RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HANS FISHER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH
and
THOMAS FRUSCIANO
and
MICHAEL JOSEPH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY
JANUARY 6, 2004

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Dr. Hans Fisher on January 6, 2004, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth …

Tom Frusciano: Tom Frusciano …

Michael Joseph: … Michael Joseph.

SI: Dr. Fisher, thank you very much for sitting down with us today.

HF: My pleasure.

SI: To begin, could you briefly give us a little of background on your family? Where were you born? Where was your family from?

HF: I was born in Breslau, Germany, Breslau, after World War II, became Polish. It's now called Wroclaw and my, both maternal and paternal, grandfathers came from a little town, which became Polish already after World War I, not after World War II, so, that's the kind of background. My paternal grandfather owned a mill, a flourmill, in this little town called Kempen, now it's called Kepno, K-E-P-N-O. … My father studied law in Breslau, but never practiced as a lawyer. He worked for various large businesses, particularly a big pharmaceutical company in Konigsberg, which is in East Prussia; [I am] trying to think what it's called now. It's Russian. It's one of these really crazy areas. It's a tiny enclave in what used to be Eastern Germany that the Russians kept. I can't think of the name.

SI: Kaliningrad?

HF: Yes. Anyway, it still is Russian, even though it's completely cut off from Russia. It has absolutely no land or any other connection to Russia. It's bounded on one side, well, maybe on both sides, I'm not sure, by Poland now, but it's on the Baltic and that's why the Russians kept it. They used it, … probably, as a submarine base during World War II.

SI: For the record, can you tell us when your birthday is?

HF: Yes. My birthday is March 4, 1928, and as I said I was born there and I went to a Jewish day school, primarily, because by the time I was ready to go to school, Hitler was in power. … Jewish kids were not allowed to go to public schools anymore. So, I went to a Jewish day school, but this day school had existed prior to Hitler's advent to power. … In 1938, on the infamous *Kristallnacht*, which took place on November 9, 1938 on November 10th, in the morning, my father was picked up by the Gestapo, and taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. … A friend was able to get him a visa, to get out of the country and on the basis of that visa, he was able to get out early in January of '39, and ended up in Cuba, in Havana. … Then the rest of the family, my mother, my sister and I, left on May 13, 1939 on the equally famous, infamous, ship, the *St. Louis* for Cuba. … Then, as you and others undoubtedly know, that ship was not allowed to land and permitted its passengers to land, just some very, very few. I think twenty-two people were allowed to get off and these are all people who had very good connections to the guy who owned the *Saturday Evening Post* in Philadelphia.

SI: William Randolph Hearst?

HF: No, not Hearst. He endowed the Wharton School of Business in Philadelphia, very famous guy. He was ambassador to England under one of the early presidents. What's his name? Walter H. Annenberg. Anyway, Annenberg had friends and relatives, and these twenty-two people were the only ones out of some 950 that were allowed to get off. … The rest of us stayed on the boat, and then the boat was shooed out of the harbor. It never was allowed to dock. It stayed outside the harbor and little rowboats would come around and circle the boat. That's where we saw my father, way down. … It was a pretty high, big boat and, you know, you couldn't really make any contact. You couldn't even talk.

SI: What was the mood like on the boat during those days?

HF: It was very somber and there were some people who tried to commit suicide. Actually, one other person also got off because he tried to commit suicide and jumped overboard, and they took him to a hospital in Havana, so, he also stayed in Havana. But, the mood was pretty bad. … Then when the boat left, they tried first to approach the coast of Florida, Miami. We could see Miami very nearby, but, the Coast Guard chased the boat away. … Of course telegrams were sent to Roosevelt, you know, it's a well-known history that he refused to let them in.

SI: You were about eleven at this time?

HF: Yes.

SI: Were you aware of what was happening?

HF: Oh, yes.

SI: And the consequences of going back and so forth?

HF: Sure, very much aware. I've been aware of what was going on back in Germany where things, you know, it wasn't that things suddenly got bad on *Kristallnacht*. The summer before if I'm not mistaken, the summer of '38, Jews who had been born in some other country, like quite a few Polish Jews, were suddenly picked up and deported. Poles wouldn't take them in and these poor people suffered without food or water in this kind of no man's zone at the border. Many of them died. … Some of these people had children who were in my class in school. So, I knew. I was very much aware of what was going on.

