

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
NEW BRUNSWICK
AN INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN REITMAN
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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AND

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NEW BRUNSWICK

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Dr. Norman Reitman on November 10, 1997 at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Scott Ceresnak: Scott Ceresnak.

KP: I guess I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Both of your parents emigrated from Russia.

Norman Reitman: That's correct.

KP: Do you know why they left Russia?

NR: Well, for the same reason that about two million Russian Jews left Russia, ... they were persecuted. ... Incidentally, my father came from a little village outside of Odessa. His father, my grandfather, was a carpenter and he used to repair the Russian church. ... One day, a priest told my father to get his family, and come to the church that night, and go to the cellar of the church. ... My father relates the fact that he looked out the window and he saw the Cossacks coming through on a pogrom where they burned the village and they raped and killed people. ... After that was over, his father, my grandfather, said, "Sam, this is no place for you to be," and he came ... to the United States, and made his life here.

KP: So, your grandfather, by repairing this church, seems to have established a pretty close relationship with the local village.

NR: I think so. ... This was a community, as I understand it, where there was a large Jewish contingent, and some non-Jewish contingents, and they all lived together. ... They did the repairs for the church and he never spoke about the ... priest, but, apparently, he felt that he couldn't befriend the family anymore.

KP: When did your father come to the United States?

NR: In 1896. ...

KP: When did your mother come here?

NR: 1892. He was thirteen and my mother was two.

KP: What circumstances led your mother to come to the United States? She obviously came with her family.

NR: ... In Russia, in the Czarist days, every young man, when he reached the age of eighteen, had to serve in the army. So, the family changed their name three times, for the three brothers, ... and they were excused ... as the only son in the family. ... It was a general feeling of persecution that occurred and brought so many millions here in the 1890s, ... the big immigration wave. ... My mother's family came from Minsk. ... They had, not a grocery store, but, a specialty store, and,

apparently, did fairly well. Now, my mother's father, my maternal grandfather, was a student who spent his whole life studying in the synagogue, studying Talmud, and never worked. They tell a story, ... my uncles, who preceded my grandfather in coming to America, were tailors. ... When they brought my grandfather over, they got him a job pressing in the tailor shop and he burnt two suits. ... The next day, they sent him to the synagogue and he spent the rest of his life in the synagogue.

KP: You mentioned that your father had a brother here in the States. Where did your father come to?

NR: To New York City. ... Both my mother's and father's family were in New York City, East Side. ... My mother's family moved to Brooklyn. My father's family moved to the Bronx, later on. ... I can recall, as a ... youngster, visiting my father's family on the East Side. My mother's family were all in Brooklyn. ... I was born in Brooklyn.

SC: How did your parents meet?

NR: Well, my father, ... I don't know if he was a streetcar conductor or not, but, he met my uncle, my mother's brother, who was a streetcar conductor, and, through them, they met. ... Initially, my father was a jewelry salesman, and he traveled throughout the country. He had all his merchandise in the money belt, and he used to sell it individually. ... When he met my mother, he decided that this business wasn't for him. ... The family, from the tailor business, developed an interest in embroidery. ... My uncles, there were four of them, my mother had four brothers, ... manufactured it and my father did the selling. So, my father's business was called the Famous Embroidery Company and my uncles' business was called The Famous Art Embroidery Company. It was the same building in Jersey City, and ... they had the heavy machines downstairs, and he was upstairs, but, the family's relationship between my father and my mother's brothers ... was a very close one. The family was very close.

KP: So, you really had two merged families. Most families do not do that that well.

NR: ... It was a very successful thing. They had their ups and downs. They made a great deal of money in the '20s, and they lost everything in the Depression of 1929, ... but, the family still stayed together. My father's family became pharmacists. One comes to mind, a lawyer who became a successful mystery writer. He wrote like Mickey Spillane, that sort of thing, quite successful. Today, most of them are gone.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

NR: Well, it had a tremendous effect on the family and it had a tremendous effect upon me. My father, during the middle '20s, actually was a very wealthy man. I didn't know this. We lived in Jersey City, we had a big car, we had a chauffeur, and we would go away for the summertime to the mountains. I went to summer camps. It was a middle-class family. We never were poor, and along came the Depression, and, like so many millions of people, my father lost everything. I recall one

incident where he threatened to jump out the window of our apartment in Jersey City. My father never got over it. He never, psychologically, got over the trauma of the Depression.

KP: Even as time went on?

NR: ... Even as time went on. I never forgot this. ... I was practicing medicine and doing fairly well. This was in the early '40s. ... My father came to me and he said he was going to go into a business with somebody else. He needed \$4,000, he had to invest \$4000, which he had. ... He said to me, "Norman, I'd like you to do me a favor. I'm going to give you \$4000 and give me a check for \$4000. I don't want my partners to know that I have any money." Do you follow the psychology of it? He had the money, he had recovered. This was twenty years after the Depression, not twenty, but, maybe, fifteen, but, he had the fear. ... He did not want anybody to think that he was wealthy or that he had money, and it affected him tremendously, and, of course, affected me. I came to Rutgers in 1928, driven down with the family chauffeur, and I had a suite right over here at Ford Hall. There were several suites. ... When I left, in 1932, I was waiting on tables to pay my tuition. ...

KP: We have interviewed people who talked about the rich fraternity boys and you had gone from that level to near poverty.

NR: Yes, that's right. When I joined a fraternity in 1929, I was ... just a rich boy. ... I always had the money to pay for tuition, or allowance or whatnot. ... That was the story for so many of us in those days. When I went to medical school, my dad did have the money for the first two years, and then, my wife, at that time my girlfriend, she was a teacher in New Brunswick, and she advanced me the money to finish my medical school tuition. ...

KP: It sounds like it was a big help.

NR: It sure was.

KP: You were born in Brooklyn. How long did your family live in Brooklyn?

NR: ... Well, we lived there 'til ... I was twelve. I went to elementary school in Brooklyn. ... I was born on Pennsylvania Avenue in Brooklyn, in East New York. ... In those days, the next station on the subway was New Lots Avenue. Of course, that was the boundary of Brooklyn. ... There, they ... developed further out into Long Island and those were the new lots that were developed, so, they called the avenue the New Lots Avenue. ... I lived on the Eastern Parkway. It was very nice. I went to PS 167. I can recall, as a youngster, in kindergarten, marching in a parade with the Kaiser in effigy. This was during World War I, and, in 1924, when I graduated from elementary school, my father's business had moved from Brooklyn to Jersey City, so, we then moved to what we thought was Jersey City. It turned out to be Bayonne. So, I went to Bayonne High School and I graduated from Bayonne High School in 1928.

KP: In one of the news clippings that Special Collections had on you, you talked about an incident that happened when you were very young that stimulated your interest in a medical career. Could you talk about that?

NR: ... Scott and I were just talking about that. I have a brother, Alan, who was the Class of 1942 at Rutgers. He is now retired. He teaches political science at Newark. He was the assistant director at the American Civil Liberties Union. ... Alan was an infant, one-year-old, and we were living on Union Street at that time. ... I was awakened about midnight, and I heard the doorbell ring, and my mother answered the doorbell, crying hysterically. Our family doctor, Dr. Wyman, came in, and my mother, hysterical, said, "Doctor, save my baby, save my baby." ... I remember Dr. Wyman saying, "Now, mother, just don't worry, we'll take good care of your baby. It's going to be all right." I didn't know what happened. ... The next morning, the baby was fine. So, I was ten-years-old and I said, "You know, this might be a nice way to live. You're helping people." ... I didn't know whether I wanted to be a rabbi or a doctor. I wanted to help people. That's what you do, relieve pain and suffering. I was interested in science as a youngster. So, I said, "This is a good way to shape my career," and I never hesitated from that moment on. I ... was focused from that time on.

KP: How observant was your family?

NR: At that time, they were not observant. By observant, I mean we went ... to the holidays. ...

KP: Did they keep a kosher household?

NR: Oh, yes. They were ... orthodox Russian Jewish people and kept ... all the laws, but, they didn't follow the traditions. They were part of the Socialist group. They were interested more in the working class type of thing. ... My mother belonged to very fine organizations that were not connected with synagogues or temples, but, were cultural organizations. All our friends were the same group of people. ... It wasn't until we got to Bayonne that we joined the synagogue there. ... That's where I was bar mitzvahed. I can tell a very interesting story about that. I'm the oldest of three brothers, one has passed away, but, my mother, of course, was very proud of her first born son, and, when I was being prepared for bar mitzvah, ... I had to give a speech, and my mother thought it might be a very good idea if her son did something different. So, I had to give my speech in Hebrew. ... The next day, I had to give an English speech. I'll never forget that experience. ... I would say since I was bar mitzvahed, or from that period of time, I've been actively involved with my religion and my temple activities. We've always joined a temple, and, of course, I was very fortunate when I came to New Brunswick and fell in love with my wife, whose family had been members of the Anshe Emeth Temple for ... about five generations here.

