

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER D. KLEIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview on May 24, 2011, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Professor Peter D. Klein and Paul Clemens and Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you very much for coming, Professor Klein, to speak with us; if you would, for the record, tell us where and when you were born.

Peter Klein: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1940, September 17th.

SH: Let us begin by talking a little bit about your family history. Please tell me your father's name, where he was from and his family's history.

PK: My father's name was Bela, B-E-L-A, Klein, and given that he was born in 1902, there were the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy still there. [Editor's Note: The dualistic state of Austria-Hungary existed from 1867 to 1918 and encompassed large portions of Central and Southeastern Europe.] So, when he's talking with Germans, he will say he was born in Austria. [laughter] When he was talking with Jews, he would say he was born in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but he never felt part of it. [laughter] He came from a family in which his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather were all rabbis. He was not a religious man at all. He had two brothers and two sisters, at least. There may have been a third. I don't know. They were middle-class Jews. All three boys went to college. My father was a doctor, a physician. His one brother, who was old enough to have finished college, became an engineer, chemical engineer. His youngest brother was killed by the Nazis, so, we don't know. [Editor's Note: Nazi refers to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, founded in 1919, the political party of Adolf Hitler. Upon Hitler's ascent to power in 1933, Germany became a totalitarian, militaristic state known as Nazi Germany or the Third Reich until its defeat in World War II in 1945.] He was--I have pictures of them--he was the brightest, the handsomest and the sort of hope of the family. None of them, none of the boys, were religious at all, which didn't go down very well with the family, but they were still speaking together. The mother and the father were both captured and put in concentration camps. The one brother was killed.

There was an effort--and I don't know much about this. My father would never talk about what happened in Nazi Germany, and so, I'm getting this from his sister, who was already over here prior to [the Holocaust]. She came over in the 1920s and settled in Cincinnati, where there's a fairly large Jewish, German-Jewish, population. So, she was the first of my father's generation--she was older than my father--to immigrate to the United States. The chemical engineer brother was imprisoned in several Nazi concentration camps and, eventually, ended up in Auschwitz. [Editor's Note: Located in southern Poland, Auschwitz consisted of three Nazi concentration camps, including Birkenau. During the Holocaust, Nazi Germany's genocide against European Jewry and other minority groups, more than two-and-a-half million Jews were deported to Birkenau. Those not killed in gas chambers and disposed of in crematoria were forced to work as slave laborers. Over two-and-a-quarter million Jews were killed there. Approximately six million European Jews died as a result of the Nazis' "Final Solution" during World War II.] The family thought he had been killed, because they kept, the Germans kept, very good records of who went in and who didn't. I mean, they didn't keep a record of, "Who we executed today," but they kept a record of who left. It turns out that, in the prison, there was a young Czech or German, somebody will know the origin of the name, a kid whose parents had already been killed and that kid's name was Klima, K-L-I-M-A. [Editor's Note: The origins of the surname

Klima are Czech and southeastern German.] My father's brother and his wife adopted the kid and, because the kid's name was not a Jewish name, they took the kid's name. So, they went in as Kleins and they came out as Klimas, and we thought that they had been killed. It took until about 1956 or 1957 when they finally found out that this brother was still alive, and it was an absolute fluke that they found out that the brother was still alive. The brother's name was Sandor. You know, sometimes, when you mix people, you get very, very beautiful children and, sometimes, when you mix people, you get these mongrel-looking things that, you know, you wouldn't wish on anybody. [laughter] I don't quite know the history of my father's family, but there must have been some mixing back there somewhere, because there were the Magyar, the Asian, faces, as well as the Jewish faces. [Editor's Note: Magyars, or Hungarians, are an ethnic group primarily associated with Hungary. The ancestors of the Magyars lived east of the Ural Mountains and in Siberia.] I have some old--not photographs, but they're prior to photographs--of these people ...

SH: Like a daguerreotype.

PK: Yes, even before daguerreotype. [Editor's Note: A daguerreotype is a type of early photograph produced on a silver-covered copper plate.]

SH: Oh, my.

PK: When my father finally got out of Nazi Germany, the one thing he took were these pictures of his ancestors. There's this one face that's clearly a mix of the Magyar people and the Jewish people and, unfortunately, it turned out to look terrible. [laughter] These people have a moon face with slanty eyes and a huge Jewish nose. [laughter] So, they are really, really distinctive people. Every generation or so--I have pictures of those generations--every generation or so, one of them crops up, and that was my father's brother, poor man. He, after being liberated from the camps, went to work for the Communists in Czechoslovakia as a chemical engineer. This, again, must have been, oh, yes, middle of my high school. At some time, Czechoslovakia modified the rules for travel to scientific conferences. [Editor's Note: Czechoslovakia formed part of the Eastern Bloc of Communist states in Eastern and Central Europe that allied with the Soviet Union during the Cold War.] [laughter] My uncle, of all things, was working on solid-state rockets for them and they let him go to a conference in London. When I was younger, although my father was a doctor--we could get to this--my father was a doctor, you would think he was earning fairly good money, but he was actually going into debt each year, because the majority of his patients were patients who had gotten out of the Holocaust. My father was an internist who specialized in psychosomatic medicine, [which] explains me to some extent, [laughter] and a lot of these people couldn't afford anything. So, he had a bunch of patients to whom *he* gave money, and then, he had some other rich patients who paid more than their normal fare, but, nevertheless, he ended up owing money every year. We had a fairly big house and we rented some rooms. One of the rooms was [rented to] a medical student and the medical student was from Hungary, where, in some sense, my family came from, because they were Hungarian Jews. Anyway, there was a guy living in our house whose name was Verner Danby, and Verner was also a chemist. He wasn't working on solid-state fuels, but he was working on properties of powder. Normally, you think chemical reactions are with gooey stuff, some sort of liquid stuff, but you can do it with powder, too. So, anyway, he was on a boat, a ferry boat, I guess, or a

tourist boat, on the Thames [River in London] and he looked across and [saw] this face. I mean, it really is a very distinctive-looking face. [laughter] It looks like a caricature of a face. He said to the man, "You must be a Beuchler," which was the mother's [name], on my father's mother's side, and the guy said, "Yes, my mother was a Beuchler." It so happened that he was living in his brother's house. I mean, Sandor met the guy who was living in my father's house, and it was that way that they found out that Sandor was still alive.

SH: Unbelievable.

PK: Just an absolute [coincidence]. If he hadn't been so distinctive, [laughter] we would never have known. I met my uncle three times. When there was the purge of the Jewish scientists in Czechoslovakia, he moved to Denmark, to Aarhus in Denmark. It's a university town. [Editor's Note: Aarhus, Denmark, is home of Aarhus University, Denmark's second-oldest university.] They wanted a person who dealt with his kind of work--not, again, for rocket fuel, they weren't interested in that part--and he lived the rest of his life in Denmark. He was a very sweet, wonderful man. You would think he would be very bitter, but there were some good things. His wife, who also survived the camp--interestingly enough, the boy did not, even though they had changed their name, but they were known as Klima. They had the boy's name. I didn't dare ask them what happened to the boy, and so, I don't know what happened, but she had become so afraid. She would never go to the door. If there was a knock on the door, she would never come out of her room. In Denmark, they made every effort to make her feel at home and, in fact, had classes to teach her Danish on television, so [that] she didn't have to go out. Eventually, she did go out and she had friends. The end of their life was a very good life. He once said to me that he started over three times and the third time was the best. Anyway, that's ...

