

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROGER LATZGO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Professor Roger Latzgo, on March 12, 2021. This is Shaun Illingworth. I am joined by--Zaynab, do you want to go first?

Zaynab Khan: Zaynab Khan.

Elijah Hanbury: Elijah Hanbury.

Roger Latzgo: I can hear them, yes.

SI: Thank you again for joining us. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

RL: I was born in 1949, November 11th, in Palmerton, Pennsylvania.

SI: For the record, what were your parents' names?

RL: My father's named Lawrence Latzgo, and my mother's name is Pauline Latzgo. Her maiden name was Gabovitz.

SI: It seems like they had been in the same area of Pennsylvania.

RL: Yes. Both were born in Carbon County, and that is maybe seventy-five miles north of Philadelphia and ninety miles west of New York City.

SI: Well, why don't you tell us a little bit about your family history, what you can remember, starting with your dad's side? How did your family come to settle in that area?

RL: Well, on my father's side, there was work in this area. You've probably heard about the coal, but we weren't really in the coal mining area. That is, my family was attracted to this area in Carbon County, the southern end of Carbon County, Palmerton, because of the New Jersey Zinc Works there, New Jersey Zinc, founded by Stephen S. Palmer, who was a Princeton alumnus. Boo. He was one of the wealthiest people in the country at the time. Palmerton was established because of its location on the Lehigh River. There were canals at the time, canals and railroads. There was a lot of work for immigrants, and my grandfather was very interested in work in the zinc company. It was steady at the time. It was hard work. In his youth, my grandfather, my father's father, also worked in the slate quarries. In those days before child labor laws, he was a kid basically, eight and nine years old, and he was a signal boy. He was a signal boy, and that meant that you were suspended in a bucket over the quarry because, from the edge of the quarry, you couldn't see to the bottom, so you couldn't tell when the workers at the bottom were ready to haul up a big slab of slate. He would get the signal from them and he would give them the signal up top, and they would haul it away. Between the slate and the zinc, that was my grandfather's work.

However, the depression hit in 1929. My grandfather was born in 1898, so he was in full hale hearty health when there was suddenly no work. He didn't work for several years during the depression. It was the kind of thing where my grandparents on my father's side couldn't support the entire family. My grandmother worked in the local hospital and also in the local firehouse, in

the kitchen in both places. So, she had some smaller income coming in, but that was more steady. However, my grandfather, as I said, was out of work, and with that situation--my father had a sister, slightly younger than he--it was common practice at the time if a family couldn't afford both children, one of them was farmed out, as they would say. My father was sent to live with some of his uncles in New York City, and he was living there for a couple of years while my grandparents weathered the depression.

My grandfather did some amazing things during those years. He was out of work, but he was active. One of the things he did--probably the most amazing thing--he wanted a basement in his house. A lot of these houses in the town of Palmerton, which is where they lived, were company houses. That is, they were put up very inexpensively but sturdily for employees of the New Jersey Zinc Company. However, they did not have basements. Many of them did not have basements. So, he wanted to have a basement. What he did was, very painstakingly, very laboriously, he dug out the basement under the house. I mean, you had to duck in a couple of places to get in certain spots. One of the things was--he's digging this basement, dumping the dirt out in the alley, and you could do that in those days, almost like a prison thing, but he dumped the dirt in the alley. At some point, he came to a huge boulder. What did he do? He dug a deeper hole alongside the boulder, and when he figured it was big enough, he rolled the boulder into the hole. One piece of that boulder stuck out over what would be the future level of the floor, and you could still see that when I was a kid. So, that's my grandfather, on my father's side.

My father went into the Navy after high school, and, of course, this was World War II. As soon as he graduated from high school, Class of 1941, he was off to the Navy and spent most of the war years on a battle cruiser called the USS *Mobile*, a Cleveland-class cruiser. The cruisers, if you study World War II history, would move in a little closer than the battleships and bombard the islands to make it possible for the landings to take place by the Marines. The *Mobile* was hit several times and there were casualties, but the ship didn't sink. In fact, of all fifty-one cruisers, none of them were sunk during the war. I guess they were too fast. But one of the things about his time in the service, for about two-and-a-half years, the sailors on that ship, the *Mobile*, did not touch land with their feet. They would occasionally come into port for repairs and restocking, but they wouldn't get off the boat. Think about that one. Where am I here? My grandmother worked in the kitchen in the hospital.

SI: This is your father's mother?

RL: My father's mother, yes. She was quite a force. I will say this, my grandfather, typical of those times, worked in the foundry, very hot work, and those guys got out of work and they were thirsty and hungry. He spent quite a bit of time in the Hungarian Club, which wasn't just for Hungarians. We have to understand that this is still Hungarian as in Austria-Hungary. In other words, all those minority groups who were part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, including the Slovaks, including "former Yugoslavians," blah, blah, blah. It was a benevolent protective association. They had insurance policies for their members. They would help with funerals and so forth. At the time, there was a fair amount of ethnic stereotyping. If you look into the early twentieth century, the Slavic immigrants, in particular, were looked down upon by many of the groups that had been here a couple of generations before them. The Lattimer Massacre happened

on September 10, 1897, in Lattimer, near Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in the coal region. A lot of the immigrants who were Slavic were demonstrating for better conditions in the mines, and a posse, a vigilante posse of that town, basically shot them up. I'd have to look at the details of that, but that was very much in the memory of these people. [Editor's Note: On September 10, 1897, local authorities killed nineteen immigrant miners during a protest for equal pay and better working conditions in what has become known as the Lattimer Massacre. Lattimer is located in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, in the anthracite coal region.]

My grandfather was very much involved in the Hungarian Club and also in the Slovak Sokol Club. The Sokol Club has its roots in Eastern Europe. Officially, it is a gymnastic organization, but it was also very much a political organization because before countries like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia--but we'll talk about Czechoslovakia--before Czechoslovakia existed, it was part of the Austrian Empire. The Sokol, you can't really shut down a gymnastic club, but the Sokol Clubs--*sokol* means falcon--if you're looking at it from a certain point of view, they were political agitators and always working for the support of their ethnic groups. They'd have life insurance policies, et cetera, things of that sort, also a bowling alley and a bar.

My grandfather was involved in both the Sokol Club and Hungarian Club, and he was fond of a glass of beer and a shot. During the depression and prohibition, he also was something of a bootlegger. I know this because I have some of his equipment. I have some of his hydrometers and some of his various things for measuring the proof of the product, i.e., the alcohol content. I know that that was the case, and according to family legend, the only time anybody ever saw my grandfather cry was when he dropped a jug of whiskey, a jug of moonshine, and it broke and that brought him to tears. That's not quite the only time he cried. In those days, long before the internet and so forth, every week or so, the newspaper would publish the casualties, the wounded and the dead in World War II, and my grandfather would be seen with a tear in his eye at that time, looking for my dad's name. But my dad survived World War II.

SI: That is a great background on your father's family. I was wondering if anybody had been involved in the mining unions.

RL: We weren't miners. We were more steel and zinc workers. The zinc refinery is very similar to a steel refinery. However, zinc, because of the location of the mines, because of the location of coal, and here's Stephen S. Palmer, founding New Jersey Zinc, and why is it New Jersey? Because a lot of the mines were in New Jersey. So, it was convenient to get the ore from New Jersey to here. There are also some zinc mines in nearby Carbon County. Palmerton, Pennsylvania, was at one point considered the zinc capital of the world, and New Jersey Zinc had all kinds of research labs there. You'd have to look into all the various uses of zinc. Zinc was used early in batteries. Zinc was used in military production. Zinc is a very useful mineral used in a lot of medicines and ointments. Zinc oxide may be the most familiar one. As a child, I had it smeared on my nose in summer months.

If you listen to the PR [public relations] from Palmerton, Pennsylvania these days, the New Jersey Zinc Company was considered to be a benevolent company town. How benevolent? You'd have to look a little farther because I've inspected the archives of the historical society, and people who know me (docents) say, "Hey, look at this page." You look at the page, and

they're talking about the company housing for immigrants, for mostly Slavic immigrants, and it says, "Yes, these people, all they need is cold water. Outhouses are okay with them because their habits are filthy. That's all that's really required for their happiness," stuff like that. I mean, you see that in writing in the town's ledger. Meanwhile, the town was advertising in Slovak newspapers for more workers, "Come here. Come to Palmerton," blah, blah, blah. Palmerton is an interesting case study if you ever want to go there and see it because the avenues, it was laid out in a modern way, a grid pattern, unlike a lot of towns around here, which were sort of sprawly in their growth. In a grid pattern, the avenues go like this, from the company refineries uphill to where the foreman and the bosses lived, the avenues are named Lehigh, Delaware, Franklin, Lafayette, Columbia, Princeton. Get it? It's all names of the universities from which the engineers had graduated. Then, it goes First Street, Second Street, Third Street, et cetera. The closer you were to the plant, well, that's where the cheap housing was. That's where most of the immigrant laborers lived.