KP: You mentioned that your family was involved in a lot of the working class circles and Socialist organizations. Were there any specific organizations?

NR: ... They belonged to a couple of cultural societies where they read books. They discussed current events. My mother's friends were schoolteachers. So, it was a middle class ... family, close family. ... Three uncles and my other aunt all lived on one square block in Brooklyn.

KP: So, you had a lot of family.

NR: So, a lot of family going on, all my cousins.

KP: What language did you speak in the house? Did you speak any Yiddish?

NR: No, my mother and father did at times, particularly if the maid was there and they didn't want her to hear. ... I spoke, even to this day, a little fraction of Yiddish.

KP: Did your parents read the Bible?

NR: Not as a rule, not as a rule. ... I don't recall.

KP: Were your parents long-standing Democrats? You have memories not only of the 1930s elections, but also, the 1920s elections.

NR: Yes, they were all Democrats.

KP: So, they were for Al Smith.

NR: Oh, yes, sure. First one I voted for was Franklin Roosevelt, '32. That was my ... first vote.

SC: So, what were your feelings toward Hoover?

NR: Wow, well, he ruined the United States.

KP: You mentioned that, at a very early age, you wanted to be a doctor. Can you perhaps reflect on your elementary school education, and, also, your high school education, in terms of the teachers you remember or any particular activities you participated in?

NR: Well, that's interesting. In elementary school, ... like so many young people, ... I did very well and ... I skipped. ... They had a rapid advance system in New York, so, I skipped two years. I graduated ... elementary school at the age of twelve. ... In high school, ... I went to Bayonne High School, which is an average high school. ... I had excellent training. We had, of course, two groups. You had the commercial group or the college prep group and I was in the college prep group. ... We had good teachers, but, the one teacher that really shaped my life, or played a very critical role in my life, was Miss Jane Spargo, who was a geometry teacher. One of my weak subjects in elementary school was arithmetic. ... I won't say I'm a philosophical sort of man, but, I'm not into absolutes. I hate things that are, "This point is right and a little bit is wrong." ... I like to think in broad terms rather than specifics. So, when arithmetic came up, I had trouble. When I got to high school, the first year was elementary algebra and I was lost. I got through that all right, but, then, I started the second year in intermediate algebra, and that was much more difficult, and I was completely lost. ... I had never failed. ... I was always a good student, a star student, and I had an average of fifty-five ... in my algebra course. ... I came home and told my folks that I was going

to fail. I never failed anything. ... I got my report card, and I got an eighty, and it was a mistake. I knew what I had. So, I went up to Miss Spargo and I said to her, "Miss Spargo, there must be some mistake here. My average is a fifty-five and you've given me an eighty." ... She said to me, "Norman, I know your average was fifty-five. I think you can do eighty work. You show me." I went home, took out my elementary algebra, now I was a year older, and I sat down and reread the whole book, and it made sense to me. Following that, my intermediate algebra, and my geometry, and trigonometry, and two years of math at Rutgers went without any trouble. So, I always attribute it to her and making sure that I got through that critical time. She was a good teacher.

KP: What activities did you take part in during high school?

NR: ... I liked sports, but, I never played a ... sport. I belonged to the usual, history club, and the civics club, and that sort of thing. We had a very nice club at the synagogue ... where I was bar mitzvahed. We had a group called the Macabees which were all the high school boys who belonged and it was a nice social club. ... We'd have meetings and we'd have fun. ... I made some very good friends and one of the reasons I came to Rutgers for my college education was Alton Adler, who's a very well known trustee for Rutgers. He was a year ahead of me in high school, and he was captain of the basketball team and a very popular fellow, and he came here to Rutgers. So, I decided to come to Rutgers. ... We had a very nice group of people that we were very friendly with, but, another thing happened. My third year in high school, ... my family moved to Jersey City. ... My father should be close to his business, and while I was just a year from graduation, I wasn't going to change, so, I continued my last year in Bayonne. ... I lost some of the contacts, the social contacts, ... and then, when I came to Jersey City and came down to Rutgers, to college, I never really had developed any contacts in Jersey City. My family lived there for thirty-five years and they were very well known in Jersey City.

KP: But, you were closer to your Bayonne circle of friends.

NR: Oh, yes.

KP: You mentioned living in an apartment house in Bayonne.

NR: ... A two family house.

KP: What was your neighborhood like?

NR: Oh, lovely. My mother, I'll never forget this, she had ... been apartment hunting, or house hunting, with a real estate man from Jersey City. ... She was a particular lady, wanted things to be nice, and she came back and she told us, "Oh, we have a lovely house. It's opposite a park and it's opposite tennis courts and fountains," and we moved to this area and it was everything you wanted. It had the county park, and we had a whole square block of maybe sixteen tennis courts and walks, and we had Newark Bay there, and everything was green and entirely different from Brooklyn. ... This was for the summer, July, and then came Labor Day, and I had to go to high school. So, I took my ... transcript from my elementary school and I went to the high school in Jersey City. I took it to the high school, and I walked in with my transcript, and I said, "I want to register for high school,"

and she looks at my address, 1018 Boulevard, and she says, "You don't live in Jersey City. You live in Bayonne. You've got to go to Bayonne High School."

KP: Was Jersey City High School viewed as a better high school?

NR: Well, ... I would have probably gone to another school, called Lincoln High School, which was closer to where we lived in Jersey City, which was the outstanding high school in Jersey City at that time, but, I never went there. My brothers went there. ... The living then was nice. It was, of course, in the good days, this was '24 through '28, and everything was fine. ... We didn't worry about anything until the crash came in '29.

KP: You mentioned you went to camps. Did you go to Jewish summer camp and do you remember the camps' names?

NR: Yes, Camp Scodale, Camp Tioga, those are the two I can remember.

KP: It sounds like you went to the Catskills.

NR: No, we didn't. ... As a matter-of-fact, we went to Pennsylvania, ... to Honesdale, Pennsylvania. ... The reason we went there, ... when I went to camp for the first time, I was about twelve. My brother, Sidney, was about nine. ... We were at camp in Scodale, which is in ... Wayne County, Pennsylvania, and my mother found a very nice hotel, a kosher hotel, ... in those days, that was important, ... right outside of Honesdale, which was about twenty miles from the camp, and she and my youngest brother would spend the summers there, and my father would come for the weekend and he was able to visit us at camp, which was close by. So, we never stayed in the Catskills. We always stayed in Honesdale, Pennsylvania.

KP: Did your parents ever go on any extended vacations when you were growing up?

NR: No, I don't recall any. It was camp every year, really. ... What happened was, after a year or two of camp, we liked the hotel very much. We made many friends and we brought family up there, my cousins came up. So, we spent several summers there and, indeed, during the time I was going to medical school, I worked several summers as a waiter at the hotel to pay my tuition.

KP: How did your family feel about Zionism?

NR: Very strongly, very strongly. I can recall having what we call now the ... box, that was the ... Zionist Appeal Box, and all of our coins went in that box. ... They were very strong Zionists.

KP: For someone who has lived and who grew up in Hudson County, I wanted to ask you about Frank Hague. Do you have any perspectives on that, particularly since your father had a business in Jersey City?

NR: ... My mother ... and the family belonged to a synagogue, Temple Emmanuel, that fought Hague back in the '30s, when Hague said he was the law, you know, ... "I am the law." ... Norman

Thomas came to speak, and he prevented him from speaking, and our rabbi was a very militant political activist. ... Many people thought he was a Communist. He was not. He was the man that bar mitzvahed me. ... He came from Bayonne to Jersey City at about the same time that the family had moved and he was our rabbi in Bayonne and ... our rabbi in Jersey City. ... The family was intensely anti-Hague. ... We were members of this congregation which used to have the high holidays in the Jewish community center. ... Of course, the synagogue was a kind of small, modest, little place. ... After several years, Hague, through his influence, denied us the use of the community center for our holidays. So, we were very, very anti-Hague. I was brought up on that.

KP: You mentioned your rabbi was very sympathetic to Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party.