SH: Wonderful story.

PK: One of my father's sisters had come to the United States. One of my father's sisters had gone to Palestine and settled in Palestine, and some of her children were part of the Irgun and the Haganah, but mostly the Irgun. [Editor's Note: Great Britain controlled Palestine as a League of Nations mandate from 1920 to 1948. Although the British limited Jewish settlement in Palestine, the period before and during World War II saw a resurgence in Zionism, a movement to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Jewish leaders established the paramilitary organization Haganah in 1920 to defend Jewish settlements from Palestinian claims to the land. The more militant Irgun split from Haganah in 1931. In 1948, Jewish leaders declared the independence of the State of Israel. Israel's victory in the subsequent Arab-Israeli War preserved that independence.] I don't know very much about them. I've met Irene. Her name is Irene. I've met Irene a couple times.

The part of my father's family that I did know pretty well, his sister had come to the United States and had married a rabbi who taught at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, which is one of the Reform, major Reform, seminaries in the United States. I went to the Hebrew Union College on Sundays. Those were very Reformed [Jews] [laughter] We were not *bar mitzvah*-ed--we were confirmed as a group. [Editor's Note: During a *bar mitzvah* ceremony, a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy is initiated into adulthood and takes responsibility for his religious and moral duties.] Now, each one of us had to read a little bit of Hebrew. You know, I had to read a sentence or two and somebody else had to read a sentence or two, but it was not an individual

process. In some ways, I feel Jewish. I feel Jewish whenever Jewish people are getting oppressed. Then, I think, I feel, "Uh-oh, that's me." On the other hand, I don't feel Jewish at all. [laughter] It seemed, at this seminary, rabbis, most rabbis, really like questions and the people who were teaching us were the rabbinical students and we had really only two classes. They came under different names, but the one class is, "What is it to be a Jew?" and we had one textbook called *When the Jewish People Was Young* [by Mordecai Isaac Soloff]. [laughter] I was quite upset by the title and I never understood why that was the title, except the whole point of the textbook was, "What is it to be a Jew? [laughter] So, chosen for what? What are these chosen people chosen for?" and we thought, "Persecution." [laughter] That was one thing we were pretty good at doing. So, one class, no matter what it was called, was, "What is it to be a Jew?" and then, the other class was, "Well, let's read the Bible." That was the other class. [laughter] Of course, my friends were all very smart and I was the smart aleck, and so, we gave these rabbinical students a hard time, [laughter] because they would try to make sense out of a story. The story that we all liked dealing with was Job. [laughter]

Paul Clemens: Ah, yes.

PK: Because we thought God was a monster, because, if you read the story, he's making a bet with the Devil. He said, "Oh, I can show you my servant will be good and faithful," [laughter] and he puts Job through all this mess, because he wants to prove to the Devil that Job will be faithful. The Devil will say something like, "Well, can I take away his sheep?" "Yes, you can take away his sheep, but don't touch him." [laughter] "Well, how about his family? Can I take away his family?" "Yes, do that, but don't touch him." Then, "Well, how about touching him?" "Yes, go ahead." [laughter] People think about that it was the patience of Job, but Job actually gets kind of pissed and says, you know, "How dare you do this to me? I've been faithful all my life. Why are you doing this to me?" Of course, God says nothing for a while, and then, God's response is, you know, "Who are you, you little worm, to ask me anything? Can you make the Heavens? Can you make a whale?" It seemed like, "Yes, I can do that because I'm big," hardly seemed fair. [laughter] My sense of social justice was that if there's a God, it's not one I'm going to pray to, that nasty creature. Then, in the end, he gets it all back, sort of, different children, different wives. We don't know what happened to them.

PC: That is right.

PK: Different children, different wives, different animals, [laughter] and he comes to see that what his friend says is true, you know, "You aren't God. God sets the standards and just because you think it's wrong doesn't make it wrong." Well, what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to say, "Oh, yes, God, that's right. Go ahead, do what you did. You're right, because you're big and strong." So, that didn't work. [laughter] After we went through Job--oh, and the Genesis story just used to piss us off, too, that God would know, of course, what was going to happen, so, to say that it was free [will], I mean, it's like you have a child and you say, "Oh, child, be free. Oh, yes, there's some cars. Go play. Just don't get hit by the red car. Any other car is okay." [laughter] Let's say that it turned us off, rather than turned us on, to Judaism. [laughter] So, I wasn't very Jewish, except when the Jewish people are getting pushed around. Then, okay, then, I'm going to be Jewish, but, aside from that, that's it.

PC: When did your father come over here?

PK: My father, interesting, my father came over in 1938.

PC: Wow.

PK: So, it was late in the game.

PC: Yes.

PK: And it was the Quakers, the American Friends Service Committee, who had almost something like an "underground railroad" where they were helping Jews and others out of Germany. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization dedicated to humanitarian service, social justice and peace. The AFSC aided Jewish refugees during the World War II era. The Underground Railroad refers to the network of abolitionists that helped to move escaped slaves from southern bondage to freedom in the North and Canada prior to the Civil War.] My father was never in a concentration camp. They wanted doctors. My father was born in 1902 and, by 1936, which would have made him thirty-four years old, he was head of a hospital in Berlin, not a Jewish hospital, a hospital, in Berlin. He was, I gather, a young, hot-shot doctor, and so good that even with the anti-Semitism that was there long before Hitler--Luther, don't get me started on Martin Luther--so, they kept my father [as the head of the hospital]. They did not put my father in a camp. [Editor's Note: Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation, wrote the anti-Semitic *On the Jews and Their Lies* in 1543.] My father's brother, Heine, the one who was killed, had been involved in helping get some of the young kids out of Germany and into Italy and across the Alps, into Crete and to Palestine. He was caught and killed.

SH: Had he also been in Berlin when he was doing this?

PK: I don't know the answer.

SH: Okay.

PK: I know that he was able to send a postcard back to the family on his last trip, saying that he wasn't sure he was going to get back, but I've never seen that postcard. My family says it's there somewhere. Clearly, I have pictures of the three boys and he, clearly, was the handsome [one]. There was this really distinctive brother and my father, who was fairly good-looking, and Heine, who was just a doll and he was the smartest. Everybody thought, "If somebody in the family is going to make it, it's going to be him." Anyway, he was killed. The Quakers figured out that the way to get my father out was to use his dead brother's passport, because my father was on a list--Irene told me this, my father never told me any of this--my father was on a list to be hunted, because he did have to go underground. When he appeared at the border to leave, he had his dead brother's passport. His dead brother was already dead and the Nazis didn't have him on a list to restrain. So, he got out using his dead brother's passport. They looked enough alike that [the Nazis did not question it]. I have my father's passport. I don't have his brother's passport, so, I don't know what he did with that, but he got out. He got out through--I don't know if it was

Sweden or Norway. He got out up there, went first to England, and then, to the United States, because his sister was here.