Palmerton, Pennsylvania right now is a Superfund cleanup site because of the zinc processing. They say, "We didn't know this at the time," blah, blah, blah, but they sure knew some of the reason why the trees were dying on the mountain, why no grass would grow on those lower streets. That's where blue-collar people lived. It turned out that there were a lot of carcinogens coming out of there, heavy metals coming out of there. My mother, in fact, died at age sixty-seven of lung cancer. She never smoked a cigarette in her life. These things cannot be proven in a court of law. It was very difficult to sue the company, especially once the company went bankrupt. They went bankrupt and reorganized as--I can't think of the name right now. What they're doing now, the inheritors of NJZ [New Jersey Zinc] are mining the banks. In other words, the culm banks, all the stuff that they threw away and made a small mountain, almost as high as the Appalachian Mountain [Blue Mountain] there, there's a lot of heavy metal in there, a lot of byproducts that they're now extracting valuable stuff from. The story goes on, anyhow. [Editor's Note: In 1966, the New Jersey Zinc Company merged with Gulf and Western Industries, and the company became a subsidiary of Horsehead Industries in 1981. Palmerton was added to the Superfund National Priorities List in 1983, and cleanup and remediation have been ongoing since 1987.]

SI: I know one of the students has a question.

ZQ: Yes. Thank you so much, Professor Latzgo, for sharing that bit on your background. I know that Carbon County has some very charming and beautiful towns, so I was wondering if you could walk us through just experiencing your childhood and into your adult life in Palmerton. I know Carbon County is also home to Jim Thorpe, and I really love that area. The Lehigh Valley is just a beautiful place to be. What was the small-town charm like as a child?

RL: Well, it seemed very charming at the time. [laughter] You've been to Jim Thorpe, I take it. That's nice. Jim Thorpe connects to a lot of this stuff in the Lehigh Valley because Jim Thorpe, then known as "Mauch Chunk," was the home of Asa Packer, who was the founder of Lehigh Coal and Navigation, which was the railroad and the canal. So, he made a lot of money there. It's a beautiful town. It has a legacy of great nineteenth century architecture. He also founded Bethlehem Steel, Asa Packer did, and he also founded Lehigh University. There's a lot of that history there. Now, Palmerton was a low-budget version of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. That is,

there were good jobs. Finally, a union got organized, not without a lot of resistance from the company, just like in Bethlehem. But to a child growing up here, you're always aware of this structure. I mentioned before about how these streets are named after the engineers' colleges. As you went uphill, the houses got fancier. That's where the more wealthy people lived.

Growing up there, I hung out with people from all backgrounds. My family lived on Franklin Avenue, which is sort of like in the middle. My dad, once he got out of the Navy, his first job was back at the zinc company. He had a GI Bill that would have given him the possibility to go to college. He went to Penn State for a couple of courses. However, at a certain point, the zinc company was hiring like crazy, and my grandfather more or less prevailed on my father to get a job there, go to work, so he did that. My dad is working in the pipefitters, which was a better job. It wasn't just shoveling ore. It was a technical kind of job. That's the kind of thing he did in the Navy.

As a child, you're very carefree. The town was not yet expanded to what it is today. Also, you felt pretty safe traveling anywhere there. I don't know that anybody got mugged in a violent way in Palmerton. I will say this, that there was a fair amount of bullying of young kids by the bigger kids, and you had to learn how to stand up for yourself. If you wore glasses--and that was me--if you wore glasses, you were "four eyes" or "frog eyes," or something like that. I didn't hear too much of the term "Hunkey," which is a derogatory way of saying somebody from Austria-Hungary, but I heard that sometimes, "You Hunkey," that kind of thing and, "You little Hunkey."

I also did hear at the swimming pool--I might be eight years old, something like that, third grade--I'm hanging out with one of the other kids my age. The mother of this child--this child was the son of an engineer--happened to be not happy that I was hanging out with her son and said, "There he is, hanging out with that Latzgo kid again." So, there were little reminders that not everybody was quite equal. But I was later in the same Scout troop as this kid, and we got along. I mean, we were never in a fistfight or anything; that would come later, not with this guy, with somebody else. There was a hierarchy. In spite of that, I felt very free riding a bicycle anywhere in town. There was also a little bit of caution, if you're going up to the fancy part of town, which is always uphill here in Palmerton, don't be hanging around there too much because those are expensive houses, so you'd better watch yourself in those parts of town. I had a lot of friends from the cheap part of town, and they were unvaryingly from the Slavic kind of background.

As kids get older and start forming sports teams, those teams would be very eager to take on the teams of the richer kids. That would always be a point of equalization. In my high school life, I played high school football and high school tennis. That was a point where under the guise of hitting somebody, maybe before the snap or after the whistle, you could maybe equalize a wrong that was done years ago, when you were coming home from parochial school and some kids chased you on your bike and made you cry and broke your glasses and your parents couldn't really do much about it. Okay, so now on the practice field, you kicked the guy in the groin. He got sent home from practice and so did you, but nobody bothered you anymore. That kind of thing happened.

SI: I wanted to go back and just ask about your mother and her side of the family and how your parents met.

RL: First of all, my mother was born in a place called Ashfield, Pennsylvania, which is outside of Bowmanstown, Pennsylvania, still in Carbon County. She was born on a farm. My grandfather, her father, got to the United States--he stowed away in 1914 from what was then still part of Austria-Hungary. Well, he was drafted. He was drafted into the Kaiser's army, and this was at a time when the conscripts were sent off to fight against fellow Slavs. My grandfather was an independent type. I guess that runs in the family here, but he decided that he was not about to do that. In those days, the draft went like this. The army would set up a big tent in the middle of town, have bands playing, have free lunch. They'd put beer on tap. They'd have schnapps there. Everybody would have a good time, sign up, and then tomorrow morning, you're off to training camp. Well, my grandfather went to the party, but instead of going to training camp, he took a train down to Trieste, stowed away on a boat there, and got to the United States. He was in New York City. He was in the Yorkville section of Manhattan, which is in the East Seventies. There's still a lot of European type of delis and things there, but at the time it was a lot of Germans, Slovaks, a lot of immigrants there. So, that's where he lived.

Believe it or not, he met his wife, that is, my maternal grandmother, he met her there because she had immigrated legally, but she was working there as a housemaid. They were from the same village but never knew each other in the old country. They got married, and my grandfather was never really happy in New York City. His great dream was to own land, to own his own farm. That's how he wound up in Carbon County because there he was able to get a job, get paid at the zinc company. He was, again, a very tough guy. In "Stara Kraj," the old country, he was a logger, a forester, on a noble's estate. He had a hard job in the zinc company, but he considered that to be the easy part of his day. He'd come home and do the farming. That was the main thing he wanted to do. My grandfather and all his sons also worked for the zinc company, and they did the same thing. They would work, by preference, either the three-to-eleven shift or the night shift, and during the day, they'd do the farming.

My mother was born--you probably have the [dates] there (November 19, 1924-May 2, 1992)--but she was born there when they still lived in a log cabin on the property, just a log cabin, no kidding. The building is now torn down. I've seen the foundations, but there was a spring there, a small cabin. Eventually, they moved into a larger building on the same property that they fixed up. They still never had running water. They had a cistern outside and the cistern would capture rainwater, and they'd bring that up into the house by hand pump. Drinking water they had from a hand-dug well outside with a hand pump, likewise. It was really an old-world type of farm with chickens, cows, pigs and a dog named "Sheppie."

Part of my childhood memories were going up there and being babysat by my grandparents. At that point, they were up in years, but my grandmother would always bake cookies and make halupki, which is cabbage rolls, you might say, rice and meat wrapped in cabbage and a tomato sauce on top of it. My grandmother would make kiffles, all this great stuff, homemade soup. My grandfather would play the accordion for us and he would sing and we'd be in heaven. So, that's where I learned a lot of my Slavic repertoire, which as a young musician--I'm fast-forwarding a little bit here--you say to yourself, "What am I doing here in music?" "What am I doing that makes a niche market?" you might say. Well, okay, it might be a small niche, but this

thing of Slavic music is something that not everybody could do. Not everybody has that kind of insight. That became a touchstone for me.

Anyway, my mother was an excellent student in high school. She was on the debate team, and she really wanted to go to college. At that time, my mother's family really didn't have much money, but she was able to get to Allentown Business School and finished a two-year--you'd call it a community college degree these days--but a two-year executive secretary course of study. She did shorthand, everything like that. She could type like crazy, type like blazes, and she eventually got an executive secretary job, again, with the New Jersey Zinc Company.

Interesting, during the war, there was rationing, and you got a certain number of gasoline coupons per month. You got a certain number of meat coupons per month, a certain number of dairy coupons per month. Well, my mother and her family had all of the meat, dairy, eggs and so forth that they could use. What she would do at the zinc company, she would trade these coupons off for gas coupons from her coworkers. So, they had a good source of eggs and meat and dairy stuff from my mother's family, and she had all kinds of gas coupons, so they could run the farm and always drive anywhere. That was an interesting factor.