NR: Yes, I wouldn't say Norman Thomas. I mentioned ... Norman Thomas because he was that incident that everybody knows about, see. ... Our rabbi was an unfortunate man. He was a brilliant man, but, he could not relate to people. He loved my mother and father, and they were his great supporters, and they were presidents of the congregation for many, many years and ran it, but, he was a great influence on my life, because, after ... I was bar mitzvahed. ... I spent four years with, actually, three girls and myself in the class, and we went right up through the Talmud, and the Mishna, the Torah, ... the treatises of the Jewish religion. So, I had a fairly good training, very good training with the Rabbi.

KP: You mentioned that your father was very despondent when he lost his fortune. Did you have to move because of it?

NR: Yes, several times. ...

KP: Did your mother ever work?

NR: No, she never did. She was a ... housewife.

KP: You mentioned, also, the pairing of the two family businesses. How did the other family business do?

NR: ... It was embroidery, the embroidery business.

KP: Yes, the embroidery business, how did they make out?

NR: Oh, about the same thing. ... As a matter-of-fact, one of my cousins became a stockbroker in those days, and, of course, he really ... represented most of the family's interest in the market, and, through him, everything went down the drain. He was a graduate of Columbia in 1923 and he went into the market, which, of course, was a different story than what we have today. ...

KP: I take it some of the stock was bought on margin, it sounds like.

NR: Oh, sure. As a matter-of-fact, it's very interesting, when my father passed away, he left everything to my mother. ... The three of us, three brothers, supported my mother all through her

life. When she passed away, she left one of my daughters, in her will, "I leave all my stocks to my granddaughter, Lois," and my brother, Sidney, he was an important attorney, called me up, and he said, "Norm, ... the total value of the stocks is \$24." ... We never let my mother know exactly what she had, because we were supporting her and she thought that she was living off the income from my father's investments.

KP: But, in fact ...

NR: There was none.

KP: You alluded earlier to one reason why you came to Rutgers. Did you consider any other schools?

NR: Yes, that's another interesting story. I had a friend by the name of ... Manny Reifler. He was a classmate of mine in Bayonne, and he was a little older than I, and I was the oldest of my three brothers, but, I was somewhat naive, and I looked upon Manny as a sort of an older brother type, even though we were in the same class. ... We wanted to go to the University of Pennsylvania and we applied there. I got in and he didn't. ... He finally ended up at Syracuse. I didn't want to go any more than one hundred miles from home in Jersey City. ... Syracuse was a six-hour train ride in those days, so, that was too far to go. ... Frankly, I was frightened to go to Philadelphia ... to a big university at the age of sixteen by myself. So, I went to ... the principal of the high school, Francis Brick, and I told him that I wanted to go to a college that was somewhere within fifty or sixty miles of Jersey City and that gave you a good pre-medical training, and he said, "Well," he said, "one of the very best is Rutgers." ... I had this friend of mine, Al Adler, here, so, I took my transcript and I came down. I went to the Registrar's office, and I gave my transcript to him, and he said, "You can come here if you want." ...

KP: Had you considered any other schools, like Columbia?

NR: No, just Penn. I thought of Columbia. ... NYU was a sort of safe school, because I could get into NYU. ... I mean, the Ivy Leagues were, in those days, ... really restricted, very, very seriously.

KP: You really thought that your chances in the Ivy League were slim?

NR: That's right. In high school, you know, I was never top of my class. I was always a good student, you know, a very good student, but, I never was really on top of the class where ... I would be recommended for Columbia or the other schools. ... The only schools in the Ivy League that I thought of ... was Columbia, and I wrote that off because that was New York and I knew New York, and the only other was Penn, because my friend was going there, or had planned to go there. So, I ended up here and it was the best thing that happened to me.

KP: Were you initiated as a freshman at Rutgers in a class initiation?

NR: Oh, yes, you mean the freshman week? ... In those days, it was a typical college experience where we had a lot of freshman-sophomore rivalries. We had banquets, and we would try to disturb each others parties.

KP: In fact, there were some epic clashes.

NR: Well, I'll tell you, there were some. ... Well, I could relate many, many stories, one is a sad one. In those days, we had what you called egg rush. ... That was the last day in May. ... The freshman all gathered down on ... lower George Street, just before where George Street and College Avenue come together, and then, we had to run up College Avenue and get pelted with rotten eggs by the sophomores, which were on two sides of the street, or else you could swim the little canal, and you could walk back. So, some people ran and got pelted and other people jumped into the canal, and swam, and went the other way. The day after the egg rush, I didn't know this, I got a telephone call from my mother, hysterical, and I said, "What happened?" She picked up the *New York Times* and here's a headline, "Rutgers Freshman Dies, Drowns in Canal During ... Egg Rush." ... The name was there. I lived at 31 Gifford Avenue. This was 21 Gifford Avenue. I never knew that there was another classmate who lived down the street from me.

KP: Oh, you did not know him?

NR: No, he belonged to a different fraternity and it was a different group of people. I never knew him, but, he lived on the same street in Jersey City that I did. So, that was a sad thing. ... He tried to swim the canal and drowned. He couldn't swim. We had a period ... when the sophomores would give you a series of rules and you had to obey them. You had to put your socks outside your pants, you had to wear a freshman dink, you had to say, "Hello," to everybody, you got out of the way when ... upper classmen walked down the street, you had to give them priority, and you had a handbook that had all these rules in it. Then, they had what they called a Proc Rush. They would have a proclamation, and behind what is now Milledoler Hall, in the parking area, was this sort of a play area, and they had a big pole there, and, on top of the pole, they would nail in this proclamation. ... They would cover it with barbed wire and cover it with grease, and then, the freshman would try to climb up this pole and take down the proclamation. ... If they could take it down, they didn't have to wear the dinks, and they didn't have to have their ... socks out, and so forth, and, of course, you had to do this within a certain period of time. If they gave us all day and put us up on the top, you couldn't have taken this down. It was a lot of fun and melee and I remember standing at the foot of the pole and supporting people who were trying to climb up. ... One of the fellows up there halfway slid down and he hit me, fell on top of me and knocked the air out of me for a few moments, then, I got up, and this redheaded fellow was there, and he says, "My name's Charlie Baltin, what's yours?" ... Charlie and I remained friends. ... He was a patient of mine up ... until he died.

KP: That tradition seems to have been a long-standing one. We have interviewed a number of people who remember that, the Rutgers Hello tradition.

NR: That's right. That was a great tradition. ... Of course, when we had the ... freshman banquet and sophomore banquet, the sophomores came and took the president of the class, and, I guess, one

or two of the other officers, and took him out on one of these little railroad lines, and tied him to the telegraph post, and left them there, and they were gone for about two days.

KP: You were pre-med going into college.

NR: Yes, it was called biological science, is what we enrolled in.

KP: You were very fond of a lot of your professors.

NR: I sure was.

KP: You noted on the survey that Professor Nelson was your favorite professor and, in the *Rutgers Alumni Magazine*, you listed a number of professors. Could you perhaps speak a little about Professor Nelson and about your courses here and your professors?

NR: ... First of all, ... we started 110 pre-medical students, biological science students. ... Few of them went on to careers in biology, but, they all were, for the most part, pre-medical. We graduated twenty-five. Twenty-three went on to medical school. They all did ... well. It was very ... heavily loaded in science, which is one of the things which I think was unfortunate, because we didn't have the humanities that we should have had. I think I took ninety out of one hundred and twenty credits in pure, hard sciences. ... We had biology, and we had three years of chemistry and physics, and three years of mathematics, and, of course, a lot of biology. We took all the courses in biology, but, Professor Nelson was my mentor, and ... I would consider him the most important person here, so far as my own training was concerned. He was a very interesting man. His father was a professor of biology before him, Julius Nelson, and Thurlow was a Rutgers College graduate, and went on to get his Ph.D., I think, at the University of Wisconsin, came back here. His father had passed away when I came to study, ... and Thurlow was professor of biology and head of the Department of Biology. He had a stammer in public. ... It was difficult for him to give lectures to a large class. Even in the laboratory, it was difficult, but, when you got him one-on-one, he was a fountain of knowledge, and you could relate very well to him. Well, we all took, as pre-medical students, a course in the first semester of our junior year in animal parasitology. It was our first experience in medicine, in a sense, because we studied all about worms that produced disease, leishmaniasis, ... that were related to actual medical disease, so that students took it. ... At one time, I found it to be so fascinating, I got a very good grade in it, I was thinking of going for a Ph.D. rather than an MD and be a parasitologist. It was September of 1931, the beginning of my senior year, and I got a job as an undergraduate assistant in biology, cleaning tubes and that sort of thing. The second half ... of my junior year, Dr. Nelson took a sabbatical and he went to London. He was quite an authority on entomology. He spent a couple of weeks at the London School of Tropical Medicine and he learned a great deal more about it. This is a world famous school. I was preparing a laboratory for the classes. I came down a couple of days early, before classes began, and Thurlow was in the lab, and we were chatting, and he was telling me about his experience at the London School of Tropical Medicine, and he said, "You know, Norman, ... I've learned so much, I've seen so much, I really feel I could teach the course better now." Well, you know, I had some electives, and he was the man that was going to recommend me to medical school, ... and I had the greatest respect for him, and I wanted to do parasitology, so, I said, "You know, I'd like to take a course under you in

