it probably was eighty degrees there and, in Wisconsin, it was about ten. [laughter] So, we made a decision and moved to California. I worked for Disney, in their creative area, until three years, three-and-a-half years, but we did not want to move to Florida again. We'd just been there briefly. So, I started my own business in 1971 and we're thirty-two years old. My son is really doing most of the work now. We went into consulting on special attractions, but, for the last fifteen years of our thirty, we specialized in the large and special format motion pictures, originally known as IMAX. Right now, my son is in the process of doing a lot of conversion of special format to digital. In fact, he'll be in Anchorage, Alaska, converting a theater we're partial owners of that went from seventy-millimeter of what we call (a perf?) to, actually, a DVD kind of system that's giving us better quality at about one-tenth the price. That's keeping him busy and I sort of come to reunions and get interviewed. [laughter]

JG: To go back, can you tell me about your father's occupation?

PC: Yes. My dad was an attorney in the City of Camden, Camden County, although he was licensed to practice in the State of Pennsylvania. Like you see with me, he had a hearing loss, but his came from what he thought was when he played baseball for Temple University in Philadelphia, was hit by a line drive and lost partial hearing and it got worse. So, he then went into title work and real estate law and got into real estate, but, unfortunately, went with developers and the Depression wiped out their company. So, like many, many families, and you may find maybe you have relatives [in the same boat], we went through a period where things were pretty lean. He, however, kept active and, up until he died in 1968, he was still doing a lot of special consulting for title companies and actually was their public relations thing, adviser, whatever, and then, he died suddenly in 1967, rather. I never got to law school because I stayed on with Johnson Wax, then, went to Disney and there's my career.

JG: What was it like growing up in Merchantville?

PC: We live in California and my wife's from Wisconsin, originally, but I took her back, three days ago, and we traced the area where I grew up. We were lucky as kids, because we moved into a development before the Depression that was to be a very exclusive development of maybe three hundred homes in the area near Merchantville, just as it reaches [the] Burlington County line, but the combination of the Depression and World War II, for fifteen years, only fourteen houses were on this [tract]. As kids, we had a football field, a baseball field, make-up basketball courts, farming land, because nobody had any money to build. I went back and we actually went to the house where I grew up and it is just locked in and, of course, the little trees that were planted when we were kids now must be two hundred feet high. [laughter] I don't think any of the people that I knew then, even their children and grandchildren, live there anymore. It's become pretty tightly a commuter kind of suburb there.

JG: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother?

PC: My mother, her mother and father came from Ireland and she was raised in--well, when I say Camden, you get a nauseas feeling today--but Camden, years ago, was beautiful, had beautiful neighborhoods. My mother's father handled all the Pennsylvania Railroad arrangements for theatrical groups that came to Philadelphia and she grew up in a family that she played the piano. She had wonderful artistic talent and she was a Glassboro graduate that taught primary school, I guess, that kind of thing. That was the way our family [was]. I had a brother, a sister, a brother that died very early in life.

JG: At what age?

PC: Oh, he was just a few weeks old, with spinal meningitis, and my older brother died of--he was in World War II in Belgium--but he lived until about 1970 and he died of an aneurysm. My sister and I are the only ones left.

JG: Can you tell me a little bit about your sister?

PC: She's seventy-three and she's ill now and we've been here to visit her. She is a graduate of Douglass College, 1951, and was president of the Burlington County Watercolor Association. She painted a lot and had a number of shows--what do you call it?--a one-woman show or something and she didn't marry. Well, she married and divorced and never remarried. We got to see her. We used to say my sister always felt that there were Indians west of the Delaware River, because to get her to come to California, it took us [our] fiftieth anniversary before we got her out there, [laughter] but she came. Then, fortunately, with my work, I was in New York or in the Baltimore/Washington area and I was able to see her regularly up until recently, since I haven't been traveling either. So, we were able to visit with her this time.

JG: It sounds like your family was not only educated, but very artistic also.

PC: I didn't inherit the artistic end. My dad was a jock. I didn't get [that]. I played soccer for Rutgers, but he had pitched for Temple University, and then, he played--he was on the 1905 Championship Football Team of Camden High School--would you believe? [laughter]--but my sister inherited the artistic talent and one of our sons has picked it up. He's a commercial photographer now in, we call it Central Coast, San Luis Obispo area, and he just seemed to get the talents that my mother had. Nobody seemed to pick up her flair--do you think?--for music.

Ethel Crane: No.

PC: No, but the other boys, oldest boy is a graduate of Butler University, our middle son, a graduate of University of Wisconsin-Madison and our youngest, with all the art talent, just knew he wanted to be a photographer from the time he was in tenth grade and he does his thing here.

JG: You said you went to the public schools.

PC: Yes. There is no Merchantville schools anymore, because Delaware Township and the Merchantville School System were all incorporated into what is now known as Cherry Hill. We drove by the new Cherry Hill High School and I guess the old Merchantville High School, whether it's functioning as a grade school now, I don't know.

JG: What kind of activities did you do when you were in school?

PC: At Rutgers here?

JG: No, as a young boy. Did you do any sports or clubs?

PC: In high school? Oh, I played on the basketball team for two years, varsity, and then, I was pretty light for football and I wrecked myself. He made me the manager my senior year. I was in a number of just clubs, the Honor Society, Student Council, the French Club, even though I can't [speak it]. I think the French I know today is not much, and that's just general run of things.

JG: What made you decide to come to Rutgers? You mentioned the scholarships.

PC: I looked at going to other schools and, living in South Jersey, I knew I didn't want to commute to Philadelphia, to Penn, to Temple. My brother went to Drexel and I wanted to have an experience and I looked at some smaller liberal arts schools, like Ursinus, Muhlenberg, Lehigh, Lafayette, and Rutgers was always up here as the State University and a wonderful rating. So, my aunt talked me into coming up to take the exam and I took the exam, and then, when I found I had a scholarship, I was just thrilled, because I'd been accepted. That was the main factor here, I think.

