

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL E. ELLING

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

CHADDS FORD, PENNSYLVANIA

FEBRUARY 21, 2020

TRANSCRIPT BY

JESSE BRADDELL

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Michael E. Elling on February 21, 2020, in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Michael E. Elling: My pleasure.

SI: Great. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

ME: August 14, 1932, at the St. Barnabas Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, I'm told. [Editor's Note: St. Barnabas Medical Center, founded in Newark in 1865, moved to its present location in Livingston, New Jersey, in 1964.]

SI: Okay.

ME: I wasn't listening too much then. [laughter] I was the youngest of three boys. We lived in Verona, which is right next to Montclair, New Jersey. My father worked in a bank, the Montclair Trust Company, until about 1939, when he had his second stroke. He was paralyzed. We moved then from Verona to Somerville, New Jersey, into the old Elling homestead.

I had an aunt that was living there by herself, a maiden aunt. She took in boarders as an income-producing thing, but, when we had to move in there, the third floor was renovated into three bedrooms. My mother had one, my older brother had one and my middle brother and me had a third, very, very compact. We were very tightly crowded.

My mother, who was a Smith graduate, realized that she had to do something. There was no source of income for us. So, she went over to Rutgers and qualified as a teacher. She worked in the Somerville High School for some twenty years and did not like it and quit, because, after twenty years, she was eligible for a retirement.

During that period of time, she was able to get a Fulbright Scholarship. She went over to Japan for a year. [Editor's Note: Initiated in 1946, the Fulbright Program, named for its sponsor, US Senator William Fulbright, provides thousands of grants for cultural exchange every year.]

SI: Wow.

ME: Which was quite interesting, and had to fight the school board to get credit against her pension for that. It was a long, drawn-out battle, but she won it and that was that. She brought home all sorts of experiences that she had had. It was quite good for her, because she had to put up with three growing boys and not much other support.

SI: The Fulbright year was probably after you were out of the house.

ME: Yes, I was in college. It was actually 1954, the year I graduated. Before she went off to Japan, she asked me whether that would bother me. I said, "Absolutely not," just seize that opportunity, which was presented to her. So, she went off and I went off. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: So, that worked out very nicely. When we moved to Somerville, we three boys, I guess we sort of knew, subconsciously, that we needed money. I mean, we had no money. The three of us made out with jobs, all sorts of different kinds of jobs. The house was in sort of a rural area, not very well built-up, which is quite different than it is today there. We delivered newspapers, we did all sorts of that kind of thing.

Twin uncles, Louis and John Elling, lived in two houses, right down next to the old homestead. They had established a plumbing business in 1915 (Elling Bros.), and Clifford was one of their sons, the son of Louis. You know from his history that he went into the plumbing business, but that's another story. [Editor's Note: The Rutgers Oral History Archives interviewed Mr. Elling's cousin, [Clifford Elling, '48.](#)]

I began to be sort of a gopher for one of the two twins. One twin was sort of the inside man and the other twin was the outside man. I sort of followed the outside twin, John, around. He kind of turned out to be a father figure for me, which I only realized much in retrospect, but it was a comfortable time, for me, growing up.

I would work after school for a couple hours and I got paid a little bit. I kept track of the stock and I did that sort of stuff. When I got older and got a driver's license, I could deliver some of the material to the plumbers who were out on jobs. Then, when I went off to college, that was it, but I enjoyed that part, in one way. I got a dog, a beagle. It was a lot of fun, because I got very close to the dog. It was an outside dog. I would deliver the secretary to her home, that was working for the firm, and come back. The dog would be right there waiting for me, because behind the house was a large, open field and I would run the dog back there.

SI: Oh.

ME: He would pick up rabbits and chase them and that sort of thing. That was a lot of fun. I had chickens and eggs and that sort of thing. My middle brother, first, he had the chickens and eggs. He went off to college and left them, so, I took them over. He also had a beehive that he didn't want, really. I don't know how he got it, but he got it. He went to the Ag School, by the way, at Rutgers.

SI: Okay, yes.

ME: He never graduated, but that's another matter. So, I was looking after the chickens and selling the eggs and cleaning out the henhouse and that sort of stuff, but that all went away when I went off to college. I had a sale of chickens and that worked okay.

When I went to college, again, didn't have much money, got a small scholarship, and thereby starts the story, because my history at Rutgers was good, in a balanced way. I joined a fraternity. My older brother had gone to Rutgers and he graduated. He was three years older than I. He graduated as a mechanical engineer. He had joined a fraternity at Rutgers by the name of Gamma Sigma and it was an independent. It had just started up. It had its home at 19 Union

Street, in a house that was required to take eighteen people. We were stuffed in sideways and upside down, but that was what was presented to me and that's the way I lived.

One year, I had three other fraternity brothers in my room, a small room. One was an Italian guy, one was an Indonesian guy and the other was a black man, black person. We got along beautifully. We had a great time, although we lived on top of each other, in double bunks and that sort of stuff, a desk and a chair and a place to put a few things, a chest of drawers. That was what was presented and it was [good]. By the way, I went back to my sixty-fifth. I'm jumping around a little bit.

SI: No, that is fine.

ME: Sixty-fifth reunion and walked down Union Street to find the house. It had been boarded up. I assume, since I went back there last year for my sixty-fifth, that they're going to tear it down. I'd love to know what they're going to do with it. The fraternity went national, joined another fraternity, which I did not have any say in. I backed away from the whole thing, but my four years at the fraternity house, three-and-a-half, were very nice. I enjoyed it.

SI: My understanding is that Gamma Sigma was founded by veterans coming back to Rutgers from World War II.

ME: Yes.

SI: It was a bit different than other fraternities.

ME: That's correct, very much so. We had all sorts of different kinds of people in it--kinds is maybe not the right word--but the make-up of the room I stayed in for a year sort of mirrored the cross-section of the people in the house. We all got along with each other quite well. We had our differences in our monthly meetings and that sort of thing. I remember some of them rather fondly. They were pretty good, I mean, fun kind of things.

Well, I'll start off with when I started at Rutgers. In the fall, I went over there to register and registration was being held in the gymnasium. I was out in the lobby and there are a whole bunch of people milling around. I heard this loud voice, "Hey, you!" A man came thundering across the lobby to me. It turned out he was the wrestling coach and he wanted me to wrestle, [laughter] but I did not. I didn't have the time for it.

SI: Okay.

ME: And I'd never done that in high school. I just wasn't into that sort of thing anyhow. So, I found that to be rather amusing, because he saw a lightweight. I think the lightest weight was 106 pounds, which I would've been able to do very nicely. Anyhow, that's another thing.

What I did do, as you may know, is, I got into the Glee Club. That, in my memories of Rutgers, was the best memories that I had. School was okay, but the Glee Club was paramount. Soup Walters was the director at the time. I tried out for it early on. I had a job working in the

cafeteria, serving dinner through the line, but I was told by Soup that if I missed one rehearsal, I was out, as a probationary person. That caused a few frictions in my job in the cafeteria, but that passed and that was okay.

The Glee Club was a bunch of guys who--my mother listened to us from time to time. We had concerts here, there and elsewhere--I'll come back to that. She made a comment--I thought for a while, I had to think about it--her comment was, "You sing better than you know how," and she was right, because most of the guys there were not music majors.

They sang for the fun of [singing] and they liked music. So, that's what got them involved in it, but we did sing better than we knew how. We did some magnificent stuff, and I'll come back to that in a little while, but school went on okay. My job in the cafeteria, when I was done in the evening, I had to run to the rehearsal hall, which was up on "Holy Hill." You've heard of that?

[Editor's Note: F. Austin "Soup" Walter (1910-2000) directed the Rutgers University Glee Club from 1932 to 1983 and founded and directed the Rutgers University Choir in 1949. The term "Holy Hill" refers to the campus of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, then part of Rutgers University, but now an independent institution.]

SI: Yes.

ME: Okay. [laughter] I guess it was the chapel that we rehearsed in all the time. We would rehearse in the fall for a repertoire that we practiced. Then, we would be invited to go to various high schools around the state to give concerts in the evening, which we would do that on a Friday and a Saturday night. We would be bussed here, there and elsewhere.

I'll go back to this. One of the things that I didn't really know, the depth of the Glee Club, was the fact that, in the fall, they went up to a place called Minnewaska in the Catskills, the Shawangunk Mountains, and rehearsed, which was ideal, just a gorgeous opportunity to go off into the woods to a little cottage that had a piano. We would rehearse for an hour, hour-and-a-half in the morning, an hour-and-a-half in the afternoon.

[Editor's Note: Minnewaska State Park Reserve in Ulster County, New York, is located on the Shawangunk Mountain Ridge, which joins with the Catskills.]

What I didn't know is that the resort, which gave us free food and lodging, was very happy to have us, because we had been going up there for quite a number of years and people would come to the lodge to listen to us practice. It was really cool, because we were off in the woods and they would be walking around outside, which was pretty nice.

We enjoyed that part of it very nicely, but it was a great [recreational] opportunity, after we had finished what we had been doing, individually. In the summertime, you go up there and put on five pounds in eating, just horsing around and swimming in that water that was just one degree above freezing. It was just great. It was a great experience. Of course, Soup was there and he put us through the paces. We certainly got our fill of rehearsals, which was good. That's why we were there.

Now, let me go back to the Glee Club itself. I guess it was in my second year, maybe third year, we got flanged up with the Rochester Symphony Orchestra--you may know that--Erich Leinsdorf. We started in with some pieces of music that involved the girls across the way in "The Coop," we called it [Douglass College]. [Editor's Note: Erich Leinsdorf (1912-1993) conducted the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra from 1947 to 1955.]

We would go over there, usually, once every two weeks, to rehearse with them on the piece that we were rehearsing for. We did some pretty keen things. We did the *St. Matthew Passion* [a 1727 Bach oratorio]. We did some [Alexander Porfirievich] Borodin. We did some pretty heavy stuff.

We traveled, by train, up to Rochester and gave a performance twice up there, which was the first time the Glee Club had ever done anything like that. Now, they go off to Europe and around the world and do that sort of thing, but this was the first time that that had happened to the Glee Club--the girls also. I've got to tell you one incident that happened in rehearsal time.

SI: Sure.

ME: We were rehearsing in the gymnasium. The orchestra was there rehearsing with us. We were a group of people of about 160. When we started off in the fall, we had probably sixty, but attrition, we lost a few during the year. Then, the girls always were more than we and they were probably eighty or ninety.

We're rehearsing in the gymnasium with the orchestra. Leinsdorf was there conducting and Soup was off somewhere watching, listening. I didn't know that this was happening, but two of the guys in the Glee Club, during a break, went over to Leinsdorf and said to him, "Hey, look, we want to get Soup to conduct some of the rehearsal, because he doesn't know anything. I don't think he's ever conducted an orchestra." I didn't know this was happening, but I put this together.

So, Leinsdorf said, "Okay." So, he's conducting away. We're rehearsing, the orchestra's booming away and he stops for a little while. He turns to Soup, who is over in the side of the gym. He said, "Can you come and conduct us? I want to hear what it sounds like out there." [laughter] Soup did it. He was very awkward, as we accused him later of looking like a duck. [laughter] He took that beautifully, but it was a surprise to everybody. It was pretty cool, just one of these little things that occur that I wonder how many people ever remember that, that was there at the time, but that's beside the point. It was a great performance. I've forgotten even what we were doing at the time.

SI: Was that recorded?

ME: I'm afraid not, as much as I would've liked it to be.

SI: Yes.

ME: It probably was not.

SI: Okay.

ME: But, that's something I don't know.

SI: I know some of the performances with Leinsdorf were recorded.

ME: Really?

SI: Yes.

ME: Okay.

SI: I can look. We can add a note.

[Editor's Note: One such performance, a 1950 radio broadcast, can be found on [YouTube](#). Erich Leinsdorf conducts the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Rutgers University Choir in a two-part performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*. The first performance was recorded at the Eastman Theatre in Rochester and the second at Rutgers University.]

ME: Yes, I'd like to know that, because, if they were, I'd love to have one, just for memory. We did some [Alexander Konstantinovich] Glazunov, Borodin, but that's beside the point.

SI: A lot of Glee Club alums that I have talked to have stories about Soup Walter.

ME: Oh, yes.

SI: Do any other memories of him come to mind?

ME: No. Well, maybe I can come up with one, but I'm interrupting myself by going to Professor [Howard D.] McKinney.

SI: Yes.

ME: In charge of the Music Department. I would go up there, from time to time, talking, for some reason, with the secretary. I don't know why I was doing this, but I remember her kind of bemoaning the fact that Professor McKinney would see the letters that were coming in for subscriptions. He would open them and read the letter and throw everything on the floor, which usually contained a check of some sort.