advanced parasitology." He said, "Let me think about it," and, a day or two later, he called in four of us. He called Phil Kunderman, Bob Hardy, ... Nat Adleman, Ted Bayles, and myself, and we were all good students. It was a seminar course. He would give it on Monday and Thursday afternoons from four to six. ... We came in, the first session, the four of us, it was in New Jersey Hall, and he had tea and cookies waiting, because he had learned this in England. So, we sat down, and we started to have tea and cookies, and we started to talk, and it was nothing but a biological bull session, for two hours. This man had so much to say about science, about biology, about education, he was a fountain of knowledge, but, on a one-on-one, or a four-to-one, situation, and then, about twenty minutes to six, he'd say, "Gentlemen," he was very forward, "Gentlemen, we haven't looked at any slides yet." He would stick in a slide that he brought back from London, and he'd tell us about it, and, of course, ... we had to write papers and do our research, laboratory work, and write the papers, and the four of us did this for one semester. ... I don't know whatever happened to that course, but, of the four of us, Ted Bayles ended up as a professor of medicine at Harvard, Bob Hardy ended up as professor of ophthalmology at Temple, Nat Adleman was one of the outstanding students at Columbia and he was an ears, nose, and throat specialist at Mount Sinai, and I was teaching medicine here for many years. So, it was really a stellar group and that's one experience I'll never forget.

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NR: ... There was a fellow by the name of William Cole, professor of physiology. ... Cole was a very dour type, sarcastic type. ... His lectures were rather dull, all factual stuff, but, a good teacher, and he said, "There'll be no announced exams in my class. Whenever I feel like giving an exam, I'll give an exam." This was the second semester of our sophomore year. ... I tried to analyze, psychologically, how people would behave, and I said, "You know, if I wanted to be a SOB, when would I give an exam to these kids? Well, the junior prom was a big, big weekend. Monday, eight o'clock was physiology. If I was to give an exam, I'd give it Monday, eight o'clock, ... after prom weekend." So, I didn't go to the junior prom. I went home and studied, reviewed my notes. Eight o'clock in the morning, there was the exam, all the students were yelling, and I got a ninety-six on the exam. ... The second one was after the Easter recess, ... he did the same thing. ... You know what was interesting, when I went to apply to medical school, I got in to several medical schools, and one of them was Yale, and he had a contact with Yale, Dr. Cole, so, I went to ask him for a recommendation, and he looked at the book, and he said, "You did very well in my course, Reitman." So, he gave me a letter of recommendation. Then, there were others. There was Dr. Chrysler. ... He was a botanist. He was a professor of Botany, little, short gentleman, loved the flowers, just, you know, was almost erotic about flowers. ... He would teach that course. He taught histology, too, very good. ... Even though they were professors, they were essentially teachers. Their research was not like today, where everybody is publishing or perishing. They were good teachers, that was their job, to teach, and they were available for questions. Another one was Jim Allison, taught Biochemistry. Jim was a sweet darling. At that time, I was very heavily involved with my girlfriend, now my wife, and we used to have dates on Sunday nights, and I'd come in on Monday mornings, ... he also had surprise exams. ... I'd come in, like, half an hour late, and the class was scribbling down, and he'd say, "Well, Norman," he says, "read your book." So, I read my book, and every time there was a surprise exam, I ... came in late. So, when I took my final exam, I

got a ninety-six on the final exam, and that was my grade for the course. ... He ended up being my patient, years later. ... There were people like those and there were others. I'll never forget, I think it was Bill Murray who was a professor of Microbiology. ... I had a roommate at the fraternity house who was ... a handsome man, ... and this fellow comes to see me one day, and he's got a little urethral discharge. ... He says, "What do you think I've got, Norm?" and I don't know, but, you know, here, I'm a junior in college, and I'm taking bacteriology, so, I said, "I'll take it to the lab." I took it, made a smear of it, ... brought it down to the microbiology lab, stained it, and it was diplococcus. So, I called Dr. Murray and I said, "Dr. Murray, look at this slide." He said, "Son," he said, "Do you have gonorrhea?" Sure enough, this Harry had gonorrhea and, in those days, it wasn't easy to treat.

KP: You did not have penicillin.

NR: No, we had nothing. ... Earle Perkins taught zoology, ... another fine fellow. ... I remember another interesting experience. When it came time for applying to medical school, you had to see Dr. Nelson. He was the head of the department. He would write the recommendations. ... You would come in and he would say, "Well, young man," or Norman, "where have you decided to apply?" and you'd give him your list, and he would look down the list, and he'd say, "Well, ... this'll be easy for you," "you'll have a little trouble here," and so forth, but, he'd take his pencil and he'd point to one. ... You'd list ten schools, and that pencil would hit one school, and that's where you got in.

KP: What school did he point to?

NR: Well, NYU, no, ... he pointed to Yale, ... but, I got into five medical schools.

SC: Why did you choose NYU?

NR: Money. It was 1932, in the depths of the Depression. I could live at home. ... One was Jefferson, in Philadelphia. There was Rush, in Chicago, Yale, in New Haven, Columbia, which put me on a waiting list, and NYU, and, interestingly enough, this is an interesting story, when I went to NYU for my interview, ... I had to appear before a committee. ... One gentleman asked me, "Apparently, Dr. Nelson thinks pretty highly of you. ... Well, suppose you got into NYU and Columbia in the same day, you opened up your mailbox tomorrow and you had admissions to both schools. Where would you go?" I couldn't say Columbia, so, of course, I said, "NYU." So, he said, "Why?" I said, "Well, because I'd have to live at home and it was very difficult for me to commute from Jersey City to uptown New York, where it was much easier to go to 26th Street," and he looked at me, he says, "Would you like to come to New York University?" to Bellevue, it was called. I said, "Yes." He said, "Okay, you're admitted." Just like that. ... He opened the door, and he called in his secretary, and he said, "Give this young man a letter of admission," and there were all these other students waiting for admission, all with their Phi Beta Kappa keys. Eighty-five percent of our class was Phi Beta Kappa at medical school. ...

KP: From what I have heard, there was not quite the same grade inflation, so, it was tough to get an A.

NR: Oh, yes. ... You had to work for your grades, no question about it, but, ... and I've told this to my children and grandchildren, the four best years of one's life are those four years in college, any college, because that's when you grow up. When you consider it, you enter as an unsophisticated, naive, wet-behind-the-ears type of person, and, when you've graduated, you may not have learned a great deal of facts, but, you've become an adult. You've learned ... what the world's about. Some people could ... grow older a little later, but, those four years were the years I grew up. I came here as a wet-behind-the-ears youngster. ...

KP: You were only sixteen. You were really young.

NR: That's right, when I went to college, ... I met my wife here, I fell in love here. I loved the community, I loved the college, and I really felt that I grew up here. It was one of the four most valuable years of my life.

KP: Could you talk about how you met your wife?