Anyway, my mother, and my grandmother too, these were tough women. My grandmother [had] a high value in education here, and my mother, I think, always felt that my dad made a big mistake not taking advantage of the GI Bill. She was bound and determined that her children were going to go to college, and my grandmother, too, my father's mother. Every time I'd have a birthday, she'd slip me a couple of bucks. It was never more than ten and it was usually about five, sometimes just a silver dollar, but she'd say, "Here, Roger, this is for college. This is for college." I think my grandfather didn't know about that, but, "This is for college." I thought, "All right." I had no idea what college was except that they had football teams. But I did save that money, and that's one of the ways [laughter] I was able to go to Rutgers. They planted that idea very firmly that education was extremely important. My parents would sit with us--I had four younger brothers and sisters--they would sit with us for homework. You were never watching TV until your homework was done. By God, they wanted to see that report card. That was a big part of growing up.

Getting back to other things in Palmerton, the zinc company, the benevolent company town that it was, the zinc company built a swimming pool. It's still, I think, the biggest swimming pool in Carbon County, a big one, and they funded that whole thing. The zinc company also built the phone company. They ran the water company. So, they ran everything. They ran everything. I thought to myself, "All right, at some point, I have to get out of here." I really felt, at some point, stifled by this whole thing, that a career path that a lot of people envisioned was, "Okay, if I do go to college, I'm going to become an engineer and work for somebody like NJZ, or Bethlehem Steel, even better." That was kind of the expectation. I'm going to stop now. Go ahead. Keep going. What's your question? Go ahead.

SI: We were curious about the quality of these schools, since they were part of this company apparatus in a way.

RL: All right. Well, first of all, the zinc company tried to do things right. The zinc company funded a kindergarten at a time when kindergarten was not typical in Pennsylvania. So, I went to the company-sponsored kindergarten. It was a very nice experience. We had a really good teacher, Ms. Warman. It was a full-day kindergarten. I walked down to the building where they had it, and so that was good.

For elementary school, I went to parochial school. I went to a Catholic school in Palmerton--then called Sacred Heart School, now called St. John Neumann School, on Third Street/Lafayette Avenue--and the teachers there were the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the MSC [Missionaries of the Sacred Heart], and they were in the black habits. Younger people, you may not have seen this, but think of the nuns in *The Sound of Music*. I was telling my daughter the other day that out of the various nuns that I had, one of them was very nice, one of them was okay, and the rest would slap you if you talked out of line. That was the way things happened in those days. If the nuns slapped you, you'd better not complain to your parents because then you'd get slapped again at home. So, they were strict. That was a very good education. The classes were small. Also, we had two grades together; first and second grade would be together. Third and fourth would be together in the same room, fifth and sixth in the same room, seventh and eighth in the same room. So, the teacher's working with one class actively. The other class is doing their workbook, and then you'd switch off like that.

Also, every day, you went to Mass first thing, at eight o'clock. So, I got plenty of religion, eight o'clock. Ladies and gentlemen, this was still the Latin Mass. This is pre-1965, pre-Vatican Council. The Mass was in Latin, and we sang in Latin. We sang Gregorian chants. We sang Renaissance kinds of things in our own way. You wouldn't mistake it for, let's say, the Sistine Chapel Choir, but we sang this stuff in Latin. When I got to Rutgers and I'm in grad school and we're talking about [Italian Renaissance composer] Palestrina, I'm thinking, "I sang that stuff in fifth grade." So, that was a big benefit. I really don't know what it cost my parents. It cost them something. I don't know what it cost them for us to go there, but we all went there for eight years, except for my youngest brother Philip. He was a little more rebellious. I think the situation didn't go so well after fourth grade for him. Philip then went to the public school.

I thought I had an excellent elementary school education. By the time I was in eighth grade there, there were about thirteen of us still in eighth grade, and of those thirteen, ladies and gentlemen, four years later, at high school graduation time, in the top ten of the graduating class of Palmerton High School of 1967, seven of those twelfth graders, seven of those seniors, were from that elementary school, from my school. So, we must have been doing something right.

The school had on the first floor--the classrooms were all on the second floor--the first floor was a basketball court and a large kitchen because they had a lot of weddings and church events there. So, there was a big kitchen, and they would have sales to support the church and support the school, sales of all kinds of ethnic specialties, like pierogi, hurka, which is like a Slovak sausage, kielbasa, all kinds of things that they would make down there. You're sitting up there in third grade, and oh my God, these aromas are coming up, wow. So, recess time comes, and you knock on the back door of the kitchen. My grandmother's in there cooking, "Grammy, can I have some pierogi? Can I have a hurka?" [laughter] So, that was a kick also.

By the way, this wasn't my experience, but there is a school still operating in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where it was a similar kind of thing, except besides the kitchen, they have a bowling alley and a barroom in the bottom floor. I think it's the only school in Pennsylvania where they're allowed to have a barroom, a bowling alley and the kitchen and so forth as part of the same building of the school. So, that was kind of fun.

SI: Did other activities for your family revolve around the church?

RL: Yes. The church would have picnics several times a summer, at least once a month, sometimes more. The church owned a grove (Knights of Columbus Grove, K of C Grove, on Fireline Road) that was out of town, very rural, and that's where these picnics would take place. The bands were always--you would call it a polka band, but they played a lot of *Csárdás*, a lot of waltzes. They played a lot of Eastern European music. The bands were all of Eastern European background. [There were] all kinds of food, the kind of food I've been talking about so far, plus your basic hot dogs and hamburgers. There were also things for the young kids like penny pitch. I don't know if you've ever seen that game. It's like a square piece of plywood, maybe five feet on a side. It's marked off with different areas. You throw your penny, and if it lands not touching any line, you win the amount that's written in the block. The highest block would be one dollar, or you could win a prize. You could either get the dollar or the prize if you got the dollar block. One time, I got the dollar thing, and I took the prize instead. Also, this being a Slavic kind of picnic, there was always a barroom somewhere and probably illegal, but it was way in the back and you had to go down this path to get there. That's where the barroom was. They got beer there. They got whiskey there and wine as well. They also had gambling down there. You bought things with tickets. If you ran out of tickets, you knew that you could always go down and find your grandfather at the bar, and he would probably give you some money for tickets. So, that's what we would do, "Pappy, Pappy, I need some tickets." [laughter] If he was on a winning streak, he'd be very generous. So, that was also part of it.

SI: It sounds like a lot of old-world traditions lived on in some form in your family life.

RL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. My mother was a stay-at-home homemaker once she started having a family. We always had home-cooked meals, and they followed a certain pattern, like Sunday, a big roast chicken for a mid-day meal. The chicken would progressively become a chicken soup later on in the week. Oftentimes, either of my grandparents--my mother's mother died when I was fairly young, so she was out of the picture--but my grandfather on either side or my grandparents on my dad's side would sometimes stop for Sunday dinner.

During high school, I went to the public high school in Palmerton. Very interesting, the public high school is Stephen S. Palmer High School, named after Stephen S. Palmer of Princeton, New Jersey. If you look at that building, it would fit in very well on the Rutgers campus or the Princeton campus. It's sort of Gothic architecture. Also, Mr. Stephen S. Palmer, when he was living in town there, sponsored the building of an Episcopal Church, and that Episcopal Church, again, has sort of a Gothic revival architecture, including Tiffany windows. You don't find that in every company town. So, that's Mr. Palmer.

The high school, I thought, was excellent. Again, this is a school that has as its director school board people, some of these engineers, so they want to make sure that this is paving the way for you to go somewhere, maybe someday, Princeton or Lehigh or perhaps Rutgers. So, it was quite good. I had two years of Latin. I had, I would say, a very good science background. I would say this, the math background was good, except that my one gripe about the school was that the advising was not on a level playing field. If I had had the right kind of advice, I might have taken an extra math [class] as a senior and taken calculus. However, it was, "You're fine. Trig is fine." So, I get to Rutgers, and all my buddies, all the people in my math class, already had at least one year and maybe two years of calculus. So, I thought, "Okay, I see what happened here." They figured, "This kid probably could go to a state school, and that would be fine, like East Stroudsburg or one of those Pennsylvania state teacher's colleges. Can I just make--I'll say the word aardvark. I think that's what we said.

SI: Sure.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RL: All right. How are we doing?

SI: Very good. We were talking about how the advising had left you short in terms of math.

RL: Yes.

SI: Maybe there were different expectations for the kids who were not the kids of engineers.