JG: Did the scholarship cover your whole tuition?

PC: Everything except books, room and board. In those days, believe me, it was wonderful. How would put a value on that today? It is just fantastic.

JG: Did you live on campus when you came to Rutgers?

PC: In my freshman year, your first semester, all the dorms were filled and they were pretty expensive. We lived on College Avenue, right across--I can't think of that frat--next door to one of the fraternities, across from Ford Hall, on College Avenue.

JG: Do you remember the number?

PC: No, but we called it the (Bellaframe?), because that was the old lady that owned it and three of us are still here and we were reliving things that happened. Well, then, two other freshmen and I decided we could afford a dorm together and Ford Hall, in those days, had suites, two little bedrooms, a living room, believe it or not, with a fireplace. Somehow, through somebody that knew whoever controlled housing, we broke tradition and were able to get three of us in there. We drew straws and I got the bed in the living room and each of them [got the rooms]. We stayed in Ford Hall right until I went in the service. I did have one short period where I didn't

get in because I was late, or whatever, but, essentially, for the four years, we got in and I have three different wings of Ford Hall and a lot of memories. In our class, and with my roommates, the two that went with me originally, then, with four other very close friends, they're all among the thirty-one we went to honor this morning. My two roommates were killed within ten days of each other--one was blown up in a Polesti air raid, the other died in the Bulge--and then, three others were in the Advanced ROTC. One of the saddest things, the tragic thing was, with the condition of the war, our classmates came out of Rutgers, went to Benning sixteen weeks and, within ten days, were in combat. You talk to anybody that's had even basic ROTC, what you learned on campus is fine, you can do close-order drill and clean your rifle, but there was no choice and they were drafting men in their forties then. That's the way it was, but I was in the cadet program and, boy, I remember getting telegrams from my mother about both of these boys, at just a week apart, and then, we learned how some of the others had died and it just hit us. It really hit us.

JG: Do you have any memorable stories about events in your life on campus at Rutgers?

PC: [laughter] I don't know whether I want to tell them in front of my wife.

EC: Go ahead.

PC: I guess on the lighter side, in the Spring of 1941, about twenty of us had an opportunity to ship onboard for our spring vacation as the crew on a cruise ship to the Caribbean. It was a Swedish American Liner that went to Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti, because there'd been a maritime strike or something and the crew deserted. They were recruiting college kids, at some like a dollar an hour--boy, big money in those days. So, we shipped aboard the *Kungsholm* and went through eleven of the most unbelievable days. I was in charge of fumigating bedbugs, because below, in the decks where the crew slept, you slept with your mattress cover tied around your neck. However, we had the beautiful friendship or camaraderie of all us against Swedes who didn't exactly like these American college, wise kids, but we had the adventure and we met a lot of really intriguing people and got to see pre-Castro Cuba, rode all through parts of Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, and things like that. That was an unusual experience. I think, other than that, there were so many of the things that involved our trips with the soccer team. I played 150-pound football my freshman year a bit. I went overweight in my sophomore year, and then, switched to soccer and stayed with soccer through my senior year.

JG: Those were the only sports that you played at Rutgers.

PC: Yes. We did a lot of intramural basketball, because I'd played in high school, but there were all kinds of intramural [sports], touch football and things like that, but my varsity sport was just soccer only.

JG: Did you participate in the fraternities?

PC: No, I couldn't afford it. That was the bottom line and I had a couple of opportunities to pledge and I ended up [declining]. It just would have meant I would've had to work more jobs than I did. A good example of this, we played soccer in the morning. We'd play, like, Lafayette

at eleven o'clock, but, by one o'clock, I was out parking cars for the football game, and then, I had the job of tending the coal furnaces at Ford Hall, which was a beautiful thing, because it helped pay for my room, and then, we did catered banquets, checked coats at dances. They got to know me in the personnel office, because, daily, I was looking for something.

JG: It sounds like you had a lot of jobs on campus.

PC: Off campus, too. We drove the garbage truck with prisoners at Camp Kilmer and I worked over in a lecithin plant, steam cleaning old lecithin drums, and whatever came up [in] your search to get that money, of course. What we did, we weren't all that poor, but we wanted money to date girls and I had a Ford Model A '30 Roadster that, for twenty-five cents' worth of gas, you could get a date over at "the Coop," [New Jersey College for Women] as we called it, and so, that sort of took a lot of the time.

JG: Did you have a favorite professor when you were at Rutgers?

PC: I put down in that sheet, we had a political science professor, his last name was George and he got us interested more--even with my dad being a lawyer--but Prof George got us interested in the politics of the State of New Jersey. [laughter] We actually worked with him to get elected in the township. If you go out, is it Milltown or something, somewhere out there, south?

JG: Milltown, yes.

PC: But, there was either a township or a borough. We really got such a kick out of him as a personality, but, boy, did he teach us, and then, I guess the most memorable thing was my first class in my freshman year. That was compulsory and it was in contemporary civilization and the professor there, we always said he got kicked out of Princeton, but his name was [Mark M.] Heald. He came in and slammed some books on his desk and he said, "Let's get something straight." He says, "The reason all of you are here is that you're either too dumb or too poor to be in Princeton. Now, that we've got that straight, let's see if we can put something between your ears," and that was how my first year, first day in class, at Rutgers began. [laughter]

JG: It does not sound like he had a very positive attitude towards Rutgers students.

PC: Actually, he was a pretty good professor and, later on, he had a class in constitutional law, which I thought--well, what he did, he got me clued into the library. Then, I lucked out and got NYA [National Youth Administration] help in the library and worked the library forty hours a month, the last year-and-a-half, and it was good for me to get that exposure.

