

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SOL KUGLER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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LENOX, MASSACHUSETTS

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview with Sol Kugler. Am I saying that properly?

Sol Kugler: Yes.

MG: Today's date is July 15, 2015. The interview is taking place in Lenox, Massachusetts. The interviewer is Molly Graham. Sol, for the record, can you tell me when and where you were born?

SK: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, February 7, 1928.

MG: Did you grow up in New York?

SK: No. My father moved out of New York, of Brooklyn, when I was one year old. So, I lived most of my life in New Jersey.

MG: Where in New Jersey did your family move?

SK: Union City and West New York, New Jersey.

MG: What brought your family to that area?

SK: My father was a typical immigrant. He came in 1904. He was a taxicab driver in Manhattan and he was a window washer in Chicago. He ended up with a grocery store in Brooklyn, where I was born. Somehow, he traded the grocery store in Brooklyn for a gas station in New Jersey. So, I lived in Hudson County, New Jersey, West New York and Union City.

MG: How old was he when he immigrated to the US?

SK: I'm guessing, probably twelve or thirteen years old.

MG: Do you know anything about his life? He came from Austria.

SK: Yes.

MG: Do you know anything about his life there?

SK: No.

MG: Was your mother from Austria as well?

SK: I think so.

MG: What do you know about their family history?

SK: I don't know anything about their family history. I was too young.

MG: Do you know how they came over and what that experience was like?

SK: No. I guess they [were] escaping from discrimination, since they were Jewish, and I guess they had relatives in New York. Because the relative in Chicago had a management company, that's how he became a window washer in Chicago. Why he traded the grocery store and [went] to New Jersey is beyond my comprehension, but my father was a very, very [hard worker]. He worked seven days a week, twelve hours a day, and was a very gregarious man. People were very happy with my father. So, he was very successful in the gas station business.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about growing up. You were pretty young during the Depression, but do you remember anything about those years?

SK: All I know is [that] my father and mother were working all the time. My mother was a housewife, and she helped. She went and pumped gas, and my father was working. The only thing I remember, we moved every two years between Union City and West New York. I changed grammar school five times, among three grammar schools, because he got a rent concession and a free paint job. So, he used to move.

MG: What was that like for you, to go to a new school every couple of years?

SK: Well, I met my old friends three or four years later. It was not easy, it was not easy. Also, being Jewish in the Hudson County area, where there basically was Italians and a lot of Germans--and this was during the war years--so, I had a little discrimination because of being Jewish.

MG: I imagine that was a transition, from Brooklyn to where you were in New Jersey, because there are lots of Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn during that time.

SK: Why my father [did that]--I guess he felt it was a business opportunity. He ended up with a gas station in New Jersey and it was a very successful gas station, during the war years. I remember pumping gas to help him out, and he had his customers. So, gas was not easy to get in those days, even with a coupon.

MG: Do you remember how much gas cost then?

SK: Well, my wife--we met in New Jersey, so, we were going for years before we got married--when my father lent me the car, it cost ten cents a gallon. Because I had ten cents and I bought a gallon of gas, we were able to drive around a little bit.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about growing up. Do you have siblings?

SK: I have a brother and a sister, but they're thirteen and fourteen years older than me. So, I didn't have much of a relationship with them, because, during the war years, my brother was an engineer and he worked in Fort Monmouth. We used to go down to visit him on weekends. I don't remember what my sister was doing. She was divorced and she had a child. My brother had two children.

MG: Can you talk a little bit more about the neighborhood you lived in in New Jersey? You said there were a lot of other Italian and German families.

SK: Well, the Germans discriminated against me and the Italians were my friends. I had a few Jewish friends, because they had a Jewish community center, a Jewish temple, in West New York, which we belonged to. Then, they had a Jewish community center in Union City, which were adjoining towns. That's where I met my wife, at the community center.

MG: Tell me more about that. Was there a special event?

SK: We went to a hockey game, double-date. I was with another girl and she was with my cousin. I decided to marry her that day, at the hockey game. [laughter] So, we went for years before we got married.

MG: In what year did you meet Norma?

SK: I graduated college in '49. I guess I met her about 1946, because we got married in 1949.

MG: I know you attended lots of schools, but are there any memories from school while growing up that stand out to you?

SK: Well, my memories [from] school were--I had no trouble with school--my memory was, I had to run home because the Germans were attacking me. This was the war years. I just remembered--we discussed it the other day--in Union City, Roosevelt School, I was in the, I guess, sixth or seventh grade, I appeared in a play. I was P. T. Barnum. We remembered that--but I was working. I worked after school when I was [in] high school.

I worked for *The Hudson Dispatch*. It's a newspaper in Union City. So, I worked six nights a week, six to ten [PM], and I learned how to type. So, I remember, in the typing class in high school, there were a bunch of girls and me. I was the only male, but I was the best typist, because I practiced every night at the [newspaper]. My job was typing. The veterans, the people in the war, sent home stories and they'd send it to the newspaper. So, I used to re-type them.