RL: Yes. When I looked at who went where, who went to what colleges, a bunch of the people who graduated with me who had approximately the same grades as I did, some went to Harvard, some went to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. Let's see, did anybody go to Princeton? I don't think so. There was definitely a disparity, and maybe it was assumed that those seniors had more budget and their parents could afford it. Maybe they were communicating to me somehow, "Aim a little bit lower, so that you're not disappointed." Honestly, I'm very happy with Rutgers, and I wouldn't trade that for a Princeton education, no way. Don't get me started about Rutgers-Princeton with all the Rutgers people in the room. [laughter]

I was accepted at four schools. This was at a time when your college application was a ten-dollar application fee. How times have changed. I was accepted at Rutgers. I was accepted at a place called Ursinus in Pennsylvania. I was accepted at Penn State and also the University of Delaware. Ursinus wanted me to play football there, and I thought, "I don't know if I want to do that," because I weigh about 170 pounds right now. I weighed about 165 at the time. Also, Ursinus was a religious school. I forget the denomination, maybe Lutheran, but similar to Muhlenberg, there was a religious component to the education. Also, I saw a shocking statistic that among Ursinus students, a lot of them wound up marrying within the college community, and I thought, "Oh, that's a little scary. I don't know if I want to go into something like that where that happens so often. I'd rather have a little more freedom of choice," shall we say. That was Ursinus. Penn State didn't turn me on at all. The University of Delaware, again, they were

interested in me playing football. I don't know why. I was not a tremendous player, but there was a scholarship involved. Rutgers was a Rutgers Alumni Scholarship. At the time, it covered everything. It was the total amount. There'll be a gap in the room, but the total amount at that time was 1,466 dollars, and that covered tuition and room and board for both semesters.

SI: Wow.

RL: Still, that would have been a lot of money for my parents. My parents were over the moon at this prospect; they were thrilled out of their gourds. But I think my dad was more leaning toward Penn State. I don't know if the football thing was on his mind or just the reputation. We have a joke about Penn State; it's an easy three-hour drive from anywhere in the State of Pennsylvania. Recently, they've built more interstates around the place; you can kind of get there. The reason they put it there was to develop that central part of Pennsylvania, which is really boondocks. It's boondocks, for sure. That's how they got away with that stuff with Sandusky for so many years. It's very much out of the spotlight, except for certain things. I'm glad they nailed him. [Editor's Note: Jerry Sandusky served as an assistant coach of the Penn State Football Team for thirty years. In 2012, he was found guilty of forty-five counts of sexual abuse of minors over a fifteen-year period.]

Rutgers is much closer, believe it or not. At that time, you had to thread your way through New Jersey from Route 22 to Route 206; you had to thread your way around. Now, it's a fairly easy shot out I-78, and it's a fairly convenient drive. A year ago, when the whole thing shut down [due to Covid-19], I was ready to come to New Brunswick to view the classical coins in the Alexander Library and meet with a friend of mine, who lived in Ford Hall at the same time I did, Dr. Ron Levao, who still teaches at Rutgers in the English Department. Maybe some of you have studied with Dr. Levao. Anyway, we were going to have a nice get-together, but that got shut down right about this time, a year ago. Anyway, I wound up at Rutgers and am very happy about that. I was really green, as most freshmen are, in terms of what to expect from college life.

SI: We have a few questions before we get into Rutgers.

RL: Yes.

SI: Given your lifelong interest in music, we wanted to talk about that aspect of your life early on. I think Elijah has a question along those lines.

RL: Yes. About the music in my early years?

EH: My question is a two-part question. When you first started getting interested in music at a young age, what was the first instrument that you learned to play?

RL: Oh, good.

EH: The second part to that, how did your cultural background with your family and your religious upbringing contribute to your love of music?

RL: Okay, good. Well, first of all, it was understood that every one of my brothers and sisters would play an instrument, and there was no choice about it. It was like, "You're going to school." That was a given. We were always singing. I told you about my grandfather playing the accordion for us. With singing, I was good at it. If you get applause for something, you're going to do more of it. I'm told that my very first singing experience before a large group of people was at my grandparents' fortieth wedding anniversary in about 1958, where I sang a bunch of Slovak songs and, oh, the people loved it. They couldn't believe it; here's this little kid singing these Slovak songs. So, that's a big encouragement. My instrument--my parents, the first choice of theirs was the accordion. They start calling accordion teachers. Well, in those days, long before the invention of the answering machine, the accordion teacher wasn't home. So, they went down the list, and the next person was a piano teacher. That's how I got started on the piano at about age six, I would say. We tell a joke. I tell a joke on stage that I'm forever grateful to that accordion teacher for not being home that day. That's one of the accordion jokes.

Anyhow, I started on the piano, and, again, I got to be pretty good at it. At that time, and this is interesting too--we all know about cable TV. Well, the very first cable TV station in the United States was in Pennsylvania in Carbon County. Why? Because all these coal towns tend to be in valleys, and they couldn't get any TV reception. So, somebody had the bright idea, "Why don't we put a big antenna on top of the mountain and run a cable down to town? That way, they can get more stations." That was the very first cable station in the United States, in Carbon County. It's still operating under a different name (PenTeleData), but my point is this. This cable company had a live studio in Palmerton, and they would have local programming, local sports news. The Monday after the high school football game, there would always be a sort of a rehash, like a post-game thing with some of the players there, the high school kids. They would also have a live music thing. My piano teacher, Earl Bryan Seip, was connected--of course, any music teacher would be connected to the studio in some way--so they said, "Hey, do you have any ringers down there?" "All right, I have this Roger Latzgo." "Get him over there." Here I am, nine and ten years old, playing piano on cable television. I asked some time ago if those tapes still exist. No, they don't exist anymore. That was, "Hey, we saw you on television." So, that was a kick.

I got to high school and the music department, we had an excellent music person, John (Jack) Goodman. He had some Broadway connections, so like a lot of high schools today, we did a lot of Broadway shows. I got to have some good roles in there, vocal roles, singing roles, and also for the other, let's say, non-Broadway shows, I got to be the piano accompanist. Here's an interesting thing about the piano in my experience with the piano and with certain instruments in particular. I'm playing the piano there for various events at school. Years and years and years later, and I'm talking about maybe thirty years after my high school time, they had me come over to play a program. I brought my guitar gear and so forth, and I said, "Do you have a piano?" "Yes, we have a Steinway." "Okay." I look at the piano, and I try it out a little bit. Yes, it needs some work, but it's still got a lot of character. So, I asked the music teacher, "How long has the school had this piano?" He says to me, "They bought this piano when they built the first high school." I'm thinking, "Oh, my God, this is the piano I played when I was in high school." Isn't that interesting because here, the Palmerton School District has outgrown a building, has moved to a new building, but it still has the same piano, the same Steinway piano? It could use some

work, yes, but it's still holding up after all that use. Now, if that isn't testimony to the Steinway, I don't know what is.

Anyway, I had a good piano background. Later in life, I had another teacher, who was a much better teacher, Madam Telma Roberts. First of all, she's Ithaca College Class of 1928, Ithaca College, very famous for music. After that, she studied with Moriz Rosenthal. Moriz Rosenthal, if you were into music, you know who he is, but he is one of a number of students of Franz Liszt. If you look at pictures of Franz Liszt from the nineteenth century with all his students hanging around him, there is young Moriz Rosenthal, as, let's say, a twenty-two-year-old young man. By the 1930s, he was quite aged at the time, but he was her teacher. She studied with people of a similar caliber, but Rosenthal is most famous. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie with Shirley MacLaine, *Madame Sousatzka*. She (Madam Roberts) was very much that kind of old lady piano teacher who was an excellent, excellent musician, very eccentric. She wore three watches, and we always called her madam, Madam Roberts. I'll get to the three watches in a moment. She would take her students to competitions. She would take me to competitions. She was a member of the Piano Teachers' Guild, where you had very strict standards of what you had to be able to play, sight-reading, repertoire, et cetera. That was excellent preparation. Yes, she was great.

The three watches, it's funny because she was rather formal in her lessons. You just didn't go in jeans and a t-shirt; you dressed up for this lesson. One time after studying with her for quite a while, I finally got the nerve to ask her, "Why do you wear three watches, Madam Roberts?" She said, "Well, I was playing for a wedding one time. They said, 'Now, okay, at five of three, you begin with the wedding march, the preamble to the wedding march.'" She said, "Okay." She looked at her watch; it was still ten of three. Well, guess what. At ten of three, her watch stopped. So, she just kept ambling on, doing her other repertoire. Finally, somebody had to come up to her organ and say, "Madam Roberts, Madam Roberts, it's five after three, start the wedding march." "Oh, my God." She took this extremely seriously. She was very embarrassed, talked about it apparently for years; it gnawed at her. Then, thereafter, that watch wasn't going to work anymore, but she couldn't take it off because her mother had given it to her. That was her mother's watch. She couldn't take that off ever. So, she wore two other watches, figuring that if one would stop, the other one would probably keep going. She always wore three watches.

SI: Again, before we get further into your life, let me see if any of the students have any questions about your pre-Rutgers life.

RL: Okay.

SI: Well, I have a question. On the eve of going away to college, can you tell us how much you knew about the world? Did you follow the news? Were you aware of things happening outside of Carbon County, so to speak?