SH: Did he come over to the United States in 1938?

PK: He came over in '38.

SH: Okay.

PK: My mother was a nurse, and so, they met right away. My mother was gorgeous. My mother was really attractive. My mother was two years older. My mother was born in 1900. When she was younger, she was very beautiful.

SH: Where was she from? Where was her family from?

PK: She was what she described as a "briar hopper." [laughter] She would say, "That's further back than the hillbillies." Her family was German and her maiden name was Himmler.

SH: Oh, no.

PC: Wow. [laughter]

PK: Her great-grandfather was Heinrich Himmler's great-grandfather's brother. So, here are the two of them, Heinrich's grandfather and my mother's grandfather, one generation, and then, my mother. [Editor's Note: Heinrich Himmler headed the SS and *Gestapo* in Nazi Germany and played a key role in the systematic mass murder of Jews and others during World War II.]

PC: The great-great-grandfather was their common ancestor.

PK: That's right.

PC: Wow.

PK: But, this one, my mother's grandfather, had immigrated to the United States and settled in the hills of Kentucky. I worked for the American Friends Service Committee in a work camp between high school and college. It was back, not quite in the place where I worked--the people [there] were Scots--but, two valleys over, they were German. They were still--and this was in 1957, the Summer of 1957--they were still speaking a dialect of English that was extremely hard to understand. In the holler [hollow] where we were, it was a Scotch sing-songy kind of dialect, but, two hollers over, it was clearly a German dialect. [Editor's Note: They pronounced it as holler]. My mother's people moved way back in the hills, and then, she was born in Covington, Kentucky, right across the river from Cincinnati. They met because she was a nurse, he was a doctor, and they were married, but they didn't tell either side of the family. [laughter] The Himmlers who were here were anti-Semitic in the sense that they couldn't imagine any one of them marrying a Jew. On the other hand, they weren't about to kill her. [laughter] Eventually, we celebrated Christmas with the Himmler side of the family and we celebrated *Pesach*

[Passover] and the other holidays, the holidays, at home. I never--well, I went to temple for Yom Kippur every once in a while.

PC: Did your mother convert?

PK: Yes, my mother actually converted before I was conceived.

PC: Wow.

SH: Really?

PK: Because it was important to the Jewish side of the family that I be Jewish and, if my mother had not converted before I was conceived, according to Jewish law, I would

PC: Yes.

PK: Not have been Jewish. So, she did. Again, interestingly enough, there came a time when I needed to prove that I was Jewish, because--this sounds absolutely nuts [laughter]--my second wife, who was raised in Montana, whose family worked in Glacier Park, her mother was Jewish, although they had been Baptist all their lives, but she was Jewish according to Jewish law. Victoria, who was never Jewish in any sense, since she was born from her mother, she was Jewish. Her thesis advisor, my wife's thesis advisor, at Princeton was married to a Conservative rabbi. When we wanted to get married, she wanted her thesis advisor's husband to marry us, but, of course, he wouldn't marry us, because he had no evidence that I was Jewish. Even though I had gone to the Hebrew Union College, he thought, "That's some evidence that you're not Jewish. [laughter] That's not any evidence." My cousin, who had been pretty high up in the American Labor Zionist movement, knew this rabbi--they had gone to *yeshiva* together--and said he remembered my mother converting. [Editor's Note: A *yeshiva* is an institution of learning dedicated to the study of Judaism, as well as culture and general education.] My cousin is about nine or ten years older than I am. [laughter] He remembered it. The temple had burned down, because they have very good records, but the temple had burned down and the records were missing. It was very important to Victoria that we get married in a Jewish ceremony. I couldn't care less, but she wanted to do it. So, all right, and why she cared, who knows? I was finally able to establish myself as officially Jewish in a way that the Conservatives would accept it, which was interesting, because it was the Hebrew Union College that was responsible for bringing my mother to Judaism. I mean, my mother could care less. My mother was about as anti-religious as you can get, but she did whatever had to be done, and it's not easy. I mean, it was a lot of classes and she had to learn a lot of stuff--knew more about Judaism than my father did and my father's father was a rabbi. [laughter] Oh, well; so, they didn't announce that they were married until they had to, and that's when she started showing with me. [laughter]

I'm an only child. My mother had some difficulty giving birth to me and it was a little dangerous for her. It would have been much more dangerous had she had another child. So, I'm it. The Catholic and Lutheran side of the family, they would do Thanksgiving, we would do Christmas, for that side of the family. The rabbi, who was a wonderful man, just wonderful, the rabbi, who was my father's sister's husband, would do all the home ones. One funny story about that,

actually, if you want--so, at *Pesach*, you go to the door and you invite any stranger in and it's a routine deal. It's not always the youngest child who does that, but I got to do that and there was a person standing there [laughter] and I invited him in. The family was horrified that this person was coming in. [laughter] He was an older person, derelict would be a proper way to describe him, but he joined us for the meal and the family was extremely upset. Actually, throughout the meal--my uncle did it the real way. I mean, it was two-and-a-half hours before you could eat and I would see the food brought, you know, and you don't eat it and it gets taken away. Then, the food is brought again and you do hocus-pocus on it and the food is brought away. [laughter] Oh, dear, oh, dear; my uncle instructed me that, "When you go to the door the next time, you turn and face us and invite the people in. You don't really invite the people in." [laughter] I told him, "No, that's not how we do the ceremony," and he agreed, that was not how we did the ceremony. So, we invited people in, but there wasn't anybody out there. I think we waited until we were sure there wasn't anybody there. [laughter] Oh, dear, but I used to like *Pesach*. Again, rabbis like being questioned, and so, when the plagues come along, all the Egyptian firstborn are killed. You know, they're little babies. My uncle, the rabbi, would have trouble explaining that one, that, "What kind of a just God is that?" He would always stumble and retreat, finally, to, "We don't understand the ways of God." Then, my response would always be, "Yes, but you pray to the thing you don't understand? How come?" His answer always was, "Because we do. That's what we are;" didn't satisfy me. So, what else do you want to know? [Editor's Note: Passover is a Jewish holiday that commemorates the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Ten plagues descended upon Egypt as punishment for the Egyptians not freeing the Israelites from slavery. The tenth plague doomed all firstborns to their death. The Israelites marked their doors, however, and their firstborns were passed over, thus giving the holiday its name. Subsequently, the Pharaoh freed the Israelites and allowed them to leave.]

SH: Where in Cincinnati did you live? Was there a neighborhood?

PK: It was a Jewish neighborhood and this was a pretty, we'd say now, upper-middle-class neighborhood. The people in the neighborhood were lawyers, doctors, CEOs of small companies, not big companies, and it was a place in Cincinnati called North Avondale. Our house had fifteen rooms on three stories. Again, my family didn't have much [money]--sounds like we would have had a lot of money--but we rented out the third story to medical students. We rented out the second. There were four bedrooms on the second floor. I had one, my parents had one, the sewing room was one and we rented out the fourth one. That's where Verner Danby was. The people who lived on the third floor, they lived there for five or six years. We were only in that house five or six years. My parents got a divorce when I was starting the fourth grade, whatever, however old, I guess I was eleven or something, I don't know. Since the family had no money, my father moved to an apartment. My mother and I moved to a tiny, little house that was in a Catholic neighborhood. So, I was in that fairly wealthy part of Cincinnati and pretty close to it, in fact, so that I could go to the same school for fourth, fifth and sixth grade that I had been going to. I had started in that school, so, it must have been in the middle of the fourth grade or something. Yes, it had to be the middle of fourth grade.