MG: Was that a good way to stay updated on what was going on during the war?

SK: Oh, yes, sure.

MG: Backing up just a little bit, were you aware of what was going on in the world before Pearl Harbor, that World War II had started in Europe, things like that?

SK: Yes, I was always aware; I read the newspaper all the time and I was aware of what's going on, yes. Pearl Harbor, I remember Pearl Harbor. Of course, it was a Sunday, December 7th, and I was laying on the couch. It was a Sunday and I was listening to the football game.

MG: It was a Giants game, right?

SK: Yes, I was a Giants fan; I'm still a Giants fan. So, I got up to look where Pearl Harbor was. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was, and I found out where Pearl Harbor was.

MG: How old were you when that happened?

SK: That's 1941. I was born in '28.

MG: Thirteen?

SK: Thirteen. We lived in Union City on 51st Street.

MG: Did the world change at all after that day, in ways that you could see?

SK: Yes. I was discriminated [against] by the German population in the area. My father had to be restrictive [as] to who he can sell gas to, because we had quotas. It was very difficult.

MG: It must have affected his business.

SK: Yes, I'm sure it was.

MG: Were there ways that you or your family participated in the war effort on the home front?

SK: My father was working, my mother was working and I was going to school. So, I was in the Boy Scouts and that's how I participated.

We visited my brother at Fort Monmouth. He was an engineer and he was assigned to a highly secret project called "Radar." He tried to enlist in the Army and he was frozen to his job. So, he was a colonel equivalent, but he wasn't in uniform. I wasn't drafted because I had to finish the semester. I had a deferment to finish the semester.

MG: Was this later in the war?

SK: This was the Korean War. I was too young for World War II.

MG: Yes, that is what I thought.

SK: So, it was the Korean War I was involved in.

MG: Right. Were you seeing young guys from your neighborhood or your town go off to war?

SK: Sure, we all had cousins and relatives, all veterans.

MG: What was that like? Were you seeing stars go up in the window? Were you staying in touch with anybody that was overseas? [Editor's Note: Service Flags, displayed by families with

children serving in the US Armed Forces, featured a Blue Star for each living child and a Gold Star for each deceased child.]

SK: Just with cousins, when they came home on leave. When my father was able to, on a Sunday, we would go to the Lower East Side in Manhattan, where mostly Jewish people lived, and we'd visit our relatives.

MG: During high school, was the discrimination starting to change a little bit? The Nazis were the enemy during World War II, so, I am wondering if ...

SK: This is World War II. I graduated high school in '46, so, the entire war, I was in high school. That's when I was, I guess, seventeen or so. I was deferred until January of '46, but they were still drafting. So, I went to NYU that spring and the summer, and I was deferred until June. By that time, the drafting was over, but, then, I heard about the Edgar Bacon Scholarship for journalism in Hudson County. I applied for that and I won that scholarship. That's how I ended up at Rutgers.

MG: What was the Rutgers connection? Was it for education at Rutgers only?

SK: New Brunswick. Rutgers was a private school. I think, when I went there, New Brunswick was probably six hundred people. When my grandson went to Rutgers, which was a few years ago he graduated, there were twenty-five thousand.

MG: It has changed quite a bit. [laughter]

SK: Yes. So, I was working for the paper, and this scholarship was from a Hudson County resident. So, I won the scholarship. I went and matriculated at Rutgers in September as a freshman, but I was really a sophomore, because I had all the classes.

So, in those days, you had to take ROTC. I mean, it was a land-grant college, Rutgers is, and I took two years of ROTC, which was wonderful, because they paid you. I worked at all the ballgames and I worked in the library. I put myself through college, but, what happened was, I graduated in my third year at Rutgers, because I had the credits from NYU. So, I wanted to take two more years Advanced ROTC and they wouldn't let me, because I only had one year of college [to go]. I offered to go to graduate school. It didn't work that way.

It probably saved my life, because all of my friends graduated in June of 1950. I graduated in June of '49. In 1950, the Korean War started. They were second lieutenants. They were graduated and they sent them right to Korea. I didn't get drafted until a few years later.

MG: Right. You wanted to study journalism at Rutgers.

SK: Yes, right. I majored in journalism.

MG: Tell me about some of your courses and professors in that field.

SK: Well, I worked for *The Targum* [the Rutgers-New Brunswick student newspaper]. Somewhere along the line, I decided that I didn't want to be strictly journalism. I wanted to be business and advertising. So, I switched to business and advertising, which I was majoring in.

MG: Tell me a little bit about the staff at *The Targum* and the stories you would put together.