SI: What about the systematic stripping away of rights?

HF: Well, of course, also, my father could no longer work. … All these things we noted. We had tried already to emigrate, maybe as early as '37, but it was very difficult to get visas, to any country, really.

SI: I've heard there were two schools of thought; one, simply, you had to get out immediately, the other we can ride out the Nazis'. Were you aware of debates like that?

HF: Well, I would say that in my immediate family we felt we had to get out. My grandparents' generation was among those who felt, I remember my grandfather saying, "What are they going to do to me? I'm an old man." He was eighty years old already. "What are they going to do to me? I lost four sons in the German Army in World War I." He lost four sons and that ought to count for something. … So he figured he can ride this out. But, he didn't. He died in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp. They were all deported from Breslau later. So, the boat eventually, again as you probably know, went back and eventually landed in Antwerp, Belgium. … There the passengers were mostly, arbitrarily, divided up into four groups. One group went to England, another group to Holland, a third group stayed in Belgium, and the fourth group, on which my mother, my sister and I were, went to France. We were sent to France. My mother and my sister joined most of the others and … they were sent to a little town in Central France called Laval, in the province of Mayenne, M-A-Y-E-N-N-E. … Children over ten, which included me, were sent to some children's camps near Paris, which were actually very nice. … These camps were supported by an organization called OSE, which means help, but, …actually the letters stood for something else. … I was in this camp from July, we left in May, and … by now it had gotten to be July, until about November I would say. The war broke out on September 1st, and by October the Germans were bombing the outskirts of Paris. … We spent more time in air raid shelters than above ground. … So, by that time they decided to send some of us, not all of the children, but many of them were sent back to their families, so, I was sent to Laval and I spent from November, about, roughly, two months, until towards the end of December in Laval. … Then, we were very fortunate; my father was able to get us visas again to go to Cuba. … This time we actually made it. There are many interesting tales. I'll tell you one. When we were about to leave on that ill-fated first trip to Havana, we had to pick up permits, which cost 500 dollars per person. … My mother and I went, my sister stayed with a friend in Hamburg, and we went to the Cuban Consulate to pick up these permits. … You know, it was a typical consulate I guess, and [we] went up to a counter. … I don't remember whether my mother paid the money, my guess is that that had been paid before. … She really just came to pick up those permits. … This didn't take but a few minutes, and she put those permits in the passport. … She turned around and we were about to walk out, and next to the door, the exit door from this consulate, there was a little desk. … There was a young woman sitting behind that desk and she accosted my mother and said to her, "Ma'am would you like me to stamp a visa in your passport?" My mother was completely taken aback, and then she kind of collected herself and said, "Oh, I don't really think we need that because I just picked up these permits." So, that was that, and we walked out. If she had gotten that visa, they would have let us off the boat. Of course, I imagine that if everybody had gotten the visas they would not have, because there were only these very, very, few people who were let off. So, that was one of these incredible tales. Now, when we left the second time, again, it left some very interesting memories, we took a train from Laval, this little town, to I think Le Havre**,** a big port, and we arrived by train. We had just gotten off, we were still on the … what do you call that?

SI: Platform?

HF: … On the platform, in front of the tracks where the train was still standing, with whatever, a couple of suitcases, perhaps, … at that moment, there was an air raid and the locomotive of the