RL: Yes. Well, if you do time travel back to, let's say, 1965, '66, '67, the Vietnam War is going like crazy. In the town of Palmerton, the VFW, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion were very strong. My father had been a past commander of the American Legion. He was a bartender up there. I mean, that was a big social gathering. In those days in Pennsylvania,

the VFW and the American Legion and also the Hungarian Club and the Sokol Club, those were the only bars that could be open on Sunday. So, they were very popular. My dad was very--I wouldn't call him right wing. He was a World War II vet, so this Vietnam thing, he was all behind it. Anyway, as I got to know more about this, I thought, "Whoa, this is maybe ..." I was thinking about ROTC [pronounced "rot-see"] at Rutgers because that's a good way to pay for your education, but then when I saw the scholarship, "Well, I don't have to do that. I don't have to worry about paying for it by joining the military." Army ROTC was a two-year commitment. Air Force ROTC or Navy ROTC was a longer commitment, but they paid you more money. I don't have to do that. There was a lot of pressure in town about Vietnam. Some of my high school teachers, one in particular, he was a real jerk (his initials were J.C.Y.), I will say. He called me a communist in senior class, and he told my father, "Your son, he's got communist leanings." I thought, "Whoa, now I have another reason not to want to live in this town ever again."

We had, in the Lehigh Valley here, between Muhlenberg, between Lafayette College, between some of the other local colleges, a lot of high-profile speakers would come. I would go to hear Stokely Carmichael. I would go to hear some of the SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, speakers, and I was really taken by their message. The high school where I went and the town itself, there was a lot of ethnic diversity. There wasn't a lot of Black family presence in Palmerton. I guess they figured that the Slavic people were enough of an underclass that it didn't attract Black families. I really didn't have a whole lot of contact with Black Americans at that time. I would very much at Rutgers, of course. Rutgers is a very diverse place, which again is a reason that I'm happy to have had my years at Rutgers, rather than, let's say, at Princeton, at that time. I hear things are changing now, but at that time, Princeton was a lot more prejudiced.

It occurs to me that I graduated with my bachelor's fifty years ago, 1971; that's a really long time ago in terms of cultural change. I mean, the civil rights bill only passed in 1964, and we had voting rights not long after that. We had Title IX not long after that. This is why this whole Trump experience--and I hate to say the guy's name--but that's why that experience, I thought a lot of these things were settled. I thought that this stuff was, "We're not going back there," but we did go back there for a couple of years. Now, I think that things are looking up, but, anyway, I digress. Go ahead. [Editor's Note: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, and later sexual orientation and gender identity. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits racial discrimination in voting. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in educational programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance.]

SI: Let's get into Rutgers. You started to say before what the first few days and weeks were like on campus. What was that experience like?

RL: Well, we had what I guess is now called the freshman drop-off. My parents drove me down there, and I did not have a whole lot of stuff. I did have one of these suitcase-type of phonographs that I set up in the dorm room in Ford Hall, and I think room 129--not Ford Hall. Did I say Ford? I meant Demarest. I was in Demarest my freshman year. Demarest was supposedly a freshman dorm. We had a couple of big tough preceptors. One name I remember

was Anatoli Welahowski. He was on the crew; he was on rowing. Every day at dawn, he'd be up, going out to row. My roommate was a guy named Lou Spiro. He was a rather serious practicing Jewish fellow. Next door to me in Demarest was an interesting combo, Peter Chin, Chinese, and Tony Ciccalese, he was Sicilian. He used to jokingly say, "Yes, don't mess with me, I'll get my family after you," kind of thing. It was a really diverse dormitory wing in Demarest there.

My first couple days, I'm in the dorm room, and somebody comes down a hallway saying, "Hey, some fraternity has a dummy of the Class of '71 hanging by its neck. Let's go get them. Let's take it down." I'm trying to think of the name of the fraternity, but it's on George Street (southeast corner of Bishop Place and George Street), Sigma Phi Epsilon. I don't know if it's still standing. It's by the river. It's on the opposite side of the road from the River Dorms and a little bit downhill from there. They had an effigy of the Class of '71 hanging there. So, we all storm out of the dormitory, not everybody, but let's say twenty or thirty freshmen storm out of the dormitory, "Hey, what's going on? Hey." So, all these fraternity members are out there holding glasses of beer, not Styrofoam cups, but glasses, sort of daring us to do it (charge up the hill). I thought, "Okay, I didn't come to college for this." I went back to Demarest, but apparently, there was a bit of a fight there that night. It was a Friday night.

Before all this happened, let's say February of 1967, in other words, the February before I came to Rutgers as a freshman, I attended a Scholarship Candidates' Weekend. That was for some interviews and, "We don't know if we're going to give you the scholarship yet. We're still talking about it. We don't know if you're admitted yet, but we want to know a little more about you." They invited me down. They said they'd put me up in the fraternity, and the frat where they had me staying was Zeta Psi. The building is still there; I've seen it recently. It's the big Greek revival building across College Avenue from Van Nest Hall. So, they put me up in an attic room there, and they had a beer party that night. I said, "Wow." I'm in my three-piece herringbone suit. I think, "Yes, this is college life. Man, I'm digging this."

The next day, I was going to have my interview with this committee. It was a committee of a couple of profs [professors], and I remember prominently Dr. Warren Susman, a very well-known, well-respected historian and very much an anti-war guy. I'm asking all kinds of questions. I'm trying to make my case here as an attractive candidate. At the time, I was still with the idea that I wanted to be some kind of an engineer because I was real good at chemistry. I thought, "Okay, I want to do some musical stuff, but the main thing I want to do [is] chemistry and work with perhaps a patent lawyer and an accountant kind of person, form a little group of four or five very smart Rutgers people, and we're going to make a lot of money." Susman thought that was good. I asked him pointedly, "What kind of speakers do you have here on campus?" He goes, "Oh, we've a lot of good speakers on campus." He mentioned some of them. Some of the ones that were coming up for next year included Norman Thomas, Socialist candidate for president, perennial Socialist candidate, and when he did show up--he was very old at that time--the VFW showed up and threw eggs at the man. The VFW came in with their hats on, their commando hats, and threw eggs at Norman Thomas. Anyway, I mean, New Brunswick, look, Joyce Kilmer, "Prayer of a Soldier in France," he is one of the proud New Brunswick sons. So, there's a lot of tension there between the anti-war feeling and the New Brunswick VFW and the American Legion. Anyway, the interview for the scholarship went

well, I thought, and that was the basis of my scholarship. [Editor's Note: Joyce Kilmer (1886-1918) was an American poet born in New Brunswick and educated at Rutgers and Columbia Universities. He was killed in action during World War I. Kilmer is the author of the poems "Trees" and "Prayer of a Soldier in France."]

At Rutgers, because I had pre-registered for ROTC, I thought, "Okay, I have to drop this." They (ROTC) said, "I don't know if you can do this. It's kind of late for you to drop something like that. Are you sure you want to do this?" I said, "Yes, I think I'm pretty sure I want to drop that course." They reluctantly, with a lot of hemming and hawing, let me drop ROTC.

Just that fall, there were a lot of demonstrations against ROTC. The ROTC building was on the corner of College Avenue and Senior Street, just between what was the Commons--I think they're tearing that building down--between the Commons and the Alexander Library; that was where the ROTC building was. So, there were protests there, and a lot of people sat on the porch and [chanted], "We hate the war in Vietnam." So, that was good. Those were some of my early days at Rutgers. It was an unorganized thing, but the SDS was there, Students for a Democratic Society, and I went to a couple of meetings there. I didn't last long there. They were a little too Marxist dogmatic. But that was my political leaning at the time.

One other amusing thing that happened, early days--see, these days, things are a lot more relaxed in terms of gender relations, or maybe they're not, I don't know. But at the time, Rutgers was all male. Let me remind our younger people, Rutgers was all male, and if you wanted to have somebody from the opposite sex in your room, that was a big deal. You could have that person in your room for a couple of hours on a weekend night. It was called weekend parietals. If you were in there with somebody, you had to hang your necktie on the doorknob to show that you wanted a little bit of privacy. Then, the legalistic question comes up, "Well, all right, who is paying for this room and how much right do you have to what you do in that room?" The question is, in loco parentis, that is, is the college really in loco parentis? In other words, is the college in place of your parents? This was a big to-do and a big brouhaha. Finally, it was determined that, yes, you could have somebody in your room other than yourself overnight. You could have overnight guests. You had to work this out with your roommate. There are jokes about this too, "Great, you can have an overnight guest in your room. Now, you've got to talk somebody into being your overnight guest." [laughter]

A couple of us who didn't have any overnight guests were getting together with a couple of six packs, and into the second six pack, one of these guys--and I remember the guy's name, I'll just say his first name, Mark--we were over in Tinsley or one of those dorms, it might have been Tinsley, and he said, "Hey, what's that thing on the ceiling that looks like a mushroom?" that little steel thing. "Oh, that's a fire alarm. If things get hot, the thing melts, and it sprays water all over everything." The next thing you know, this guy Mark is up on a chair with a match, holding it up to the fire alarm, and, boom, suddenly, the entire dormitory is soaked. Now, it's like late October, maybe early November. All these overnight girlfriends and their boyfriends, who are Rutgers students, are out on the courtyard there [laughter] in whatever kind of dress they could manage because their rooms are getting soaked. Mark, to his credit, owned up to the fact that he did it, and he got bounced from Rutgers. We knew that the dean could be tough, but that's one of the more colorful things that happened.