SK: Well, I used to write about the galas, when they had--what do you call them? not gala--they had formal nights. I used to write about the formal nights. I used to write about the ballgames, and I was very happy.

MG: You were in a fraternity at Rutgers.

SK: I was Tau Delta Phi. The reason I joined the fraternity, I worked my [way] through college. When my father took me down to Rutgers in September of '46, I guess all the returning veterans were coming back. So, there was no housing. They put me in Raritan Arsenal, which was five or seven miles away, in a dormitory. I didn't like that.

So, I found out that Tau Delta Phi--was a Jewish fraternity at that time--had rooms. So, I applied and they accepted me, and they had an admission fee, which I didn't have. That's the only time I asked my father for money. So, he gave me the admission fee. I joined the fraternity, and I lived on campus, 4 Union Street.

MG: I am trying to picture where that is.

SK: Oh, it's right down--College Avenue, the main part of the administration building's here, College Avenue, the next street was some street, and one street over was Union Street. We had the corner. It was nice.

MG: Tell me a little bit about your fraternity brothers and the things you would do.

SK: Well, of course, I'd met my wife at that time, so, we dated the entire college life. I was in a dormitory the first year. I was [in] a semi-private room the second year with another fraternity brother and, the last year, I had a private room. I was working and I was studying and I didn't have much of a social life, because I worked in the bookstore, I worked on the campus, I worked on the [ballgame parking crews].

The one story I remember was, I was working the parking lot for a football game. People would come in and they would give me a pass or buy a parking ticket. So, we were playing Princeton that day. So, I accumulated the money. I waited for somebody to pick me up and nobody's picking me up. So, I went. My wife--my girlfriend--was with [my] fraternity brothers watching the game. So, I took the money and I went to the game, and was watching the game with my fraternity brothers and my girlfriend. Then, the announcement [was made], "Would Sol Kugler please go to the press box?" [laughter] They figured I ran off with the money. So, I ran to the press box and I gave them the money. I remember that.

MG: How was the Rutgers football team in those years?

SK: Well, it was okay. We played--I went to all the games--we went to Princeton, we went to Penn State, we used to play once in a while, and Columbia, Yale. It was an Ivy League schedule.

MG: What was Norma doing during these years? Did she go to school?

SK: Norma was working. She was working, selling shoes in Bergenline Avenue in West New York. Then, she got a job--I guess about the time I graduated--she got a job in New York for National Shoes, for the main office. I was working summers in the Catskill Mountains as a waiter, a busboy and a waiter. That's where I made a lot of money.

MG: Yes, tell me more about that. Did any famous acts or people come to your restaurant?

SK: No, it was not a restaurant; it was in a hotel.

MG: Okay.

SK: In Livingston Manor, New York. It's a long time ago. So, we had a good time. I was looking for a job in advertising. I couldn't find a job. In those days, Jews were not hired for advertising jobs. So, I was a busboy and a waiter in the Catskills.

I met a comptroller of a men's clothing manufacturer. He offered me a job in the mailroom in Manhattan. So, I took it, and he said, "As soon as something opens, he'll let me know." Something opened and he put me in the piece goods department, where they'd buy the cloth for the manufacturing of clothes.

I worked for two years there, and my wife worked in Manhattan. We saw every show on Broadway, because we used to go a couple nights a week, for twenty-five cents. We sat in the last row of all the shows. [laughter] Then, I was drafted.

MG: Before we talk about your experience in the Korean War period, I want to hear a little bit more about your life at Rutgers and what it was like back then.

SK: Well, I was working all the time and I was going to school.

MG: You were also doing ROTC. Can you describe that?

SK: One day a week, Tuesdays, we went to class, and we marched for two years, one day a week. They paid me and they gave me credit. ROTC helped me when I was [drafted], and the typing and the [fact that I was a] college graduate. I was drafted. Can you visualize a Jewish, drafted Marine?

MG: It does not happen every day.

SK: There's very few of them. I didn't volunteer for the Marines--I was drafted. They said every fifth person would step forward, "You're now a Marine." I called my wife and she broke down crying.

MG: How did you feel?

SK: I was a little scared.

MG: Yes.

SK: Being in the Marines; I was scared of being in the Army. I was married, and they sent me to Parris Island, [South Carolina].

MG: Before we get to training, I was curious--I live in New Brunswick now and I imagine it was very different in the late 1940s. Do you remember what New Brunswick was like then and the places you would go to?

SK: We didn't go into town very much. The only time we went to town [was] when we went to Douglass College, to meet the girls. We went through town and Douglass College was at the other end. We really had nothing to do with New Brunswick. There was a railroad coming [through]. We were on one side of the railroad and the town was really on the other side of the railroad. So, we really had nothing to do with them, and Johnson and Johnson was on the other side and the Raritan River.

MG: I also want to hear more about your journalism classes and the teachers you admired.