train from which we had just gotten off was hit. It was a steam engine and the sheer noise from that explosion, you know, the steam escaping was so strong that we were all thrown with great force to the ground. We all had bruises, you know, it was a cement platform. But fortunately, nobody was hurt because, you know, the engine was way up in front and we were way in the back someplace. … We stayed in a hotel overnight. Again, there were air raids all night long. I only remember, we didn't even bother going out. We were so inured to these air raids all the time [that] we didn't bother anymore. … The next day we boarded this ancient French boat called *De Grasse*, D-E, new word G-R-A-S-S-E, that had been taken out of mothballs. It had already been discarded, but they weren't going to risk any modern or newer boats. … This boat was full of Spanish loyalists, refugees, because the Spanish Civil War was just over. … We were probably the only non-Spaniards on that boat. Everybody spoke Spanish. … The boat just crossed the Channel, to the British port, Southampton, and we stayed there for two weeks until a convoy of about 200 ships assembled. Most of these, of course, were merchant ships escorted by several British destroyers and cruisers. … This was the end of December, beginning of January, 1940. … After two weeks this convoy left for New York because that was the period of the great submarine warfare. Germans were sinking merchant ships right and left. And I remember two things; number one, it was an extremely stormy passage. My mother was so deathly seasick, and so were most of the other people. For some reason I wasn't seasick at all. But, I still remember playing Ping Pong at one end of the boat, and the ball would remain suspended in midair, you know, it was going up and down like that. It was very, very stormy. … Most of the people, who were not too seasick, were just walking around with life vests all day long. They saw submarines everywhere. Again, you have to remember these were people who had just escaped from the Spanish Civil War, and so they were very paranoid about this kind of thing. But, the voyage was completely uneventful and I don't remember whether it took five days or seven days to reach New York. … Then, we had the pleasure to be interned for four days on Ellis Island, because we didn't have any visas for the States, and we had to wait for a boat to Cuba. So, we were on Ellis Island, and I remember it very fondly because the thing that really sticks out in my mind is to get fresh milk to drink. I hadn't seen fresh milk in a long time. … Then we were on one of the luxury Grace Line boats from New York to Havana, which was like being in a paradise of food, and the quantity of food, and all that. … Then, we were reunited with my father in Havana and stayed in Cuba for about a year, until February 1941. … At that time we were able to get visas for the States. It was a very rigid quota system to come into the States. … My mother, my sister, and I could have come almost immediately because we were German quota, but my father was Polish quota, because the little town where he was born in, Kempen, had become Polish after World War I. … These immigration laws were absolutely crazy. I don't know if you know how they operated. It went by the nationality in 1924 of your place of birth. So, even though he was born in Germany, because when he was born in this town it was German, but that didn't matter. In 1924 it was Polish. So, he was Polish quota. … The Polish quota was tiny, tiny, tiny because the United States kept out Eastern Europeans, Southern Europeans, no Italians, no Poles, and so on. But, by this time the war was in full bloom, and so people, even the small contingent, couldn't come from Poland anymore, so, even that quota opened up and there weren't that many people on the Polish quota that lived in Cuba. So, we were able to come to the States.

TF: You mentioned that your father was in Cuba for a year before he…

HF: Yes, he was already there for a year before,

TF: What was he doing there in terms of work?

HF: Well, they were not, officially, they were not allowed to work. Unofficially, he worked as a peddler. He went around with two heavy suitcases selling shoemaker supplies. Heels were sold by the dozen, leather, and shoelaces. The main item I remember were heels. That was the biggest item. It was very tough, very tough. … Then when I joined him there, I would help him carry these bags and, again, learn something very interesting. Many of these shoemakers were Armenians who had escaped from Turkey in 1915, you know, when these infamous *pogroms* took place against Armenians. … It whetted my appetite to find out more about this episode. … Later on, when I was an undergraduate here at Rutgers, I did a major paper on the Armenian situation. … Actually, this library, it must still be here, … I think it was a white paper, by I think, by Lord Bryce if I'm not mistaken on the Armenian, who investigated the Armenian situation, which I read and was part of what I based my report on. … Of course, I had read in the meantime with enormous interest something that if you haven't read it, you really should read it, by Franz Werfel. You know the name? He's a very, very, famous Czech-German author, W-E-R-F-E-L. *Song of Bernadette*, you know that one, but this one is much, much better, much more important because it really tells the Armenian story. It's called *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. Musa Dagh is a mountain in Turkey where the Armenians had prepared kind of a last stand before they were assaulted. So, we left Cuba then, in February of '41, and came first to New York and lived in New York until about September. … Then with the aid of a foundation, the Baron Hirsch Agricultural Foundation, I don't know if you've heard about it. They had quite a few projects here in the States. One was in Ohio and another one was here on the East Coast. They helped Jewish refugees to buy farms. So, my father and mother bought a poultry farm in Vineland, here in New Jersey. So, the next five years, four and a half years, I spent in Vineland. [I] went to high school there and graduated valedictorian, coming here not knowing a word of English! [laughter] [I] graduated in 1946 and then got a full four-year State Scholarship to come to Rutgers.