JG: Were there any classes that you had when you were here that stand out in your mind, besides the ones you mentioned?

PC: Let me think. I took Spanish six days a week and we had classes at eight o'clock, even on Saturday morning, and I had a professor that must've been in his sixties then. It fascinated me, with the language, and I guess I had thought of trying, if I went on either to law or Foreign Service, to do something in Latin America. I always felt that Professor [Harold S.] Corlett was a

fascinating man, because he'd lived in Spain, Portugal, Argentina, and I think, being six days a week, there was more of a saturation than you got when you had a three-day-a-week class. So many professors have a tendency to be impersonal, but we had only twelve in our class, which was great. We live in a Spanish-speaking--Orange County, where we live, is, what, forty-one percent Latino now?

EC: Probably more.

PC: And I wish I'd had the command of the language now that I had at the end of my junior year, but, anyway, that answered your question.

JG: You do not have a chance to speak Spanish anymore. You do, but you do not use it. [laughter]

PC: We have day laborers you pick up on the corner, if you want to have some unskilled labor, and you negotiate and I don't do too well anymore. I can say it, but I don't have the right Mexican accent. Puerto Rican Spanish here is so much different than Mexican Spanish or the Castilian they taught in school here. If you talked like that, they think you're insulting them. We worked in Spain, or we were in Spain for a conference, but, in Barcelona, they don't even accept the kind of Spanish that the rest of Spain talks.

JG: Catalan.

PC: They really look down or get mad at you.

JG: Did you have any nicknames?

PC: Oh, well, all Peters get called Pete and my hair was red--a few people, but not as many at Rutgers, called me Red, but it wasn't something I enjoyed. Did I have any nicknames in the Army?

EC: Redsy, I guess.

PC: Oh, hated Redsy, yes. [laughter] I had a boss that called me Redsy.

JG: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

PC: I sure do, and I told Ethel this morning, we sat in chapel and it was a Sunday. After chapel, I went back to Ford Hall and I went up to the john. We had toilets in Ford in either the basement or the fourth floor and a guy came into the bathroom screaming, "They bombed Pearl Harbor," and some other guy in the next stall yelled, "Where's that?" That and JFK, and I guess the Challenger, are places--well, 9/11, we'll all remember, you probably will never forget where you were on 9/11--but that was the day people [recall], that and JFK's assassination are indelibly etched in your mind.

JG: What did you think about mandatory chapel?

PC: I guess I had been brought up in a family that were not strict churchgoers and it didn't bother me at all. In my senior year, I had a girlfriend in Philadelphia and I could only go see her every other Sunday, but the services, I thought, varied, because, usually, they brought in a speaker from elsewhere and some of them were excellent, others, just so-so. Again, there was a stronger influence of the Old Dutch Reformed Church then than I think there is now. I don't know, but it was still--the state was in control, but the old guard, or whatever you called them, that were the old Rutgers people, they still insisted on the compulsory fifty percent of your time. Now, the Jewish students, Roman Catholics and others could get a letter, if I recall, that excused them from chapel and it was sort of like a promise they were going to go to Mass or the temple or whatever, but, for those of us, it was something that you do. Then, Sunday, if you wanted to go home, you'd always take another weekend.

JG: What religion was your family?

PC: My mother's family were Irish Protestant Presbyterians. My father's family were a combination Methodist--his mother was a Methodist, his father was a Catholic, they divorced--but he was brought up mostly by an aunt who was a Quaker. My dad was not an agnostic, but he was not a churchgoer, but he did go to the Presbyterian church with my mother and that's where we went to Sunday school. Merchantville had a Presbyterian church that, other than high school, had the only basketball gym in town and you'd be surprised at the number of kids that went to Presbyterian Sunday school. [laughter]

JG: Would you characterize your mother as being religious, maybe not your father?

PC: She had, I think, a beautiful approach to religion. It worked for her comfortably. In her own way, I think she was sincere and devout. We used to kid her, because, if the sermons got long and boring, she would do pencil sketches and she did some great ones of the Minister and the backs of ladies' hats and things like that. I think she tried so hard to live a Christian life and I think she did a good job.

JG: Did that have much effect on you? Did it make you more or less of a religious person?

PC: I think the combination of my father not being able to conceal from us that he wasn't deeply concerned that we should go to church every Sunday may have left us of a little less concern ourselves. Right now, my wife and I attend a Lutheran church. We were members in Wisconsin before we moved to California and I guess I consider myself a Christian and a Lutheran and we don't work hard at it, but we believe and have a very comfortable feeling about our own faith that I think works for us. That all right?

EC: Right.

JG: Were you politically active when you were at Rutgers?

PC: Through Professor George, at the local level, I got into politics. I didn't do politics in the school, within the framework of the student body, although I was president of Ford Hall, but that

was one dormitory and we just had an association. I did some work, but, no, this is more--I did a lot of title searching over at the Middlesex County [Courthouse?], that I'd get so much a title to search, because my dad taught me that years ago and I could wade through the old books and look at when they measured property in rods and chains--but that was more of [a job], it wasn't the kind of politics.

JG: What did you think about President Roosevelt?

PC: I look back now and, actually, I did do some work for Wendell Willkie when he came to New Brunswick. So, I guess my mother, if anything more than a Presbyterian, she was a Republican and, for some reason, she was loyal--she was as loyal to Herbert Hoover as Ethel's mother was to Franklin Roosevelt--and how we ever married, I don't know. I think I look back and, with all the criticism and stuff that went on, it was remarkable [what] that man did and got this country through. Then, we think of Harry Truman and Ethel and I think Truman, no matter what they say, was, whether anyone knew it, the right man at the right time, because he shot from the hip and made decisions--couldn't survive today, the way things go.

JG: How would you characterize your political views today?