SK: Well, the teachers were very, very nice. A lot of them were newspaper people. Since I had the background of working for a newspaper for three or four years, I know I had a good rapport with the teachers. Some of the teachers, when I went to summer school, some of the teachers were living in Hudson County. So, we traveled back and forth by train. So, I don't remember any particular teacher. It was very, very nice. I enjoyed it.

MG: Are there any stories you reported on that stand out to you now, that you were particularly excited about or excited to write about?

SK: The only [thing], I was working for a newspaper. I went to work for a newspaper when I was in high school, for *The Hudson Dispatch*. I was working there, and the thing I remember--I was just discussing it with my grandson, because he's moving to Hoboken--one of my jobs, I worked six nights a week from six to ten every night. The first job was to get on the trolley and to go to Hoboken to pick up the police report and bring it back. It was very dangerous, because Hoboken was not a nice area. I remember that. I was telling him that.

We got married. I knew Hoboken very well, and we used to go down to Hoboken from Hudson County, to Clam Broth House, which was a fish restaurant. The only thing I remember about it--because I was kosher, I wouldn't have clams--but they ate the clams and they threw them, the shell, on the floor. So, the whole floor was full of shells. [laughter]

MG: You and Norma were married in 1949.

SK: Yes.

MG: Had you graduated? Tell me about that.

SK: Well, we were going together for years, but I had no money and we couldn't get married. So, when this guy, the comptroller from Joseph H. Cohen, which was a men's clothing manufacturer, gave me the job, I came home around Labor Day, or just before it. I borrowed Norma's father's car. He had an old '29 Packard, which was a huge car. I'm the only one he allowed to use it. [laughter]

So, I decided to get married, and I proposed to her in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, on the Palisades. We were engaged. We didn't have any money. We're both working. She was making fifty dollars a week, I was making twenty-five dollars a week.

This couple, friends of ours, decided that, Christmas Eve, they're going to drive to Florida. My father had retired because he had a heart attack, and he was living in Florida. So, we decided to get married Christmas Eve and we would drive with them to Florida, to see my parents, and so forth, because he couldn't come up. They backed out on the drive. So, I was stuck with Norma. [laughter] So, we got married, and we took a train, took twenty-four hours, in coach.

MG: That was your honeymoon.

SK: That was our honeymoon. Then, we get to Florida. My father had bought a group of motel rooms. In the front, on Biscayne Boulevard, he had a restaurant and [living] quarters. So, he gave us the quarters, which was nice, except we went to take a shower and this tarantula was on the wall. [laughter] So, we quick borrowed his car, and we moved to the beach. So, the story of why I got married, but it's been sixty-five years.

MG: That is amazing.

SK: Yes.

MG: Were you living in New York when you both were working in New York?

SK: No, we were living in West New York, in an apartment.

MG: Tell me more about this job you had for the clothing store, what you were doing.

SK: It was very nice. I was working for the largest manufacturer of men's clothing in the country, Joseph H. Cohen & Sons, and they put me in the piece goods department, where you bought the piece goods. It was the hub of the thing, because there were three brothers who owned the company. One brother was I. M. Cohen, and he really ran the show.

I learned a lot the two years I worked there, learned a lot with him, the way he operated this business, was a very successful business. He was very knowledgeable. I went to school, Fashion Institute of Technology, because I wanted to learn more about piece goods. Then, I was offered a job with a competitor, a small competitor, Gramercy Park Clothes. I worked there for about a year and I got drafted.

MG: During those years, was the Korean War on your radar as something that might affect you?

SK: Oh, yes, oh, sure, because I had friends in Korea, and I should've been in Korea. So, when I was drafted--I was serving my country, I had no problem with that--but, because I got drafted, they gave me leave the first night, which we spent crying in a newsreel theater. The next morning, they flew me to Parris Island with a bunch of other guys. I had never been in a plane before. So, I got to Parris Island, and we met the Drill Sergeant, who was a tough, tough man.

The second day of my enlistment, the Commanding Officer called me in and he said, "I've been looking over your record. You've taken ROTC, you're a college graduate--I'm going to offer you a direct commission right now." Right then, they would make me a second lieutenant and send me to Quantico to train. I turned him down, because I'd have to enlist for an additional year--but I was married, I said. So, that was the first opportunity.

The second opportunity, since I was a college graduate and I was surrounded by seventeen-year-old guys who enlisted--ninety-nine-and-forty-four-hundredths percent were enlisted men. There were only a few drafted men. So, I ended up in an office. They sent me to Camp Lejeune to go to supply school, but supply school was all jammed up and you were in a casual company for a month or six weeks.

MG: Sol, I am just going to pause this real quick.

[TAPE PAUSED]

MG: Can you remind me when you were drafted? Was it 1953?

SK: I was drafted on February 18, 1952.

MG: Okay, about a halfway into the war.