SI: What was it like for you being a teenager, or even younger, being drawn into all these different situations, like having to live on your own in France, living in Cuba, different languages, different cultures, and so forth?

HF: You grew up in a hurry. That's the best I can say. I mean, you never really lived the life of a normal teenager at all. I remember very distinctly, I was always concerned with what was going on politically and otherwise, and economically, in terms of the family. I mean, the minute we came to the States, I knew my parents had a devil of a time trying to make ends meet. My father was over fifty years old and couldn't find a job for love or money. What was he going to do here? He studied law and German-Roman law [which] was of no value here. [He] couldn't get a job and that's why he ended up on a farm. My mother had it much easier. My mother was able to work as a nighttime nurse taking care of infants. … That's how we survived these months between February and September. But, you never had the ordinary interest that I'm sure that my own grandchildren now have. They don't know what this kind of a life is like, at all. I'm glad they don't. But on the farm again, I always told my father that in terms of farming, he was born with two left hands. [laughter] Because he really didn't, you know what it's like on a

farm, there's something that has to be fixed every single day. You have to be a carpenter, you have to be a plumber, you have to be an electrician, you have to do all these things. … I was pretty good at all these things. I had to lay new pipes and you know, we didn't have copper tubing. These were galvanized pipes and they broke. … This was an old farm. This wasn't new. So, he couldn't do any of these things, so, he would do the routine stuff and I would take care of the repairs for the most part. Then, in addition to that, I worked on the outside after school. … Every penny that I made, you know, I gave to them because it was needed. Just to give you a full picture of how difficult this period was for my parents; when my father died in 1969, now this was twenty-eight years after we came to Vineland, he still owed the feed manufacturer something like 18,000 dollars. I paid off that last 18,000 dollars. In other words, yes, they were able to live there and survive, but they never really made it financially. … The last, I would say, fifteen years, my mother worked as a schoolteacher. She had been trained in that in Germany, too. … She was really, you know, making enough for them to live on, but she never made enough to be able to pay all that debt off. It was only paid off when I sold the farm eventually.

MJ: Talking about the normal pursuits as a teenager I am really curious to know what you found to read when you were eleven-twelve-thirteen?

HF: I devoured every book in the Vineland Public Library. I read all the things that you might think, Sabatini, what else? You know, all the famous things, De Bergerac, *Count of Monte Christo*, you know all these. There was a book in English literature, *Father and Son*. I don't remember the author. It's a very famous British book. There were very few books that I had not read by the time I graduated from Vineland High School. I was an extremely avid reader.

MJ: Is that how you taught yourself English? By reading romances?

HF: No. You know how I learned English? By taking four years of Latin. [laughter] That's when I learned, really. That's when I learned English grammar, from Latin, through Latin. So, yes, reading was always my hobby, but that was already the case in Germany. I read very avidly, every bit of pocket money I ever had, I would go out and buy books.

MJ: Did you buy comic books as well?

HF: No. I never enjoyed them, frankly, I found, to this day I find comics strips very hard to understand. I guess you have to grow up with this. It's a totally different thing, you know. First of all, yes, reading is also looking at, but it's a different kind of looking at. I have difficulty. I mean, friends, my wife, will look at a cartoon and laugh and it takes me a few minutes longer to get the point. So, I'm very slow in that regard. But to this day I'm an avid reader. I am one of amazon.com's very good customers. [laughter]

TF: I guess you read newspapers?

HF: Oh, yes, newspapers also, yes, I was addicted for a long time to the *Herald Tribune* and then the *New York Times*. … Now I read it on the web, I don't buy it, I buy it only on Sunday because I don't want to sit there all day long and look at it on the screen. But on a daily basis I read it on the web.

MJ: You mentioned studying Latin…

HF: Yes.

MJ: When did you study Latin?

HF: In high school.

MJ: In Vineland?

HF: In Vineland, yes, from freshman year on they offered Latin. I also took Spanish, which I knew to some extent.

SI: Before getting to Vineland, how did your education progress?