So, she was bemoaning this to me, [laughter] about that, but that's the way he was, an awfully, awfully, nice guy, gosh. The few times that I talked to him--well, maybe a number of times--but the few times I talked to him, he just was a patronizing father figure, that's all I can tell you, just a beautiful man. I believe he was the one that started the classical series of orchestras coming to Rutgers from around the world.

Now, I'm going to go back in time, before I was a student there. My mother, who was quite musical herself, subscribed to those concerts. Every so often, she would drag me over, if you will. I guess I was maybe a freshman, sophomore in high school. One that I never thought I would remember much about until, recently, I got to thinking about it, one concert was by Paul Robeson. I remember him singing acapella with a piano, and a voice that I can remember today. It was just absolutely beautiful, but that's all I remember about it. I didn't know, at that time, who he was really.

[Editor's Note: Paul Robeson (1898-1976), a singer, actor and human rights activist, became the first African-American Rutgers football player, a two-time All-American and the valedictorian of his class at Rutgers in 1919.]

SI: Yes.

ME: What a figure he was, to Rutgers as well as the world.

SI: Do you remember approximately how old you were?

ME: Probably fourteen or fifteen.

SI: Yes.

ME: My mother was. I think she kind of made me go with her. My other two brothers had no interest in music whatsoever. Whether or not they were tone deaf, [laughter] I'll never know, but they had no interest in it. So, I did.

SI: Had you been involved in choir or any other musical activities?

ME: In high school, I was, yes. My mother tried to get me to play an instrument or play the piano. Each time an instrument appeared, I'd try it out. I guess I was too busy doing other things. I have an excuse, but it's a poor one. [laughter]

That was quite something, when I began to know a little bit about the man. Particularly, when I was at the sixty-fifth reunion, there was a big thing about Paul Robeson. I remember the fact that he was singing and doing one hell of a job, yes, a bass voice. I'm sure you've heard of [that], bass voice singers are very good. They are good, but he was something else.

[Editor's Note: The Paul Robeson Memorial Plaza, a gift of the Rutgers Class of 1971, was dedicated on the College Avenue Campus, Rutgers-New Brunswick, in the Spring of 2019, the centenary of his graduation.]

SI: He had a tie to Somerville as well.

ME: I don't know.

SI: Okay.

ME: You may be right, and I'd like to know.

SI: Yes. I was just curious if you knew anything about him from the town.

ME: No, I don't. Do you know something about that?

SI: I think he may have lived there for a while.

ME: Okay.

SI: Yes. In recent years, they have done a few things to bring attention to that, if I am recalling correctly, but I was just curious if, growing up there, you knew anything about that.

ME: No, I didn't. [Editor's Note: Robeson lived in Somerville from 1910, when his father became pastor of the St. Thomas AME Zion Church, to 1915, when he graduated from Somerville High School and went on to Rutgers.]

SI: What other concerts do you recall from your time in the Glee Club?

ME: Well, a long string of high school concerts that we went to. We would go there and we would come out on the stage in our tails. Then, in the second half, we'd go and change into our Glee Club blazers. That always got a few "oohs" and "ahs" from the audience, which was interesting. Our first half was usually a bit heavier music than our second half.

I don't remember any high school concert that was particularly profound in my opinion. Sometimes, a ladies' guild would have doughnuts and coffee for us afterwards--usually not, but that was a highlight. We would pile back on the bus and get back to the campus, sometime, depending upon how far away, as late as one o'clock in the morning. That was a long day. No, I don't remember anything that was memorable in any one of those kinds of concerts.

SI: Were there other trips, other than the one to Rochester?

ME: No, Minnewaska, Rochester. No, there were no other trips that I knew of, and I would've known about them. I think we went up to Newark once. We went up to Newark once to sing with Leontyne Price, a contralto of great note, operatic voice. We were going to sing--I'll try to remember what it was--and it was going to be recorded. At the last moment, apparently, there were not enough tickets sold, so, the whole thing was cancelled. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: We had learned the music--oh, gosh, maybe I can remember--but I'm sure there's nothing in the annals of history at Rutgers that would tell me, because it was cancelled.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, I don't know, maybe, but that was [it]. We were really bound to New Jersey. We rarely went anywhere beyond that, that I can even remember. Now, that's not the case, but we did go to Carnegie Hall. No, I'm sorry, that's not right. After I graduated, I came back for a year and tried to sing with the Glee Club, but Soup was gone at that time. Come on, what's his name, the Director of the Glee Club now?

SI: Drinkwater?

ME: No. He was a singer with me. [Editor's Note: David Drinkwater, Professor *Emeritus* of Music at Rutgers, served as the University organist and directed the Kirkpatrick Chapel Choir.]

SI: Okay. You mean the person who directs it now.

ME: Yes.

SI: Patrick.

ME: Patrick, Patrick. [Editor's Note: Patrick Garner has directed the Glee Club since 1993. Following Walter's retirement in 1983, there were several directors: Frederic Hugh Ford (1983-86), Timothy McDonald (1986-87), Robert Kapilow (1987-88), Stephen Barton (1988-91) and Bruce Kolb (1991-93).]

SI: I interviewed him once. I am blanking on his last name.

ME: You'll think of him in a moment, but a nice guy.

SI: Yes.

ME: The Glee Club, after Soup left it, they went through a couple of trial directors, none of which really worked. I only knew that anecdotally, because I was not around. I guess I was in the Army. I remember going back to a reunion. It must've been, gosh, maybe fifteen years after I graduated. Soup was still alive. I went there with my wife, Janet, and my kids and introduced them to Soup, who didn't seem to be too interested in it. That's just a memory that I have, but he was a very revered person, as you well know.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what you studied at Rutgers.

ME: Okay, good point. When I went there, I started off in economics. Toward the end of my first year, I don't know why I did this, but I got an interest in going to Alaska. I don't know why. I found an ad in a paper somewhere about summer jobs in Alaska, that if I applied for, I could get a summer job, guaranteed summer job. So, I ultimately called up two of my high school friends, both of whom were in different colleges, and asked them if they wanted to go up there for the summer, got good pay and that sort of thing.

So, I bought a 1938 DeSoto sedan from my older brother. He and I put new rings and bearings on the engine. We set sail and drove all the way up, but the first thing we did was get two spare

tires, because we knew that the ALCAN Highway was a dirt road. The first flat tire we had was on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. We ultimately wound up with six flat tires.

[Editor's Note: Constructed between March and September 1942, the originally 1,700-mile Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) Highway served as a military supply route to Alaska, then under attack by Japanese forces. The highway was opened to civilian traffic in 1948.]

SI: Wow.

ME: I had never been west of Harrisburg in my entire life. When I got up into the Canadian Rockies, I just could not believe what I was seeing and I was terribly, terribly impressed. After being up there--I'll come back to that in a moment--get back to Rutgers, I changed my major to geology, which was not a good idea, because I had missed the introductory courses. I remember the head of the department giving me instructions in how to catch up, and so forth. I don't know that I did a good job, but I was in that major for, oh, probably three years.

There weren't many major guys like me, majoring in geology back then. Our headquarters was what's now the museum building, which was Geology Hall, as we would call it, we called it back then. I enjoyed that very much, but it turned out that I just wasn't going to be able to graduate unless I went for a couple more years. So, I switched back to economics and I was able to catch up there. That was a lot easier and that was what it was. I remember that the head of the department, a guy by the name of Helgi Johnson--you knew that?

SI: Yes.

ME: Did you?

SI: Yes.

ME: Did you take any geology way back when?

SI: No, but I have interviewed a few geology majors who recall Helgi and the field trips he would take you on. [Editor's Note: Dr. Helgi Johnson, a specialist in stratigraphy and paleontology, served in the Geology Department from 1951 to 1970, including as department chairman from 1945 to 1961.]

ME: Yes, and they were most interesting, really, really great. I remember the final exam in paleontology. There were six of us and we reported down in the basement of the Geology Hall at one o'clock. We sat there and we sat there and we sat there. You know, you only give a professor ten minutes--well, not for a final. We all decided, six of us, we're going to stay there for a good while.

So, after about an hour, who comes down from upstairs but Professor Johnson? He looked around and he said, "What are you guys doing here?" [laughter] We told him and he just gave himself a (dope?) slap, figuratively, and pleaded with us to come back when we could or whatever. We finally [did]; I've forgotten how. He must've given us, two or three--the six of us

didn't get together for the final exam--maybe two here, three there and one there, kind of thing. We managed. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: There was another professor, Martens. Does that [sound familiar]?

SI: It does not ring a bell for me. [Editor's Note: Dr. James H. C. Martens, a specialist in sedimentology, served in the Geology Department from 1947 to 1966, including as department chairman from 1961 to 1966.]

ME: Sort of, he looked as though he was a grumpy old man. We had a course in mineralogy. Our labs were to take specimens, look at them, turn them around and God knows what we did then. In a lab, we brought our lunches there to eat lunch. One of the guys had a roast beef sandwich. So, he took a tiny, little bit of the roast beef off. He mashed it into a vein of this material and took it up to the professor, I think Martens, and said that he couldn't identify this mineral, "What was it?"

I'll never forget Martens looking at it. Sort of in this "ho-ho-ho," he said, "Looked like roast beef to me," [laughter] so, a small anecdote, but that's okay. By the way, on the sixty-fifth anniversary, I was interested in going back to the building and went upstairs to the museum, where it looked very much [like it did] years ago and quite interesting. They had a floor map of New Jersey; maybe you saw that.

SI: Yes.

ME: Pretty cool, I thought, and it was very interesting. I didn't spend enough time there, but that's beside the point.

SI: Let me follow up on that summer you spent in Alaska. Tell me a little bit more about that.

ME: Okay. Well, before I went there, I went into New York City, to the Esso Building [75 Rockefeller Plaza]--not Exxon, Esso Building--because I heard that they would give you free maps and mark your route, anywhere you wanted to go. So, I went in there. For God knows why, I went all the way in there, but I did. I got maps all the way up to Fairbanks. So, off we went with the maps.

When we got across the border into Canada, the first town was Lethbridge, and then, Calgary, and then, Edmonton. I was prepared for the ALCAN Highway, which technically began at Dawson Creek, but that was some four hundred miles beyond Edmonton. As soon as we got outside Edmonton, it got to be a dirt road.

So, our trip to Alaska was seventeen, almost eighteen, hundred miles of dirt road, and it was spectacular. Some of the highlights were the dust. We had five flat tires. It took three people to change a flat tire--one person to jack it up, take the tire off and put the spare on, all by himself, and the other two to keep the mosquitos away from him. It was that grim.

SI: Wow.

ME: When we got along there, we came to two places where the [US Army] Corps of Engineers had built suspension bridges. One of them was the Liard River and the other was the Peace River. After coming X number of miles on the dirt road, we came on to these concrete bridges. They were so neat, so smooth and so clean, we went to the end and backed up all the way and came back a couple of times, just to go over a good road. [laughter] The trip was sensational. It really was.

When we got to Alaska, I had gotten these certificates for a job with the USRRM, the United States Mining and Refining Company, USRRM. When we got into Fairbanks, we didn't know where to go and we stopped at a station. Somebody said, "You have to go out seven miles to the west, and that's where they have their offices." So, we did and showed our credentials and we were put on the payroll. That turned out to be a tough job. It was ten hours a day, seven days a week, fascinating work, though.

The process there for recovering the gold was to placer mine a hill. They knew where the gold was. It was an old streambed down. After you got the mountain away, then, you were down in permafrost. In order to get the dredge in there, you had to melt the permafrost. That's where my work, and the other two guys', we're put. We had to take the pipe and it would be driven in, down to about fifteen feet, a one-inch pipe, and hooked up with water.

Water would be pushed down and circulated there until the fall, which they would disconnect the water. By that time, the permafrost down by the riverbed, fifteen, twenty feet below us, was thawed. Then, the next year, the dredge would come through. It was a floating dredge, a big, ugly floating dredge. They separated the material over a bed of mercury and the rocks that they're separating were thrown out the back.

When my wife and I went up there--gosh, that's been about fifteen years ago--that overburden that they put back there is still there. It looks as ugly as it was when it was put there. It's just open rock. One time, I was told to go over to the dredge and report to the foreman over there. So, somebody else went with me and he said, "Well, you pick up that box and take it out to the truck," or whatever, something like that. The box was a narrow box, galvanized iron, about that wide, about that long and about that deep, well, maybe longer than that.

SI: Like an ammo box?

ME: Yes, but it was much deeper, with two handles, big handles, on either end. So, the foreman said, "Take that out to the [truck]." So, the other guy and I started to pick this thing up. It was full of gold. [laughter] You couldn't see it, of course, but it was very, very heavy. That's what I remembered vividly.

