RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EPHRAIM ROBINSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Tara Kraenzlin: This begins an interview with Ephraim Robinson, performed on April 2, 1999 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Tara Kraenzlin ...

Larry Vellensky: Larry Vellensky.

Ephraim Robinson: Class of 1941.

TK: Yes, Class of 1941. Mr. Robinson, I would like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents. Where did your father come from?

ER: Poland, but it was Russia at the time. He came over to escape the Russian-Chinese War.

TK: Did he come to escape military conscription?

ER: That's right.

TK: How old was he when he came to the United States?

ER: Twenty.

TK: Do you know how he managed to get here?

ER: Yes. He had to steal across the border to escape Russia. … Then, he went to Scotland, and from Scotland, he picked up a ship to the United States.

TK: Then he came to New York City.

ER: Yes.

TK: Where did he settle?

ER: He settled in Brooklyn, got married, and his first job was for ten dollars a week.

TK: Doing what?

ER: He was kind of an artistic person, so he got glasswork and painted on it. Then, he got a two-dollar a week raise and got married.

LV: What sort of work had he been doing in Poland?

ER: I don't think [he had] a profession in Poland. He was well educated in the Bible and religious studies and had a magnificent tenor voice. He trained to be a cantor, but he only pursued that as an avocation, not an occupation. He had a very fine voice.

TK: Where was your mother from?

ER: My mother was from Lithuania.

TK: How did she come to the United States?

ER: I really don't know, but she came over when she was about fifteen or sixteen years old. Her father had been here, and her younger sister was born here. … She was educated in this country. She might have been a little younger. She was well educated.

TK: How did your parents meet?

ER: Marriage broker. How else in those days? [laughter]

TK: … Were they married in Brooklyn?

ER: Yes.

TK: How long did they stay there?

ER: They moved all around the City. My father went into … selling clothing and was what they called "a customer peddler." [He] had a route and [would] sell things on time and he went to clothing fairs. So they moved around. I was born in the Bronx. A year later, they moved to Lakewood, when I was one year old, to establish a chicken farm.

TK: How is it they came to be involved in farming?

ER: My father loved it. There are pictures of him in the Bronx holding a chicken and looking at it. He had some chickens out there.

LV: Had he any experience farming in Poland?

ER: None whatsoever.

LV: Because Jews were not allowed to own land [in] some areas of Poland. Is that the area he came from in Poland?

ER: No, he came from the big city.

TK: Maybe that was the attraction of farming.

ER: Well, maybe so. He studied it. My grandfather, his father-in-law, used to tease him about it.

TK: Were they helped by the Jewish Agricultural Aid Society?

ER: I really can't say that. We were familiar with them. The representatives were on our farm a number of times, but I don't think he was. I can't really say. However, I know that they were on the place quite a bit.

TK: Did your father own his own farm?

ER: Oh, yes. He bought it in Lakewood.

TK: How big was it?

ER: He bought about twenty acres. There was a hatchery on it and there was a coop for the chickens. … That was the time when the poultry industry was growing in New Jersey and especially in Toms River, so there was a lot of interplay, cooperation, and so forth.

TK: Was the neighborhood mostly Jewish chicken farmers?

ER: They were all Jewish farmers. Well, I would not say all. There were dairy farmers. My father had a cow. The dairy farm across the street, well, not quite across the street, the dairy, Mr. Sherman. Actually, Mr. Sherman's father was a veteran of the Civil War. [laughter]

TK: So most of your memories start out at this farm.

ER: Oh, yes. I don't remember anything before the farm.

TK: How early did you begin working on the farm?

ER: Well, I was always interested in it. My father always said that farming was great and you could always get enough to eat. I remember people would always come by the place and offer to buy it, and I would start crying. I loved it.

TK: So you loved the farm.

ER: I did.

TK: How did the Great Depression affect the farm?

ER: My father was out the farm business much before that, because there were no vaccines for the diseases and the chickens got chicken pox. The eggs were not fertile, and the chickens died. He was out of it in three to four years.

TK: What did he do after that?