SK: Yes.

MG: You were first sent to Parris Island for basic training,

SK: Yes, for boot training.

MG: Tell me about that. Were you used to that kind of thing?

SK: No, it changed my life. The whole experience changed my life. The boot camp was very, very strict. You had forced marches, you had where they'd wake you up in the middle of the night. It was very, very difficult and very stringent. They tried to weed you out.

I remember, we were on the second floor. The Drill Sergeant--I remember his name, (Griffin?)--we ran down the stairs and he threw water on the stairs. One guy fell and broke his leg--very, very different, but that's what it was all about.

MG: You mentioned you ate kosher. Were you still able to do that in the Marine Corps?

SK: No. After that, they sent us to Camp Lejeune, waiting for additional training. They put me in an office. We were waiting and we had nothing to do. So, they added a casual company. They used to do guard duty and mess duty and everything else. I never served guard duty or mess duty, because they looked at my record. I was a college graduate and I could type seventy-five words a minute. So, he immediately put me in an office. Every time they had the casual company, they sent me in an office to type letters and stuff like that.

Then, eventually, they said, "Why do you want to go to supply school? We can put you right here. Your wife can fly down and you can live down here," which is what happened. They had Butler Drive and there were little cottages outside the gate. So, eventually, we got one of those and we spent two years there.

MG: Norma joined you in North Carolina.

SK: Yes, we lived there.

MG: What was life like for the two of you then?

SK: It wasn't bad, it wasn't bad. That's where my daughter was born, in '53, 1953, and she was born in the naval hospital. We lived off the base. We had a Jewish community. We had a naval chaplain, we had services every Friday night. It was not bad living. They were pleasant years.

MG: Were you able to stay in that duty until the end of the war?

SK: Yes. Well, in July of '53, they were having the peace treaty [negotiations]. They told the North Koreans that, unless they signed the peace treaty, they're going to send over the Third Marine Division. There was no Third Marine Division; there was only two. So, they froze everybody to the base, like me, issued me a rifle and full combat gear. They were putting us on the next troop train to Camp Pendleton, and then, a troopship to Korea.

So, the North Koreans heard I was coming and they signed the peace treaty. [laughter] So, they canceled all that. So, I stayed in Camp Lejeune for the entire time.

MG: Were you relieved, or did you want an opportunity to ...

SK: I was a coward. I didn't want to go over where people are shooting at you. [laughter]

MG: The Marines really did some heavy lifting during the Korean War.

SK: They lost a [lot]. There were seventy-five original Marine recruits in my battalion; nineteen survived, because they sent them back to Camp Lejeune to dismiss them after the war. Only nineteen of us were left, but my college training at Rutgers was sufficient to make me stand out, my typing ability. So, we were in, I guess, an office of fifteen or twenty Marines. There was a staff sergeant, a master sergeant and a major. They gave me a lot of responsibility.

MG: Like what? What were you responsible for?

SK: Well, the thing I remember is, every class came through our office. It was like an academic office at a university. I'd get a list on every Friday of all the graduates, of all the different classes and duty stations. So, I had to match one to the other. That was my job. From there, we had a lot of them went to Korea.

Every Friday, one or two recruits would come in and they said, "I didn't enlist in the Marines to go to Washington, DC--I enlisted in the Marines to go to Korea." I said, "You've been assigned the other way," so, I said, "but don't go AWOL, because you will get punished."

MG: Did that ever happen?

SK: Every week. [laughter] So, they left the office and went AWOL for two or three days, then, came back. I was a corporal at the time. They said, "Corporal, you told me to go AWOL." I said, "I didn't tell you to go AWOL." I said, "I'll take you to the Commanding Officer." So, I take them to the Major.

I said, "This guy, this recruit, was assigned to Camp Pendleton and he went AWOL." So, he said, "Corporal, what should we do with him?" "I think we should send him to Korea." So, he said, "So ordered," [Mr. Kugler bangs on the table]. So, we took the guy and sent him to Korea, but, that afternoon, everybody in the office waited for the payoff, because you had to pay for [this], and they gave me a dozen doughnuts. So, every Friday, I would distribute doughnuts to everybody. So, that was my job.

MG: Do you think the *gung ho* Marine regretted not taking the other post when he got to Korea?

SK: No, he wanted to go to Korea. He really wanted to go to Korea. He didn't enlist in the Marines to go to Camp Pendleton or Washington, DC, or to Baltimore or Maine. That's what he wanted.

A funny story was, my wife [was pregnant], we had a hurricane came through. Telephone service was disrupted, but, before that happened, there was a seaside resort about forty, fifty miles [away] and we used to go there to a resort. Then, we went to a dog track, I think it was a dog track. My wife was not feeling good. So, we ran back to the bungalow, and she went to the hospital. It was a false alarm. Then, the hurricane came through.