SH: Did your mother return to work?

PK: Yes. She became the head of psychiatric nursing training at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati; didn't pay much. My father did not provide the amount of financial support he should have, in part because he didn't have it, because he'd always lived beyond his means. I think it was very difficult for him, having been head of a hospital, to come over and essentially start his internship again. I think it was important for him to keep up an appearance of not having lost status.

SH: Did he talk about when he came out of Berlin, and then, went north, and then, to England?

PK: Yes.

SH: Did he practice medicine at all in the Scandinavian countries or in England?

PK: I don't know. He wasn't there very long.

SH: Okay.

PK: I think he must have been in England--the plan all along was to get to Cincinnati. So, I think this was just a stopping off point. I doubt if he did practice medicine in Belgium or Sweden or wherever he got out. Again, he would never talk about any of it.

SH: You said he left Germany in 1938. Did he get to the United States that same year?

PK: Yes, yes.

SH: Okay.

PC: He must have, given when Peter was born.

PK: Yes, I was born in September of 1940.

PC: Yes.

SH: Okay.

PK: So, this was a pretty quick romance. My mother was, in many ways, a very soft, kind person. In other ways, she was a Himmler. [laughter] I wrangled at a dude ranch in Montana once and there are horses that have what are called tough mouths. They take the bit in their mouth and, of course, they're so much stronger than you are, there's nothing you can do. You can put a burr on the bit and a double rein, so that the burr bites into the tongue, but, if the horse is strong enough, you can't even do that. My mother was like that. My mother, once she decided where she was going, there was nothing you could do to deter her, just absolutely nothing. [laughter] So, she was very--understandably--very bitter. My father had had affairs with several women, some of his patients, a clear no-no. It's very interesting. My father was a very forgiving, warm, sentimental, smart man; my mother was a hard-ass. So, if I came home with, God help me, a "B-," my father, who was not there very much, even before the divorce--he was

one of these people who would make house calls, literally go to the people's houses when they were ill, think of that. He would make house calls on Tuesday afternoon and evenings and on Sundays and I would often go with him. Sometimes, I'd sit in the car and, that way, I got to listen to some of the great radio programs, the comedy programs. I still remember some of them, [American comedian and actor] Jack Benny in particular. [laughter]

PC: My hero.

PK: *The Shadow*, which was a mystery story, and *Inner Sanctum*. I heard the chair creak and that reminded me. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* radio program featured a creaking door sound to begin and end the show.] So, I got to know my father well on Sunday afternoons and Tuesday nights, and that remained the same after the divorce, until--I played sports a little bit and, as I got a little more serious at it, that got in the way. My mother taught nursing, psychiatric nursing. She was a really good teacher. She tried her best to raise me. I was not the most cooperative, [laughter] but she did the best she could and she's the one who instilled Jewish guilt in me. My father didn't. So, this Himmler brought that about. [laughter]

SH: What did you do during the summers?

PK: Well, you couldn't do this anymore, but, between my senior year and college, I went to this Friends Service Committee, and there's a good story about that I'll tell you in a minute. For three summers prior to that, since I was an only child, my parents wanted me to learn to socialize; failed miserably. [laughter] So, there was a camp at Spotted Bear, which is a place in the Flathead National Forest [in Montana], up on the south fork of the Flathead River. That was a hunting camp, but, of course, the hunters don't get there until October or November. During the summer, it was run as a boys' camp and most of the boys were from New York City. They went to a school called Riverdale in New York City, which is a private boys' school, and, at the time, I don't know if it still is, it was almost exclusively Jewish. There were a couple kids from Chicago and my friend and I, Jewish friend and I--I grew up in Cincinnati with Jewish friends. I went to a high school that had fraternities and sororities in high school.

PC: Yes.

PK: We can get back to this, if you want. It was highly segregated, not just by religion, but there were three Jewish fraternities, the RTs, the 'Round Towners, and the Phi Epsilons and I forget what the other ones were. The 'Round Towners were the rich kids, the presidents of the student council, the straight "A" students. Then, there were the Phi Epsilons, that's what I was, who, if they played football, they were good, but they weren't the stars, and, if they were in the student council, they may have become the treasurer or the secretary. So, it was highly split. Then, there was this other thing, its name I can't remember, that had the sort of thuggy Jews. That's where Jerry Rubin, one of the Chicago Seven, was. Jerry was one year ahead of me, but, in other ways, years behind. He was a *schmuck*. [laughter] I identify with his politics, but not with him. He was a real *schmuck*. [Editor's Note: The Chicago Seven refers to seven defendants, including Youth International Party founders Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, who were charged with conspiracy to incite riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago]

in 1968. Jerry Rubin grew up in Cincinnati and attended Walnut Hills High School, the same school attended by Dr. Klein.] Anyway, so, the first year, I went there as a camper, so-to-speak. The reason they had this thing--and it was a good deal for everybody all around--the horses would not have been ridden. They'd be out, you know, in pasture almost from the end of November until June. Well, they hadn't been ridden at all. "Well, what are you going to do, put these hunters, who are paying a lot of money, on these sort of wild horses?" "No, we're going to bring out high school kids and they're going to ride them." Well, I got pretty good at it and they asked me, in the second and third year, whether I would be a wrangler. Wranglers are to horses as cowboys are to cows. So, we would take care of the horses. What they wanted was a kid who was somewhere between the rough-tough Montana wranglers and the kids who were eleven, twelve and thirteen years old, and so, I did that for three summers and loved it, absolutely loved it.

SH: Had you ever been out West before?

PK: I was out West with my family once and we went to Yellowstone Park. Here's a little story. All the way out, I kept saying I wanted to see a bear, because that's what kids want to do, "I want to see a bear. I want to see a bear. I want to see a bear." It must have driven them nuts. We finally got to Yellowstone Park and, at the time, there was a lodge. I think the darn thing is still there. I think it's the Many Glacier Lodge, but I'm not sure.

PC: That is in Glacier.

PK: In Glacier Park, yes.

PC: Okay.

PK: Did I say ...

PC: I thought you said Yellowstone.

PK: Yes, I did.

PC: Okay.

PK: But, we went to Glacier Park. We went to Yellowstone, didn't see any bears, headed up to Glacier Park, didn't see a damn bear, and so, I was really upset. In Glacier Park, there was this lodge that was sort of at the center of the spokes of a wheel and all the cabins would come off little lanes from this center lodge. So, here's where you'd have your meals and the bathrooms were distributed something like that. [Editor's Note: Professor Klein draws a diagram for the interviewers.] We had picked up a hitchhiker and the hitchhiker and I were sharing one lodge and my parents were in one of the other little cabins. I was feeling very big. I don't know how old I was and I thought, "I could get to the bathroom," and I did get to the bathroom, but, when I left the bathroom, I must have gone in this way and come out that way and they all looked the same and I was completely lost. I was so proud or stupid that I could see the lodge, because it had big lights and all that, and I could go there and say, "Look, I'm lost and I can't get home," or

I could find my way home. I thought, "I'm going to find my way home," because the car was parked by the cabin and I'd recognize the car. So, I would walk up and down these aisles and I got more and more and more sad and frightened. So, I finally sat down in the back and I didn't want to be out in front of the little cabins crying, because I had wanted to see a bear and I was rough-tough and all that. So, I sat in the back and out of the woods comes what to me must have been a house with furry legs. [laughter] It came walking up and it looked at me. It was from here to, I don't know

SH: Six feet away.