HF: I didn't go to school at all in France. In Cuba, when I arrived in Cuba, they put me into an English school where I didn't understand one word. I only remember that the first week the teacher was reading to the class from *Alice in Wonderland*. … I laughed when the other kids laughed, but I didn't understand a word, not one word. I didn't have the slightest idea what it was all about. … I was taken out of that school. I don't know for what reason, maybe a teacher felt that I was too far behind, whatever. … Then for a very short time I went to a school that some of the Jewish refugees had formed, but that also wasn't for very long. Remember, I was only there one year and there must have been a vacation period, too, so, it was very, very, sporadic. … In New York, I arrived in February, I did go to school there. Again, I didn't understand a word, but I learned. … Again, that was only, let's say, from March, I arrived really at the end of February, so it was March, April, May, and then in June I'm sure there was vacation, no school until September. … Then I started in September, in junior high, '41 to '42 and then '42 to '46 in the high school.

SI: I've asked this question hundreds of times, but you'll provide a different perspective: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked? You were just recently settled in New York…

HF: No, no, we were in Vineland, that was December 7th, 1941, we were in Vineland.

SI: Do you remember that day or how you reacted?

HF: Well, no, I don't remember that day as such. But it was, basically, just a continuation. Not only because we had just escaped the war itself, but also because until just about that time we would hear occasionally from my grandparents. … That's about the time when they were deported, so, Pearl Harbor certainly loomed as a very important landmark. … Another very important, the reason, I don't know if you are aware of it, right after Pearl Harbor we were considered enemy aliens, yes, they incarcerated Japanese-Americans. As a matter-of-fact, right near Vineland and Bridgeton, there were big farms, [I] can't remember the name. Who's the biggest manufacturer of cranberry?

TF: Ocean Spray?

HF: Ocean Spray, I think, is a division of this, Sea?

SI: Seabrook Farms.

HF: Seabrook Farms employed a lot of Japanese-Americans. … I remember seeing them being put on busses and there was even a camp around there, I would guess. But, we were affected only in so far as we were supposed to get police permission if we wanted to travel outside of maybe a fifteen to twenty-five mile zone. For instance, if we wanted to go from Vineland to New York, we were supposed get permission. We didn't, because the country wasn't really set up for this. I'm sure if we'd walked into the Vineland Police Station, they would have thought we were nuts. They wouldn't have known what this was all about. So, this was practiced in the breach, but, it was on the books and it was in the newspapers, that we were different, and so on. So, I remember Pearl Harbor very well. We followed the war. My mother was absolutely enchanted with Franklin Roosevelt. [We] could listen to his fireside chats whenever he gave them. … Gabriel Heater, you are too young to remember him, Gabriel Heater was like, what's that guy on CNN? I can't stand him, with suspenders.

SI: Larry King.

HF: Larry King. He was really a radio commentator but always very positive. … My parents would listen to the news every night being reported by Gabriel Heater, I remember that. But for the most part the four years in high school, school was almost a side issue for me; the important thing was helping out on the farm and making money on the side and these kinds of things.

SI: I interviewed a woman from Vineland and she spoke about a lot of the refugee community in Vineland. Was it after the war that the population grew?

HF: Well, this is a group that came already [in] '38. We were latecomers, in '41, to this group. But then there was another group that came after the war, about '47-'48. The guy who until very recently was the chairman of the US Holocaust Committee, Lerner, I think is his name, I used to vaccinate chickens for him, when he first came after the war, he had a huge poultry farm, too. … Then later, he went into real estate [and] became very wealthy. So, there were these two waves of immigrants. … By [the] early 1950s the farms all disappeared. Today there are none left. By the way, while I was in high school, I went into business with a friend of mine to vaccinate chickens and we made a lot of money. That was a very, very profitable business. … Particularly after '46, after I graduated. I started this business maybe in '44-'45, I don't remember exactly. I worked very, very hard. In the summers I drove a huge truck from Vineland to Brooklyn during the night with chickens and I had some interesting experiences, once getting stuck in the Holland Tunnel because it had rained and so I had put the canvas over these crates. This thing (the truck) was a mile high and then the rain had stopped. … I didn't want to suffocate these chickens so I took the canvas off and just put it on top and it got stuck. It was too high; it got stuck in the tunnel. But it was at three a.m. and there wasn't another car or truck, so I just got out. But I was scared to death that something would come up. But there was no police, no nothing, and I was able to tug it loose. When I got out of the tunnel there were some policemen there saying,

"You've got a dead chicken in there." [laughter] I said, "Yeah, I know, but I'm going to the market." But, that was very hard work.