PC: And I voted a lot of Republican tickets, but, I guess, if we want to talk about that, we'll get off the record. Well, I think this cowboy [President George W. Bush] is going to get this country in trouble, period, and we can go back on the record.

JG: You talked about Pearl Harbor. Was that what made you decide to go the military route?

PC: Well, no, we had no choice. The morning after Pearl Harbor, half the student body went to the recruiting office and they sent us home and they said, "Stay. All of you undergraduates are to stay in school until you're notified by a draft board or enter into some Reserve program," and it took a good thirty to sixty days before the programs were developed that gave you opportunities to see if you qualified. Some were for pre-meds, where they could get in what was called ASTP, which was how they could stay in and get their [degree]. Charlie Korbonits, who's with us today, was able to get that kind of a thing and they went. [Editor's Note: The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), established in 1942, was an officer training program that serviced over two hundred thousand enlisted men in several specialties, including engineering, medicine and dentistry, psychology and foreign languages, at 227 colleges and universities. The majority of ASTP cadets were reassigned in the Spring of 1944, before completing the program, to meet manpower needs in other units, particularly in infantry, airborne and armored divisions destined for frontline combat.] Then, we got into the Army Air Corps' Reserve program and there were pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and then, there were engineering, photography, communications and meteorology that didn't need to pass the physical. I had a 20/30 left eye and you need 20/20 on both eyes. So, I ended up in the communications, because I had switched enough classes, courses, that I qualified for that. So, that let me get through the first week of my last semester, and then, I went on. Fred Detrick, in our class here, did the same thing and we always say, "How did we get so lucky and lose so many of our dear friends?" but we both ended up in this long training program that never got us overseas in combat, but it was just the way things happened then. Others were just waiting for the draft and, when they called, they went.

JG: Tell me about the timeline from early 1942 to when you first heard about the Reserves to graduation to when you entered the service.

PC: Well, I went to class, I kept working. That's when I would start--[Camp] Kilmer was being built and I took the job over there in construction. Then, they brought prisoners in and we'd use them for different details. Classes, I say classes went on as normal, but there wasn't a week that there wasn't at least one farewell party to somebody, be it called up for the draft or the Reserve program. Gradually, the student body began to shrink. That summer, I wanted to get called up, because I thought, gee, particularly when I went home, my father was president of the draft board and ladies would stop me on the street and say, "You're here because your father's on the draft board and my boy's overseas." I was in a Reserve program and couldn't do a thing about it, but that didn't mean beans to them. So, the Summer of '42, I ended up working at RCA in Camden, on--actually, we were doing the crystals that went into the oscillators for aircraft radio. I didn't need a deferment, I was in the Reserve program; then, came back for my senior year and stayed right on. I always worked for the Post Office at Christmas and was able to work the December, Christmas of '42, came back, and then, I got the orders that said I'd be going sometime in February. Boy, the student body just shrank by the day almost, because notices would come out, and then, when I left, there were still quite a few, but my two roommates left within two weeks of when I did and three or four others in Ford Hall all went before March 1, I think it was. '43 is when they really started to drain us, because the war'd been on fourteen months by then.

JG: How would you characterize the mood on campus during World War II?

PC: I guess it's the mood of what our country was, that I don't even think, after 9/11, we went through a temporary period, I call it, but the jelling of ninety-nine, I'm going to say ninety-eight percent, of the American people was the same on campus. This was a war for this country's survival. It was something that had to be won and completed and, where you'd criticize certain things maybe Roosevelt did or something, the unification and I think the common denominator that all of us had this unified feeling, "We have to win this war and, if we're needed, we go." Now, there were always those--there's the exception--but, boy, there weren't many.

JG: Did you share these feelings before December 7, 1941?

PC: I wasn't an isolationist, but there were quite a few and there were a few that were on the other end of the gamut, that were sort of, "Why don't we go over there and finish it right now?" but they were a very small minority. I wasn't active in any antiwar or trying to let them come here or something, but we could see the handwriting on the wall. Some of our professors were astute on this, because they had been saying [so] since maybe 1940 and we studied what was happening. I had an unusual experience in my prep school, the year before Rutgers, in that we had German exchange students that came who had been brainwashed by Hitler and came on an exchange program. They were really out there to spread "the gospel" and this (Ozzie Mueller?) refused to eat at the same table with any of the Jewish boys. Our headmaster wanted to send him back and the US government said he couldn't do it, I mean, and this kid would get up, beautiful bi-lingual--I mean, his English had an accent--but he preached "the Nazi gospel" and he was,

like, seventeen years old. I thought, "Something's screwy here," but you're a kid then and you think, "Well, maybe there are just a few freaks like that," but, then, when you began to learn just what had happened, I guess it was--oof. Did you see *The Pianist*?

JG: I have not seen it.

PC: Oh, you've got to see it. It does better than *Schindler's List*. [Editor's Note: Both the 1993 film *Schindler's List* and the 2002 film *The Pianist* tell stories related to the Holocaust.]

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

JG: This continues an interview with Mr. Peter Crane in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on May 17, 2003, with Jonathan Gurstelle. Mr. Crane, were you aware of any German-American *Bund* activity in the United States?

PC: Rutgers had a Deutscher Verein. Do they still do? I don't know.

JG: I do not know.

PC: And this was the German club and one of my roommates, John Groves, was active, because he wanted to take as many years of German as he could, because he felt he just was fascinated. There were students that almost adamantly wanted to close the Deutscher Verein, claimed it was a Nazi propaganda mill. It's hard to believe now. I don't think it was, but that's about all I can recall here on campus. Ethel grew up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, which was very predominantly German heritage or ancestors, but did you think there was? When you were a kid, growing up, there wasn't.

EC: I don't think there was anything, really.

PC: No.

JG: Are you familiar with the case of the Nazi professor at Rutgers?

PC: No, I'm not.

JG: I was just wondering. I forget what year that was.