SI: Well, let me ask the Rutgers students of today what questions they have about your era.

ZQ: With this shift in the surrounding social, political and cultural atmosphere at Rutgers, how did you yourself feel in terms of where you sat politically? Also, how much did you get involved in different activities at Rutgers? How much of that was affected by that shift? I know you were part of the Glee Club. I know you furthered your musical career. How did that all occur? How was it affected by this cultural shift and the shift of your surroundings?

RL: Good. Well, thank you for the question. I knew I wanted to do something active at Rutgers. When I was in high school, I did a lot of stuff. I was on the debate team. I was on the tennis team. I played football. I acted in plays. I was in musicals. I was in about everything that I could conceive of. When I got to Rutgers, I realized you can't do all that stuff, and some of it is going to be more time consuming than others.

One of the things I tried--in terms of my political awareness, I thought that debate would be a good thing, because debate, I know that it requires a lot of preparation. It requires a lot of study. You really have to know what you're talking about, and the Rutgers debate team was very well respected. So, I went to a debate meeting. I'm thinking, "Okay, I'm going to get to do some debating rebuttals or whatever here." They said, "All right, freshmen and sophomores, here's what you're going to do. You're going to research the topic. You're going to prepare the quotes. You're going to type them up on three-by-five cards and have them organized according to this, that and the other thing." I said, "Well, what about standing up and debating?" He goes, "Oh, you will do that when you're juniors and seniors if you're good enough, but until then, you're going to do research." I thought, "Oh, boy, I think I'm going to be doing enough research in 'Western Civ' and in some of these other courses." So, I didn't do that.

Then, I thought, "Well, I know Rutgers has a football team. I'm too small for that, but I know they have 150-pound football, so I'm going to check that out." I went to a practice. I'm looking at these guys on the team, and I'm thinking, "Where are the 150-pounders?" They said, "This is the team. This is the 150-pound team." I said, "Wow, these guys are all like 180-190." They said, "Oh, they'll be down to weight by Thursday." I thought, "Okay, I don't want to do this either."

Then, I thought, "Well, maybe soccer would be something that I could do." So, I went to a soccer practice. Now, listen, New Brunswick at that time was very much and still does have a Hungarian immigrant ethnic background. Well, those guys, they can play soccer. I mean, I thought the ball was tied [with] elastic to those guys' feet. I didn't last long there. I tried tennis, similar thing. These guys were way out of my class.

Then, I thought, "Well ..." I heard the Glee Club, and the Glee Club really got me. I loved the combination of tradition and seriousness that this club had. It was small. The Club, at that time, was about forty voices. I heard them one day during freshmen orientation at the Commons, at what's now--I guess they're thinking about tearing it down--the Brower Dining Hall. So, I asked one of the guys (Dave Politziner, RC '69) afterward, "How do you get in The Club?" He goes, "Well, you've got to audition." "Well, who do you talk to?" "Well, you've got to talk to Soup."

I said, "Who's Soup?" "Well, Soup is the nickname for Dr. F. Austin Walter, who is the director of The Club." "All right." I made an appointment to audition for Soup. He heard me sing. I did some sight-reading for him. I did some prepared stuff, and he said, "All right, you're a tenor. You're in The Club." That was it. That became sort of my home away from home for the next four years. I'm still in contact very much with the Glee Club, and some of my friends from that time are still my friends. What can you say? The Club is the oldest club on campus, still, the oldest student organization on campus, 1872, I believe.

It had a fair amount of autonomy. That is, the Glee Club could, and I think still can, run its own show without a whole lot of university interference, as long as it behaves. It turned out that Mason Gross and, yes, that Mason Gross, President of Rutgers at the time, was very much a fan of The Club. If we needed a bus to go somewhere, an extra special kind of thing, he would make it happen. If we needed permission to use a certain building, he would make that happen. He loved The Club, so that was really neat.

The other thing that made me very interested in going with The Club was that The Club did foreign tours. That coming summer, that is the summer of 1968, was going to be a European tour, three weeks singing for all kinds of audiences, anywhere from Holland to Germany to Austria to Denmark to Sweden and winding up in London. So, that was very much appealing to me. That, again, cemented my interest in music and in the combination of music and travel, which has been thwarted in the last year, but it'll be back. It'll be back. I didn't get my [Covid] vaccination yet, but they say it's coming soon. We're a little chaotic out here in Pennsylvania, but I know I'll get it soon. I think I may have rambled a little bit there.

SI: That is good. I have interviewed a number of Glee Club alums, and I understand that it is a big part of your life. I wanted to ask more about that. First, can you reflect a little more on Soup as a figure?

RL: Yes. Soup was a real leader and an inspiration. Now, Soup is an alumnus himself, Class of 1932, and he took over the Glee Club from Dr. Howard McKinney, who brought it into the twentieth century. McKinney was a predecessor of Soup. He turned The Club from a group of singers who liked to harmonize perhaps barber shop-wise in Rutgers and other college songs, he turned it into a more serious organization that would do, let's say, the serious male vocal repertoire. Soup picked it up from there. Soup continued with that. I mean, if you look at the Glee Club repertoire, there are songs in there that were written in the 1870s either by students or by directors. These are beautiful hymns. Some of them you may be aware of, like we can't sing, "My father sent me to old Rutgers, and resolved that I should be a man." We don't sing that anymore, do we? We're in the twenty-first century now, but that's the way things go. Now, it's, "From far and wide we've come to Rutgers, and resolved to learn all that we can. And so I settled down, in that noisy college town, on the Banks of the Old Raritan." So, there were many other Rutgers songs that may not pass muster and we've had to delete certain verses and do certain things, but that's, again, one for history.

Soup left the running of The Club pretty much to The Club members. We had a tour manager. We had a business manager. He would come in, he would give guidance, but the tours were set up by Club members and all the budgeting, et cetera, was done that way. We would make

recordings. We'd sell the recordings; that would go into our tour fund. We would do concerts in the local area and sometimes far beyond New Jersey's borders. We would go to New England. We'd go down to Philadelphia, to D.C. sometimes, New York City. We'd get paid for these events. We'd get paid, and that would go into our tour fund. When it came time to do the tour, we would still have some individual out-of-pocket expenses, but most of it was covered by the Glee Club treasury, which is kind of amazing. Now, fast forward to the twenty-first century. Things have gotten more expensive, so The Club has to do a little more fundraising. What they do is they ask parents to come along, parents, friends and family, to come along on the tour to help defray expenses for the Glee Clubbers. Quite honestly, I don't know if I'd want my parents to be along on that tour. [laughter] I mean, we were young guys. Here you are, traveling in Europe without a whole lot of supervision. It requires a lot of responsibility on a young man's part, and that was a big growing-up experience. Soup let us have a pretty long leash.

SI: Elijah, I think you have a question.

EH: Yes. In regards to the tours you did with the Glee Club, what was the catalog? Did you have themes for the tours for certain songs you would sing? Would you practice them back at Rutgers before you went?

RL: Yes, it's good. Well, Soup was very astute at coming up with repertoire. First of all, we'd have Rutgers songs because they wanted to hear that. Secondly, we always had a couple of Broadway medleys of shows. People may say that they hate America, but they love American music and they love Broadway. We would do a lot of Broadway medleys. We would also do a fair amount of serious music. When I say serious, I'm talking about Renaissance and Baroque, classical and modern music in different languages, some Italian, some French, some Russian. We would always find something--that is, Soup would find something--from the places that we were performing. Soup really knew music. He would find a tune, a song, that was particularly beloved in a certain area, and we would learn that in a special arrangement that Soup would write for us. So, that was a big drawing card for us. Something just crossed my mind; it flew out. Yes, Soup was good that way. Sometimes, he would rely on us. We were going on a different tour. We were going to what was then Czechoslovakia. So, he'd say, "Okay, what are some Czech or Slovak songs that we should do?" He got some input from some of us, and we learned some of those tunes and they were big hits.

SI: What was it like going behind the Iron Curtain then, particularly for you, having this family background related to the area?

RL: Well, first of all, these are some of the most tense years of the Cold War. You're going into a Communist country (1971 tour). This is not like a theme park here; this is serious stuff. We had one performance scheduled for August, and it was the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. We were told by our local contact that it would be a good idea for us not to perform that day because it might--the term they used for protesters there was "hooligans"--it might incite some hooliganism amongst the local population. So, we had to cancel a performance or two there.

Another thing, this is the 1968 tour, we were in Luxembourg at the time, and it was the day in June when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. There, again, what is going on politically? What do we have to fear? Are we going to be called home? Are we going to be held there? We didn't know what was going on. So, we actually had a special meeting with the ambassador to ease everybody's fears about what might be happening. So, things like that occurred. We stayed and finished the tour.