ER: First, he went back to being a customer peddler, and then, in 1926, he went into insurance and real estate in Lakewood.

TK: He did not go back into farming.

ER: No, but he always had a big garden, and he kept the cow until the day I left for college. [laughter]

TK: Then he sold the cow.

ER: Then he sold the cow. We all used to milk the cow. I'm the youngest of five brothers.

TK: So you were five years old when they sold the farm.

ER: They never sold the farm. I was drafted when he finally sold the place and moved inside of Lakewood.

TK: So he simply stopped farming.

ER: Yes, he needed to make a living. For awhile there, he went back into selling dry goods, men's clothing. He bought the insurance and real estate business in 1926.

TK: How did that business do throughout the Great Depression?

ER: Tough. He did that until he retired, but he had plenty of problems. There were five boys and they were all going to college. There were the tuitions and times were tough. I'm still, what's the word? I don't spend too much money.

TK: Thrifty?

ER: No, not thrifty, not quite parsimonious, a little better than that.

TK: Parsimonious is a little strong. Money-wise might be more fitting.

ER: Yes.

TK: Do you attribute this to the Depression?

ER: Oh, no question about it. We heard how terrible Wall Street was, and we also had relatives that lost a lot of money.

TK: How did it affect the other farmers in Lakewood?

ER: Well, it was bad up until the middle of the '30s, and then it sort of came out. My father and a group of other Jewish farmers in the area, I guess that is how the Jewish Agricultural Society got involved, they sent breeding hens and roosters to Israel to establish a chicken industry there. So he was one of the first to do that.

TK: So your father was involved in that exchange.

ER: Yes, way back in the beginning of the '20s, when he first got there.

TK: Did he ever go to Israel?

ER: He visited, but he never went to settle. … He had nephews and one niece who escaped Poland before the war. One survived the war in Siberia, the niece did. The nephews went to what was then Palestine before the war. There were eight children and my uncle out there and the other five did not survive. They said it could not be worse than the Russians but they were killed. … We visited them in Israel, too.

TK: When was the first time that you went to Israel?

ER: 1991, during Desert … Storm.

TK: Had your father gone when you were younger?

ER: No, he did not go until his fiftieth wedding anniversary. … My father was very Orthodox. The Orthodox believe that the Messiah would bring statehood. … So after they won independence, he said that was the miracle that they won.

TK: He thought it would be good to visit.

ER: Yes.

TK: What was your religious upbringing like?

ER: Orthodox, but not far right Orthodox, like the *Hasidim*. My father was Orthodox, observed the Sabbath, kept his business closed on the Sabbath, kept kosher and observed all the holidays.

TK: But you went to public school.

ER: There were no parochial schools in Lakewood at the time. He helped to establish them, because he figured that we were less religious because we did not have a parochial school.

TK: So he was in favor of combining religious upbringing with your education.

ER: That's right.

TK: But by the time the parochial school was established, you had already been through school.

ER: Yes.

TK: Was school a mix of different backgrounds in Lakewood?

ER: … Lakewood had become a Jewish winter resort, so there was a fair number of Jewish people there. There was a Catholic parochial school up to the eighth grade, and so when I went to high school, a whole new group of people came. It was a fair mix, but they didn't hire a Jewish teacher until well into the '30s, and she was an old maid. [laughter] … In Toms River, it was even worse. They told my wife's cousin, "Don't bother going to teacher's college and expect to teach in Toms

River."

TK: Did they tell her that because she was Jewish she would not get a job?

ER: Yes.

TK: So there was a larger Jewish population, but the administration was prejudiced.

ER: Not in Toms River. There was a large Jewish population …

TK: In Lakewood.

ER: … No, in Toms River, in two areas of Toms River, but the rest were not.

TK: So in a way, there was no say in the administration.

ER: Correct.

LV: Was there a strong Socialist presence among the Jewish community in Lakewood?

ER: Oh, yes. It was Socialist, Communists, Democrats, Republicans, whatever you want.

LV: What was you father's political affiliation?

ER: He was a Democrat. My brothers voted Socialist, [for] Norman Thomas.