PC: He might've been here and I'm a blank on that. [Editor's Note: In the mid-1930s, a scandal arose over the dismissal of Lienhard Bergel, a professor in the New Jersey College for Women German Department and an opponent of Nazism, by department chairman Friedrich Hauptmann, who was known for his pro-Nazi leanings.]

JG: You entered the military in February 1943. When did you receive your diploma from Rutgers?

PC: The ceremony was either late May or June of '43. I had started the second semester, but they gave me the full degree, what they called *in absentia*, and, by sheer coincidence, my brother was stationed at Fort Dix and he came up for the ceremony and got the diploma, because I was either in Texas or Florida in training.

JG: Where was the first place you were sent when you entered the service?

PC: Boca Raton, Florida, and I took what they called pre-flight training there.

JG: You said, because of your eye, you were not able to …

PC: But, it was pre-flight, was a general category for even--in fact, in Boca, most of the so-called pre-flight weren't flight crews. They were, like I said, communications, meteorology, engineering and photography, but they still called it pre-flight, and then, we were sent to Yale University.

JG: What did you study there?

PC: That's where you studied electronics and things to make you a communications officer, but, at the end of the twelfth week, there was a shortage of flight crews. Magically, the Air Corps found I had 20/20 vision [laughter] and I was transferred to a flying cadet, but, then, they made me go through pre-flight all over again. So, for a year-and-a-half after I went in, I was still struggling through the cadet program. It was a statistic, that I'm sure there were others that did that, but so many that went in with me went through their basic in Boca, they went through either Yale or flying school and were off in one theater of operations or another. I struggled, and then, finally, got into navigation school, down in Texas, but that was '44 or so. I was just one of those statistical casualties that probably saved my life.

JG: What was life like on the different bases you went for training?

PC: I don't think it varies much. I think one of the things that most of us observed was, depended on individual assignments, could vary, in a lot of the bases, they were overcrowded. You waited in line for meals forever and there weren't enough blankets and all that, but it was stateside and it was paradise compared to what the guys were going through in Europe and the Asian Theater. One incident there, the one interlude that was unbelievably pleasant, was the assignment to what we called pre-pre-flight in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, because we were assigned to what is now University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, but it was called Oshkosh State Teachers College. After living in a tent in Biloxi, Mississippi, for six weeks and sleeping in my overcoat, because there were no blankets in the middle of November, we came in and they assigned us to rooms, but, then, we got down to the mess hall and, oh, the lovely, what were they, the Lutheran Ladies League, that were catering? We looked at the food and you couldn't believe it and as much as you could eat. It was catered by the people there and, here, we're a bunch of lonely GIs. This went on for three months, and then, we were shipped to California and went back to Army life, even though we had rigid discipline. While we were there, we only got six or twelve hours' flight time and that was merely to check you out, to see if you could [fly], how your basic flying

skills were, and I learned mine weren't so good anyway. So, that's how I became put in the navigation then, even though I had the 20/20.

JG: What kind of planes did they put you on?

PC: Piper J-3s, with a single-engine, with the instructor in the front and the student in the back. I threw up on my instructor's back of his head and I got washed out. [laughter] Actually, the throwing up wasn't bad, but Oshkosh, in the winter, that winter had subzero days with no snow. I don't know whether you're familiar with Wisconsin, but it sits on Lake Winnebago, which is, what? thirty, sixty miles long and fifteen miles wide and, with no snow, it was a sheet of ice. You could shoot touch-and-go landings on them and I came in for what I thought was a beautiful landing and, all of a sudden, he yanked the stick away. I hadn't seen the high-tension wires. [laughter] I was doomed from then on, but the nice thing of that stay was, we got off Saturday night and Sunday until three in the afternoon. A bunkmate of mine from South Carolina and I went in a restaurant and started flirting with the waitress. We talked her into going to a movie and walked her home, but her mother wouldn't let us in the house and it was zero. So, being a good Carolina boy, he said, "Peter, I'm going home." So, I stayed and kissed her goodnight and, fifty-nine years later, she's [sitting] on that bed. So, that really happened.

JG: Wisconsin, I would guess, was your favorite place you were stationed during the war.

PC: Oh, yes, without exception, although, when we were teaching in Arizona, the duty was weird, because I had students and, every night, I had to fly ten o'clock or nine until three in the morning, but, all day long, we had time to ourselves. We had an officers' club pool, but these were pre-air conditioning days. You had excelsior coolers and it averaged about 112 to 114 a day, but she lived in the pool and we had good officers' club food. Then, all things come to a halt and they moved us off for a staging area to go to Japan, and then, the war ended.

JG: Where were you when the war ended?

PC: Driving through the Petrified Forest, of all things. They gave us a ten-day leave and it was just prior to the dropping--this is V-J Day, not V-E, because we were up in Victorville for V-E. V-J Day came and six of us drove from Chandler, Arizona, to St. Louis, non-stop, in a '39 Chevy, and then, we split up and took trains to get home--for three days, was it?--and then, met in St. Louis and drove the car back. As we were driving through the Petrified Forest, we heard the results of the bomb and that the Japanese had surrendered. So, when we got back to the base, there was an immediate assembly and the CO [commanding officer] got up and told everybody, "Until we get orders, it's business as usual. We'll still keep flying our training missions." That lasted for maybe two weeks, and then, all flying was suspended, but I was able--I didn't volunteer, I got picked--to take airplanes to the graveyard. We would fly B-24s and B-25 up to a place called Kingman, Arizona, and dump them and, by the time they got there, everything except the prop had been stolen, I think. [laughter] That went on for, oh, gosh, several months, and then, I went out to Minter Field in California, where they were staging officers to go over and replace the crews that were in Okinawa and moving into Japan. One day, there was a notice on the bulletin board, if you had what we called the MOS, military occupational specialty, of what I happened to have, the three of them for navigation, to report to the Colonel or whatever. I

went in and there was a one-star general there and they said, "Lieutenant Crane, this is General So-and-So," and he says, "I'm going to ask you two questions." He said, "Do you play bridge?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Can you pack your bag and be ready to fly with me in one hour?" I said, "Yes, sir." He was the Inspector General, touring bases in the United States, deciding whether they should be closed. I had to be his bridge partner, because he was a West Point grad and, everywhere we went, we'd play bridge with the CO's wife and the CO. When we got back from the tour, all my buddies had gone to Japan and they said, "Well, here's the thing, if you have these points, you can get separated and, if you don't, you can still go to Fort Dix and you'll probably get separated in two weeks," and I did and that's another weird way the Army worked in those days--well, they still do things, you talk to any guy today.