MJ: Did your father want you to be a farmer after him?

HF: No. This was just a way of making money.

MJ: Did you have any sense of what you wanted to do?

HF: Well, originally, when I started Rutgers in 1946, I wanted to major in math and languages. But my father took me aside and had a long talk with me and told me that may be very nice, but it's the wrong thing to study because if, God forbid, you ever have to immigrate again you won't be able to make a living with it, so I should do something that's more germane. He said, "Don't study law." [laughter] He also told me that. So, I actually went into a program that was called Research in Agriculture that was offered by what was then called the College of Agriculture. … The curriculum was part of Rutgers College, it was not, as it is today, a separate college. There was a separate College of Agriculture, but the teaching curricula were all part of Rutgers College. So, when I graduated my degree was from Rutgers College. … Just to give you an idea of how easy it is to graduate now, the requirement to graduate from that program was 155 credits.

MJ: Wow.

HF: Instead of, what is it at, 120 or so?

SI: Yes.

HF: It's almost a year more but we did it in four years. I had enough credits to actually get a degree in chemistry, too.

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

SI: Please, continue.

HF: I had enough credits to actually get a degree in chemistry, too. I'd taken all the chemistry courses that were required by the chemistry faculty and it was a very interesting experience. I had some very good teachers, also had some lousy ones. The chairman of the chemistry department was one of the worst professors that you can imagine, boring as all come on. He taught from a textbook. If you didn't go to class you would probably do better than if you went to class; read it on your own. Another member of the chemistry department, a Professor Rieman, also had his own textbook. He was a very good teacher, but he also only read from his textbook.

TF: I am reading the citation from when you won the Warren I. Susman Award, [an award for teaching excellence given by Rutgers University].

HF: Yes.

TF: It says that you were very innovative in the classroom. I take it that your experiences with these professors influenced you in that regard.

HF: I wasn't going to do that kind of stuff. Of course, you know, looking back now, one of the major differences clearly was that these people were not researchers. … I think that makes a big difference. So, they were not smitten with that enthusiasm that only, in my opinion, only a researcher can bring to the classroom, because, you know, after having taught here now for fifty years, I can tell you one thing. Students always come up with this "Pardon me," nonsense. The first question always is, "What textbook do we use? What chapters should I read?" I try to tell them early on that the best textbook is at its best two years behind the times. … Much of the stuff that they're going hear from me is going to be up-to-date. It maybe something that just appeared in the scientific literature the week before, the day before, even on that same day! But that's very hard to swallow, because I think, even now that Rutgers is a major research university, I think there is still too much of that old milieu. So that students really don't quite take it seriously enough that there might be professors who can offer them that kind of information. … Just to give you an example, this past semester, very typically, I had about 150 people in this one course that I teach, undergraduates, I don't think I exaggerate if I say that with the exception of the days when there were exams, never would there be more than fifty-percent of the class in attendance. Never! … I would say on perhaps many other days, no more than a third would show up, because there is this inbuilt feeling, "read it in the book", you know, "what do I need to." … Even though after the first exam I think they probably found out that they better attend the lectures, and some do and that's the ones who show up, but the others feel textbook and book, and so on. It's a very interesting phenomenon. Anyway, I had a very good time. There were some very good professors in the College of Agriculture that inspired me. There was one professor in particular who didn't have a PhD even, he had a master's degree, but he was bitten by the bug of wanting to know, "Why does this work?" "Why does that not work?" … He performed very practically oriented experiments that had to do with feeding animals, and so on. … Because of him I took, as an undergraduate, a course in biochemistry, which at that time was quite unusual. If my recollection is correct, and I think it is, there were very, very few undergraduates in that course. I think they were almost all graduate students even though it was a senior level undergraduate course. But most of the students were graduate students and I still remember the professor's name, Roth, R-O-T-H; he was very, very good. … He inspired me and that's how I ended up going into biochemistry, nutritional biochemistry.

TF: One of the more famous faculty members of the time was Waksman.