NR: It's a very interesting story. The first two years, I was sixteen when I came here, and I knew I wanted to be a doctor, and I knew no one was going ... to get me into medical school except Norman Reitman, and I was not one of these great social types. I liked the boys, I liked the fraternities, and I belonged to a fraternity, and I had many friends, but, I was sort of shy. I never went out very much, one or two dates, occasionally. ... Really, I loved to study. My grandson is that way. ... My big brother at the fraternity, a fellow named Lester Sherwood, Class of 1930, a wonderful fellow, nice fellow, and we were very friendly, I was a freshman, he was a junior, and we roomed together for two years. He graduated in June of '30 and he loved football. He came down for Rutgers football games his whole life. He died about ten years ago, and he was down here for a football game, and we had dinner at the fraternity house, and we were sitting around talking, and he said to me, ... "You know, Norman, there's more to life than books and grades." He said, ... "Have you met any girls? Have you gone out?" Well, I said, "Occasionally." He said, "You know," he says, "you've got to start going out. ... Next week is a big football weekend." ... You don't realize it, but, in those days, the college was what you see on College Avenue, that's all it was. ... The fraternities were all together here and we used to play football at Nelson Field, where the Records Hall is. ... He says, "We have this big fall weekend, we're playing Lehigh," or Lafayette, "and we're having dinner at the fraternity house, and we're having a house party. I want to see you here with a date. Don't disappoint me." Well, that was on Saturday, November the 1st, 1930. Where am I going to get a date? Well, Sunday afternoon, the temple here in New Brunswick, Anshe Emeth Temple, had a mixer with the girls from what was then called New Jersey College for Women, NJC, and Rutgers. So, I figured, well, I'd get a date. So, I went over there, and, of course, when we walked in, I got a number. The girl got a number and the idea was that, whatever your number was, you find the girl with the same number and that was your date for the little mixer. I came in, and I took a look at the number, and I saw the girl with the number, and I wasn't attracted to her, so, I put the number in my pocket. ... Over in the corner was this pretty little girl surrounded by about a half a dozen fellows saying, "Oh, I've got your number, I've got your number, I've got your number." So, I walked over to her and I said, "Look, I don't pretend to have your number, but, will you let me have a dance." ... She said, "Sure," so, ... I was determined to get that date. We

danced right around the dance floor once, and I said to her, "How would you like to come to a football game next Saturday, and have dinner at the fraternity house, and stay for the house party?" ... You know what she said to me? "I'll have to ask my mother." That sold me on her. ... We courted for eight years, and we got married when I started practice in 1938, and, thank God, we're still together.

KP: That is a great story. Scott and other students have read the *Targums* of the '20s, and '30s, and '40s and you had a really remarkable social life.

NR: ... Oh, they were lovely. Of course, after I met Syril, you know, I went to the prom, I went to the Military Ball, the Junior Prom, and they were great fun. I mean, ... girls came up from New York to the fraternity house. ... We had to shack up someplace else. ... It was a wonderful thing. We used to have a lovely party over at Woodlawn that Jim Nelson gave us, called Jimmy's Dances, and, there, you had to come formal. In those days, formal was a dark jacket and ... white flannels and the girls had to wear lovely dresses. ... He had lanterns outside his garden, he had a beautiful rose garden, ... it was everything you'd ... want for a romantic evening. ... The proms were the same way. I mean, ... there were certain dates, the Junior Prom, the Senior Ball, the Military Ball, the Sophomore Hop, those were ... the big social events.

KP: You mentioned that you studied a lot, to the point where one of your fraternity brothers sort of said, "You need to take some time off." Were you viewed as a grinder?

NR: Well, ... I was viewed as a serious student. One of the things, I always had a fear I could never finish in time what I had to do, so, I always planned my work to do it ahead of time. As a result, ... we used to have an exam week, ... we were off for a week to prepare for it, and I'm in the fraternity house, and, every night, I went to the library. ... You couldn't study at the fraternity house, right, so, I had to use the library a great deal. ... I was out of the house, I'm studying, and, you know, the life in the fraternity house can be a very hectic thing. ... All these fellows are busy, and, when time came to study for the exams, I knew my stuff, because I had been through my notes and the books thoroughly, and I would say to the fellows, "Well, how about going to the movies tonight?" Everybody else was boning up for the exam and I'm going to the movies. ... But, I don't think I was known as a grinder.

KP: Was that term used at all?

NR: Oh, yes, grinder, absolutely. ... We had fellows like that, I can even name them to you. ... Of the 110 that started, I'd say, by the junior year, there were probably thirty left and, by the senior year, there were twenty-five.

KP: So, you got to be a very small group.

NR: Yes. We lived all over, you know. Some of them I've retained friendships with and many of them I haven't.

KP: You entered in 1928 when the country was still, in many ways, at the high water mark.

NR: Sure, the Jazz Age.

KP: Right, the Jazz Age. We interviewed a member of the Class of '25, Carl Heyer.

NR: Oh, yes.

KP: He had fond memories of the time he went to the speak-easy on Easton Avenue. Do you have any memories of the speakeasies?

NR: No, I don't. Again, I didn't do much drinking. ... I was too young for it. ... I remember, once, going to a speakeasy, not the Corner Tavern, but, it was at the corner of Hamilton Street and Louis Street. They used to have applejack. Of course, in those days, it was prohibited, you know. We had Prohibition. ... We'd have some applejack. ... I think I was there once and I didn't remember liking it. So, I really didn't start drinking until, I guess, I was in practice.

KP: You mentioned the Corner Tavern. Was that a speak-easy during Prohibition?

NR: Yes, ... it was a place where they had food and you could get applejack.

KP: You knew how to do it.

NR: Oh, yes, sure. ... There were fellows who came down, brought bottles down. Of course, one of our classmates, one of our fraternity brothers, was Bob Kreindler. Bob was the president of the Twenty-One Club, you know the famous Twenty-One Club? the eating club in New York, that was a speakeasy, see, Twenty-one West 52nd Street. I remember taking Milton, our son, and the whole family to the Twenty-One Club for dinner for Milton's 21st birthday, and Bob said, "Would you like to see the wine cellar?" ... He took us down there. ... See, you entered and everything was in the basement. ... There was this wall, and it was painted and repainted, so, he took a long, metal prong, and he went to the wall where there was nothing, and he pressed something, and, all of a sudden, this whole wall opened up, and then, you're in the wine cellar, which, of course, was the speakeasy.

KP: You mentioned you came to Rutgers with a chauffeur, and you could afford to join a fraternity, and you had a suite at Ford Hall.

NR: That's right.

KP: So, could you describe the suite, because you are the first to mention one?

NR: Well, the suite, first of all, the first room you came into was a study. ... The only thing I remember about that was that it had floor to ceiling windows and they still may have them. There were several windows there. ... Then, you had the bedroom behind it. No bathroom, you had the regular bathroom on the floor, but, to have a room for study, separately from your bedroom. ...

KP: So, you had no roommates?

NR: No roommates.

KP: So, this was your own suite.

NR: ... That's right.

KP: How much did you have to pay?

NR: 125 dollars.

KP: For the semester?

NR: Yes.

KP: You lived there your first year?

NR: I lived there for ... several months, and then, I became friendly with a fellow and moved in with him. Then, I went to the fraternity for the second semester of my freshman year. ... I really didn't live in the fraternity house until the beginning of my sophomore year.

KP: So, you stayed in Ford Hall, in your suite?

NR: Yes.

KP: What was the break where it became difficult? When did you father say he was in trouble?

NR: Well, it was not right away. The Crash occurred in October, 1929, at the beginning of my sophomore year. By the ... beginning of my senior year, I really was in trouble.

KP: So, really, your first three years, you were still fairly comfortable.

NR: Yes. ... We were okay.

KP: You mentioned joining the fraternity. What led you to join the fraternity that you joined?

NR: Well, two reasons. First of all, my friend, Alton Adler, was in the fraternity, and, in those days, you had Jewish fraternities and non-Jewish fraternities, and there was ... no mixing. Today, it's all one mix. There were three Jewish fraternities on the campus and the Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity had all the outstanding people. ... Of course, it had some of the athletes, the captain of the football team, some other football players, swimmers. It also had some very good scholars. Dave Moskowitz was the head of our fraternity, a very well known attorney. ... I liked the people, see. ... Of the three fraternities, there was a different personality to each one.

KP: What were the different personalities?

NR: Well, we represented the most sophisticated group. The people there, ... many of them came from New York or Brooklyn and they were New Yorkers. They couldn't wait for Friday afternoon to run back to the city for their social activities. I liked the weekends here, ... you know, with my own group. Then, they had the, what they called, OAT, became Tau Delta Phi, which had mostly townies, ... local boys who lived in New Brunswick. ... The other one, the SAM group, was another group, nice people, there're all nice, but, I would say our group was, perhaps, more sophisticated. ... I think the reason I joined was because of Al. He asked if I would like to join and I said, "Sure." I wanted to have a base in this sort of thing.

KP: Do you remember your initiation into the fraternity? Hell week was quite a week, as we have read in the *Targum*.