JG: Do you have any humorous stories that stand out about your Army experience?

PC: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I think how I became an instructor--after I finished all the specialty schools, we had a check flight. You had to go up and the pilot put it on automatic, and then, you had to fly the plane from the radar and trigger off artificial bombs and do a bunch of other stuff, but you had an inspector riding right over your shoulder. So, I went in and was waiting for my inspector to come in. I felt a hand on my shoulder and a voice said, "How 'bout a Pepsi?" I looked up and this was a kid, way back when we had a curbside restaurant down in South Jersey, who used to sneak over and bum Pepsi-Cola from me and I'd let him smoke, so [that] his mother couldn't see him, in the back. He was back from combat. So, we took the check flight and we told old stories and he gave me the highest grade and I became an instructor. [laughter] So, it's a lottery and I just lucked out that day. I had good grades anyway, but it was just the way it worked out.

JG: How do you think your military experience helped you grow as a person?

PC: I'd say it certainly helped, but I wished there'd been more things that would've helped me grow as a person--even I wish I could've come to Rutgers knowing what I know about myself today. I think the military, under any condition, does a slight job of maturing an individual, but too long in the military is like too long anywhere. You develop this umbilical and become dependent. One of the things in industry and working in business that we look for when you're hiring or trying to recruit people is, if they've been in the military, have they been in more than three years? because, then, you find certain habits have developed. I'm generalizing now, because there are many exceptions, but I just wish I'd had a little more maturity going in. I could've gotten even more out of the military; the same was as I did at Rutgers.

JG: What were your ranks, from the point you entered the military through your discharge?

PC: What rank? Oh, I went in as a private, then, cadet and came out as a second lieutenant, then, got first lieutenant in the Reserve.

JG: How long did you stay in the Reserves?

PC: I stayed in--we're flying weekends--until Korea. I was recalled to active duty, but the vice-president of the company flew to Selfridge Field, Michigan, and pleaded a hardship for my case,

because I had three children; had two, Bill wasn't born in '50, was he? no, '53. We had two children and it was a job they couldn't replace and, instead of going, they took a guy that I had flown with in World War II who had no children. He went and served eighteen months during Korea, and then, I got out of the Reserve, period.

JG: You mentioned the Lutheran women in Oshkosh. Did you have much other civilian interaction while you were in the military?

PC: I was a good boy. [laughter] We had a nice romance, and then, I'd say we're sort of going steady. Both of us were engaged when we met and I guess, four months later, when she came to California, we decided that we would get married.

JG: You got married when you were still in the service.

PC: Yes, in Santa Barbara. I got a leave after there was no openings from Santa Ana, where I was to get to navigation school. So, I got fifteen days and we went up to see my cousin in Santa Barbara and she wouldn't let us live in her house until we [wed], because she was downtown with her husband who was in the hospital there. So, we got married, and then, we took the train home to tell her family--dum-dah-dum-dum. [laughter]

JG: What was the reaction?

PC: Off the record. It took us a while, but we've become, with all of them, a wonderful family and they accepted me. Should I tell him what your father thought about me?

EC: Sure.

PC: When she told them she's going to marry me, this is a good, old German Lutheran father, "How can you do that? He's got red hair, he's left-handed, he's Irish, but the worst thing is, he's from New Jersey," and he actually said that. [laughter]

JG: Was Mrs. Crane able to accompany you to the other places you were stationed?

PC: Well, she had her senior year and she promised her father and I wanted her to get her degree from University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. So, we were married in September and she went and finished her senior year. Then, when she completed that, she came out to Arizona and stayed with me right on through our assignments in Arizona, California, back to, actually, Fort Dix. Oh, they were out at Hempstead, Long Island. We had a '36 Ford with 280,000 miles out of it and it crossed the country with everything we owned, but no windshield wipers or heater, and we did it in December, didn't we?

JG: Did you have a chance to make any other interesting travels while you were in the military?

PC: I guess a lot of transfers. Then, I told you, with the Inspector General, we just flew all over. We went to Salt Lake, Ogden, Utah, Laurinburg, North Carolina, all over, and we'd just stay a day. Then, of course, when we flew [as] cadets in navigation, you only went to a place like

Amarillo, slept and got up at four in the morning and flew somewhere else. In Arizona, we only flew five-hour missions and always got back to the Williams Field base.

JG: Do you remember where you were when Roosevelt died?

PC: Yes. We were in Victorville, California, and we cut our weekend short. We used to go up to Big Bear and we had to come back for a big parade for Roosevelt's funeral. It was in Victorville, California.

JG: How did you feel at that point?

PC: I think everyone in the service felt, "We've lost our leader," but there were signs the war was getting better, and no one even knew--I don't think half of them knew--Truman was Vice President. So, that's about the best I can say there.

JG: When were you discharged from the service?

PC: In March of '46, somewhere around there, yes.

JG: Where was that?