PK: Ten, twelve feet away. It looked at me and I looked at it, and then, it sort of went [Editor's Note: Professor Klein imitates a bear roar.] I thought, "Oh, dear," [laughter] but I had some Lifesavers. So, I threw it a Lifesaver and it bent over and ate the Lifesaver, and then, it took a step towards me. [laughter] Then, I threw it another Lifesaver and it [Editor's Note: Professor Klein makes a bear noise.] It took a step towards me and I realized, "Oh, dear."

PC: This is not working.

PK: [laughter] "All I'm doing is bringing this bear closer to me and I'm going to run out of Lifesavers." So, I opened up the Lifesavers, threw a bunch and ran. [laughter]

PC: It worked.

PK: And I'm still here. It probably wouldn't have done anything. It was, I believe, a black bear.

PC: I was going to ask whether it was a black bear or a brown bear.

PK: No, it was a black bear, I think.

PC: Okay.

PK: I think I would have been okay anyway.

PC: Yes.

PK: It would have gotten a little mad, but I don't think it would've hit me.

PC: No.

PK: So, that's how I first got out there. I became a wrangler. I didn't realize that they hired--I did it one summer, but, then, again, my family didn't have much money. I worked at a grocery store and I had saved a little money and my mother had a little money. I worked at the camp the first year. So, I only had to pay the train fare out and back and we went on the Great Northern, which was just spectacular. I'd take a train from Cincinnati to Chicago, meet the train in Chicago and we'd end up in Whitefish in Montana. Then, they'd meet us with trucks and we'd go back in trucks. The train rides were great and I didn't realize that one of the people on the train, until

halfway through the camp, I didn't realize this kid was special, because he was getting a free train ride. He was the person I became the next year. We weren't counselors, we were just wranglers, but we were a go-between. I saw the ad. They had little ads for high school jobs, little catalogs, and, in there, what they wanted was, you couldn't do it now, a Jewish kid who knew how to ride Western saddle who was available for the months, blah, blah, blah, to work at a summer camp primarily for Jewish boys. I had been there that one summer. Of course, I didn't saddle my own horse, because those saddles are heavy, [laughter] and I was Jewish in some sense. You had to be from the East and I was from Cincinnati and I figured, "Well, they're going to think that's East," [laughter] and they hired me, of all things. They hired me because I had been there and they knew that I would work hard and stuff. So, that's how I first got out to Montana, aside from that one trip with my parents, which was fun, but it didn't endear me to the country [like] that going to northwest Montana, where this camp was. It was closer to Glacier Park than where I now am, although we're on the same mountain range. That's that.

SH: In high school, did you have a favorite subject or favorite sport?

PK: I ran track and I played football, but I didn't play football long. The track coach was the same as the football coach. We were--they didn't call it a magnet school, but you had to pass a test to get in--and you would start there in the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, so, from the seventh grade on. The questions weren't too hard, "Two, four, six, eight, nine, ten--which is the wrong number?" [laughter] That was the difficulty of the test and I did all right on that, and so, I got in. It was a very mixed group. Almost all of the Cincinnati high schools and elementary schools were segregated, not by law, not by practice in the sense that somebody was aiming for segregated schools, but by fact, because of the way people lived. Cincinnati was a very, very clustery way of living. So, there was very little chance for interaction between blacks and whites, almost none, except during football games or track meets or something, except at the school that I went to, because students from all over the city would take these tests and you had to have certain grades. They didn't have to be that good, but I did well in first, second and third grade, fourth, fifth and sixth. Actually, that's not quite right. Fourth, fifth and sixth, I did well, except for math, but first, second and third, I went to a private school, because I have dyslexia and I couldn't read. I don't have very much of a memory of what it was like. Still, if I read for two hours straight, everything starts swimming and I can't read and I have to stop.

I do remember that my mother would read the material to me at night and I went to a private school called the Cincinnati Country Day School, all rich kids. I was really out of place with them, all rich, white, Protestant kids or Catholic kids. You had to stand up and read. Well, the teacher knew I couldn't read, but I could memorize just pages after pages after pages. So, I had a very good oral memory, I guess, auditory memory. So, the teacher would say, "Peter, would you start with..." and then, I knew I could read it and the students didn't know I couldn't read. By the end of the third grade, the third grade teacher was--I don't know what would have happened to me if she hadn't figured this out--she knew I was dyslexic. She had a cardboard sheet that she had cut out, about like this, with rectangular pieces cut out, of different sizes. So, these were holes. [Editor's Note: Professor Klein uses a piece of paper to show how the reading device worked.] I would move this thing along a line of text until there was white space here and white space there and I knew that was a word, and then, I could read that word. It took forever, [laughter] but I could read, because the problem for me was--and, I mean, I remember the

formula, but I don't remember this happening exactly the way I'm describing it, but it must have been that way--I couldn't figure out where the words started and where the words ended, because it just all looked like one big shmush. I didn't have the kind of thing where I would reverse letters, because I couldn't even identify the letters. It was just sort of wiggly stuff and that's what happens now even, if I read for two or three hours. Then, it just starts doing that. By allowing me to find the word, find what was a word, then, I could just focus on that little bit, and so, I could get that word. I can't remember her name and I've been trying to remember it over these years, not much likelihood she'd still be alive, but I think she taught me. If she hadn't figured that thing out, I don't know if I ever would've learned to read. I might have. Then, eventually, I could do that with my eyes. I didn't need this cardboard thing. I could scan until I saw where the white spaces were, and then, I could focus on those words. The swimming, the things that were swimming were confined. [laughter] Now, it's this much and it was much easier. If I looked at it with one eye, sometimes, it'd help. Who knows?

I did okay first to third grade, and then, in elementary school, I used to love math, but, in the sixth grade, I had this horror for a teacher, for math, who would say, "Well, you solve this problem using that formula." You'd ask why and the teacher would say, "Because it gives the right answer," and that just would infuriate me. I remember the decisive moment in my life, I think. I had this, must have been third grade teacher, no, fourth grade, had to be fourth grade, and we were learning what happened. This was at the public school, so, it had to be the fourth grade, because it was Mr. Farnam. I remember him. We were figuring out what one-and-a-half times four was, or one-and-a-half times something-or-other. Let's make it four. [laughter] He would say, "Well, first, you multiply it by one, and then, you multiply it by half and you get the result." He asked me, "So, what's one-and-a-half times four?" and I remember saying, "Two," and he said, "No, you didn't do what I said. You multiply it by one, and then, you multiply it by a half and you get the result," and I remember getting furious, saying, "I multiplied it by one. One times four is four. Multiply it by a half and you get two." [laughter] He said, "No, that's..." and then, he would yell at me. He would accuse me, "Stupid people like this are never going to learn mathematics." [laughter] I got so mad, I stalked out of class a couple times, and I was crying, because I didn't like being called stupid. He could've explained it to me. I think I would have been smart enough to get

SH: Of course. [laughter]

PK: How to do that. So, he ruined math for me for several years, but we had a sixth grade teacher named Mr. Hale, who I was in contact with quite a bit, and I've only written one book in my life and I dedicated the book to him. [laughter] Mr. Hale allowed us to keep our own records of grades. So, we had a little chart and we would keep a graph and we would keep our grades. We would grade each other's papers. He took a step back and said, "Learning is your responsibility," and I loved it. We could make up questions. The class could make up exam questions. It was terrific. Then, I went to this high school that was the magnet high school or whatever one calls it and there were these segregated groups.