Well, that was too much work for us, though we got room and board. We sent one of the other two guys back into Fairbanks to see if he could get us a better job. He came back and he said, "Yes, got a better job. We'll go to Ladd Air Force Base," which was in Fairbanks at that time. It

doesn't exist anymore. "We'll be maintenance engineers," which meant nothing more than sweeping out barracks. We got paid more, we had a half a day Saturday and Sunday off and we got room and board--couldn't beat that with a stick.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, that was good. Then, the car decided that it didn't want to run anymore, because we had tightened the bearings, when we put them back on again, too tight. We didn't know anything about a strain gauge, a torque wrench, if you know what that is, okay. So, there was a garage on base. When I say "garage," it was a tent and it had a sand pad out front, where some cars were parked, and so forth and so on. I took this car over there.

The Sergeant who was in charge knew everything. He didn't, but he thought he did. "Oh, I can fix that, yes, no problem. Just leave it here and I'll take care of it." So, next week, we went back to see that the engine was in pieces, buried in the sand all over the place. The pistons were here and they were full of sand. [laughter] The guy, the Sergeant, wasn't there. "Where was the Sergeant?" "Well, he went out on an exercise. He'll be back next week."

So, we went back next week. Yes, he said, "You want to sell that car?" I said, "Yes," because it was never going to go anywhere on its own. [laughter] He said, "I've got plenty of money, because I played poker and I won a lot of money. I'll give you four hundred dollars for the car," and I had paid my brother two hundred for it, but that's beside the point. [laughter] Then, we were kind of stuck.

So, what we did is, we flew from Fairbanks, on Pan-Am, to Seattle, on our way home. One of them had an uncle that lived in Port Orchard, which was just outside of Seattle, nicely picked us up from the airport and took us back to his house, fed us and got us all prepared for our trip back across the Continent. He took us across the floating bridge, which was a main artery out of Seattle to the east. It's not the main artery anymore. I think the bridge is still there, but I'm not sure. [Editor's Note: This may be the Lake Washington Floating Bridge, opened in 1940 and renamed the Lacey V. Murrow Memorial Bridge in 1967. The original bridge shut down in 1989 and its replacement opened in 1993.]

He dropped us at the end of the bridge and wished us good luck. Our idea was to hitchhike all the way back. Well, we found out that three people couldn't get a ride. So, we all split up and, oddly enough, we all got back to our homes in New Jersey within four hours of each other.

SI: Wow.

ME: Which was pretty cool, but that was an experience that I'm glad I did it once, I would never do it again. [laughter] So, there were some wonderful people out there that would pick you up and I never had any problem. I got stranded a couple of times, but I pulled through that.

In Idaho, I was picked up by a man in a front-seat car, very pleasant man. We drove for maybe a couple hours and he said, "Well, I'm going to turn here. You'll have to get out." As I got out, he said, "No offense, man, but," he said, "you're the first person I ever picked up as a hitchhiker. I

don't intend to do it again. The only reason I picked you up is because I just got out of the hospital, and then, they'd told me I'd be subject to fainting spells." So, I was supposed to be his backup. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: Then, I got to another place on the way home. I was in Montana--boy, that's a long state, oh, the west end of Montana. I'd come through Idaho and I was standing there and not getting a ride. It's very discouraging if you don't get a ride. I looked across the road. On the other side of the road, down about two hundred yards, was a freight train marshalling yard. It was very clear that the trains that were going out that way were going west and the [other] ones east.

So, I figured, "Well, I'm not doing anything. I'll go over here and jump on to a freight train," and I did. I was carrying a little ditty bag. I found a gondola. The train was beginning to move, because they had assembled cars, and so forth. So, I threw my ditty bag over the side, climbed up the railing and jumped in--and jumped on to two hobos there. [laughter] Other than the shock--and I was worried that I had made a very, very bad mistake--it turned out not to be a mistake at all, because these two guys just thought that I was a wonderful young boy, young man, didn't know the ropes. They were bound and determined to get me back to college.

The car, the gondola, was filled with four large steel ingots. They were going somewhere. Although the train didn't go that fast, I don't think, the roadbed was not terribly good and the vibrations were killing. I guess if it got up to over thirty miles per hour, the vibrations were terrible, because you couldn't lay down. You couldn't sit down. It was hard to stand up. So, you crouched, and I got pretty tired of that after a while.

These two guys, we'd come to a train/freight yard and they would show me how to avoid the detectives, to run here and there, and so forth, and so on, and get back on the thing. Then, they found an old passenger car that was going somewhere. So, when the train was just moving, we would jump on to that, because that had springs and that was pretty good. That was high-tech. When we got to South Dakota, I'd had enough of that. So, I got off.

Then, the rides came pretty regularly. I found myself down circling Chicago in a car, and then, pretty much came back to New Jersey. It took me, I guess it was six days to get back. As I say, the other two guys did that and we all got back to our homes within, say, four hours of each other, which was pretty cool. They also had some strange experiences, as I did. We got together once to compare notes. One went up to, he was in Hiram (Ohio) College, and the other went up to New England. I'll think of the college in a moment. That's not too important.

I lost track of them. I did find out that one, the one that went up to New England, had two children eventually, married a very nice girl. When he was out riding his bicycle with his two girls, he fell off with a fatal heart attack and died instantly. Then, ultimately, I lost track of the other one. I think he's not living either. I don't know.

SI: Oh.

ME: Let's see--I haven't gone into my post-graduate life.

SI: We will definitely get into that. Are there any other stories about fraternity life and what that entailed at the time?

ME: Well, the camaraderie was good. I enjoyed most of the people. The life at [the house], in my sophomore year, I was in that one room with three other guys. Then, I got with another guy and we went up to the third floor, room for two of us. It was more room for two than we had, I had, before. There was a fire escape there, which provided a source of bringing beer into the house--and I hate to say this--but peeing off of it, because the only bathroom in the whole house was in the basement.

It was a pretty crummy thing. There were three toilets, mounted on a platform, no dividers or anything. So, you got up there and did your thing. There were two shower stalls back in another room that were equally unappealing, but that was what there was. That's all there was.

I was steward in the fraternity for a couple of years, which provided me with food, which was free. That was nice, but it was very difficult. We had a housemother, Helen Johnson by name, and she had a magnificent attitude. I'm sure she had a blind eye when she had to have one. She was a very, very nice person, wonderful person. Of course, I lost track of her after I graduated and I don't know what happened to her, but an awfully nice person.

After dinner, we'd all go to our rooms to study, and so forth. Come ten o'clock, somebody would say, "Pizza," and we would all pile in somebody's car and go almost across town, but not really, not that far, to a neat place. We'd have a pizza and beer, did that many, many times. The one guy who kind of led that effort, he was the one that called "pizza" far more often than anyone else, Marty Leipold by name, and I'm sure you don't know him. You probably didn't hear of him. He and Norm Tallan--do you know that name?

SI: No.

ME: Okay. He and Norm Tallan were students of ceramics. Norm Tallan was, I think, the fourth person in Rutgers' history that graduated with a perfect "4.0." Marty was just behind him. They were two very, very bright people. I didn't know enough about Marty Leipold, because he was an awfully nice guy.

After graduating, soon after graduating, I was in ROTC and I had orders to report in February of 1955. Now, I had a job with Crucible Steel Company in Harrison, New Jersey, as an industrial engineer of all things. He [Marty] and I would meet in New York and go to the opera and something like that, but Marty disappeared, absolutely disappeared. I found out later that he was gay. I imagine he contracted a disease, because he completely disappeared. I regret that, but anyhow; go back to my ROTC.

SI: It was mandatory then.

ME: Two years was mandatory.

SI: Okay.

ME: Then, you had a choice. So, I decided that I needed the money, which was thirty-six dollars a month. So, I went into Advanced ROTC. It came to toward the middle of my third year when I was in Infantry. They had three branches there, Infantry, Signal and Ordnance. I got put in the Infantry. I said to myself, "Well, in case of a war, I'm a lover, not a fighter. There's got to be some way I can get out of this."

So, I went to the provost marshal and I laid out a compelling case to him that, with all my geology background, I could do a much better job in the Corps of Engineers, of which there was no branch at Rutgers. So, lo and behold, he pulls a few strings, here, there and elsewhere. The next thing I know, for summer camp, I go down to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, the Corps of Engineers' place, summer camp, six weeks. When graduation time came, I was the only one graduating in the Corps of Engineers, which was kind of interesting.

It turned out to be the right decision, because the orders that I had, as I said to you before, were for early February 1955. Along in November, Eisenhower, who was the President, declared that the Korean War would be over at the end of January, the technical part of it. I said to myself, "Well, gee whiz, that means I don't get the GI Bill and all that sort of stuff?"

[Editor's Note: The Korean War began on June 25, 1950. The fighting ended with the signing of the armistice on July 27, 1953, though the date for benefits eligibility was set at January 31, 1955. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill of Rights, offered funding for college or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment and loans to buy homes, to returning World War II veterans. The Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 provided similar benefits to Korean War era veterans.]

So, I took a little time off from Crucible Steel, who were very nice to let me do this. I went around the East Coast trying to figure out how I can get my orders changed. Somebody said, "Well, why don't you go over to Staten Island, because that's the headquarters of the First Army?" So, I got on the ferry boat and went over there, had no idea where to go. I went in to the first door I came to and was told to go down here, went in to that door.

There's the sergeant sitting there and [he said], "What could I do for you?" I said, "Here are my orders. I'd like to have them accelerated. I'd like to get in in January." "Oh, that's okay. Here, I'll change them for you." [laughter] That was my lesson about that the Army ran on sergeants, not second lieutenants.

SI: Yes.

ME: I did. I went in in late January, down to Fort Belvoir for engineering officer training, three-and-a-half months, and then, got sent overseas to Germany, where I spent two years; two three-month assignments in France, but the rest in places south of Stuttgart. That was very, very good duty, gave me a really great chance, even though I'd gone to Alaska and done that sort of stuff, to see the world.

I made contact with some very old relatives that lived in Berlin and was invited to go there. I did, in my Army uniform, but that was when the Russians didn't have the Wall up at that time. I remember taking a military bus into East Berlin, looking around. It was devastating. Nobody will ever know, unless they'd seen the same thing I did, and those people are dying off privately by now, but there was devastation. There was a marked difference between the American Sector and the Russian Sector. The Army bus could pass through there with no trouble at all, but other people were given trouble. The Wall wasn't there.

[Editor's Note: In May 1949, the United States, Great Britain and France consolidated their postwar occupation zones to form West Germany, followed that October by the creation of East Germany in the Soviet sphere. The capital of Germany, Berlin, was similarly divided into West Berlin and East Berlin. In 1961, the Soviet Union constructed the Berlin Wall around West Berlin, which remained in place until November 1989.]

SI: Were your relatives in the Western section?

ME: They were in the American [Zone], yes, and they came through very late. They were very, very fortunate. I'm going to say he was probably twenty-five years older than I. This was a distant cousin, I think. He got captured in Greece, he told me. He didn't want to talk much about his [German] Army experience.

SI: Sure.

ME: Got captured in Greece and went into a prisoner of war camp, was liberated and came back to his house in a suburb of Berlin, a residential, upscale house, that had been taken over by the Americans for a headquarters or whatever. They had given it back to him and they replaced everything that had been wrong with it. Any damage that it had, they replaced it and made it fine for him.

He had a son. He had also a daughter that I never saw, but he had a son by the name of Dirk. Dirk was fifteen years old at that time. He remembered me more than I remembered him, because, in my uniform, I guess I was impressive in some fashion. He took me around Berlin, under his father's direction, sort of. I remember him taking me to the Wannsee. The Wannsee is a large lake in Berlin.

They had a little sailboat on it, which had come through the war for some reason. He and I went out sailing one day and I got to use the tiller. After a while, he cautioned me not to go any farther over in this direction, because--you couldn't see a line there--but that was the Russian Section and they would machine-gun us.

SI: Wow.

ME: So, I turned quickly, but they were very, very gracious to me. Fast-forward, quite a number of years, about Dirk, the father had died and the father owned an apartment, large apartment house, in the center of Berlin. Dirk was living, I guess, there. He called up one [day]-

-we kept in touch as best we could. He came to visit us and we were living in Upper Saddle River at the time. I mean, he was a bon vivant, that international reputation.

We had this great, big Chevy SUV, carried four kids around in. He borrowed it and went down to Washington and Virginia. When he came back, he showed us the pictures that he had taken of all the girls on the hood and this sort of thing. [laughter] We remember that very well. My younger son, who was alive then, and he hit it off beautifully. I mean, they were kindred souls.

Then, we can go back to my younger son, Steven. When he was in college, he didn't do well. He wasn't ready to do that sort of thing, settle down. He got early admission, very bright, early admission to Lafayette, but flunked out, came home and batted around for a while; then, realized that if he was ever going to do anything with his life, he had to get his act together. He did.

He decided to go back to college. He went down to the University of Delaware, who wouldn't take him in unless he demonstrated that he could do the work, and he did. Midway, around halfway through his [college years], he met a gal down there, turned out, to make a long story short, ultimately got married.