PC: It was probably at Fort Dix or at Mitchell Field, in Hempstead, Long Island, because I went back and forth and had to get some flying time in to get some back pay. I don't know where the actual discharge was. They were either Fort Dix or Mitchell Field, but it's one of those two. Then, we went down to Merchantville to move in with my family until we moved to Wisconsin, or Ethel went back first, and then, I came back a month later.

JG: What did you do after you were discharged?

PC: Oh, I started to look for work, tried to decide if I could afford going either to law school or going into the training for the Foreign Service. We had what they called the "52/20 Club," which meant every veteran got twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks, which was more then than it is today, but it was excluded from any taxes or anything like that. I only stayed in that until June, and then, the job in Racine, Wisconsin, came. We moved and I started what became twenty-one years. [Editor's Note: The GI Bill included a "52/20" clause, which provided twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks to discharged servicemen while they looked for work.]

JG: Did you make use of the GI Bill?

PC: Only that, and, oh, a GI mortgage, yes, on my first home. We got a hundred percent GI mortgage and I did use that and I kept my GI insurance, maybe eight years or ten, and that was all. I didn't go back to school under the GI Bill. I took a couple of advanced courses while I was in Wisconsin. I went to the Layton Art School in Milwaukee, but, [when] I did that, company paid all the tuition.

JG: Can you tell me a little bit about your first job after the military, with S. C. Johnson?

PC: It was the beginning of their expansion program, because the company, in World War II, had very little to classify them as a defense industry. They made dubbin to put on Army shoes and they had a few paint products that were acceptable, but their whole bread-and-butter had been floor wax, furniture polish, automobile things. The thrust was to expand the company and bring in as many products as possible. So, the initial work that I did was assigned to what was called technical service and we then started to explore. You look at that company today, five billion dollars annual and they were barely a hundred million, well, not even that, after World War II. So, we got into actual testing and exploring ideas, and then, I got into writing, or, first, writing the directions for use of the products, then, the editing of what had been written by our ad agencies, who we have to clear both legally and technically. Then, they started to work on editing TV copy, and then, it got so that TV was misrepresenting the products and they had product liability. So, I was assigned to work shooting with all TV commercials, which included both live and in film in those days, before video, and they were shot in Chicago, New York and LA. Then, we began to expand into Pride, in furniture, but the biggest jump was in insecticides and air fresheners. Out of that all, the company is--you may know, if you've studied any business--one of the five largest privately-owned companies in the United States and, if you ever see their commercials, you'll see a little corner flap up that says, "S. C. Johnson, a family company." There was the Mr. Johnson that I ended up reporting for, because he then moved into major projects like the World's Fair, actually owned the whole company, and his son took it over, after H. F. had a stroke in 1965, and is still the Chairman *Emeritus*, but his four kids run the company, two boys and two girls. Ethel got to know one of them when she was a substitute teacher for a while, when they went to school, but I had inherited the project from television to all corporate motion pictures, video, and then, inherited their World's Fair program. We tested the idea in Seattle in 1962, and then, went to New York. As his mandate was, he wanted to "steal the Fair from General Motors" and do it for five million and General Motors had a thirty-six-million-dollar budget for their part. Out of that, I met Walt Disney, and then, went with Disney for the development of Walt Disney World in Epcot Center and started my own business in 1971, because we didn't want to move back to Florida, as I told you.

JG: What did you do with Disney and what year was this?

PC: I went with Disney in '69, '70 and '71, and then, in '71, late, we started Peter Crane Associates, which went on into the attraction business at first, but, then, we became very specialized in special motion picture formats. In the Montreal Fair [Expo 67], I had taken the film that Johnson made and anamorphically put it into a single screen and, out of that, had met Disney, and then, got more training. Disney had Circle-Vision and I tried to convince them we ought to look at what was then called multi-screen, became the IMAX Company. Then, in our attraction work, we got into more and more opportunities for IMAX Theaters, and then, in the mid-'70s, I took on an assignment to represent them in commercial …

JG: IMAX?

PC: IMAX, US, and then, I inherited Northern Europe. We went everywhere where, I said, "We could drink the water and drive a car," but we had all the Nordic countries, Benelux, Germany, France, etc., and then, IMAX got greedy and went public. I couldn't do other consulting work,

so, we went independent, and then, started to work. My son has been with me twenty years now and he got started on doing digital work and DVDs. What we see now is, we're putting beautiful quality, beautiful pictures on screens, not quite as big as IMAX, but we're learning, through a lot of market studies, that people aren't as keen on the great, big screen as they are the feeling of being immersed into the picture. That's what he's carrying the company on, while we sort of just enjoy what we're doing.

JG: Can you tell me about your kids?

PC: Three boys. Michael's been with me. He was a graduate of communications in Butler University, and then, 'Nam was on. I guess twenty seconds before he was drafted, he enlisted in the Air Force and ended up [going] through a number of schools, but ended up for thirteen months as director of the Armed Forces Television station in Seoul, Korea, and then, came back and took a job as news director with (KON?) Denver, and then, got the urge to come to California, just at a time when I really needed some help. I said, "Well, why don't you try this for a couple of weeks?" So, twenty years later, he's still trying it, [laughter] but he's been running the business end. Our middle son was a graduate of University of Wisconsin in Madison in--what was Pete, communications?

EC: Yes.

PC: Yes. He had been at USC's film school, but we kind of think there was a girl he liked in Madison, so, he went back, got his degree there. He has had fifteen years in Silicon Valley, most of it with the Phillips Company in semiconductors, which he ended up [in]. Our third did not go to college and he became a very, we think, extremely successful commercial photographer and he runs his own business and has done this for seven or eight years in what we call the Central Coast, which is near San Luis Obispo in California. Actually, it's near a place called Pismo Beach, which is a very attractive beach stretch in-between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Bill, his company is Imagemakers. Mike has two kids and we'll have a grandchild, when?

EC: Great grandchild.