NR: Sure. Well, it was a week ... of hazing, there was a lot of physical punishment, but, a lot of it was making you do things just to keep you ... going, so that you got tired and you couldn't do some of the things, but, we had some very interesting experiences. For example, after a full day of working around the fraternity, and cleaning up, and doing this and that, it was about two o'clock in the morning, and the pledgemaster sent us, our class, out to bring back something by seven o'clock in the morning. ... I had to bring back a white, leghorn chicken and where are you going to find a white, leghorn chicken at two o'clock in the morning in New Brunswick? Well, the only thing I knew was the college farm. So, I went up with ... Gil Berkeley, who was my friend and fraternity brother, and we were together, and we went up there, and here was this, you know, big college farm with a lot of chicken coops. We ran into one, and we grabbed a chicken, and I can still see Gil putting it under his ... coat. He had big, long legs, and he played basketball, and he ran, because we didn't want to get caught. We got back to the house and we turned it over to the pledge master, "Here's the white, leghorn chicken." ... The head of the house, at that point, Bart Rudnick, turned to the cook and he said, "Well, look, here's a chicken, so, let's have some chicken salad or something of the sort." ... Apparently, the chicken was strutting all over the place, cackling all over the place as if he owned it, the fraternity house. ... The cook said to Bob, ... "You know, there's something about this chicken. There's a red ribbon, a scarlet ribbon, around it's neck. I never saw it before." So, Bob said, "Look, Norm, ... you'll take the chicken back tonight. Put it back in the hen-house." We get back there the following night and there's a guard with a rifle. ... So, we told him what happened, "We were being initiated and we took the chicken. We're returning the chicken." He said, "Don't you realize, you don't realize, but, this is the prize chicken." It was worth, in those days, a thousand dollars. They had something like five thousand chickens and we took the prize chicken. ... The hell week was a pretty tough week. They did the paddling and that sort of thing. ... It was one of those things you got through.

KP: You went to college when there was still mandatory chapel. Could you maybe reflect on how you felt about chapel and, also what it was like to be a Jew in a Protestant institution?

NR: Yes. ... I spent four years at Rutgers, and this was a church dominated college, and chapel was mandatory. I don't recall any instances of anti-Semitism, not one instance, from professors or from ... students. We lived our lives in the Jewish fraternity houses, but, we did mingle. We had inter-

fraternity council, and we mingled back and forth, and I never found one iota of it here. Chapel itself was Mondays and Thursdays at 12:15 and it was mostly for announcements. Dean of Men, Fraser Metzger, who was quite a person, would come in. He was a minister, and he would read a chapter from one of the Psalms, all non-denominational, and then, he read the announcements, and it was over in a half an hour. That was it, that was our chapel. ... Now, they had Sunday morning services, see, this was not compulsory, but, chapel was compulsory.

KP: You mentioned Dean Metzger. I have been told he could be a very stern figure.

NR: Well, he was a very, very stern figure. ... Until you knew him, you didn't realize what a fine person he was. I can tell you two stories, one was in 1939. My brother started as a freshman here in 1938, the ... year I started to practice. ... In 1939, my father said to me, "Norman, there's no money. If you want Alan to go to Rutgers, it's up to you." He had no scholarship, and ... one of the first jobs I got when I came back to practice was to work at the student health service, and, ... at that time, we had a lightweight football team, 150-pound football team, and they could use a doctor, and I could use the fresh air. This isn't the kind of practice I had later on, ... and so, I went out and was a doctor for the team. ... Of course, *gratis*, I was doing this, there was no money there. At the end of the year, we had a banquet, and Tom Kenneally, the coach, introduced me for a few words, and said, "You know, Doc here is a loyal Rutgers son, and he's given all his time and expertise for nothing, just because of the University." Fraser Metzger was present there, and, a week later, I got a nice letter from Dr. Clothier thanking me, and enclosed an honorarium for one hundred dollars. Well, '39 comes along, and here I am with my brother, and I thought I'd go to see Dean Metzger. He was Dean of Men, who handled these problems. ... I went up to see him and I explained the situation, ... that my brother ... finished his first year, but, there was no money to start in the second year, and could the University somehow help him, and he looked at Alan, looked at his record, he looked at me, and he says, "Well, I'm going to give him a scholarship, not on his record, but, on your record," and he gave him a scholarship all the way through. The other story involves Charlie Jurgensen, Charlie Jurgensen of the Class of 1931. Charlie came from Sargeantsville. Do you know where Sargeantsville is? It's outside of Flemington, between Flemington and Stockton. It's a wide spot in the road. His parents and his family were farmers, no one had gone to college. Charlie was a good student at Flemington High School and, apparently, he wanted to go to college. He wanted to be an engineer. So, the family got together the money, a little bit here, a little bit there, to send Charlie to Rutgers. Then, Charlie comes to Rutgers, and he goes in to Register, and he had the money that he brought in, and the Registrar said, "Well, young man, you're fifty dollars short." He says, "Well, I don't have anymore money." He said, "You can't get anymore money?" and he said, "No." "Well, then, you're going to have to withdraw. Go upstairs and see Dean Metzger to complete the papers and he'll withdraw you." So, he goes up to see Dean Metzger and Fraser Metzger said to him, "What's the problem?" He said, "Well, I've come here to ... enroll, but, I don't have enough money to enroll, and the Registrar says I have to come upstairs to withdraw," and Dr. Metzger said to him, ... "Well, how much is it?" ... He said, "Fifty dollars." He put his hand in his pocket, and took out fifty dollars, and says, "Young man, go downstairs and register." Charlie Jurgensen graduated, became an engineer, became vice-president of Delaval Turbine Company, one of the largest turbine companies in the world, and is one of the most loyal Rutgers alumni, was a member of the Board of Trustees, a member of the Board of Governors, has given many scholarships to the University. ... That was a wonderful story, and the other story I can tell

you about. Our fraternity, like all fraternities, was noisy. You know, we'd have a party, there was a lot of noise. This was the Depression and we had a woman across the street, a widow, who objected to the noise and that sort of thing. So, we had this party and noisy goings on, and she called up the police to register a complaint, and the police were going to raid us. ... She said there's liquor going on and this was during the ... Prohibition days. ... The police chief called up Fraser Metzger, because he's the Dean of Men, and says, "We're going to raid the house." So, Fraser Metzger said, ... "Look, I'm in bed and it takes me a little while to get dressed. Can you wait about a half an hour and I'll meet you in a half an hour, because I want to be there?" He immediately called up the fraternity and said, "I'm coming to raid your house with the police in thirty minutes. I don't want to see anything that I shouldn't see," and, sure enough, when he came in, ... everything was quiet. So, that was my impression of Dean Metzger. He was a very stern figure. He really was a very stern person and most people had a negative opinion of him.

KP: I have been told that sometimes he would refer to himself in the third person and refer to himself as the Dean.

NR: Yes, that sort of thing. ... It was a different world, eons different from what it is now, but, they had great principles.

KP: Fraternities really ran the school and ran student life in a way they do not today.

NR: Yes, that's right. ...

KP: Fraternities would often control the *Targum* and dominate the Student Council. Could you maybe talk about some of the bargaining that went on?

NR: ... Well, I wasn't involved with that, 'cause I was not a politician, I was a student. ... There were people in the fraternity who did that sort of thing. ... I was never involved. I knew that certain houses ran the *Targum* and certain houses ran the other activities. We had a lot of debating teams. A fellow named Richard Reager, who ... was a great teacher for public speaking, I never took his course, I wish I had, but, everybody who took his course became a ... great debater. ... Of course, college life, then, was very simple. ... Winants Hall was the center of college life. Everything was there, the cafeteria, the post office, the Registrar, and the other thing was, of course, Old Queens, everything was downstairs, but, ... it was nice. ... I was fortunate. I came here, I had four great years, and a lot of it due to the fact that I got a good education. I made some good friends, I fell in love, I'm still in love, and I've had a wonderful life. I came back to New Brunswick ... largely because of Rutgers.

KP: So, in a sense, you settled here because you enjoyed your college experience.

NR: Yes. ... When the time came, my first decision in my life, after saying I wanted to be a physician, was where was I going to practice, and, you know, Jersey City, I didn't want. I hated the political atmosphere in that area, although my folks were very well established there and that would've been great. I didn't want to be in Brooklyn or in the Bronx ... because I'd be a family doctor in these areas, and, at least, here my wife's family's known, and I knew the University, the

college, I knew a few people, so, I wasn't entirely unknown. ... In New Brunswick, in those days, it was a metropolis in microcosm, because ... it had education, ... it was a county seat, so, it had a very good business base, it had the legal profession here, it had good industry, we had, you know, several very large concerns ... here, so, it gave you a good base. I felt, you know, I was not going to establish my practice with the upper levels of society. It was going to be a blue-collar type of practice. This was where I could get it and the other thing, of course, my wife was a teacher here. She was teaching, so, when I started in, you know, I had absolutely zero money when I came here.