PC: Is this the school with the fraternities that you mentioned?

PK: Yes.

PC: Okay.

PK: Yes, Walnut Hills High School, which is a really well-known high school in Cincinnati. I mean, they produce a lot of good scholars. You did have to pass a test to get in, the best teachers were there, etc. One of my closest friends in high school, a guy named Bob Martin, who was responsible for getting me to Rutgers in the long run, and I became close friends, and there were just very talented kids there of all sorts. [Editor's Note: Dr. Robert Martin served as Associate Professor of Philosophy and Cellist in Residence at Livingston College, Rutgers University, from 1969 to 1974, before leaving to play and tour with the Sequoia String Quartet from 1975 to 1985 and serve as a professor of philosophy at California State University-Northridge. Since 1994, he has been a faculty member at Bard College and now serves as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Philosophy and Music there.] Bob was probably among the most talented. There, I did better, although I was somewhat of a jock. I ran track. I played football. I was good in track. Now, when I say this, it's not quite right, but I'll say it anyway--I was the third fastest in the hundred yard dash in Ohio. Now, that meant, when we went to the state meets, I ran the hundred and I came in third. Now, that doesn't mean I was the third fastest, because the coaches of the opposing teams may have held back their fastest person to run the 220 [yards] rather than the hundred. [laughter] So, God knows, but I used to be able to beat those people from Cleveland East. Cleveland East had these huge, huge monsters, [laughter] white guys, Polish guys, or something or other. I don't know what they were, but they looked like college students. The Dayton Flyers, a black school, they looked like track stars. I mean, they would just come out there and it was like the Harlem Globetrotters for track. [laughter] They were just amazing, but I could beat them and that was good. [laughter] There was a headline in my high school newspaper, "Hither-to-Unheralded Sophomore Wins Race." [laughter]

PC: Yes.

SH: Great headline.

PK: Yes, that was good, right, and I liked the hither-to part, right, instead [of] if they'd just said unheralded. So, I liked a lot of high school, but I was a jock. I ran track and I played football for a year, was good at it, but the coach, who was the same as the track coach--we had what were called "dirty drills." What we were learning was what the other team was going to do to us and how to protect ourselves. So, we learned how to high-low tackle, [which] essentially means one person holds the runner and, if possible, turns the runner's back towards the tackler that's going to come in high. We were learning that that's what the other team was going to do to us. [laughter] In the locker room, we had a picture, a big picture, of the opposing team, with nooses drawn around the necks of the people we were going to try and get out in the first quarter, because one way we could win, you get rid of their good people in the first quarter, and then, you can run over them. So, we had that. During practice one day, since I played on offense and defense, the offensive players would know what plays were going to be practiced, the defensive players didn't know that, because it would've been too easy, [laughter] but, since I was an offensive and a defensive player, even if I was playing defense in a scrimmage, I knew what the offensive guys were going to do. The quarterback was a guy named Skip Donaldson--couldn't stand him, he didn't like me, either. From my perspective, it seemed to me that he would always,

during a game--now, I weighed 175 pounds in high school and I was fast. I was the fastest back we had and we had backs that were weighing 185, 190 pounds. He would send me as a fake to the middle of the line. Well, I was the smallest guy and I was fast. Now, the person he ought to send the fake to was one of the big, heavy guys, and then, give me the ball and let me go around the end, rather than the other way, or let me go outside tackle at least, but, between the tackle and the guard, why was that my play? So, I didn't like him and he didn't like me and we were competitors in the classroom, too. The coach, I was playing defense on scrimmage and Skip was the quarterback and I knew they were going to practice an option play, where the quarterback'll get the ball and run around the end and the halfback would be following behind. The choice was, if the defensive end came in and went to the quarterback, then, the quarterback lateraled it off. This was a full contact scrimmage, because it was Thursday. We played Friday nights. I told the coach, "Don't do that," because I was the defensive left halfback and he was coming around the right end and I said, "Just don't do that, because if he comes around and whether he has the ball or not, I'm going to nail him," because you're allowed to. As long as you thought it was that the guy could still have the ball, and, sometimes, you know, he'd be hiding it, and so, you could tackle him. I said, "Don't do that," and the coach said, "No, no." One of the reasons the coach said that was because he was six-foot-three and he weighed probably 210 [pounds]. He was a big guy, and so, he probably thought nothing was going to happen, except I might get injured. Well, I broke the guy's collarbone and the coach was somewhat perturbed, let's say, and yelled at me in front of all these players and I gave him the finger and quit. I told him, "You know, I told you not to do that," and then, I walked off and didn't finish. So, not only did I cripple the quarterback, but I wasn't there to play. [laughter] So, needless to say, the team didn't do that well that year and that didn't endear me to my fellow athletes.

SH: Yet, the coach was okay with you running track.

PK: No, he didn't let me run track. No, I knew, once I did that, he wasn't going to let me run track, either. So, that was the end of that. I loved math in junior high school, again, because I had a really good teacher for the first two years. Then, they put you in the advanced placement math course and we had a teacher, her name was Miss Becker and we referred to her as "Boom-Boom" Becker, [laughter] because she looked like a football tackle and, when she would come down the hall, you'd [Editor's Note: Professor Klein knocks on the table to imitate feet thumping on the floor.] I'm exaggerating a bit. She did have one eye that would roam and she had arthritic hands. [laughter] I was in the class. There was a kid named Fine in the class and a kid named Dine in the class. So, there's a Klein, Fine and a Dine. For some reason, she would point with this finger and she would say ...

SH: Pinky finger.

PK: "Ine, to the board," and we'd look at that, "You know, is she pointing with this, with this or with this?" and so, we'd all duck. [laughter] She hated me and I didn't work at all. Had it been a regular class, I would've flunked it, because she gave tests every Monday and I managed to get sick a lot on Monday. She would say, on Tuesday, "I see Klein is back. His test fever, he's overcome his test fever," and she was so mean and nasty. She was another one of these people that [thought], "You solve a problem using this formula because it works," and she wouldn't explain it. I'm not sure she could've. Maybe she could've.

SH: Were you expected to go to college?