Before that, Steve joined the Air Force ROTC down at the University of Delaware. When he graduated, he got his second lieutenant bars and he was the only one of the whole class that was able to go to pilot school and he did. Then, he went out to--I'll think of it--in Texas, and went to school there for pilot training. When he was done there, we were invited to go out to the graduation ceremony, which was pretty cool. We went out there and our older son, John, accompanied us.

We're sitting in the audience and they were talking about the academics, and so forth. They were proud to say that the person who came in first was Steven Elling. His older brother, sitting in the auditorium, in a loud voice, "What?" [laughter] but, anyhow, he came in first. So, then, we knew he was bright. He really was.

He went down to his first assignment; I guess it was in Panama. He had a girlfriend who ultimately went down there. They were not married, so, she could not be on the base, that sort of thing. She also was very, very smart and she decided she was going to go back to school. So, as soon as she left, he decided he did want to marry her and called her up right away. So, that Christmas, he was back here and they got married, which was very nice. She went back down there. Then, we went down to visit them, as we always seemed to do, very successful, lovely trip, just in the southern part of the Panama border.

He flew a special airplane down throughout South America for embassy resupply stuff. He had some hairy tales and that sort of thing, but that's another long story. That was very successful. He and his wife, then, their next assignment was in South Carolina. Steve decided that he was going to go into Special Operations, which is this cloak-and-dagger organization, which he did. He got a couple of Oak Leaf Clusters, commendations for some of the stuff that he did.

He only told us about one operation that he had. I'm sure there were a lot of others that he didn't tell me about, or Janet, but the one he did tell me about was kind of cool. He was in a C-141

[Lockheed C-141 Starlifter]. He was the aircraft commander. They went to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, landed, and I guess, they got some stuff on and off and that sort of thing.

When they went to take off, the tower wouldn't give them clearance and he wanted to know why. "Oh, this comes from the manager of the airport." So, Steve had to take the whole big airplane back to the [hanger] and try to find the manager, who ran away, didn't want to see him, because he wanted ten thousand dollars. So, Steve had no idea where he's going to get ten thousand and, if he did, he wouldn't give it to the guy anyhow.

So, they went back to the Hilton Hotel. They radioed back and got people in Washington a bit stirred up, and so on, and so forth. Finally, I guess it was about two days later, some general in Washington called them up and said, "You're now cleared to take off as soon as you can." Steve said, "Well, General, do you know the rule about 'bottle to the throttle?'" He said, "We're in no condition to take off and we'll take off in twelve hours," [laughter] but that was pretty cool.

We finally found out how the whole thing got resolved. Madeleine Albright was the Secretary of State at that time. She is obviously involved in this, because she gave the order to impound an Ethiopian airliner that was at Kennedy and impounded it. Word went out to Ethiopia, "You want your plane? You've got to let this one go," and that's what happened. [Editor's Note: Madeleine Albright served as US Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001.]

SI: Wow. [laughter]

ME: Yes.

SI: Let me pause for one second.

ME: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We are back on. It sounds like he served for quite a while.

ME: He did. He began to have back problems and, by that time, he had decided to leave the Air Force. He went to FedEx--no, UPS--as a pilot, but his back was not doing well. He didn't seem to be able to get any relief. He had some operations on it. He and his wife, at that time, they had two young children. They were living in Louisville. He had an operation on his back and it didn't seem to help him.

Psychologically, he was hurting badly. His wife became quite impatient with him, which was most unfortunate. He came here to rehab and he went down to Arizona; Janet's brother lived down there. He was there for four or five months and did very well; came back and his wife decided to divorce him. The only relief Steve seemed to be able to get was through drugs, and you can estimate the end of this story, because he overdosed and died. He was forty-one at the time. It still hurts.

SI: Sure.

ME: Anyway, his two children, a girl, and then, a boy, are academically just absolutely superior. The daughter graduated *summa cum laude* from Kentucky. She's now in a physician assistant course, a two-year course that will get her to be a physician's assistant. Nick, Nicholas, who has gone to Alaska with me now twice, is in mining engineering. He has a summer job in Nevada, in a gold mine. He's the only one from Kentucky that got it. They have invited him to come back this year, so, he will. This year, I've told him, if he can do it, I'm going to fly out there and go down in the mine with him, if he can get me in. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: He probably can't, but that's his mission.

SI: Yes.

ME: I'm going to go back to fishing in Alaska again, as I've been doing for years and years. My older son and I are the first to really go up there. We used to go--do you know anything of the geography of Alaska?

SI: A little bit.

ME: The Homer Peninsula, if you go out of Anchorage, due south, on the Peninsula, you come to Homer. [Editor's Note: Homer, a city on the Kenai Peninsula, is 218 miles south of Anchorage.] We would go down there and we would fish for salmon and halibut, but we did that for a couple years. Before Steve passed away, he went with us. Then, we decided to go to Kodiak Island, and you know Kodiak Island.

We'd fly into Anchorage and we'd take a small plane to the town of Kodiak, then, a smaller plane into a little place on the northwest corner called Karluk. Nobody's heard of Karluk. [laughter] It's a little Inuit village. There are no roads into it. There's a couple there that will put us up, feed us, give us a boat, outboard motorboat. We spend the nights there and we'd go out fishing in the Karluk River. It's God's country.

SI: Wow.

ME: I'll tell you, it's just utterly beautiful. It's not terribly mountainous, but it's rugged. There are low hills of about a thousand, two thousand feet, green, green as green can possibly be. We've never been up there that we haven't run into a Kodiak bear, but, if you know what to do, they're no problem at all. You can actually run after them and chase them. It took me a while to do it the first time. [laughter] If you run at it, scream and holler and make a big face like this, then, they'll run away. If you decide you want to run away from them, you're dead.

SI: Yes.

ME: Not a good idea, but we come back there with a lot of [fish]. We do this ourselves up there--filet them, freeze them and vacuum pack them. We bring them back here and, down in my basement, I have, still, some from last year. So, I have to finish eating these rather quickly, so [that] I can go back up again, make more space. [laughter] It's an outing that my older daughter and my older son will be coming with us, as well as the mining engineering student, my grandson. So, there will be four of us this time.

SI: Neat.

ME: There's nothing to do up there.

SI: Yes.

ME: Although, in 1968, a rogue hurricane came through their village and blew it all out to sea. So, the government came in and built them all new houses. There were thirty-six houses, different sizes, and so forth, to fit the need, and they put roads in, dirt roads. They put streetlights in--why? no idea--but they put a water system in, electricity, the whole nine yards.

The town is dying. They put in a school up through the eighth grade. After eighth grade, the kids, Sunday afternoon, have to get on an airplane to fly into Kodiak to go to school Monday through Friday, and then, fly back and that sort of thing. That's their high school.

SI: Wow.

ME: The reason the little town is dying is because these kids go to eighth grade at Karluk, which is nowhere whatsoever. Then, they go into Kodiak, which is a big city--not really, to them, it's [big]--but, then, they get an opportunity to go over to Anchorage, which is a big city. They realize how little they have of the things that they can get in Anchorage. So, they never go back to Kodiak. They never go back to Karluk.

So, all the kids are leaving. The school is now closed, because it has to have, I've forgotten, six or eight students as a minimum, because the government provides two teachers there. If there's not eight students, or ten, they close. They pull the teachers. So, that's why it's dying.

SI: Wow.

ME: But, if you want a cheap house, you can go up there and try and buy it. I wouldn't advise it. Everything that's brought in there has to be flown in. They can bring in stuff by way of sea, but that's terribly expensive. Their generator runs on propane. Every so often, they bring a barge, anchor it offshore and bring a big hose in, big effort, but that's what they do.

SI: Yes.

ME: There's no source of income for them. They get a stipend from the oil pipeline and they get money from the government somehow. We go up there and we pay them a fair price for the

lodge. It's not a lodge, it's a house. If all four of us go up, which we have done before, we're on top of each other, but that's all right.

SI: Yes.

ME: We see all sorts of animals. As I said, we see grizzly bears all the time. There are bald eagles all over the place. It's really beautiful, and it's a shame that the thing is dying.

SI: Yes.

ME: It is, but there's no way for you to go up. Janet, who does not fish--here are these glowing reports, by me and our kids--she, one time, said, "Gee, I think it'd be nice to go up there. When you're off fishing, I'll just wander around and see things." "So, you need to make sure that you can make friends with a Kodiak bear very quickly." [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: She's not suggested she wants to go again at all. She's never been there, but it's the way things go.

SI: I am curious--when you were in Europe, did you do a lot of outdoor activity?

ME: In the Army?

SI: Yes.

ME: We were construction engineers, as opposed to combat engineers.

SI: Yes.

ME: When we went to France, we had an assignment to do some construction. The battalion would get up and go in a big, long convoy to France. We were housed in crummy places for the three months. I remember, we did a lot of earthmoving, some construction of minor stuff, but that was about it.

I remember, I guess it was the first time we went there, the first three months' assignment, one of the things a second lieutenant needs to know is--I was a platoon leader--"Where are your people? What are they doing? How many do you have?" and so on, and so forth. So, you've got to know this all the time, regardless of whether you know it or not.

So, we got word that there was a general coming around to inspect us. So, I'm down in a ditch doing some things and here the General comes along. I jump out and I salute the General. I start talking and he says, "Lieutenant, how old are you?" [laughter] I didn't look old enough to be there. That word got around to everybody in the whole damn company. So, I had trouble living it down.

I was sent to Karlsruhe; I was near Stuttgart. I was sent to Karlsruhe to be part of a cadre of NCO School, did that for, I guess, about a month. Saturday afternoon, after we had our last inspection, or whatever we did up to noon, we'd go back to the BOQ [bachelor officers' quarters] and have a beer and decide what we wanted to do. Some people had to stay there, but there were five of us that really bonded. I got to know these people, these guys, very, very well.

Often as not, we would pick up--somebody would have a car--and we'd go down to Salzburg in Austria, which was about a two-and-a-half-hour drive south on the *Autobahn*. We would go there, get there in the middle of the afternoon. There was a lovely *Gasthaus* [tavern/inn] on top of a hill. I don't know if you've ever been there, but it's an awfully nice city. We'd go there and have a beer, and then, find a place to spend the night, get up and have breakfast somewhere and come back to the base. We did that many, many times.

I learned to ski over there, not well, but, when I came back to the States, I took it up and got to be a little bit better. There was another one of the other guys that I got very close to; his name was Al Johnson. He's passed away now, but he and I were really buddies. He decided that he wanted to ski.

So, what do I know about skiing? So, we went somewhere and bought skis and boots and that sort of thing. The bindings were of such a nature that they were not safety whatsoever. So, you were strapped to the ski. So, we went to a little place in the Black Forest and it had a rope tow. Do you do any skiing?

SI: I have been skiing, so, I know a little bit. I do not know very much.

ME: You know what a rope tow is?

SI: Yes.

ME: Okay. They're hard. So, when we got onto the slope, we were sort of halfway up. So, I decided, and Al did as well, we sort of bobbed and weaved. I didn't fall down. I got down to the bottom and I said, "There's nothing to this." So, I decided to get onto the rope tow. I'm going up on the rope tow and managing. The rope tow went up this way and it leveled off, and then, went up this way. Right at this corner, I fell off.

SI: Oh.

ME: Of course, the guy down at the bottom, the operator, couldn't see that I was off until the stack of people got high enough, who were using words such as, "Stupid American," "*Dummkopf* [blockhead]," that sort of thing. I felt about that high. [laughter] I finally managed to crawl out and get back on the slope. That was my first episode of skiing, but I finally got to ski a little bit better when I got back home.

I bought a Triumph TR3 sports car when I was in Germany. When I got ready to go back home, I came down with mononucleosis. I was all packed and ready to go, so, they couldn't change my orders, but I was in the hospital. I couldn't take my car up to Bremerhaven, which is where it'd

ship back to the States for nothing, no cost. So, two of the people in my platoon took it up there and it got sent over here. When I went to pick it up in--I've forgotten where the place was--but, when they had loaded it, they had taken four ropes, and why they did this, I don't know, but the ropes buckled in each fender perfectly.

SI: Oh.

ME: So, I had to get it fixed and that sort of thing, but that was a neat car. I would drive that everywhere and try to go as fast as I could. I did that once and I got two tickets from the same policeman. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

ME: That was a nice car, and I finally sold it. Then, Janet and I got married. I had gotten rid of the TR3 and I bought a far more usable car, which was a Karmann Ghia, the German Volkswagen, but a sports car. When we got married and had a child, the child was put in the basket in the backseat. There was no such things as straps or any of that sort of stuff, never had a problem. That was our family car, until we had more kids.

Let me jump into a timeframe; let's see where I was at the time. We were living in a place called Lafayette Hill, which was north of Philadelphia, in a nice row house. I was having trouble keeping a job. I was restless. At one time, I answered a blind ad in *The Wall Street Journal*, a little one-inch ad. I've forgotten what it said, but I was sending my résumé everywhere and I never heard from that whatsoever. We had our fourth child in Lafayette Hill.