KP: You actually have never left, except when you were in the Army.

NR: ... Yes, that's right.

KP: Before leaving Rutgers, you had to take ROTC for two years.

NR: I didn't take it.

KP: You did not take it? How did you get exempt?

NR: ... I took physical education.

KP: Oh, you could use physical education?

NR: ... Yes, that's right.

KP: What struck me, when reading the *Targum*, was how conservative the students were, particularly in 1928 when the students were for Hoover. You could explain that in terms of prosperity, but, even in 1932, in the depths of the Depression, the majority of students in the *Targum* poll voted for Hoover.

NR: ... No, as I say, when I voted, which was '32, I voted for Roosevelt. ... Most of the people I knew voted for Roosevelt. Now, maybe it was the *Targum* group, you see. ...

KP: We were struck by that, even in '32.

NR: ... Rutgers never was a red-hot, liberal institution. It was a church dominated institution and it had very conservative values, good, strong, positive values, but, very conservative values. ... You go through the history of some of the crises we've had here with some of our professors, where even the trustees made bad decisions during the '50s, you know. ... Personally, the people I knew were absolutely liberal.

KP: Were there any Norman Thomas supporters?

NR: No, not here.

KP: Well, let me turn the questions over to Scott, since he is in medical school.

SC: What was the most difficult thing for you in medical school, in terms of your hardest courses and the most difficult things for you to deal with emotionally, in terms of seeing patients?

NR: ... The hardest course was probably Biochemistry and Physiology. ... This is at Bellevue, ... New York University School of Medicine. In those days, it was called Bellevue Hospital Medical College and everybody referred to it as Bellevue. ... This was, again, the '30s, where there was a change from the 19th Century philosophy of chemistry and physiology to the newer physiology and chemistry. ... We had a professor of chemistry, they brought him from the University of London, R. Keith Cannon. He was a physical chemist. You know I wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to know about the urine, I wanted to know about the blood, I wanted to know about the acids and bases. I wasn't interested in theoretical physical chemistry and he was teaching us principles of physical chemistry. So, that was a very hard course. ... The other thing was that we had a professor named Homer Smith, who was a professor of physiology, who was one of the early newer physiologists. He looked at physiology in a much more basic way and a lot of ... his experimental work involved mathematical formulae instead of general principles. They were getting down to this sort of thing. ... His concept was, of course, the way they taught it later on, but, in those days, no other medical school taught the ... advanced physiology that Homer Smith taught. Those were my two most difficult courses. As far as emotionally, I loved medical school. I disliked NYU, but, I loved medical school.

SC: Why did you dislike NYU?

NR: It was the antithesis of Rutgers. Where, here, I looked out the window, I saw green grass and I saw the Raritan River, when I looked out on 26th Street, all I saw was another big, tall building and trucks rumbling by. Although, it was very interesting, when I took physical diagnosis, you know, when you start to learn, ... this is the heart sounds and the breath sounds with the stethoscope, the clinic was on 26th Street and First Avenue and First Avenue is an avenue full of trucks. You had to learn how to differentiate heart sounds and murmurs with the background of all this noise, so that, when you listened without the noisy background, it sounded very clear to you. So, in one respect, it was okay, but, ... as you probably realized from our discussion, this was a warm sort of friendly place. It was a smaller group of people and my ... relationships were all positive. There are many more stories I could tell you about the University, ... but, New York University was just the opposite. You were a number, you came in, the Dean greeted us, and he says, "Gentlemen," we had to have five girls in the class, out of the class of 125, he said, "look around you," he says, "ten percent of you will be gone next year." That was the way he greeted us. When my grandson entered Tufts Medical School and the Dean met them, he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, one thing I'm going to tell you is that all of you are going to graduate," and I used to say, when my son, ... Milton, was going to medical school, "The only way you can flunk out of medical school is to work hard at it," because they did everything that they ... could to keep students in the medical school.

KP: But, not in your era?

NR: In my era, no. They were very, very rough. ... This occurred throughout the country because kids got in who shouldn't have gotten in. We had a kid by the name of Phil Rosenbaum from Princeton who lasted two months at NYU. He couldn't take it.

SC: What was the biggest difference you saw between civilian medicine and the medicine you experienced in the Army?

NR: Well, I had an interesting Army experience. In 1936, when I graduated from medical school, there was a little blurb in the *AMA Journal* about the formation of the American Board of Internal Medicine. This was not heard of. ... You graduated, you got a degree, ... a Medical Doctor's degree, you took your state licensing examination, you practiced medicine. Very few people did a whole lot. I saw that thing and I'm one of these people that feel I can't be anything if I don't have the qualifications, if I don't have the ... records of it. ... I knew I wanted to do internal medicine at the time, so that I looked at the requirements, and it said, "Well, you had to have two years of hospital experience and you got to be in practice three years," or five years, "and you had to be approved to take the examination." So, I did my hospital work with that in mind, and I ... took the examination in '43, and I became the youngest certified internist in central New Jersey. ...

SC: What did you think the difference was between Army medicine and your practice?

NR: Oh, yes. ... I was certified in internal medicine in 1943. I did not go into military service until 1943, and I knew that my time was approaching, I was looking for the best deal I could get. So, I went down to Washington, it was '43, and I went to see the people at the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery of the Navy, the Surgeon General of the Army Medical Department. ... In those days, they had a separate division called the Army Air Corps, the medical department of the Army Air Corps. It was the Army, it wasn't the Air Force. ... They all saw that I had this record. ... I said, "What will I be doing in the Army, in the Navy?" They said, "Well, in the Navy, you know, you'll do medicine." I called up a friend of mine who was at the naval hospital in ... Norfolk and he says, "Forget it," he says, "those certifications mean nothing. Today, you are here, tomorrow, you'll be on a ship in the Pacific." Well, when I went to the Army Medical Department, ... they could promise me nothing. When I went to the Air Corps, this young lieutenant colonel interviewed me, and I kept telling him that I was certified in internal medicine and that I wanted to do internal medicine. He said, "Oh, don't worry, you'll be at an ... Air Corps hospital. You'll do nothing but internal medicine." He says, "With your credits, you're going to do just hospital work." So, I kept on telling him about this board examination and, finally, he says to me, "Doctor, what's the number of your certificate?" and I said, "2,014." He says, "I hold certificate number seven." He was Howard Rusk, the ... rehabilitation fellow, and he got his start in the Army. He was the one who interviewed me, so that I went to the Air Corps and it was just as Howard Rusk said. ... The first assignment, after getting training, was at Dale Marry Field in Tallahassee, where I assisted the Chief of Medicine, then, I went to Lake Charles, where I was Chief of Medicine, and then, I went overseas where I was Chief of Medicine. So, my medical experience was all hospital administrative experience. I had no combat experience. As a matter-of-fact, when I was in Fairbanks, Alaska, where I went overseas, I was geographically further away from any combat than people in New Jersey.

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KP: When you started medical school and during your early years of practice, medicine could not do as much for people as it can do today.

NR: When I look back, now, in 1997, to the medicine that existed in 1936 when I graduated as a physician, it was the Dark Ages. It was the Dark Ages. The word antibiotic had not been coined. No one ever heard of it. People died of pneumonia. I can recall patients developing what we call now cellulitis, ... an infection of the arm, and you find these streaks going in the arm, and you know what the recommended treatment was? Disarticulation, you cut the arm off. If you wanted to live, you cut the arm off. ... Infection was a terrible thing and there was no way to combat it, let alone use mercurochrome or iodine, that sort of thing. ... I can recall, ... in the 1930s, Dr. (Cutler?), who was professor of surgery at Harvard, was one of the early cardiac surgeons. I use that term advisedly. He operated on three patients with rheumatic mitral stenosis, rheumatic heart disease, and three of them died, and he says, "Gentlemen," he says, "of all the organs in the body, the heart is not amenable to surgery. Don't think you can operate on the heart," and, in 1946 and '47, they started operating on the heart. Incidentally, the very first heart operation was done by a Rutgers graduate, Dr. Charles Bailey, Class of 1930. In 1947, he was the first one to open up a valve in ... a patient with rheumatic heart disease. ... Everybody was afraid to touch it, but, see, during the war, surgeons began to have experience with wounds which infected the heart. ... If there's been a shrapnel wound and the heart has been lacerated, they had to sew it up, and they found these patients didn't die, so that people began to think that, maybe, the heart was amenable to surgery. ... Here was this woman dying in Newark, and Charlie, who was a professor of surgery at ... Hahnemann, came in, and ... he was a very interesting character, a flamboyant type. ... He said, "Well, you know, if I can put my finger in that heart, move it around, I can probably break up those adhesions in the heart and the valve can open," and he did it and that woman lived. ... It was the first successful heart operation that was done. So, he's been called the father of cardiac surgery. Unfortunately, he was too flamboyant, he didn't do things scientifically, and the specialty passed him by.