PK: Yes. I was expected to become a doctor and my father realized pretty quickly I wouldn't be a good one. For a month, during the Christmas break, I worked in what was called Longview State Hospital, which was a hospital for the mentally insane. I worked--this was a volunteer [position]--in a post, think of this, post-operative senile psychotic ward. So, they had all had major surgery, they were senile, so, they were seventy-five, eighty [years old], maybe some of them were as young as fifty-five, and they were psychotic. So, they not only were senile, but they were psychotic. You'd walk into this--this was out of the early 1900s, middle 1800s--state mental institution, so, this huge, big thing, and you'd walk into a ward and it was shaped like this. So, here'd be something they would call the nurses' station. So, here's the door in. [Editor's Note: Professor Klein draws a diagram of the ward.] There'd be twenty-four beds here and twenty-four beds here and maybe a couple of isolation rooms, padded rooms, here and here. The smell, when you first walked in that room, the smell was like hitting a wall and the sound was like hitting a wall, because everybody was talking. People were laughing, not to each other, just laughing, or crying or screaming or saying something or singing. There was a television set here, on the wall. You know how they [the broadcast] used to roll over? Nobody could pay any attention [to it]. I mean, it was rolling over very quickly, but there was a television set. I was doing bedpans and taking people from one place to the other and talking to them. There was a guy there called "Old John" and Old John had to be in mild restraints. He would sit, but you had to--not tough restraints, just cloth--you'd tie his hands, because, if you didn't, he'd scratch himself and he'd open up sores and things. Other than that and his delusions, he had had a major operation here and he just could've ruined that thing. You'd ask Old John, "How are you, John?" and he'd say, "It goes about forty," and almost in answer to every question, "Well, what are you planning to do today, John?" "It goes about forty," but, then, if you got him talking, John was an old black guy and he told stories as though he had been a slave. Now, he couldn't have been a slave, impossible, but his father could've been a slave. His stories of being married to his first wife and what happened to their kids, over time, the stories made sense. They would line up chronologically, but they couldn't have been about him. If they were true, they were true about his father and he was reenacting his father's life; fascinating man. I still don't know what, "It goes about forty" means. [laughter] I think it meant, "Yes, it's okay." I think that's what it meant. "Yes, it's okay. It's not twenty. It's not eighty." I don't know quite what it meant, but it goes about forty. John was a calming influence in my life, believe it or not. [laughter] I spent a lot of time with John, but it was very clear I didn't like being around sick people and my father knew that, so that I was not going to become a doctor. That was that.

I had planned to stay out of school between high school and college for a year, because I was sick and tired of school and I wanted to do something different. I had worked in a log yard, a lumberyard, but they were logs when they came in and they sawed [the wood]. I mean, this thing produced the lumber. I liked that and it was good, heavy work and I was planning to do that between high school and college, but I went to a Quaker work camp, American Friends Service Committee work camp, in Breathitt County, Kentucky, with other young boys and girls. I had graduated. I think some of them had graduated, but most of them were between their junior and senior year. We were down in Breathitt County, which is way back in Kentucky, dirt road to the holler, but you could get a car up it with some struggle. These people lived [in] terrible

poverty, no electricity. They did have battery-powered radios and they lived in a valley that had pretty steep hills. They lived down near the--they said "cricks." They lived down near the creeks, because that's where they got their water. They would walk up the hills and the hills would flatten out a little bit and they'd grow tobacco. So, their crop was tobacco and they would grow enough so that they could sell some. So, that was their cash crop. They all looked like each other. It really looked like, though, [Li'l Abner], or whatever that cartoon was, Little Abner? [Editor's Note: *Li'l Abner*, a comic strip by Al Capp, comically depicted the lives of hillbillies from Kentucky.]

SH: Li'l Abner.

PK: Abner, and, every once in a while, there was a Li'l Abner character. There was a really, really handsome guy and a really, really gorgeous Daisy Mae, but the rest of the people were these long, thin, very thin, emaciated people who looked like they had bed sticks for arms. The minister was a guy named Sam Vander Meer and there was a pitcher, Johnny Vander Meer, and Sam was Johnny's uncle. Sam had been digging ditches in New York City and God spoke to him and said, "Go to the people in Kentucky and get them to stop drinking." [laughter] So, Sam, somehow, I don't know, he was a member of some church, it was a fundamentalist church, and they must have given him some money and he went there and he had inculcated various religious beliefs. Singing and dancing were instruments of the Devil. Drinking was clearly an instrument of the Devil. Playing musical instruments was an instrument of the Devil. We arrived the summer--remember Asian flu? [Editor's Note: The Asian flu pandemic, which began in Asia in 1956 and spread throughout the world over the course of 1957 and 1958, claimed nearly seventy thousand lives in the United States.]

PC: Yes.

PK: Well, we brought it.

SH: [laughter] Oh, my.

PK: One of the girls, whose name I don't remember, gorgeous, came from California, and she had it with her. Well, here we were, boys and girls, in the middle of this community, and they would refer to us as "fur-eigners" and they didn't like us anyway and we brought the Asian flu. They had no physicians, but they had county visiting nurses. The visiting nurse came and said, "Yes, you got the Asian flu." "Well, what do you do?" She said, "Well, you're going to have to put all the sick people in one place and all the well people in another place," and that meant the sick boys and girls were sleeping in the one barn and the well boys and girls were sleeping in another barn. That did not go down well with those people, and so, we had some obstacles to overcome. Our job there was to build a little dam. There was a creek that had clearly, at one time, had a fairly good-sized pond behind it, but that had long since disappeared. We were going to rebuild the dam and put in a little, little power plant, so that the church could have lights and so that there could be a little community center where they could have washing machines. The dam would have put out enough power to do that when the water was at high level. When it was low, it wouldn't do it, but, for a lot of the year, it'd work. We were also supposed to assess what

skills these people had, so that they could, if they left, earn a living, and I'll get back to that in a minute.