A day or two later, we took her to the hospital and we waited for the baby, my daughter. My daughter arrived, and I was sleeping in the waiting room. They told me I had a daughter. So, I got into the car and I went back to the house to call, because the phone was at that house. Halfway back, I couldn't remember if it was a boy or a girl. [laughter] I figured the in-laws and my mother and father would ask. So, I went back and I said, "What was it, a boy or a girl?"

MG: You were so excited.

SK: Yes, I tell everybody the story.

MG: What was that like, becoming a father for the first time?

SK: Well, it was glorious, glorious. We had a wonderful time. I was working in an office, virtually removed from the war--except I sent these people, these poor people, to die. That was the Marines.

MG: Were there other married men living on the base?

SK: Oh, yes.

MG: Did you guys all kind of stick together?

SK: Yes.

MG: What did you do for fun?

SK: We'd go to the beach. There was a beach not too far away, and we were big beach people. Camp Lejeune is a fairly moderate temperature. The Jewish people would go to services every Friday night. The local merchants were very nice to us. They gave us refreshments. They were very nice.

MG: You talked about those nineteen Marines coming home. Did they tell you what their experience was like?

SK: No, I never met them.

MG: In the office, were you getting updates on casualties and things like that?

SK: Yes, but it was [more like] an academic office of a college. We had cooks' school, bakery school, all types of schools, and they would go through our office. I remember they gave me a course. I was teaching a course at that time. I don't remember what, maybe English or math or something like that, but I was an instructor on a part-time basis, because I was college graduate. There weren't too many college graduates.

Every day, we would have lunch, and I would play pinnacle with the Major and the Master Sergeant and the Tech Sergeant and me. I was a corporal. They gave me a meritorious

promotion. They made me a corporal at that time. I wasn't eligible, but they made me. They made me a sergeant, but I got out before I was promoted.

MG: Yes, I was going to ask how you got along with your superiors.

SK: Oh, very well. I had no problems.

MG: Good. Having lived through World War II and the Korean War, did you notice a different atmosphere on the home front during each war? World War II is "The Good War," and Korea sometimes gets called "The Forgotten War." Were returning soldiers treated differently?

SK: Well, I can't tell you about World War II, but I can tell you they treated me very nice on leave. My former employer gave me tickets to *Carmen* at the Met [Metropolitan Opera], and they were very nice to me.

The Marines changed my life. They actually changed my life--my attitude, my discipline, my ability to make decisions. So, when I came back, after being discharged, I went back to my previous job. He didn't honor some of the promises, so, I quit. I went to this a couple weeks, I guess, and I quit. We were living in an apartment in Lodi, New Jersey, and the reason I got an [apartment]--it was very difficult to get an apartment in 1954.

MG: How come?

SK: Well, you had all the veterans coming back. I guess they didn't build as much. Because I was a former Marine, one builder gave us an apartment. It was not in a nice section, but it was an apartment. So, I went back, and I told my wife I quit.

MG: What was her reaction?

SK: She said, "You'll get another job." She was very supportive--is, is supportive--but I credit the Marines for that.

MG: Can you say more about that change? What about your attitude changed?

SK: I became from a kid to an adult. I had a baby. So, I was very fortunate. My father, when he had his heart attack and he had to sell his business, went to work for a real estate broker in New Jersey. So, he introduced me to a former colleague who was a broker, and he got me a job. He said, "Why don't you go try this, selling real estate?" So, I did this.

I did it for a couple of months, and my father came up again and he met another guy. My father was very gregarious. He met another guy who he worked for who was starting a mortgage company. He said, "You're better off with the mortgage company." So, he introduced me to him and I went to work for him. That's how I got into the mortgage business.

MG: What was the name of that company?

SK: Which one?

MG: The first mortgage company that you worked for.

SK: Toomey-Fountain Mortgage.

MG: Tell me what you were doing with that company.

SK: Well, I was working for the mortgage company, soliciting mortgages, and I did very well. I decided to go to law school at night. I couldn't do it during the day. So, I went to NYU Law School for approximately two years at night, a year-and-a-half, I can't remember.

What happened was, I was working from nine to five and I had to go to law school from six to ten, four nights a week. So, I started law school, and he objected, Toomey. He thought I should be not leaving at five o'clock, maybe five-thirty, six, whatever. So, because of my Marine Corps training, I quit. I can't explain it; I don't think I would've done this before. I was going to law school at night and I left him and I went to a competitor, who was Northern New Jersey Mortgage, very big company. I went to work for him.

I said, "I can't do mortgages, because I'm in a restrictive covenant with the other guy. So, how about title insurance?" which is related to mortgage. I don't know if you're familiar with that. When you buy a house, you get a mortgage and you have title insurance. So, you have to go to a lawyer's, because they do searches of the property, and then, they insure the title. So, I went to work for his title company, mortgage and title company. I did that for a couple of years, I guess. I can't remember.