KP: I have interviewed a number of doctors and, from what they tell me, it strikes me as a very different world. One of the things that struck me was, one of the doctors talked to me about a house call he had made and my jaw almost dropped.

NR: Well, first of all, ... I think one of the ... things that we miss today is the sense of responsibility that we have to patients who are ill. For example, in the hospital, every hospital had a charity service, and the charity service is where the young doctors learned how to do things, how to be a surgeon, or a gynecologist, or whatever it might be. ... This was your responsibility and your trust and you took this very seriously. In New York, there were ... doctors, outstanding doctors, that would spend fifty percent of their time taking care of charity cases, people working in Bellevue Hospital, which is a charity hospital. ... I can recall, a doctor saw a patient in Paterson, a very well known specialist in New York, ... Matthew Shapiro is his name, and he was called to Paterson to see a patient, and he drove out from New York City to Paterson, saw the patient, came home, charged five hundred dollars. ... At a party a few weeks later, we were talking about it, and I said,

"Matthew, how can you charge somebody," this is 1940, ... "five hundred dollars?" ... He says to me, "Norman," he says, "I start my day at seven o'clock in the morning and the first time I see a patient who pays me a dollar is two o'clock in the afternoon." He says, "More than sixty percent of my time is non-income producing," but, the important thing is that he took that responsibility seriously. Now, with the advent of insurance, and Medicare, and Medicaid, and ... all these agencies, there's no longer a, quote, "charity patient." Every patient has got ... some ability to pay through one mechanism or another. I feel that's ... one of the many things that's lost in the younger physicians, but, one of the other things, of course, is the house calls. Now, the house call, to be very, very frank with you, you couldn't do very much. I mean, in the days when medicine was holding of hands, and empathy, and compassion, it was a great thing. ... I practiced that very diligently. I enjoyed house calls and I made many, many house calls. ... When I was very busy in the '50s, I would make rounds on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday afternoon, those were the house call days. ... I would see maybe thirty or forty patients making house calls. I would see them geographically. ... I'd see a group here, and a group in Highland Park, and, maybe, a group in North Brunswick. ... These were all older people who couldn't get to the office. Now, what did I do for them at ... their home? Very little. I came in, I took their blood pressure, "How are you, Mr. Jones? You'll be feeling better next week. How's your medicine? Let's take a little more of this pill or a little less of that pill." We didn't have the drugs that we have today, so, we never had to worry about fifteen medications, as we do today, but, they were time consuming, and they really were not productive of any good medicine, because, in order to do something for a patient, even in those days, back in the '50s, you realized you had to have the facilities of a hospital, an emergency room, that sort of thing. But, I enjoyed house calls and I enjoyed, when I was ... doing my residency, making ... ambulance calls. We had to make ambulance calls and I really learned how to evaluate sick patients. In fifty years of practice, I can tell you within a minute when I saw a patient if the patient was sick or not.

KP: Maybe you should tell Scott. How would you determine that?

NR: It was just a feeling, because I learned, when I ... rode ambulance, ... this person is sick enough to bring into the hospital right away, or this person probably is hysterical, or something of the sort, but, it's something you learn. It's a feel. There's no other way of doing it, but, I was able to, and I have never once been mistaken. I've had misdiagnoses, but, my ...

KP: Your general sense.

NR: ... My general sense, the patient is sick and needs major attention. ... It's just something that developed within me.

SC: How did it make you feel to lose your first patient?

NR: Very bad, very bad. ... I'll tell you something, it's very difficult, it's how a person feels. ...

SC: Do you recall?

NR: Well, I can recall a patient, during my residency, who had asthma. Even in those days, people didn't die of asthma. ... This patient was fighting ... for his breath. ... Morphine was a drug that relieved difficulty in breathing, but, morphine is contraindicated, and I had this poor patient who was, literally, dying, and he pleaded with me to give him something to relieve him. ... I thought of morphine and I said, "No, it's contraindicated." He died in my arms. He probably would have died if I had given him morphine, but, I mean, you run into these situations. ... The one thing you have to learn, and this has nothing to do with this, you've got to be hard. You've got to. If you make a mistake, and you'll make your mistakes, pick yourself up and keep going. You can't brood over what might have been. You do the best you can, "This is the best I can, ... this is my judgment. I've made my decision," and you live by it. My son asked me, when he was a young resident, he called me up, and he said, "Dad," he says, "I've just lost my first patient and I've got to speak to the family. What do I say to them?" I said, "Milton, I can't tell you. It's got to come from inside of you." ... You learn. ... It's a great experience, a great experience.

KP: One of the other things, in terms of how medicine is changing, was how hard it was to set up a practice before World War II.

NR: ... Well, it was very interesting. Everybody has a personal experience. I told you that, when I started practice in September of 1938, I had zero money, literally zero money in my little bank account. My wife had accumulated, from her teaching, about \$2500. ... We went out, we rented a small apartment here on New Street. I had a little room in front, which was my waiting room, and another room, which was my consulting room and examining room, and, behind that, I had a small, little kitchen, and a little alcove to sit at, and I had a bedroom. That was where we started. ... It was thirty-five dollars a month rent. ... I had to buy equipment and we had to buy a bedroom set, then, we started setting up housekeeping. Our bills came to ... \$2,435. So, I started paying that out by time. I had a father-in-law who was a very, very strict fellow. He was in World War I. ... He was a very tough man, but, a very honorable man. ... He said to me, "Look," he says, "you have \$2500 in the bank. Why carry all the expenses, all the payments, all through interest and whatnot. ... Pay it off." He says, "Syril has a job. She gets \$100 a month, \$1200 a year. You take your big meals with me," they only lived here in New Brunswick, ... "a little supper and a little breakfast isn't very much," and my mother-in-law was a wonderful cook. So, ... he said, "Start off this way." So, we started off, and we paid off everything, and the day I opened my office, September 19th, 1938, I didn't owe one cent. ... We had sixty-five dollars in the bank, but, I had a school teacher for a wife. ... In our house, which was on New Street, we had an old furnace, but, we had to feed it coal. We had to buy coal and put coal in it to get heat, and I sat and waited, and I decided I would open the office at one o'clock in the afternoon, and, ... five minutes after one, in walks my first patient, my ... father-in-law's partner. They owned an office equipment company in New Brunswick and his little eighteen-month-old baby had a cold. ... Kiuie wanted to give the young doctor a patient, so, he brought this little child in, and that was my first patient. When I retired, September 19th, 1989, fifty years later, she was at my retirement party.

KP: That is quite a feat.

NR: ... It was the first month of practice. I made thirty-five dollars. The second month, I made about sixty-eight dollars. The third month, \$100. Then, I was on my way, but, you talk about

house calls. The office fees ... were two dollars, a house call was three dollars, but, a night call was five dollars. The night call we were looking for, because it was extra money. I was practicing three weeks, and it's 12:30 at night, and the phone rings, "Hello." "Can you come down to Norm's Tavern right away?" "Sure," I get up, get dressed, got my bag, put it in the car, and I drove down to the tavern here on Dennis Street, right across from where the Frog and the Peach is, and I walk to this tavern, and no excitement, and I said to the bartender, ... "I'm Dr. Reitman. Someone called for a doctor and I'm here." ... He said, "Gee, Doc, I don't see anybody that's in trouble. Let me check in the back." He said, "No, nobody called ... for any doctor, but," he says, "there's been a couple waiting for a cab for the last twenty minutes." My phone number is 170, the taxi's 107. I knew what happened, so, I go out in the street, ... in the dim light, and I see, halfway down the street, a young couple. So, I said, "Taxi service?" "We're waiting for you." I took them home for a dollar. It was my first night call. So, those were the kinds of things that we did. ... The first year of practice, I made ... about \$1500. When I went into the Army, in 1943, I was making \$15,000 a year, and that was very good.

KP: No, that was very good.

NR: ... I've got to go. We'll have to call it off now.

KP: That is fine. This concludes an interview session with Dr. Norman Reitman on November 10, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

SC: Scott Ceresnak.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/25/99

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