In Czechoslovakia, we had a great time. We were in Prague, and if you've been to Prague or if you've seen pictures of it, you know it's just a magical place. That was our first stop in Czechoslovakia. After that, they said, "Okay, now we're going to a youth camp for a couple of days." I think, "Oh, my God, a youth camp. You know, here we are in Prague, where it's amazing, and we're going to go out in the boondocks here. What is this going to be?" Anyway, we went, and it turned out to be a great time. First of all, a youth camp has very different connotations in Eastern Europe. This is where, if you were a good--I won't say a good Communist--but if you didn't have any black marks against you in terms of misbehavior, anti-socialist misbehavior, you could get to go to youth camp for a couple of weeks. The youth camp had the regular food that you might have, only a little bit better, but it also had a bar with wonderful beer at very cheap prices. It also had Cuban rum at very cheap prices. It also had Cuban cigars at very cheap prices. This is all very positive stuff.

Also, we're getting off the train--and this is one of these Eastern European trains, still a steam locomotive--we're getting off the train, and we are serenaded at the depot there by a bluegrass band and they're singing bluegrass in the Czech language. I said, "Whoa, this is something I haven't experienced anywhere." So, we got to know these guys, and we hung out with them quite a bit. We worked up some tunes together. At one point, they said, "Well, look, we have a program in Prague in a couple of days. Would you like to be part of the show?" I thought, "Oh, my God, would I like to be?" So, I got permission from Soup. My brother was in The Club at the same time, my brother Thomas, who is two years younger than me, so we got permission to go with this group to a place in Prague called Riegrovy Sady, which is Rieger Gardens, a rather large outdoor amphitheater and I would say comparable to the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park, the band shell there, very comparable to that band shell or to the one by the city opera (Guggenheim Bandshell, Damrosch Park) in Manhattan, that size of a band shell.

We're there, and we performed. I have the live recording of that thing, and it's wild. It's wild. During the concert, there was a blackout, and they were used to this. If there was some kind of threat that the authorities perceived of hooliganism, they would shut off the electricity in that part of town. So, they shut off the electricity for a couple of minutes just to say, "Okay, don't get too wild over there." So, the power came back on then, and we knew that we had to not get too crazy. I mean, people were coming to this thing with blank pistols, and if they really liked the act, they'd--bang, bang, bang--shoot blank pistols. I thought, "What is this?" I had been to Woodstock, but this was a little wilder than that. I might say aardvark again. I may have to take a health break.

SI: Sure.

RL: Is that okay?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: During the break, you were talking about how there were these two tours you were on, one in '68 in Western Europe and one in '71 in Eastern Europe.

RL: Yes.

SI: In '68, you actually didn't come back with the Rutgers Glee Club.

RL: Correct. I stayed in Europe that entire summer. My first idea was I would hitchhike into--see, I had arranged to work at the farm in Germany, and that went quite well. But I saved some time to hitchhike into Czechoslovakia because here's the whole thing. You want to see the town where your grandparents came from, not necessarily wash your face and drink the water from the well where they pumped their drinking water, but I wanted to see what it was really like. Now, this is 1968, again, the height of the Cold War these years, so there were very serious border guards. I hitchhiked into the place. I was in Bratislava, which is quite close to Vienna. I was coming through Vienna to Bratislava, and my ride didn't want to take me over the border. So, I thought, "Well, all right, I've got my passport. I can walk in from here. I can see the thing from here." So, I start walking in, and this jeep comes up to me. In Slovak, they said, "Get in." "All right. Okay." I got in. Now, they start questioning me, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well ..." I spoke a little Slovak, and I told them I wanted to go into Bratislava and also to some of these other towns to see the place. They said, "Okay, you shouldn't be walking over this border. It's very dangerous. You could get shot." So, I said, "All right. Well, what am I going to do?" They said, "Well, we'll drive you into town." They drove me into town and set me up in a very inexpensive hotel.

I woke up the next morning and saw all these steam locomotives with the red star on the front, very much like you'd see in *Doctor Zhivago*. Seven, eight o'clock in the morning, the taverns are already full. All of these guys are in there drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. "So, this is Eastern Europe, huh?"

I traveled around a little bit from Bratislava up north to a place called Trnava, which is where my grandparents are from on my mother's side, Trnava and Trenčín. Trnava is known as a town of a hundred churches. Many of these places are very old, quite primitive if you look at it, but cozy. The food was great. People were very nice to me.

During my time there, I had just seen the film *Doctor Zhivago*; it had just come out. I thought, "Wow, I wonder if I could get a balalaika somewhere over here." So, I went into a music store and said, "I'm looking for a balalaika." They said, "Oh, we don't have any balalaikas. That's a Russian instrument." I think it was thumbs down on the idea of a Russian instrument. But they said, "You know, somebody who would have one is this Professor Miron Conorto." C-O-N-O-R-T-O, Conorto. They said, "Would you like to meet him?" I said, "Yes, sure." So, they called him up, and he said, "Yes, send him right over."

I get there. He's retired, but he's a former music professor at Bratislava University, and his wife is there too. Her name is Anna. Professor Conorto was Russian, and at the end of World War II, a lot of people, whenever the war ended, that's where they kind of stayed. So, he was in Bratislava, fell in love with a Slovak girl, and that's where he stayed. His main instrument was the mandolin, but he had a balalaika, he had several of them, and he played very well. At the end of my stay with him, he presented me with this balalaika, and I still have it. It's a beautiful old instrument. It's pre-revolutionary, and this is the prima balalaika. It's the small triangular one, like you see in the movie *Doctor Zhivago*, but not as fancy as that one. But it's definitely handmade, probably a homemade instrument, very plain, but has some Cyrillic writing on the back that I've never been able to decipher. People who have seen it, who know more about balalaikas than I do, they like it very much.

He was talking about how, "Yes, things are getting better. The newspapers can print more stuff. Things are getting much more open." [Alexander] Dubček, who was a Slovak guy, was premier and he was talking about "socialism with a human face." But then, bang, I guess it got too much for Moscow, and they sent in tanks. I was advised, "Okay, now you'd better get out of here." So, I made it back over the border to Western Europe, to Vienna. I'm told that I was lucky to be able to get out because the shooting started. I don't know how many people died, but it was not a pretty sight. I mean, that was the first time I had ever seen live tanks. [Editor's Note: In 1968, Alexander Dubček instituted liberal reforms in Communist-controlled Czechoslovakia in what was known as the Prague Spring. On August 20, 1968, the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations invaded Czechoslovakia and reinstated the authoritarian wing of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which continued to rule until the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989.]

Another part of a different trip, I met a guy in Prague. This was 1971. Is it okay if I segue to that?

SI: Of course, please.

RL: Okay. In 1971, the Glee Club is in Prague, and I met this guy in a very famous barroom called U Fleků, that is, Flek's Tavern. They make this dark beer there, and they only sell it there and they only sell it on tap. You can't get it in a bottle. You can't get it anywhere else, U Fleků. So, I'm there, and I had my guitar with me. This guy comes up and sits down in front of me. His name, he introduces himself, Wolf Biermann, B-I-E-R-M-A-N-N, Biermann. He's like a more aggressive folk singer kind of guy from East Berlin. He was always in trouble with the authorities, in and out of jail, like a provocateur folk singer kind of guy. We swapped a couple of songs, and he invited me to come to Berlin to play at this club, East Berlin. So, I thought, "All right, this sounds like an adventure." I go there and take the trains and do some hitchhiking, and I get to East Berlin. Well, the whole Checkpoint Charlie, I go through there, and I get to this club.

Again, I was young and very foolish. One of my favorite records at that time was *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison*. Johnny Cash has a song in there, it's called "The Wall." [Editor's Note: Mr. Latzgo sings.] "There's a lot of brave men in cell block ten, but the bravest of them all is a friend of mine, who spent his time staring at the wall, just staring at the wall. I looked at that wall, so

strong and tall. I could hear him softly curse. Nobody at all ever climbed that wall, but I'm going to be the first. Yes, I'm going to be the first." So, I sang that song. Okay, boom, after that set, some guy comes back to the dressing room and says, "Mr. Latzgo, your stay in East Berlin is over. You will take your things. Come immediately to the subway." In other words, I was deported from East Berlin. My visa was canceled, and I was thrown out. So, that was an interesting experience. Again, if I had known what a dumb thing I did, I probably wouldn't have done it, but when you're in your early twenties, you do dumb things, right?

SI: Wow. Did they try to intimidate you?

RL: That was intimidating enough. You've got a guy wearing a gun in the Communist uniform. The part that I felt bad about was that it was set up by Wolf Biermann, who was already skating the line. He was always writing provocative songs, and if you Google him, you'll find out. So, I sort of screwed things up there and also for the club. Now, I'm sure that the club had similar experiences with the authorities before, but that's not why I came there. I guess I was thinking too much of press freedoms and freedom of the First Amendment in the United States when I did that and trying to strike a blow for freedom of speech, but I was misguided.

SI: Wow. We're coming up on eleven o'clock. I think we have a lot more to talk about in another session. I think we just have a few more questions for this round.

RL: All right.

SI: I know the students have a lot of questions about Woodstock, but sticking with these European tours, were there any other memorable experiences that stand out from either Eastern Europe or other countries?