PC: Great grandpa, yes, and Bill has a family, a couple of stepsons and two boys, one's twenty and one's sixteen, I think. One's in high school and the other is in junior college or something. The third has no children and he remarried, the girl he took to his high prom, when he met her at the twentieth reunion. She's from Madison, but she moved out and she's director of special events for the City of San Jose's Chamber of Commerce and she has other kids from her marriage, but they have a neat setup up in the San Jose area, where we go visit and enjoy all their [stuff]. So, there are the kids.

JG: Where do you live in California?

PC: We live in San Clemente, which is halfway between LA and San Diego, and we're right on, about two blocks in from, the ocean on a canyon that comes in. If it doesn't warm up, it's going to get like this, I guess, but we've had a very cold spring, but we don't air condition at all. Heating is mainly the fireplace and electric blankets, because we've lived a lot of places, but it's a

perfect climate and we love the ocean. My family, my mother's family, had a beautiful home in Avalon, [New Jersey], and, when I came home from World War II, it had been washed to sea in a hurricane that hit Jersey, whatever they called it, a nor'easter, but it was a hurricane, I think in 1943 or '44. [Editor's Note: The Great Atlantic Hurricane struck the Mid-Atlantic in the middle of September 1944.] San Clemente, when we decided to move there, was as near to being the way Avalon was when I was a kid. I wouldn't move back now, it's probably got high rises like Miami Beach. We fell in love with San Clemente and it had, what, twelve thousand, then?

EC: Yes, when we moved there.

PC: What does it have now?

EC: Sixty.

PC: But, we're in an area that can't grow and we're very close to Camp Pendleton and the Marines are some of the greatest neighbors you ever want to have. They are just superior guys, that we're glad they're there.

JG: You do not have any resentment towards the Marines, being a different branch of service.

PC: No. I guess some of that went on. I hear what the media isn't reporting, there's still these rivalries, have been in Iraq, that you can't escape, but that's the way the military [is]. It was far worse in World War II, until they tried to unify them and the Army Air Corps and the Navy and the Marine Air Corps, until they made the Air Force, was a nightmare, because everybody fought over who had jurisdiction to do what.

JG: At your reunion, have you seen any classmates that were good friends of yours? Are there any stories you would like to share about your classmates?

PC: Oh, I guess some of them are little things, but, in the parade today, we went by the rooming house where three of us that are here lived.

JG: Ford Hall?

PC: Right across from Ford Hall, on College Avenue.

JG: Is that the Italian House now?

PC: No. (Bellaframe?) was the landlady and she filled it with students and we gave her a hard time. There was a stairwell with a narrow slot and we had one guy that was always doing something smart. He decided he would be--who was it, Isaac Newton?--and drop an apple, only he hit the landlady on the head. She came screaming, "Henry, you hit me with an apple," and Fred and I still remember that. We had a few drinks and laughs on that, but this is a lot of the things that would happen there. There were many, many little things that you look back and we had a lot of *deja vu* in the last day here.

JG: How do you think Rutgers and New Brunswick have changed since you were here?

PC: Everything, everywhere you go, things have grown, but, of course, the campus is awesome now. It was a nice campus and it wasn't a small school for those days. I think I did come back a couple of times in the last ten years, but I didn't really [tour] and we came back for the fiftieth, but I guess our impression today was that, "Man, this Rutgers has gone into the big leagues," and it's very impressive, I think. I look back--and nothing like 20/20 hindsight--but I think of Rutgers as this wonderful ocean of learning and, instead of being a sponge and soaking all that up, I was almost a leaf that floated on the surface and looked at the sky. I think, "What an opportunity for a kid to come into this university today, that really wants to learn something," and I guess there are a lot that do, and then, there are a lot that look at those four years, like, some of us didn't do it intentionally, but we didn't have the depths that you get with your age that it'd be nice to have had, but I guess that's the way things are.

JG: You do not feel that you made the most of the years that you had here.

PC: I don't. I got good grades and all this. I just felt there was so much more I could've done to broaden myself had I been aware more of just what life was all about. That may sound corny to you, but, boy, we know it now and I think Ethel shares that with me.

EC: I think that you don't mature in college. You just have to have life's experiences. College is there and you do what you have to do, but you really don't get out of it what you should, I don't think.

JG: I tell you, after the war, the guys that went back on the GI Bill, they wanted to learn. They'd been denied an education, the government was making this possible and they knew they didn't want to go back to another war or the military. These guys really upgraded the level, I think, of learning, not that we were playboys here exactly, but I guess I always thought, "Well, if I get through," the old thing, "If you get the degree, you'll get a pretty good job and, if you get into law school," blah, blah, blah, but the GIs that came back, and Ethel's brother went through Madison on the GI Bill, man, he really propelled himself, in industry, up and came out with a wonderful job with a major company, retired, and I think has become just such a worldly, informed person. I respect him tremendously, but I don't know whether, had he gone through--he started at Marquette, and then, came back and went into University of Wisconsin. I think the competitive spirit of the GIs, after they came back, and I think some of the students who were there thought, "Gee, what a bunch of bookworms," but these guys really wanted to learn and that's what it's all about. I wished I'd known.

JG: When we interview people from, say, the Class of 1948, some of them were GIs who came back on the GI Bill, some of them were eighteen, nineteen-year-olds who had never seen war.

PC: What a difference.

JG: They were living side by side and, yet, they were four or five years apart in age. It is interesting to hear about those differences.

PC: Well, Clyde went through that when he was back at Madison and the kids that had come in, no military, right out of high school, the GIs couldn't respect them.

JG: Yes. You cannot compare a seventeen, eighteen-year-old high school kid to a GI who served three or four years in combat. It is quite a difference. Is there anything else you would like to add to your interview?

PC: No; review what you're going to do with this again, and then, I'm done.

JG: This concludes the interview with Peter Crane.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/6/2015