HF: Yes, but I had nothing to do with him at all. No, I took a course in soils; he was a member of the soils department. The chairman of the soils department was a man by the name of Firman Bear and he was very good and that was a very interesting course. I enjoyed that very much. Other courses, there was a man after whom the building in which I've had my office all these fifty years is named, [Willard] Thompson. He was an Englishman, wonderful guy. He taught statistics, which was also fairly unusual for people to take statistics in those days. … That's what he taught. I enjoyed that also very much, but the main thrusts were chemistry and biology. For instance, I had a course in Zoology from Harold Haskins. He is still alive. There's a Haskins Oyster Lab. … He and I became very good friends after I came back on the faculty, but

I had him as a teacher. Strauss, Ullie Strauss, chemistry professor, professor of physical chemistry, I had him as a teacher and we've also become very good friends. He is retired but he's still around.

SI: I've always been fascinated by the five-year period after World War II ended, '45 to '50, maybe '51 even, it's really I think where Rutgers today was born.

HF: That's right.

SI: Yes, and there was such an influx because you had kids like yourself coming out of high school…

HF: And all the GIs.

SI: What was it like being at Rutgers?

HF: It was very interesting. They arrived; there was just bedlam here at Rutgers, absolute bedlam. There were about 1100 in our freshman class, and Rutgers was simply not set up, most of us were housed in barracks down on Woodbridge Avenue. What's the name of that?

SI: The shingle?

HF: No, it's down, it's still a base, an army base…

SI: Camp Kilmer?

HF: No, not Camp Kilmer. Kilmer is Livingston. What's the one down on Woodbridge Avenue?

SI: Raritan Arsenal?

HF: Raritan Arsenal. We were in barracks and we were at an arsenal. … The guy who later founded Suburban Transit, you know, the bus company?

SI: Yes.

HF: The owner himself drove a school bus between College Avenue and Raritan Arsenal all day long, back and forth. It was terrible. You know, we had to go back and forth to go to class. I was very lucky, I only had to do this one semester and then I got into Hegeman Hall, which is right over here, which was very nice and I was in there for the rest of my four years at Rutgers. I lived down here. But they weren't set up. The cafeteria when I arrived was in Winants Hall, you know, where the Foundation is today, much too small, I mean, it couldn't handle this onslaught of students. Later it moved into the gym, the cafeteria then was in the gym, this gym across the street here. [College Avenue Gym] So, there were a lot of birth pains. But the fact that the vast majority of the students were GIs made it easy for me because they wouldn't tolerate, pardon me, any shit, you know. Fraternities were frowned upon. These were not the heydays of fraternities

here on campus. No GIs ever joined a fraternity and we didn't have the money either, so, we wouldn't do that anyway. So, the seriousness of study was much greater.

TF: I've heard more people say…

HF: I'll give you another example of how important that was. There was a Hillel organization on campus at the time and I joined that. … We had great difficulty with the director of the Hillel organization because he was also used to these fraternity kids. … The seriousness of our group was something that he wasn't used to … so relations were not that good. … We kind of took over and he wasn't much older than many of the GIs. … Frankly, I would have been in the army, too, had it not been for the fact that A: I lived in Vineland, which was a backwater and because I was not a citizen. Again, the immigration laws were so crazy. My parents became American citizens in 1946, after five years, but because I was over the age of twelve, I was excluded. I could not become a citizen with my parents. I had to wait till I was eighteen. That was the law. … So, I was still not a citizen when I, actually my draft number came up but in Vineland they only called up the draft once a month, … since I wasn't a citizen that threw all kinds of monkey wrenches into the thing. … By the time I should have been called up, the draft was finished, so, I was never called up.

SI: Did that also exclude you from having to serve with the ROTC at Rutgers? Was that still required when you came?

HF: It was required and that excluded me also for the same reason, yes. I have to go. It's a good time to stop. We'll do it again sometime.

MJ: I want to ask you a question. I'll do this next time, so this is off the record.

SI: We will just stop the tape.

[TAPE PAUSED]

HF: Registration had to be done in what is now Cook College. They always had a Dean of Resident instruction. That was a man by the name of Helyar, Helyar Forest, and there was a Doctor Helyar. … In those days there were Saturday classes and I tried to get out of them, more because of religious conviction than anything else. … When I tried to do that, Helyer said to me, "When in Rome, you have to do as the Romans do." But I don't really think that, this wasn't meant as an anti-Semitic remark, you might interpret it that way, but I don't think it was. Listen, I really have to run.

SI: Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by David Whitman 2/7/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 2/9/05
Reviewed by Hans Fisher 2/24/05