RL: Well, the whole thing was magical. When you're that young--I mean, 1968, I was not yet twenty years old. Our first performance was for the Dutch Royal Navy with the royal family in attendance. So, there we are, wow. The Club, at that time, toured in the tailcoats, the white formal tailcoats, with the white tie and white shirt. That was our first half in tails. The second half would be in blazer and vest, where we do more of the pop repertoire. Here we are, performing for the Dutch Royal Navy with the queen and the royal family in attendance in Amsterdam. I thought, "Wow, this is incredible." So, that was amazing.

We also performed at Echternach, Luxembourg, capital of the little kingdom. We had a contact there, a former Glee Clubber named Bob Magocsi, RC '66. On a similar Glee Club tour, some years earlier, he met a girl from there, and they got married. He and she were managing her family hotel. We stayed in this very nice hotel in the heart of old historic Echternach. We were honored at some very nice receptions in the castle there. One of those days--I'd have to look up what date it was, but it happens every year--in celebration of the ending of the plague or something like that--and I can research this [for] the next time we speak--they have this parade, and in this parade, the bands play a traditional tune. They all play it in the same key, and it goes [hums the melody] and so forth. Anyway, there's a traditional dance that goes with this. Okay, the Glee Clubbers decide, "Hey, we're going to get in on this." We go down there, and at this time, it's pouring rain. We go down there anyway, in the pouring rain, doing this hopping dance.

I forget. They call it the hopping dance, something like that. Anyway, we were doing this, and one of our Glee Club members, Mark Shangold, RC '68, Mark Shane, as he's now known, had a Super 8 camera, and he filmed it from the hotel. There's some film of that. There's some film of that. In fact, Mark had that Super 8 on the tour. When you're on stage, you can't really do any filming, but he filmed some of the shenanigans off stage. [Editor's Note: The Dancing Procession of Echternach occurs every year on Whit Tuesday in honor of the patron saint of Luxembourg. Musicians play "Sprangprozessioùn" while the procession takes place. Luxembourg City is the capital of Luxembourg.]

One of our stops there was Heidelberg, a famous student town. Now, we had very few rules from Soup, but one of the rules was, on the day of a performance, no smoking or drinking and also no singing of repertoire outside of rehearsal or performance. Why? Because if you start singing repertoire elsewhere, like a bunch of Clubbers get together and want to sing some Rutgers songs or anything, the chances are that some of the corners of the repertoire, some of the fine points, get rounded off in the exuberance of the moment, especially with a couple of drinks.

We were walking around Heidelberg, and there were all these great student taverns there. We go into one of them, and we're sitting at a table, six or eight of us. The waiter comes over, "*Ja, Amerikaner, woher kommen sie?*" "Where do you come from?" "Oh, we're a university student choir from the United States." "Oh, really, you're a choir. Well, sing something. Sing something!" We try to explain, "No, we're not allowed to. We're not allowed to sing because we have a performance coming up. Anyway, we're not supposed to be howling late at night in a barroom. We're going to ruin our voices." "What's the matter with these Americans? *Verdammte Amerikaner.*" We're sitting there, and we're all disappointed, they're disappointed. Who walks in the door but Soup. "Soup, hey, how are you doing? Soup, they want us to sing, but we told them we couldn't." He goes, "They want us to sing? Well, then let's sing." Soup gets up on a chair and starts conducting us, and we laid the place out. I mean, we completely slayed them. We couldn't buy anything for the rest of the night. That was fun.

SI: Wow. Again, there are a lot more stories here, so I want to save some for next time. Again, the students were very interested in one of the summers in between, 1969.

RL: Yes, Woodstock, right.

ZQ: Yes. If you could please just elaborate on that experience--what nights were you there? How was it? Who were you listening to? I know you just talked about Johnny Cash, but I just wanted to know about your musical influences and things that you were listening to at that time, during those college years.

RL: Right. Well, it wasn't only Johnny Cash. I mean, I was a big fan of a lot of classical music. Listen, I heard Jim Morrison live. I heard Eric Clapton live. I heard [Jimi] Hendrix live a number of times and the Isley Brothers, Richie Havens. I was already performing. I performed in Palmerton on the Friday night, that evening of Woodstock. I hadn't even thought about going, but the promoter for that concert said, "Hey, tomorrow, my wife and I and this friend of ours, we're going up to Woodstock. Do you want to join us?" I said, "Oh, yes, I do." So, we left at

the crack of dawn the next day and drove up to Woodstock. From this part of Pennsylvania, it's maybe like a three-and-a-half-hour drive. We went up there.

It had rained the night before, so everybody was soggy. The place was completely unprepared for that number of people, and there are various estimates, but between 400,000 and 500,000 is probably accurate. People were running out of food. They were running out of drinking water. It's August; it's hot and humid. With all of those things that might cause tension, people were very open. It was, like they say, a celebration of love.

I found the most interesting thing about Woodstock was not so much on the stage, because I wasn't really, let's say, a hard rock fan, but I was fascinated by the experience. Yes, there were drugs going on, but it wasn't like everybody tripping. People were very calm. People were very casual. They would share food if they had some. They'd share water if they had some. It was just beautiful.

My friends said, "Okay, we're going home now." I thought, "Well, I'm going to stay." It was warm. I camped out. It didn't rain much anymore. I had brought, actually, a bedroll and something to keep me dry. I stayed until the last of it. When I finally heard Hendrix, who closed out the show, I was like twenty feet from him when he did that National Anthem so famously. That was one of those indelible experiences. As I say about Woodstock and Michael--what's his name? I can't think of the guy's name right now. I'll think of it in a moment, but he tried to do a Woodstock fortieth anniversary. He tried to do a Woodstock fiftieth anniversary. Neither of those worked out. You can Google it.

ZQ: Michael Lang.

RL: Yes, right. He showed us three ways how to not put on a rock festival. [laughter] I was able to then hitchhike home Monday morning, and there were a lot of people who would pick you up. They figured where you were coming from. This is still pre-Charles Manson, and the Charles Manson thing kind of ended the idea of hitchhiking around. When I was at Rutgers, if I wanted to go home for the weekend, I would mostly hitchhike. I would hitchhike. I didn't have a car down there, so I'd hitchhike. You'd stick your thumb out, you've got a guitar, and people would pick you up. It wasn't that far. I would get to within about fifteen miles of my parents' house, and I'd call them up from a payphone. That was another archaic thing about our society, we had payphones. But no more! I'd call them up from a payphone; they'd come pick me up. Likewise, on the way back to New Brunswick, they would take me down to Route 22, and from there, I would find my way back.

The Woodstock was amazing. Like what Arlo Guthrie said about Woodstock, it wasn't so much about drugs and rock and roll; it was about civil rights. It was a big statement, a big statement that you're not alone. You are not alone. There are a lot of people who are against the war in Vietnam, who are against the draft, who are similarly inclined to you all over this country. The tide of public opinion was in the process of turning against the war, turning against the draft, etcetera, but the Woodstock was a big part of it. It was very encouraging to a young person.

SI: All right. Do you guys have any other questions before we wrap up this session?

RL: I have one more comment.

SI: Sure, absolutely.

RL: I wasn't there for Richie Havens' performance at Woodstock. He opened the festival famously. At this point, a lot of performers couldn't get there unless they came in early, some of them came in later by helicopter, but many of them were stuck on the road. They said to Richie Havens during his set, "Keep going. We don't have our next act." So, he improvised this piece based on, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," and he called it "Freedom." It lasted about twenty minutes. He just kept playing and kept singing. It was incredible. I've seen it on film. I wasn't there at the time.

Anyway, years, years later, Richie Havens, who is now no longer with us, but he was playing nearby, and, okay, gang, he played at Jim Thorpe at the opera house there. I said to my wife, "Well, let's go hear him." We decided to go, and I had my Woodstock triple LP fold-out thing with me. I thought, "Well, in case we see him, if we perhaps get a chance to talk to him, I might get him to inscribe it." We're in Jim Thorpe. It was parked full, so we parked up the hill. If you know Jim Thorpe, you go up the hill, and you finally get to the prison, Carbon County Prison, the old prison. So, I parked up there. We're walking down, and Jim Thorpe is very picturesque. Who do we see on the street taking pictures of the beautiful architecture of Jim Thorpe? It's Richie Havens. We say hello, and he was very, very genial. I said, "Well, if you don't mind, I brought the Woodstock thing along, and I wonder if you would autograph it." "Oh, man, oh, man, were you there?" I said, "Yes, I was there." He says, "You've got to go up there," because now there's this great museum--and if you haven't been there, I recommend it--the Museum at Bethel Woods, which is all about the festival and all about the political and social and cultural things of the late 1960s, early 1970s. He says, "You've got to go up there." I said, "All right, absolutely." He inscribed it to me, "To Roger, Friends Forever, Richie Havens."

SI: Wow. Well, that is a very cool story to end on. We will conclude this session. Then, we will talk about a follow up, but thank you very much. We really appreciate your time.

RL: Okay, very good.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/27/2021

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 11/12/2021

Reviewed by Roger Latzgo 6/23/2022