TK: What was your father's opinion of Roosevelt?

ER: Loved him. He blamed him for not letting the Jews into the US once the Nazis came, but he thought he was a good man.

TK: Do you remember seeing any WPA projects in Lakewood, any renewal projects or road building?

ER: The only one I remember is they built the new post office in Lakewood. They did some work around the lake. They did some work to establish a new lake, Lake (Shanendoah?), but that was not completed until fifteen years ago; they let it die during the war. Then, of course, you had Lakehurst.

TK: And Lakehurst is where you had the ...

ER: Hindenburg. I went to religious school, also, until the day I left for Rutgers. You were in there every day at seven-thirty and you heard this big "bang."

TK: So you heard it.

ER: Oh, yes. Well, it was a cloudy day and those son-of-guns flew over Lakewood with a swastika. I don't think he was 500 feet off the ground. People started running right through the streets saying, "The Hindenburg blew up." So I went up to a high spot, Lakewood is flat, and I could see the smoke burning. I had a new car, I didn't, it was father's new car, and I didn't show up for awhile. He got a little upset. [laughter] I could already drive myself to religious school, so I went right up on that hill to see it burn. It used to fly, I remember one May Day, georgeous day, and that thing flew over, blackened swastikas painted on the tail, and my father cursed it out. [laughter]

TK: So you had an idea of what was going on over in Germany.

ER: Oh, yes, sure. Well, we had a lot of German refugees come and establish themselves in the chicken business, German Jews, so we knew all about it from them.

TK: Was there any animosity between the German, Russian or Polish Jews?

ER: No, they all joined. In Toms River they had the Community of Jewish Farmers, they had the community in Farmingdale, had a community in Jackson, and they all became members. They had the religious, observe the holidays. There was a lot of disagreement, politically, you know, but as far [as] standing together for their own benefit, there was were no problems there.

TK: So as these new refugees would come, you would find out how dire the situation was becoming for Jews.

ER: Well, we knew about it before. I can remember when Roosevelt was nominated in 1932 and Hitler had just risen to power, and we were aware of what was going on, especially since we had relatives over there. My mother's family, no one survived.

LV: Did you hear from your relatives in the years 1932 until …

ER: Yes, my mother heard from her relatives, and my father, I can remember my father's brother visiting in 1931.

TK: From Russia?

ER: From Poland. He lived in Poland. I remember him visiting and they deciding to stay in Poland.

TK: So your uncle, who visited, then stayed in the United States.

ER: No, he went back and did not survive. One daughter went to Siberia and the other two boys went to Palestine before the war broke out.

TK: In high school, did you see this as a situation that was going to come to a head?

ER: Well, we knew it was heading there, but it was not that imminent. It was more obvious when

I got to Rutgers.

TK: You had mentioned that you went to religious school. Did you go in the morning before school?

ER: No, no, after school everyday for an hour and Sunday morning, as well, and Saturday we went to services.

TK: And you would study ...

ER: Hebrew and the Bible. We translated the Hebrew from the Bible.

TK: Growing up, did you speak Yiddish in the home?

ER: No, my Yiddish is very poor. My wife's Yiddish is better than mine.

TK: What language would you speak with your parents?

ER: English.

TK: Is that the same for your older brothers as well?

ER: My two oldest brothers, actually, Yiddish was the first language. I guess that helped them both end up Phi Beta Kappa. [laughter]

TK: So starting in high school, you began to ...

ER: No, I didn't stop doing what my father wanted me to do until I left for college.

TK: Where did you go to high school?

ER: In Lakewood.

TK: Did any teachers stand out?

ER: Oh, yes. We had a Rutgers graduate of '93, 1893, [laughter] a math teacher, who was very good. Also, there was a very good English teacher, and two good history teachers, who were very good. (Harris?), what was his first name ... We had very good teachers and a lot of bright kids.

TK: You had mentioned that your brothers had all gone to college. Was it a foregone conclusion that you would go, as well?

ER: Foregone conclusion, no question about it.

TK: Your older brother went to CUNY?