Lo and behold, the telephone rings and it's Mobil Oil Company in New York. They want to talk to me. So, I'm happy to do that. So, up to New York I went and they were recruiting for the oil exploration and producing company, one of two branches of a consortium in Iran. The two companies that they were recruiting for were part of the consortium. The consortium was made up of Esso, Shell, Texaco, Gulf, a French company, a German company, a Mexican company and all manner of different owners.

Now, I'll go backwards in time. That consortium was put together because British Petroleum Company was the first one to go into the southern part of Iran for oil. When they were there--1908 was the first year they went there--they ultimately had a hundred thousand people working in oil camps in the southern part of the country. They were producing about, oh, a million barrels a day and it was just an arm of the British colonial empire. Churchill had put a refinery in Abadan, which is at the top of the Persian Gulf, if you know any of your geography, can figure it.

[Editor's Note: Grasping oil's strategic implications for naval power, Winston Churchill, as a Member of Parliament, led efforts in the United Kingdom to support British oil explorer William Knox D'Arcy and his fledgling Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in the 1900s. After D'Arcy discovered and drilled the first significant oil well in the Middle East near Masjid-i-Sulaiman in 1908, APOC expanded rapidly, building the Abadan refinery in 1912. Churchill became First

Lord of the Admiralty in 1911 and, by the eve of World War I, had successfully encouraged the British government to acquire a controlling interest in APOC.]

When BP was thrown out by the Shah--the Shah was thrown out by Mosaddegh and he nationalized the oil industry--but the oil industry in the world was such that he couldn't get away with that, because nobody would buy his oil. So, he got thrown out and the Shah got put back in again. The Shah then established a consortium of many independent oil companies, majors in the world.

[Editor's Note: Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) served as the last Shah of Iran from 1941 to 1979. In 1951, the Shah appointed Mohammad Mosaddegh (1882-1967) as Prime Minister of Iran. Soon afterward, Mosaddegh angered the United Kingdom by nationalizing the Iranian oil industry. On August 19, 1953, a military coup d'état backed by the CIA, MI6 and the Shah removed Mosaddegh from power.]

That was staffed by--they principally had to use foreign people, because they didn't have any education among the local people. When the consortium was up and running and they began training Iranian people, they still didn't have enough. So, member companies would send their people over for a couple of years, technical people to learn, in geology, geography and geophysics, and so forth. They would go back, but they still didn't have enough. They needed to have what they called direct hires.

When Mobil called me and I went up there to talk to them, I would've been a direct hire. Ultimately, I was, because they made a very gracious offer to me and they were quite willing to take Janet and the four kids over there. We packed up and moved, sold our house in Lafayette Hill, put stuff in storage and stuff to take with us. We went over there and we were there for five years, in the southern part of the country. We went over with four kids. The youngest was one. We came back with four kids and they were all five years older.

On balance, that was a very neat thing for us. Life was very different, because we were in the southern part of the country, which was hot. We were in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains that were about nine hundred feet in elevation, but they were still bloody hot. Every so often, we would get a sandstorm that would last for three days kind of thing, but it was such a different way of life for us, completely different way of life.

SI: Yes.

ME: We managed to do it very well. The highs were higher and the lows were lower, but I had six weeks of vacation every year and they would pay for all of us to go back to our point of origin, six of us. We could fly back to Philadelphia. I soon found, from all the other expatriates over there, the best way to handle that would be to take the money and you could buy a ticket. They would give you the money [for a ticket] from Abadan to Philadelphia, but you could take that and you could go from Abadan to Norway, to Spain, and then, Philadelphia, and come back, that sort of thing. That's what we did for five years.

SI: Wow.

ME: In the fifth year, we went through the Far East and took two months to get home. When I left there, I didn't have a job, because I was a direct hire, but they were very generous in severance and that sort of stuff. So, when I got back to the States, we lived with Janet's parents outside of Philadelphia for almost a year. I finally got a job in Northern New Jersey with Western Electric, had nothing to do with oil and gas, but I took it, because it was a very fine job.

We moved up there, and then, I had an opportunity to join Union Carbide in their oil/chemical business. I took that and it took me into New York. We stayed where we lived in Upper Saddle River. The commute was tough, very, very tough. I didn't like it, but the job with Union Carbide was really excellent, but they decided, instead of staying in New York, they were moving up to Connecticut.

At that very time, the telephone rang. A headhunter had found me and said, "You might want to consider coming down to here." ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries], the British chemical company, a big, big chemical company, was setting up a subsidiary down here in oil and gas exploration. Make a long story short, I did. That's why we've been here for forty-one years.

SI: Wow.

ME: Yes, the joint venture with ICI, this subsidiary, and Chevron. ICI and Chevron had had a very happy joint venture in the North Sea and they found a huge deposit there. That made ICI so much money that they thought Chevron walked on water, and Chevron offered them an opportunity of a joint venture here. They didn't know how to do it. That's what I came down here to head up for a while.

I didn't know it, at that time, that DuPont, which is down here, as you know, had almost the same kind of joint venture with Conoco, but they were six months older than our business. I got to know the guy who was heading up that joint venture in DuPont. They turned out to have the very same problems that I ran into.

There's a mentality in a corporation. If it's a steel company, it's a steel company mentality, oil company, chemical company, and they're different. To illustrate it, when I first got there, in ICI, the joint venture called for ICI to pay for certain costs in exploring, for drilling wells. If a well was considered economic, it would be completed. Then, Chevron would pay for that part, but the riskier part was for drilling the exploration wells.

So, when I came here, the business was already underway and I sort of had to find my way through ICI down here. One day, I got a cash call from Chevron and, per the contract, it was due to be paid to Chevron. So, I called up the treasurer down here and I introduced myself. He said, "Oh, I know who you are." I hadn't met him.

I said, "Well, I have a cash call here for a million dollars. Would you be good enough to send Chevron a million dollars?" and there was a long, dramatic pause on the other side. [laughter] He said, "Mr. Elling, in ICI, God himself can't approve a cash call for a million dollars. You have to justify it. You have to get signed off, all the way up to God and back." I'm exaggerating

a bit. It went to Chevron, because it [was due], but it was one of the mentalities of the chemical company. That's the way they did things; the oil company, no.

SI: Yes.

ME: No. You get there and you have an agreement with whomever it is to drill and complete and that sort of thing. You just go ahead and do it, that's all.

When I got to Iran in 1968, first time there, with the kids and the family, and so forth, that oil business was so much larger in scope than anything I had ever seen before. They drilled a well over there and, if it didn't produce more than a thousand barrels, they would cap it and leave it alone, because it wasn't worth it.

Before I got to Iran, they had drilled one well in a particular anticline formation [an arch-like fold in rock strata] that produced 108,000 barrels a day, which was a record in the world, but they had to shut it back, because there were so many vibration harmonics that occurred. So, they shut it back to 92,000--shut it back to 92,000 barrels a day. That's incredible.

When we got there, we got put into; the guy I was to work for--how can I explain this? The British system over there still had roots. If you were a lowly "serf" or laborer, you didn't get any housing, but, if you got up a little bit, you got maybe a little bit more. If you got a little bit higher, maybe they'd give you a radio you could put in, and so on, and so forth, a better house.

Well, when I got there, my manager, his wife had left him. He was in an old British colonial house, lovely house, very, very old. So, he said, "Well, look, I don't need all this space. You go live here and I'll go somewhere else," which he did--until the powers in the company found out that I was in a house that I wasn't allowed to have. I didn't have enough "brownie points," if you will.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, I got moved into a small house in a development that was a little bit farther out from the main town. That was too small. Then, I rattled the cage badly and, finally, got a better house. We lived happily ever after, so-to-speak.

SI: In terms of your living area and the places you and your family would go to socialize, was it all Westerners or a mix?

ME: Yes and no. There was a lot of clubs that had been [set up], the cricket club and the arts club and golf club. By the way, they had an eighteen-hole, PGA-approved golf course over there. I never played golf, but, anyhow, it's something to do on Saturday afternoon, which was Fridays--Thursday and Friday were Saturday and Sunday over there. So, I'd go over there with a friend of mine and we'd tee off.

In the summers, when we'd come back here on vacation and live with Janet's folks, her father was a very, very good golfer. I mean, he had, oh, I think something like a four handicap, if you know anything about that.

SI: Yes.

ME: You know, okay. I would tell him about playing on this golf course, which was terribly unique, as I say, PGA-approved. You tee off and you'd have to climb on to a tee box, but it was an adobe thing and it was hard as a rock. Your caddy, which would be a local kid, knew enough to bring a little baggie with mud in it.

He would pass you a piece of mud and he would've shaped it like an hourglass very quick and put it on there. You'd put the ball on it and you'd hit it off and the tee would disappear and would be gone. Who cared? because you get another one. You'd go and you'd hit onto the green. It was hotter than hell in the summer. We got a little rain in the winter.

There's no grass, no grass on the [green], technically no grass. So, you go onto the green, which was oiled sand, quite good [as] a matter of fact, but you had to be very careful, because, when you hit your ball onto the green, onto the sand, you couldn't walk between the ball and the hole, because you'd leave big footprints. So, you'd do that and your caddy, then--there was a rake at the entrance of the green--he would rake it all back again for the next hitter to come.

I'd be telling this to Janet's father on our way home, he would just sort of nod, this sort of thing. Then, we finally talked them into coming to visit us and they did. Of course, I couldn't wait to get him out on the golf course. So, we got out there, got up on the first tee. By the way, on the second tee, if you sliced it badly, you would hit it over a little hill and into a flare fire, because there were active wells that had been built for a while and they were venting the gas. That's a phenomenon in producing oil. These gas flares, sometimes, were pretty darn big.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, if you hit your ball over there, you didn't go after it. You had to take a penalty shot, because the ball was irretrievable, unless you wanted to burn yourself to death. So, I got her dad on the first tee and he teed off. We walked to the green and hit into the hole and went walking off for the second green. He turned to me and he said, "Mike," he said, "you talked about this for so many times." He said, "I really had no idea what it was." [laughter] He was quite impressed with it, but we only did nine, because it was summertime and very hot. We would get up to 120 with no trouble.

SI: Wow.

ME: Yes, so, that was not good. You talked about social [activity]. We had a lot of clubs, as I was mentioning to you, as I said, this, that and the other thing. I'll come back to the cricket club in a minute, but, in many of them, there were a mixture of local people and expatriates. In some that the local people really had no interest in, such as the arts club--some of them, a few, did, but that sort of thing--it was mostly expatriate, the expatriate community.

The expatriate community was shrinking, because that was a goal of the consortium, was to turn everything over to the local people and train them, and then, get out of there. That was the whole idea. So, the expatriate community was shrinking. Some people who left, their jobs would be taken by local people, capable, no problem there at all, but capable--but things began to fall apart. We left there in 1973, from '68 to '73.

SI: Okay.

ME: In '73, if we had stayed, we would've had to move from our town down on to the plains, about another fifty miles to the south, to a city called Ahvaz; means nothing unless you've been looking at your map. We would have to pick up and move our household stuff down there.

We decided--we'd been there five years--the kids were running out of school. The school was an overseas school for expatriates. Although it was tiny, it was adequate, but the kids needed a better school. After five years, we were ready to go home. So, that's why we went home.

Things fell apart in--well, the whole place fell apart in '79, end of '78, '79. There was a revolution. The Shah was kicked out and went over to Egypt and died, that sort of thing, but we had gone by then, although we kept track of a number of people there. Some of them, I guess the revolutionaries thought they were tainted too badly and a lot of them had "heart attacks," okay, which was their loss, really, because a lot of people that were very, very keen Iranians died, or they were killed, but that's history now and it's all over with.

[Editor's Note: In January 1979, the Shah of Iran fled Iran into exile in Egypt as the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, reached its crescendo. A national referendum in April 1979 led to the declaration of the Islamic Republic of Iran ruled by Khomeini as supreme leader.]

Now, when I got there, they were producing about three million barrels a day. When I left, we were producing about four. It got up to a little over five. That was really the maximum that they could handle and, sometimes, they didn't handle that too well. The whole geography of the place was that the oil was in the southern part of the country. For export, it was pipelined offshore to a small island, called Kharg Island. It was piped under the ocean to great, big tanks over there. Then, tankers would come and load up and disappear over the horizon, member companies.

I remember going down there visiting for a couple of reasons. I took one of my guys with me, an Iranian, and we flew down there. We had a fleet of airplanes--the company had--down there that we would get on and get off with impunity. I mean, we would plan and we would be known to be on the plane, and so on. The plane that was due to take us off of Kharg--we spent the night there--we were ahead of time. We didn't have anything to do for several hours.

So, I said to this young man, "Let's go out onto the jetty," and they had a T-jetty. If that's the mainland there, the jetty would come out this way, and then, a big dock like this. That was the jetty. This was a mile long. There were a number of tankers out here. The jetty had two sides, of course. The side over here could take the deepest water, had the deepest water.