I was working for this guy, who was very, very smart. He's a lawyer, and he started the mortgage company. It was very successful, but he couldn't run the company and do all of this, and so, he appointed a guy to run the company, a guy my age. I was working for him. Then, he sold the company a year or two later, I can't remember exactly, a year or two later. He sold the company and this fellow, Murray, Murray Beer, decided that he would leave and he would start his own company. So, he asked me to follow him, to work for him. Because of my Marine Corps training, I told him that I would go with him, but only as a partner. He agreed.

MG: What company was that?

SK: Globe Mortgage Company. We formed, he and I formed, Globe Mortgage Company, and we left. I was going to law school and was working. I had a new company with him and, finally, we were very successful, from day one. We both had background. He was very, very involved with banks, I was involved with brokers. It was a good combination, and we got along.

After a while, I couldn't handle it; I couldn't go six to ten to law school. So, I had to make a decision. So, I dropped out of law school, which I regret. I regret dropping out, but I don't regret--we became very successful.

MG: What part of it do you think you missed out on?

SK: Just the training.

MG: Right. Were you seeing connections between your work and your law school education?

SK: Oh, sure, sure, but law school required a lot of work. It wasn't easy, and I was working in Hackensack, New Jersey. I had to leave Hackensack at five o'clock and get downtown Manhattan at six o'clock, four nights a week.

I spent all day Saturday in the courthouse, in the library. I knew judges, because I had solicited them. They gave me permission to use the Bergen County Courthouse, the library, to do my research, so [that] I didn't have to go back to New York on Saturday. It was too much. We had two kids by that time, so, I had to make a decision. I decided to work at the mortgage company. So, that's where we are.

MG: What do you attribute that success to from day one?

SK: My wife, supportive, and my training. I was not an outstanding student, but I always did well, and I did well in law school. It was just a combination--he was a terrific salesman and I was a good salesman and follow-up person. We hit it very, very well.

MG: When you freed up your evenings and weekends, were you able to spend more time with your family?

SK: I don't think I spent much time with my [family]. My wife raised my kids. I remember I spent Saturday and Sunday with them, and we were very, very close. We're still close. The last couple weeks, all my kids, except one, have come to visit us.

We didn't know that we were getting a visit by my great granddaughter. So, a couple days ago, the doorbell rings. My wife goes and she opens up the door. They put my great granddaughter, (Hailey?), right in front of the door, [laughter] and nobody there. It was very exciting. We had a wonderful time. My daughter and my grandson just left this morning, a couple of hours ago, and they're coming back in a couple weeks. They come to visit us in Florida.

MG: That is nice.

SK: We have a nice family.

MG: You stayed with that company until 1987.

SK: What happened was, we built it into a mortgage company, title insurance, general insurance, because, when I was in the Marines, I took real estate courses and insurance courses. So, when I came out, they gave me a license, my real estate license, my insurance license. So, we sold insurance, title insurance, searching, abstracting--we went into all facets of a mortgage banking company.

MG: All these companies here, are these ones you also managed?

SK: What happened was--I didn't have to tell you all this, it's right here [on his résumé]--what happened was, we were in business for thirty years. After twenty years, we went public. The name of the company was really Globe Mortgage Company, but this was our public company, Financial Resources Group. We went public. Metropolitan Lawyers Abstract Company did title searching. We had appraisals; North Jersey Appraisal Company did the appraisals. We sold--this was my insurance company.

MG: Garden State Insurance Agency?

SK: Yes. We did construction, Beer, Kugler and (Leibowitz?), we did construction. I built a shopping center in Fort Lee, and we started a small business company. I don't remember what [Pinnacle Properties] ...

MG: Is that a property management company, perhaps?

SK: Probably. These are all our companies, but this one was the one we went public with.

MG: Financial Resources Group. All those other ones are sort of under that umbrella.

SK: Yes.

MG: Okay. Were you impacted by the economic downturn in the 1970s?

SK: Oh, sure, sure, but we survived it. We survived.

MG: I imagine your company must have grown quite a bit over the years.

SK: [laughter] Yes, I would say so.

MG: Can you say how it changed?

SK: We started with two employees. When we went out, when we went--Metropolitan Lawyers became an exclusive title company in New York. They called us a month or two after we went out and we had no employees, just myself and my partner. We called a friend to come in and she would answer the phone calls. That's where we lived.

MG: Did you maintain that attitude you gained from the Marine Corps?

SK: I guess I did.

MG: What was the rest of your life like during these busy business years?

SK: Raising kids.

MG: Tell me, for the record, when your other three children were born and their names.

SK: I have four children.

MG: Right. You had one in 1953.

SK: I have Iva, Mark, Adam and Seth. They're my four children.

MG: What years were they born?