Well, the second day we were there, one of the women in the village died of childbirth, with her second illegitimate child. Well, the way they would punish people in the village was to shun them. That's how you'd punish them. You'd be shunned. I don't know who determined [that], but somebody determined, probably Uncle Sam, Sam Vander Meer. Everybody called each other aunt or uncle, because everybody was everybody else's aunt or uncle. [laughter] They had to put on a funeral of some sort, but they had to shun the woman. Well, guess who got to put on the funeral? So, we put on the funeral. So, that was a compromise. We could do something the village wanted us to do and the village wouldn't be mad. They would be thankful and we could overcome this Asian flu stuff, because they were terrified. If you remember, it was a really debilitating thing. It was unpleasant and these people weren't in the best of health anyway. So, we couldn't get anywhere near them and they couldn't come anywhere near us, which they wouldn't have anyway. There had been an old mill and there was a slab pile, you know, where, when you square off a log, you have the slabs that, usually, just nothing happens to them. This slab pile was probably fifteen, twenty years old and that's where they got their lumber for things. So, we got our lumber for the casket and we made a casket. The girls washed the body of the woman and the baby and they dressed it and they put it in the coffin, and then, we came and nailed it up. We were doing the little singing of hymns. We all learned four-part harmony for some hymns and we were about ready to leave and Widow, but she was called "Widder," Widder Mary Thompson said to me, "No, you're the head man. You and the others have to accompany the coffin to the house where the woman had lived with her family," and I said, "What do you mean, accompany the coffin?" [laughter] She said to me, "You have to carry it," and nobody had told us that. The head man was just the person who had been at the head of the coffin. That's all it meant. So, all right, what are we going to do? I mean, we can't just leave the coffin there, because they take the body back to the house. They take the body out of the coffin. It would have been nice if they had told us that, because we had already nailed it shut, [laughter] but they take the body out of the coffin, put it in its bed for the night, then, put it back in the coffin and go bury it the next day, and she sort of explained that little ritual. Okay, so, we pick the body up and we have six of us carrying this thing, the head, the foot and two others. Of course, we don't have any sticks going through or anything like that and we're walking up. The path to the house was a dry creek bed. So, here we are, stumbling, going up this dry creek bed and she was a fairly heavy lady anyway and the coffin was made out of these slabs, which were moist and heavy. So, this weighed quite a bit and we started to put the coffin down and the people in the village shrieked, "You can't put the coffin down until it gets to the place where it's going or the woman will go to hell." We weren't allowed to switch carriers, not a new six, but the person who was on the right-hand side could go to the left-hand side, and so, it was a little different muscles you were using, and I think the damn thing was three-quarters of a mile. [laughter] We got to the door and we had built the coffin. We didn't know what we were doing, but we had seen that coffins were narrower at the bottom, and then, they went like this, so, that's how we built it. It wouldn't get through the door [laughter] and it's a wooden door. You can imagine these shacks. So, I said to Widow Mary Thompson, "We're going to have to turn this thing on the side." She said, "Go ahead." So, we turned the thing on the side and the body went flop-flop. [laughter] Then, when we got back in, we turned it back over and it went flop-flop, and then, we put it [down] [Editor's Note: Professor Klein makes a banging noise] and it was a standard-looking

thing. We had two chairs facing each other and we put the coffin [between] the two chairs. We sang some more hymns and we were about ready to leave and Widow Mary Thompson, Widder Mary Thompson, says to me, "You can't leave," and I said, "Why?" [laughter] She said, "Because you're the head man. You have to stay all night," and I said, "Why?" [laughter] She said, "Well, because when everybody else leaves, you and the family are going to take the body out of the coffin and you're going to put it in the bed and you have to be sure that the Devil doesn't come and switch bodies, because, if you bury the wrong body, this woman will go to hell and the Devil does this frequently." [laughter] The people in the house had a hammer and I went to open these nails. This is rotten, old wood, and it went just standard, "Creak," and one of our girls just fainted dead on the spot. [laughter] Oh, dear, oh, dear, but I finally got the nails off and here's the head. I'll make this the top of the coffin, [Editor's Note: Professor Klein illustrates the coffin using a piece of paper] but I didn't take the nails all the way out. I left the nails sitting in the top of the coffin, so that, when in the morning, I was looking ahead, in the morning, well, we can put the coffin [lid] back on. Anyway, so, I had to stay awake all night. I didn't carry the body. They carried the body. They asked if I wanted to do it, "No." They carried the body to the bed. It's a straw bed on the floor, logs with straw in the middle, and they put her in there. I had to sit, watching the body all night, because, you know, the Devil could sneak in and they were dead serious. I mean, you couldn't crack a smile. [laughter] I mean, just, that would have been so disrespectful.

PC: This would have been about 1960.

PK: Yes, yes. Well, I was ...

SH: It would be around 1958.

PK: I was seventeen, so, 1957, and they were just absolutely dead serious about this. So, in the morning, we pick this girl up and the rigor mortis had sort of disappeared. So, it was a little floppy. They didn't close her eyes, anyway, and she was smelling a little bit and the baby; that was hard. So, we picked these two up, put it back in the coffin, and then, everybody appears. You know, they all come and we start singing. Then, it's time to put the coffin back together and I pick up the hammer to put the nail in, screaming, and Widow Mary Thompson says, "You can't use the same holes, because the woman will go to hell. You have to use different holes." [laughter] I said to Widow Mary Thompson--I liked her a lot and she knew this was very hard for me--and I said, "Really? Why didn't somebody tell me that?" and nobody had told me. Anyway, so, we nailed it up. Then, thank God, different people carried her to the cemetery. The cemetery, they couldn't use their good land for the cemetery, because they didn't have very much of it, so, it was on a hillside, rocky. Some of the other guys had dug the grave and they had been very smart. So, here's the hillside and they dug the grave. Of course, the dirt would roll down the hill, so, above the grave, they had put some stakes, and then, put some wood. Then, they could throw the dirt above the wood. Their plan was, all you'd have to do was to remove those pieces of wood and the dirt would naturally fall into the hole, or you could help it fall. Well, then, we sang some more songs and they pulled the first board and, "Oh," scream, scream, scream. "No, you have to put it in shovel by shovel or the woman will go to hell." So, they had to shovel around this thing, because they couldn't pull the stuff. [laughter] Anyway, I had been up all night. I was exhausted. Thank God, I didn't have to do any of the digging or I would've

been a complete wreck. I'm sitting underneath a tree and Widow Mary Thompson comes to me and says, "I see you're sitting in the black spot." I thought, "Oh, dear God, what is that?" [laughter] It was just their word for shadow.

SH: Ah.

PK: What she meant was, she was consoling me, she said, "I see you're sitting in the shadow. You're very tired," but I heard, "I see you're sitting in the black spot," and I thought, "Oh, dear, oh, dear." Anyway, the punch line of all this, the well boys were sleeping in a cabin, a barn. We had bunk beds and I was on the top bunk and, in the middle of the night, I wake up and I see the door to the cabin open and in comes this floating body. This is the dead woman's body, just floating above the floor. She had a long, white gown. She's floating past me and I say to myself, "This is a hallucination. You're having a hallucination and all you have to do is close your eyes, blink your eyes and it will go away." So, I blink my eyes and it didn't go away. In fact, when she went past me, the wind, you know, I felt this chill wind, [laughter] you know, because there are all these folk songs about, "She was wearing a long white dress," and ...

SH: Long white dress.

PK: "The chill wind." I thought, "Oh, my God, is this a dream or am I awake?" I woke up the kid below me and I said, "In the morning, I want you to tell me if I woke you up," and, in the morning, I asked him and he said, "Yes, you said, 'In the morning, I want you to tell me if I woke you up.'" So, I was having this great hallucination and what she did was, in the hallucination, she went to my little footlocker, opened it up and climbed in and closed the footlocker. Later that day, a kid wanted to borrow my baseball glove. [laughter] I told him, "It's in my footlocker."

PC: Watch out. [laughter]

PK: Yes. No, I didn't say, "Watch out." I didn't tell anybody about this thing, because they would think I was nuts. Anyway, so, he got the glove with no problem. [laughter] So, it was confirmed and it was a great hallucination, because I couldn't stop it. I mean, I knew it was a hallucination and I couldn't stop it. So, that was an interesting time; all right.

PC: We are out of time.

PK: We should stop.

SH: I think your session is up. This will conclude our first session. We look forward to talking to you next week.

PK: Okay.

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Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 11/26/12

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/12/13
Reviewed by Jessica Friedman 11/10/14
Reviewed by Peter Klein 11/8/2019
Reviewed by Kate Rizzi 1/27/2020