We finally got out there--nobody around. Nobody at all. Nobody stopped us. I think they must have seen us; somebody must have seen us. So, we get out there and there's a super tanker down at that corner. We say, "Well, let's go down and take a look at that." So, we walked down there and there's still nobody around. The gangway is there.

So, I said, "Well, let's go on it, see what happens." So, we go up the gangway, get on top of this super tanker. The first thing is, my god, it's big. I mean, it is huge. It was 206,000 tons. So, there's still nobody there. So, we go back to the tower area and open the door and walk in. Here comes a man down the stairs, "May I help you?" "Uh, well, we're sorry, we're looking around." "Oh," he said, "well, come on, I'm the captain. I'll show you around," and we had a tour of the tanker, huge, just huge. The absence of people was profound.

He showed us the quarters, where the guys would sleep, the galley, the recreation area, but a terribly lonely life, because he and the crew would get on one of these boats and they'd go to a place like Kharg Island, which was the rear-end of nowhere, I'll be honest with you, nothing to do. So, they load up and they go back on the tanker. They go off to somewhere else, unload. It's the same barren area kind of place. They don't get off the boat for three, six months, a year, voluntary, of course. They're making a lot of good money. That's why they stay on the boat.

SI: Yes.

ME: But, what a life, what a life, yes. This captain was very happy to see us, because he wouldn't have anybody to talk to. [laughter]

SI: Yes, wow.

ME: That was quite an interesting thing. Then, we got off the boat, walked all the way back to the jetty, got to the airport and flew home. So, that was back to Masjid-i-Sulaiman. Masjid-i-Sulaiman is Farsi--oh, gosh, I've forgotten the translation, something about kings. It's the place where, in 1908, BP found the first oil there. They didn't know what they had when they drilled it, but a lot of oil came up.

The formation that they hit, at that time, was the top of a gigantic formation that was still producing oil when we got there--amazing, I mean, just huge. Some of the deposits were staggeringly large.

My job over there was sort of economics and planning. It was really cool, because the member companies would say they wanted another two hundred thousand barrels a day of capacity. So, in our department, we would have to know where we could find it, but we can't go out there and find it and produce it and give it to them next year, because it takes five years to do that, or more. So, we would be working with the geologists and the geophysicists, and so forth, to find out where we would potentially find more oil, and then, be able to produce it when it was called on. That's basically what we did, because those numbers are huge.

SI: Yes.

ME: Yes. Back here, you'd knock at least one zero off of them and you might get a good well. Over there, it was, I told you, a thousand barrel a day, new well, they cap it, say, "Oh, phooey."

SI: Could we take a break for a minute?

[TAPE PAUSED]

ME: We got over there and we were living in this house that belonged to my manager. We came along and we could look out and there was a hill about a mile away, not very big. I didn't know anything about this, but, soon, there was a drilling rig over there, well within sight.

I found out what was happening is because they wanted to drill down to eleven thousand feet to get what was known as sour gas. Sour gas had a lot of hydrogen sulfide in it, which was terribly, terribly dangerous. A whiff of it will kill you, because they were putting in another [facility], a chemical plant, in down near the Gulf, near Khorramshahr. They wanted the hydrogen sulfide to put into product.

I wasn't home at the time; Janet was. She heard this boom and she looked out there and she saw the rig on fire. Then, the rig fell over and this plume of fire went way up. Of course, that's very bad news. The bad news is, because it's hydrogen sulfide, they could go in there and they could get it out rather quickly, within a couple of days if they wanted to, but the time it would take them, from the time they got the flame out to capping it, would be enough time for the gas to roll down the hill, because it was heavier than air, into the town and kill everyone. So, that was not [ideal]--took a dim view of that. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

ME: Again, this was a whole business that I knew nothing about. So, the call went out for a guy by the name of Red Adair. You ever hear of him?

[Editor's Note: Paul Neal "Red" Adair (1915-2004) was a world-renowned firefighter and an innovator in using explosives to extinguish oil well fires.]

SI: Yes.

ME: Fireman.

SI: Yes, he blows out the well fires.

ME: Right, yes. So, he was busy somewhere. So, he sent his associate by the name of Boots Hansen over, who looked at the thing and said, "Well, this is how we're going to have to do it, but it's going to take time. We have to start marshaling all of our equipment," and so forth. "The way we're going to do this, if this is the surface of the ground and that's down at eleven thousand feet, we're going to have to drill a well down there and turn the corner and intersect the bottom.

We're going to push all sorts of debris down," it's not debris, but stuff, "down here. We're going to flood this over to the bottom of the well and it gets sucked up.

[Editor's Note: Asger "Boots" Hansen (1926-2019) worked for Red Adair from 1949 to 1977. He then started a competing company with Ed "Coots" Matthews, Boots and Coots, Inc.]

SI: Yes.

ME: "All of it will get up to the top and that will stop the gas from coming out." They did that, but they couldn't push enough down to stop the well flowing. So, they had to move the rig over and do it again and they did. They got it out, but, to see that, it was just really fascinating. If they needed something, if they needed a left-handed monkey wrench that you could only get in Hong Kong, they would send an airplane for it. Everything stopped, "Get that fire out."

SI: Yes.

ME: The Gemini Space Program was underway at that time. One of the times it came over the fire, they looked down and they saw a fire, but they were up too high to see a fire. So, they radioed Mission Control and asked, "What are we seeing?" Mission Control had to come and tell them what it was, because they had to find out themselves. That flame was up about 150 feet. [Editor's Note: Project Gemini, NASA's second manned space flight program, ran from 1961 to 1966.]

SI: Wow.

ME: And made a noise, a noise. In the evening, every windowpane in that old house rattled. The noise was tremendous.

SI: Wow.

ME: Boots Hansen, once he was there and set things up, wanted to go home. Of course, they didn't want him to go home, from the standpoint of image, because they wanted to make sure everybody knew that they had maximum effort. Boots Hansen was on the scene and all is well in heaven.

So, we, the company, put him up in this guest house, which was a very modest kind of thing, had a bar and a couple of rooms in it. That's about it. I think they fed him there. I'm pretty sure they did. One of my guys went over there one evening, just to introduce himself to Boots Hansen. He found Boots Hansen at the bar and Boots Hansen was not happy. He did not want to stay there any longer. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

ME: He said to my friend, Bob Beck was his name, "Bob," he says, "you know, this place is like wiping your ass with a wagon wheel--there's no end to it." [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: I have used that many times since that time, because it just tells you everything about something. You're welcome to use it.

SI: Yes, wow. [laughter]

ME: Well, that's about all I can think to tell you.

SI: To go back earlier, you had gotten your MBA when you came out of the military.

ME: Yes, I did. I worked for General Electric in Philadelphia, in their missile and defense department. Reentry vehicles was what they were doing. I first started off in a laboratory. That was very interesting, because they were trying to figure out how to make a nose cone that would stand reentry. Then, I went from the lab down into the main building, down in Philadelphia. Right across the street was Drexel. So, I finished my work in GE and walked across the street.

I don't know that I got an awful lot out of the MBA. It was fun. I didn't meet anybody, because everybody--not everybody, but people who were doing night work there, that is, going to school at night--were people like me. They had a job. They'd go there and they probably ran back to their families. I was not married at the time. So, it was very transient. I got my degree in a little less than three years. It looks good on the résumé; I don't know that it really did me any good.

SI: How did you meet your wife? Was it during that time?

ME: When I was over at the research space sciences laboratory in northern Philadelphia, GE was recruiting at colleges. They went down to William & Mary. Apparently, somehow, the recruiters got wind of the fact that we in the space sciences lab needed computer people. Janet had majored in math. She had a particular course under her belt at the time, which GE made her an offer that was very, very generous for her. She took the job and came up. The rest is history. That's when I met her.

In the lab, we had a group of scientists, engineers. Everybody knew each other. It wasn't a big lab, but we had a particular piece of experimental equipment that was unique. Anyhow, we socialized a lot. I remember--I'd like to say it this way--I met Janet soon after she got there at a farewell party for one of my girlfriends. Well, she wasn't a girlfriend. I mean, she was a girl and a nice person, but there was nothing really between us. She was leaving and they gave her a big party. Janet went and I went, and the rest is history.

After hours, I was working in Philadelphia for the Republican Party and there was a guy running for the House. Philadelphia was solid Democrat, absolutely solid Democrat, but I got recruited to go door-to-door and that sort of thing. At this farewell party, I'd asked her if she would like to help recruiting. That was "the nose of the camel." From there, it was downhill. We got engaged, I think, in about seven weeks.

SI: Wow.

ME: Yes, waited for a while, and then, got married.

SI: In-between Iran and when you worked for General Electric, were there any other jobs?

ME: Let me see if I can go back and straighten the timeline out a little bit. When I got out of the Army, that's when I went to work for GE. My older brother had gotten a job at GE in Evendale, [Ohio], but, somehow, he knew someone in GE in Philadelphia. That's how I landed a job there. When I first got there, I went to the space sciences lab and that was where I met Janet. Then, I was moved into Philadelphia, and then, I went to get my master's degree.

Gosh, I'm having a blank myself on my timeline. With the timeline, I would think that I was married with children at the time I got my master's degree and I wasn't. So, I guess I got down to Philadelphia and through the master's degree sooner than I may have said to you. Then, it was after that that I met Janet, yes. Maybe it didn't take me three years. It probably took me only two years, because I wasn't married. I didn't have any ties to anything, so, I could take as many courses as I could. Some of the courses were really good. I enjoyed them. Some of them were a lot of work. Oh, I have to go back to my undergraduate at Rutgers.

SI: Sure.

ME: I had an advanced economics course. I think it was in my last year. It was in the chemistry building--Jameson, is that the name of the campus? What is it?

SI: Jameson is over on the Douglass Campus.

ME: Yes. What's the main campus, with the William of Orange on it? [Editor's Note: On Voorhees Mall on the Rutgers' College Avenue Campus stands a statue of William I, Prince of Orange, or "William the Silent," a nod to Rutgers University's Dutch heritage.]

SI: That is College Avenue.

ME: Yes, but there's a name of that campus.

SI: Old Queens or Voorhees Mall?

ME: I guess it's Voorhees Mall, okay. There may be eight of us in this class, Professor Kohr, K-O-H-R, I'm sure you've never heard of him, a Lichtenstein man, very short, even shorter than I am. He fit the bill all the time, because he had this Tyrolean hat with a feather on it. He spoke with a big accent, and so forth, nice person, but he was deaf as a post. So, he'd come into the class and he'd take this big speaker, or whatever it was, out of his pocket and put it on the desk, like this, "Ach." Then, we'd begin talking about whatever it was we were to talk about.

When you were called on, you stood up. That was his requirement--you stood up. He called on some guy in the back, who obviously was not prepared. So, he stood up and he started--he would mouth an answer, didn't say a word, but mouthed something. The professor thought he

was talking softly, so, he would turn the machine up to the high volume. Then, this guy would bellow out the answer, which was kind of cruel.

SI: Yes.

ME: And, "Ach, stupid machine."

SI: Wow. [laughter]

ME: That was pretty cruel.

SI: Yes.

ME: One of the first things that he said to us--that old chemistry building was very, indeed, an old building. I don't know what they've done with it now. What is it called? Who do they use it for?

SI: Most of the buildings on that campus are Humanities or office buildings.

ME: Okay, well, anyway.

SI: Was it Milledoler or Murray?

ME: I can't remember.

SI: Okay.

ME: When we first got into the class, he said to us, he said, "I'm not a believer in spot quizzes and I will not give you a spot quiz." He looked up at the transom. There were transoms over the doors. It was that old kind of a building, big, big transom. He said, "I would rather climb through that transom than give you a spot quiz."

So, after this episode with this one guy, here comes Professor Kohr, down the hall, with a stepladder. That man--he was small, I said--that man climbed onto that stepladder, climbed through the transom and gave us a spot quiz.

SI: Wow. [laughter]

ME: They don't make them like that anymore.

SI: Yes. That is a good story. [laughter]

ME: Professor Kohr, nice man.

SI: Yes. Do any other professors stand out in your memory?

ME: Well, Helgi Johnson was one and Soup, of course. Although I never had him for a course, he was very formative to me. I never knew the name of the person, but we had a language requirement--as a freshman, we had to take a language. I guess that Rutgers was bringing in students, foreign students, as assistant--what would they call them?

SI: Teaching assistants or graduate assistants?

ME: Yes, graduate assistants, yes, and someone, a girl, was trying to teach us Spanish. We couldn't understand her English, to say the least. I remember going somewhere and complaining about it and told, "Go away."

SI: You mentioned how, in your fraternity, a lot of people were jammed together. Do you remember other aspects of the campus being overcrowded or kind of in makeshift facilities?

ME: Yes, yes, I've forgotten about the building plans. The only building I keenly remember was not on the main campus area. It was across the river. It was the Institute of Microbiology, Waksman, I believe was his name, who had invented streptomycin.