SK: [Sigh]

MG: [laughter] Uh-oh.

SK: I can't answer that.

MG: That is okay. We can put it in the transcript later.

SK: Yes. They were born two years apart, I guess. Seth was seven or eight, but he was the baby. He lives in California. He has two girls.

MG: What made you ready to sell the mortgage, banking and construction companies in 1987 and retire?

SK: We were public. Our stock, we came out at six or six-and-a-half dollars. We didn't promote the stock and it went down to about a dollar-and-a-half, two dollars. In 1987, a guy walked in and wants to buy our company. We were listed, Financial Resources Group. He had sold some mortgage company out in the Midwest and he wanted to buy us. We sold to him in a matter of two or three months. We signed a letter of agreement and he did his due diligence. He gave us a couple hundred thousand dollars to hire a lawyer. He closed two months later.

My partner wanted to continue, so, he signed the contract to continue as president. I wanted out at that point, and I signed a contract for five years, for a no-show consulting contract. So, they paid him and paid me. Then, we had the real estate [firm], that he didn't buy the real estate. So, we divided the real estate, my partner and I, and we went our separate ways. He continued there and I spun off the real estate to my children. Knock wood, we were very successful. I'm very lucky and very successful.

MG: What did you do when you retired? Did you stay in New Jersey or did you move to Florida at that point?

SK: We stayed in New Jersey, and then, we bought a house in Boca Raton, because my accountant told me I should be a Florida resident for tax purposes. So, I became a Florida resident. We've been living eight or nine months, eight months, in Florida. We bought the house there, we built the house here, in Boca Raton, in Lenox.

MG: How come Lenox?

SK: Well, my kids went to camp in the Adirondacks when they were growing up. We used to come back from the Adirondacks, we would go to Saratoga, and then, we came down [here]. We liked the lifestyle here in Lenox and Pittsfield. We decided--we rented for a few years for the summer, bed-and-breakfasts, motels. I never stayed in this motel. Then, we decided to have a house. Now, we have a house.

MG: Do you want to tell me about some of the activities you have on here [his résumé], the Alpine Country Club and your duties with them?

SK: Well, Alpine was a golf club near our house in Tenaflly. We were members there for fifteen, twenty years. They made me president. They were in trouble, and they drafted me as president. We don't belong there anymore. My son, however, belongs, my second oldest son. He's been club champion there twenty-four times. He's a very good golfer. He benefitted by it. He's an outstanding golfer. He won a major tournament last year. New Jersey, Connecticut and New York have a golf association [the Metropolitan Golf Association] and they had an annual tournament, Senior Open. Do you know what that is, Senior Open?

MG: A little bit.

SK: Well, it's open because the pros play and the amateurs can play. For the first time ever, the amateur beat the pros. He won the tournament, and he was invited, in two weeks, he's going to Ireland, Northern Ireland, to play in the British Amateur, Senior Amateur, in two weeks.

MG: That is very exciting.

SK: Yes, he's very good. He's better than par.

MG: Why was Rutgers so important to you, and why is it something you want to contribute to?

SK: Well, I won the Edgar Bacon Scholarship for a journalism major in Hudson County, and I felt obligated to continue that. So, I set up a foundation for similar requirements. They send me, every year, they pick one or two people. So, that was an obligation I felt mentally to continue, since I can afford it.

MG: It looks like you are involved in many charities as well. What causes are important to you?

SK: Well, I'm sort of retired now. I was very involved with the Boy Scouts and the AMVETS, because one of my employees was president of that. So, I did that. I played the Bob Hope [Desert Classic Charities golf tournament] for years.

MG: What is the Kugler Foundation?

SK: That's a charitable foundation.

MG: Did you found it?

SK: Yes.

MG: What is its purpose?

SK: To spend money. [laughter]

MG: On anything in particular?

SK: On charities.

MG: Good.

SK: We have a list of twenty or thirty charities we make annual contributions to; one is Rutgers. This Tri-County was a golf organization of all fine clubs in the area. They made me president of that. Boca West, now that we live at Boca West, so, I've been on all the committees. I'm presently on the (masters?) association, which is responsible for everything at Boca West, for everything except the golf course and the clubhouses. We have a ten-million-dollar budget. There's seven board members and I'm in my fifth year on that.

I'm not as active anymore, and I still have these licenses. [laughter] Florida, they keep threatening me, if I don't take courses, they're going to take away my license. I haven't done anything in thirty years, so, I don't answer them, but I'm not active. I still get checks, occasionally, from insurance that I wrote many years ago. What else?

MG: I know you wanted to get out of here by four-thirty and it is just about that time. I want to thank you for all the time you spent with me.

SK: Okay.

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

Reviewed by Anthony DelConte II 6/4/2018

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/28/2018

Reviewed by Sol Kugler 7/16/2018