[Editor's Note: Dr. Selman Waksman (1888-1973) was a microbiologist whose research led to the discovery of streptomycin and who coined the term "antibiotics." He joined the Rutgers University faculty in 1918. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1952. The Waksman Institute of Microbiology was founded in 1954 on Rutgers' Busch Campus.]

SI: Yes.

ME: Yes. That was so positioned that, when you walked up College Avenue, you could see it all the way across this [landscape]. When I went back for the sixty-fifth, I got on that bus with Janet to go over there to see all of it, which was all new to me. I'd never seen it. It did not pass that institute building, which I had asked them to do, but they were on a route that didn't deviate, too bad. It's still there, I'm sure.

SI: Yes.

ME: Is it booming? I have no idea.

SI: I think so. That is not really my field, but I have seen some of their annual reports. They seem to be doing well.

ME: Okay.

SI: The University has a lot of new buildings that they want to show people.

ME: Oh, boy, I'm glad I never got off the bus over there, because I would still be trying to find my way home. [laughter]

SI: Yes.

ME: Why, it's big, huge.

SI: Yes, lots of big changes. From what I have heard, in the period you were there, it was just growing much faster than the physical plant could catch up.

ME: Boy, I'll say, yes. One of the jobs, I would go up to the employment office, which was also on Union Street. There was a lady there I got to know quite well and I'd go up there and see about a job here or there. One of the jobs that I got was parking cars at the football games.

Should I tell you this? [laughter] When I was there, any football game, you could get a ticket. I think you could get two tickets. You'd go somewhere and get them and have them in your hand and go out there. Well, I didn't need a ticket, because I was parking cars. I had some sort of a tag or something that let me through the gate.

Most of the kids who didn't want to go didn't know what to do with their tickets. I would accumulate a whole bunch of them and go out there and scalp them. On a good day, that would see me for the next several weeks in anything I needed. That was very illegal. The next year, they cut that all out. [laughter]

SI: All right.

ME: But, it was a good job, every home game. My senior year, I was in charge of a parking area. They gave me a jeep to be out there and do all that sort of stuff. That morning, I woke up and I felt terrible, really sick. So, I went up to the infirmary.

I got a shot of penicillin, with instructions to go directly back to bed, but I knew that if I didn't go out to that job--we had a bonus. At the end of the season, we'd get an extra five bucks or something like that. If I didn't to all the games, I would lose the fee I got for that time as well as the bonus. Besides, I wanted to drive the jeep.

So, as I walked back to the fraternity house, I began to feel quite better. Then, I said, "I'm going," went and got the jeep and went out there and put a full day's work in. That's what penicillin did when you first got the first dose of it. Nowadays, I guess everybody's somewhat immune to it, the value of it. Do they use penicillin anymore?

SI: They try not to. It is usually amoxicillin or something.

ME: Yes, yes.

SI: With my kids, they will only give them antibiotics as a last resort.

ME: Yes, but, boy, when penicillin came out, boy, it was a miracle drug.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, I remember that.

SI: What about other summer jobs and experiences? I would imagine you had to work.

ME: Well, one summer was in Alaska that I talked about. Another summer was taken up by ROTC summer camp. The other summers, I would work more full-time for my uncles in the plumbing business.

SI: Okay.

ME: That would see me employed or busy. No, I don't know that I did anything in particular. I do remember driving with my mother up to Ottawa. Her parents came through Canada from England and they were up there. Her grandfather was a royal Canadian architect, her grandfather, my great grandfather, and he had done some things. When we went up, it was just to take a general look at the area, to drive up and back.

Later on, when Janet and I were living here, early on, we went back to Ottawa. Oh, I remember why. There was a wedding. The daughter of a couple we knew in Iran had moved back to Canada--they were Canadian--and she was getting married in Ottawa. We went up there for that purpose, but I'd done some research. This great grandfather, the royal architect, had designed some furniture in their library and the shelves in their library. I really wanted to see them.

We got up there on a Friday night. Saturday morning was taken up by some of the wedding preparations, and so forth, but I went down to their archives. Now, what do they call them? Anyway, the national archives, [Library and Archives Canada (LAC)], went in there and told them what I was after.

People could not have been more helpful. Janet was with me and they gave me a free pass to the archives for a year, if I wanted it. They were able to bring out some documents that referenced him and referenced the work that my great grandfather had done and pictures, and so forth.

Then, we went to the wedding that Saturday afternoon and a big reception afterwards, and then, we went to bed. What I really wanted to do is, I wanted to get into that library, but it was Sunday morning. So, Janet and I had a bite to eat somewhere, I guess in the hotel, and went over to the library, which was closed. It was sort of an octagonal building, very pretty.

It was closed, but I went around the back and there was a door there. There was a Mountie inside. Janet with me, I went in and I told him exactly who I was and what I wanted. He called on his telephone, or his radio, somebody else who was in the library to come down, who took us through the library and showed us everything about what that furniture was.

It was there, gorgeous stuff, huge, beautiful tables and bookcases and that sort of thing. We were running late for the airport. We ran down, thanked them profusely, because they didn't have to do this. We ran to the airport just in time to get to the airplane and got the airplane.

SI: Wow.

ME: We got home. That was very, very [nice]. They could not have been nicer, gosh. We did see one of the houses that this great grandfather had designed. From today's standpoint, it was the ugliest thing I've ever seen.

SI: Okay.

ME: Yes, very of its time. It got some sort of an award or whatever. Oh, we have a picture. You can't see it. It's behind that lamp over there on the wall. It's a very small one.

SI: Okay.

ME: Painted by my great grandfather, because what he did, he was also a painter, but he was known as the architect. He would paint things and trade them with his artist friends. We have a picture in the living room, a larger one over the fireplace, done by a man by the name of [Franklin] Brownell, a noted painter, Canadian. It's titled *The Beach at St. Kitts* and I've had that for a long time. I got it restored, complicated how I got it, but that's not important, had it restored. We've been seeing it for many, many years.

You'll see on there, there is a beach scene, but, in the background, there is a customhouse with a gold dome, clear in the picture. Brownell painted three or four, three, other pictures of the same thing, also called *Beach at St. Kitts*. So, one time, Janet and I were wondering what to do in the summer and we decided we were going to go down to St. Kitts. Nevis is another island right next to it, Nevis and St. Kitts. We got down there. We got into a lovely plantation place, and so forth, and told them what we wanted. They knew of the customhouse.

We went down there and we finally found the customhouse, but everything around it had been built up. There were all sorts of shops and that sort of thing, but we went in there and found somebody who knew a little bit about the building, who was happy to show us around and took us upstairs and downstairs, that sort of thing.

It was still used for some municipal purpose. I've forgotten what it was. It wasn't a customhouse, but maybe it was. I'm not sure. I don't remember what it's currently used for now, but there was also a shop in it, because there were a lot of other buildings around that catered to the tourists who came in on the ships there, right to that port.

SI: Yes.

ME: So, but that was pretty cool. It was fun to do that. It's neat to have someplace where you go, you have a purpose. With the fun things you do, then, you can also tie them in with doing something that you wanted to do, research.

SI: Earlier, you mentioned working on some Republican campaigns.

ME: Yes.

SI: You also served in municipal government.

ME: Oh, I didn't talk about that. Yes, when we moved here, I was busy with kids, and so forth, but I got appointed to the township Planning Commission, which was fun. I was on that for thirteen years. They kept nagging me to run for supervisor, which I finally did. This township was solidly Republican. It's a six-year term and I was the Republican committee supervisor for eighteen years. So, I spent thirty-one years in municipal government and it was fun.

Now, it's solidly Democratic, Democrats, and still three supervisors, but, when I was there, we were a lot looser, if you will. Now, every one of their meetings, they have a lawyer present and that sort of thing. They have a lot more people in the administrative part of the township, but I have to boast a little bit here, because the other supervisors, it was a two-year stagger, six years. One is off and another comes on after. Every two years, a new one comes on.

The offices were shared in the fire department, Longwood Fire Department, over on Route 1. They're cramped, and so forth, and we were convinced that we needed a municipal building, which ultimately wound up, we got one. We built a brand-new building in the township, beautiful building.

I helped establish the first municipal land trust in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which is unsung. Nobody knows about that. We bought land in the township, in the trust. We spent a lot of money on the spur of the moment, without consultation of anybody, we three supervisors.

There's a developer that came into the township and got the rights to a farm. The farm was ninety-six acres and this developer wanted to put a big sort of resort in it, against the zoning, but he tried to do it and tried to do it and tried to do it. He had paid four million dollars for it.

Telephone rang here in the week before Christmas one year and it was this developer. He said, "Look, I'm sick and tired of this. I want out. If you can give me 4.2 million by the end of the year, it's yours." So, I got the other two supervisors. We went into the township office, which was empty by then, people off for Christmas. We sat in the back room and we figured out what we ought to do. We found that we could get the 4.2 million.

We had two million, because of a certain situation that had occurred, and we had a municipal voluntary tax for open space. This was the purpose of getting that farm. Within three days, we bought the farm. We were able to give this guy 4.2 million dollars--couldn't do that today, because that's against the law, because that should be done in an open public meeting, and right.

What we did, we found out that we could divide it into large blocks. With some--ahem--discussions with the nearby owners, we divided it into four blocks. Twenty-six acres, we gave to the land trust. Then, we had two seventeen-acre blocks, seventeen, eighteen, that went to the owners and said, "Look, we'll sell these things to you at a real bargain, but you have to put a conservation easement on them."

We got, I think, almost a million dollars for those. Then, we sold the last one, was that house and the barn on it, to some people. The whole thing cost us a million bucks. That made me very proud, but it's not something anybody knows about.

SI: Yes.

ME: I'm not about to try to pat myself on the back in the public, because the supervisors that I worked with over the period of eighteen years, the last two years were not pleasant, because one of the supervisors who had come off was replaced by a Democrat. Not that the Democrats then were bad, not at all, but this guy happened to be poisonous and he wanted to disrupt everything. That's beside the point, but I'm very proud of what I did--and I'm not telling anybody.

SI: Yes.

ME: One of the supervisors who was with me for six years was a guy, he's now ninety-two. He has one arm. He has a scar face that you can't believe. He was an Air Force pilot in Korea. He flew--what are they called, Star Jets? something like that.

SI: Yes, Shooting Stars [Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star].

ME: Yes, something like that, a fighter plane.

SI: Yes.

ME: He had any number of missions over North Korea. He doesn't talk about that too much, although I know him well enough and he does. When the war was over, he came back here and he was flying for the Delaware Air National Guard. It was a F-86, which is called a Thunderbird. Is that right?

SI: I think so [North American F-86 Sabre].

ME: Something like that. He and his wingman were coming in to land down in the Delaware Airport and he crashed. He slid down into a little ravine. On top of the ravine was a housing development. In the house that overlooked the ravine, in there was an Air Force doctor who saw the whole thing. It was getting dark and the airplane burst on fire.

This man ran out, ran down to the airplane, on his belly, crawled in toward the cockpit. At the time, Tom Nale was upside down and almost unconscious. This man talked to Tom and told him what to do, "Take the seatbelt, undo this and crawl toward my voice," which Tom did. Tom spent the next three years in the hospital.

SI: Wow.

ME: Lost an arm. I've never really seen his legs, but I'm sure there's a scar there as not--neat man, just absolutely wonderful guy. He was a supervisor with me. Now, I see him all the time. We have lunch together often, yes, nice person, war story.

SI: You were self-employed for a long time.

ME: Yes. Let's see where that fit in. After I worked here for ICI--and the business was not a good one--ICI decided to sell the whole subsidiary, which I helped--ah, another war story. I'm going to interrupt myself. [laughter]

This was a joint venture with Chevron. Their headquarters for this particular work was in New Orleans. I went down to New Orleans about once a month for five years to see an office that I set up down there with a geologist and a geophysicist and a few other people to liaise with Chevron down there. Why I wasn't sent down there permanently, I don't know--and I didn't want to go anyhow--but I was up here to liaise with the people up here. Well, that was pretty cool, because I managed to get out and do some things when I went down to the office with Chevron.

One time, my older daughter, who was in college at that time in Ohio, took a course, something called "Island Biology." Why I remember this, I really don't know, but it was a very expensive course, because it meant an airplane down there. They were going to go around the Galapagos. Have you ever been there?

SI: No.

ME: We've been there twice, and it's worth going. Anyhow, she wanted to do that. So, what I said is, "Look, Karen, I can't afford this, but I'll tell you what. I'll get you a job on an offshore platform, where you will earn gobs of money for the summer. Then, you'll be able to do it." [laughter] So, Janet didn't think this was a good idea. So, she said, "Well, you can only do it if your brother, John, goes with you." Now, what he would do to protect her was not really known, but that's beside the point.

So, I got them both jobs on an offshore platform that was about 110 miles offshore. It was a platform that had about 150 men on it and she was the only girl. Every so often, another girl would come out on a helicopter for a day's work or maybe a couple of days, and so forth.

When she got out there, she was into outdoor activity. The only thing that she could really do was jog around the helipad, until the platform supervisor said, "Karen, you'd better not do that. We can't get anybody to do any work." [laughter] When John got out there, he was a firefighter and it paid gobs of money. They would go out for either two weeks or, in their case, they did it for three, and then, came off for a week off, and then, went back again.

So, that was the time that the subsidiary, ICI Delaware, which I was in charge of, they were beginning to realize that it was never going to go anywhere. They didn't want to sell it yet or get rid of it. So, when these two kids were there on the offshore platform, I decided that Janet and my younger son, Steve, who was home, might like to go down. The middle daughter was at Penn State. She had to go to Penn State in the summer in order to get onto the main campus, but, anyway, that's another story.

So, we went down there. I got Chevron to give Janet a helicopter and Steve was in the back. They were going to go out to an offshore platform, not the one that Karen was on. Karen was a dispatcher on her platform, among other things. The helicopter pilot with Janet was piloting the helicopter and Janet's sitting next to the guy and Steve's in the back.

On the radio--Janet's got headphones on, also--comes a female voice ordering something from land. Janet says, "Oh, that's my daughter." He said, "Oh, do you know Karen? We all know Karen," and there are probably a hundred platforms out there. So, it was pretty cute. She was terribly impressed. [laughter] So, she and Steve got a tour of a platform.

SI: Wow.

ME: I'm sure you've never been on one.

SI: No.

ME: If you ever get a chance, don't say no. They're incredible things. The social status, their pecking order, if you will, is very, very severe. There is no horsing around. You horse around too much, you'll find yourself being launched from the top into the water and you'll never be seen again.

Janet was concerned about Karen, because she's a short, very good-looking girl. She was worried about that. I kept assuring Janet that there was no chance of Karen getting in trouble, because they just don't want to do that. These guys that do this for their livelihood go out for two and go on the shore for one. They do this around the clock and they get an awful lot of money.

John relates a wonderful story; being a firefighter is one of the most boring jobs in the world, because you sit there and you watch people working. Your hose is ready to go in case anything should possibly happen, and nothing ever--well, that's not true--but you're there "in case." John and a couple of other kids who were firefighters would always get kidded, because they weren't working. John said he finally got even with a bunch of them, because he was watching a bunch of welders.

Sure enough, there was a spark--something got ignited on a wall that the welders were working on. So, John opened his firehose, a great, big spray. He sprayed everything in sight, which of course was the welders as well, who tried to get out of the way. They all forgot that they were tethered to a rail. So, they all tried to get out quickly and John just let them have it. [laughter]

SI: Wow.

ME: Those are the small things. Boy, it is tough to be on a platform, I will tell you.

SI: I could imagine.

ME: As much as they try very hard to make it as good as possible. The food has to be good and plentiful, twenty-four/seven. They can get television, they have radios and that sort of stuff, but it's just a hard job, that's all.

SI: Yes.

ME: Lonely job, not hard, but lonely, yes. I remember going out there once, because we had--in the Gulf of Mexico, there are leases. Maybe you know this. When a company owns a lease, it has bid on it competitively. All the leases offshore are owned by the government. Every so often, the government will have a sale and they'll nominate, say, twenty leases to be, not auctioned off, but bid on competitively, closed bids, and so forth.

When Chevron and ICI got involved in this, Chevron had a whole bunch of leases there. So, that's what we began to explore on and that sort of thing. On one of them--it was 116 miles offshore--we found a lot of gas, natural gas. It was decided--Chevron decided this--that they were going to commercialize it and put a platform there. They ordered a platform for that depth, and so forth.

When it came time to drag the platform out from the fabrication yard, on a huge barge, towed, the platform horizontally was 710 feet and the bottom was, the depth of the water was, about 675. So, 675 feet of this platform was going to be underwater. I went out there, not on the barge that had the platform on it, but on another barge, just to watch it being launched and set.

Finally, the platform on the barge came in sight. It was very, very precisely identified, where it was to go. When they were ready to launch it from the barge, they invited some people, if they wanted to, to go over to watch it. They would be under the platform that was sliding over their heads to go into the water, but I decided--most people did--to stay on the observation boat.

When they did this, it was very perfunctory. They started pushing the thing off, down, down, and then, it pivoted on some pivot points, went up in the air and slid down. As it went down on the skids, it gave off--the skids were greased, so [that] it would go easier--that grease smoked like the dickens. So, the guys that were over there couldn't see a thing. They could hear this thing rumbling over their heads, [laughter] but they couldn't see a thing. We could see it.

SI: Wow.

ME: Then, we stayed there the night. They started to maneuver it very slowly, because, when it fell in the water, it all went underwater, because it hit the bottom, and then, came back up again, because it floats. It was pipe that was sealed, made out of pipe, that kind of construction.

It had four slave anodes on it, made of zinc. Each one of these anodes was nine hundred tons, a huge pile of zinc, and that would degrade. Being a slave anode, it would keep the electricity from pitting the steel pipe and that's what they do there all the time. If it's there more than, I guess, fifteen years, then, they have to replace those anodes, because they just totally disappear. When they maneuvered it, they finally dropped it in the last ten feet to make sure it got to where they wanted it. The moment it hit there, that was fine. Everything was going perfectly.

Then, what they had to do is, on the legs of the platform, going down these huge legs, steel pipe, they had small pipes over here that they would run another pipe through and down into the dirt, down below, to anchor the platform. They had to get them in there on time, very quickly, because you don't want the platform to tip over and that sort of thing. So, they worked pretty fast and they've got everything there, all the equipment ready to do that. Then, we got off that. I guess we got a helicopter, must've been.

SI: Wow.

ME: Those are cool. I miss that part of the business, doing that.

SI: It sounds like an incredible thing to see.

ME: Oh, it is, yes. I was lucky, because I was in charge of this little subsidiary and I was independent. I mean, nobody in ICI understood the business anyhow. I suppose I could've done some other things if I'd wanted to, but, when they got around to getting rid of the subsidiary, I found a buyer for them. The rest is history, yes.

SI: When you were self-employed, were you doing the same thing?

ME: Yes. When I got let go from ICI, I didn't really know what to do. It's like people today that are fifty and they get laid off. They're professional people and they can't get another job. I finally realized that I couldn't do that, either. So, what I did is, I tapped into a few of my old oil buddies and I went into business for myself.

I would raise money privately and I would drill wells. I would partner with other people to drill wells, because you never drilled a well by yourself. It's always a joint venture, always. Never--well, hardly ever--does a company do the whole thing by themselves. It's always a joint venture.

I would joint venture with a bunch of people. Most of my wells that I drilled--I called them for myself, but it was for everybody--were up in New York State and they were shallow gas wells. They're probably still producing, because they go on forever up there. I would frack every one of them, which was quite fun. Sometimes, I'd go up and watch; drilled over fifty wells. Some of them were in Pennsylvania, some of them were in Virginia, West Virginia.

That was fun and it kept me in the business. That went on for a long, long time. I finally decided that I was done and I retired. So, I kept doing the township work and I do a lot of volunteer stuff around here. One of the things, do you know Longwood Gardens?

[Editor's Note: Longwood Gardens, a botanical garden in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, was developed on over a thousand acres bought by Pierre S. du Pont in 1906.]

SI: Yes.

ME: It's a stone's throw from where we're sitting.

SI: Okay.

ME: I have volunteered there for nine years. It's an incredible [place]. If you ever need to do something different, go to Longwood Gardens, because you'll never see another garden in the world like it. They have four hundred full-time employees and over seven hundred volunteers. They keep everybody busy. It's a huge place.

SI: I have been there for the Christmas displays.

ME: You have seen it?

SI: Yes.

ME: Okay, yes.

SI: We have always talked about going back to see the outside, because it seems like there is a lot more than just what you see at Christmas.

ME: Oh, God, yes.

SI: Yes, just going through for that takes a long time, to go through all the different displays. It is great.

ME: I've forgotten--I think there's something like nine hundred acres or something like that.

SI: Wow.

ME: The conservatory, of course, is the main thing, but, in the summertime, Longwood Gardens does stuff that you can't believe. Well, they do it for every [season]. Four seasons, they have a theme for each of the four seasons, but it's different every year. You can never get tired of it, never. Right now, they're going to be ending an orchid extravaganza. My god, I can't tell you how many orchids they have over there.

They do things. They had a chrysanthemum display at one time. They had planned this--obviously, they plan ahead, I guess five or six years--as you walked into the conservatory, they had one chrysanthemum tree that had something like 2,500 blooms on it. It was in a ball. The two of us couldn't put our hands around it. It was just incredible, absolutely incredible. When that display was over, that thing went into the compost heap. They don't keep anything.

SI: Yes.

ME: I helped them with something called a green wall at one time. All the stuff was up there, it looked pretty good--threw it all away, right into the composter. They have lovely compost, by the way. [laughter]

SI: Yes, I am sure they do. Is there any other aspect of your life that we either skipped over or that you want to say something about?

ME: I can guarantee you that the moment you're out the door and in your car ...

SI: You will remember something, yes.

ME: Yes, that's the way it's going to go.

SI: You have talked about some of your grandkids. How many grandchildren do you have?

ME: We have six. We have them in two sort of groups, four and two. My son in Santa Fe has a boy, twelve, and a girl, ten. The other is a group of four, three girls and a boy, in that order, in two different families, but they grew up together. The oldest girl is the one I think I mentioned that's in physician's assistant school.

SI: Yes.

ME: The next older is an archaeologist. How can I describe what she does? That's sort of an anecdotal part of her work--that's what she really likes--but what she is is a naturalist. She has been working for an environmental impact statement company, who will be employed, let's say, by a potential pipeline company that has to get an environmental impact statement for their right of way. She will be hired by them to go down and trap bats--her specialty is bats, mostly. It's nighttime work. She'll get out there and she just loves that very, very much.

It's like her mother, my oldest daughter, who's into gardening and a naturalist. Janet is a master gardener with the University of Delaware and Karen is a master gardener out where she works, lives in Evansville, Indiana. She's much into gardening, although not into bats. She has two daughters. She divorced her husband quite a while ago.

The other one graduated from the University of Indiana as a biologist and she's working in a laboratory at the university on a stipend. She'll be looking for something in the near future, but she'll probably stay there and get another one. She's very, very good. The boy is still at the University of Kentucky and he's going back. He's in his last year now and he will go back to a gold mine this summer. Let's see, one, two, yes, three girls and a boy; I think I covered them all.

SI: Yes.

ME: They all grew up together, which is really neat. We revel in getting them together, because, if we get them all in one room, we just sit back and listen to them, because they will insult each other in a manner that might get other people unhappy, but they know each other so well that one could not insult the other no matter what. They just laugh at each other. This last summer, we took them on a cruise boat--well, on a boat--Inside Passage to Alaska. You know where I'm talking about?

SI: Yes.

ME: Okay. It's a small boat, holds sixty passengers and it's a naturalist kind of a thing. We invited them to go with us on that boat and there were four of them and two of us, six. That's ten percent of the passengers. Most of the people on the boat were older people, like Janet and me. Every time after dinner, we'd go into the lounge and these four kids would get up a card game or something like that. They were having such a good time that other people would come around and stand there. If one of them had to get up and go to the bathroom, a stranger would sit down and play the card game and partake. It was great fun, great fun.

SI: Wow.

ME: Janet and I know that we're lucky we're able to do this for them. We're lucky. I'm lucky I've been able to earn a good living. That's all I can tell you.

SI: That is a good note to end on.

ME: Yes, that's right.

SI: If you want to add anything later, you are certainly welcome. I appreciate all your time today and for answering all my questions.

ME: Is it true that we've been here for three hours?

SI: I believe so, yes.

ME: Time flies.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 3/11/2020
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 4/30/2020
Reviewed by Michael E. Elling 8/1/2020
Reviewed by Kate Rizzi 8/7/2020

[Addendum: The following photographs and captions have been provided by Michael E. Elling.]

The first photograph is of Michael Elling in Glee Club glamor.

The second photograph is dredge #8 in Alaska, where Elling was working for the U.S. Mining and Refining Company.

The rest of the photographs are from Elling's service in the Army in and around Nellinggen Base Camp in Germany and temporary assignments in France.

The third photograph is Elling and his car in Esslingen, Germany. He brought the license plates home with him and still has them.

The fourth photograph is looking out of Elling's second floor BOQ window at the generating plant for the base.

The fifth photograph is officers playing volleyball.

The sixth and seventh photographs are of Elling going on inspection tours.

The eighth is of Army engineers cleaning up stumps in LaRochelle, France.

The ninth photograph is Elling on a bulldozer in France.

The tenth and last photograph is Elling receiving an award for pistol marksmanship from the battalion commander, Lt. Col. H.H. Hoover.