ER: Yes, my oldest brother went to City College. Actually, he started out at Fordham to become a lawyer, but he could not stand it. So he went to City College, and he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and taught French. He was a tremendous foreign linguist. You name the language, and he could talk it. … The next oldest graduated from Rutgers in '28, so my earliest memories of Rutgers …

TK: Are coming to visit him.

ER: Well, yes. I'd visit him and at graduation. He became a lawyer, and he's still practicing in Beach Haven, New Jersey. He's going to be ninety-two. My oldest brother just passed away at ninety-two. Number three, he went to New Jersey Law School, got his degree and became a lawyer in '33.

TK: That's what is now Newark.

ER: Yes. He was the only one who passed away young. He was sixty-seven. Number four went to City College and then Hahnenamann Medical School. He's a MD. He is five years older than I am; he is eighty-four. I came here, College of Agriculture.

TK: So you are the only one who had a yearning to get back into agriculture, the family business.

ER: That's right. I spent my career in it. I ran the farm until 1966. In 1964, I went to work for the US Department of Agriculture, the Farmers Home Administration. I stayed with them until 1982, when we got a political state director, when Reagan got elected, and I said, "I'm out of here."

TK: So you have remained a Democrat to this day.

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: At least not a Reagan Republican.

ER: No. Well, as a matter-of-fact, I worked at the state office, as the farm program manager for the state, and they lent money to farmers who were residents, the farm program. So all the chiefs, there were five of us, we all left within a year. We just couldn't stand the guy.

TK: Getting back to when you were in high school, did your older brother, who attended Rutgers, influence your decision to attend Rutgers? How did you choose Rutgers?

ER: To be honest, I really wanted to go to Cornell. [laughter]

TK: Rutgers by default, a tradition that continues to this day.

ER: Well, the reason was my next oldest brother was admitted to medical school, and Rutgers College of Agriculture was a hundred dollars year.

TK: It also had an agricultural school.

ER: Yes.

TK: Did you come up to visit before you made the decision?

ER: No, I knew the place. My father used to come up to Agricultural Field Days here.

TK: So you entered in the fall of 1937.

ER: Yes.

TK: What was your impression of the place when you got here?

ER: Oh, I loved it.

TK: Where did you live?

ER: The first year I lived in town with a private family, and then the other three years I lived in Winants.

TK: How did you like living with that family for the year?

ER: I didn't like it.

TK: Did you feel separated from the Rutgers community?

ER: Yes.

TK: When you lived in Winants, did you have a roommate?

ER: Yes, my sophomore year, I had one, and then junior and senior year, I had a three-room suite. There were three of us. It was nice. It was a rickety, old place.

TK: They have fixed it up. Have you been there recently?

ER: Yes. The only thing that is still the same is the staircase when you walk in the entrance. Down at each end, there was a staircase, too, which you could see top to bottom. Boys used drop bags of water on people, college humor. [laughter]

TK: It's amazing, because when you tell people that Winants was a dorm, they don't believe you.

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: They can't imagine living in it because ...

ER: My brother lived there, too. I can remember being there as a little kid.

TK: So you started your classes at the College of Agriculture. You specifically majored in ...

ER: Agriculture, well, agricultural economics.

TK: And you were active in the Ag Club and ...

ER: Yes, I was active in that, the Economics Club ...

TK: What kind of things would you do?

ER: Well, we started Ag Field Day. George Luke and a bunch of others started the first Field Day that we ran out in the spring. That was our brainchild.

TK: Oh, really. What year was that?

ER: That's a good question. [It was] probably my junior year.

LV: Have you returned to subsequent Ag Field Days?

ER: Yes, oh, yes.

LV: How has it evolved through the years?

ER: Oh, it's become a big deal. Then it was just a small. It was serious, the things we worked on, as I recall. I came back a lot, when I had the chickens, to visit the pathology lab, the poultry department, Dave Tudor. Beaudette, he ran the thing. But I took a lot of courses, over here, at Queens Campus. Instead of agricultural engineering, I took regular physics. That's how I know Van Dyke Hall.

TK: Back before history took it over.

ER: I took a logic course with, used to be ...

TK: Philosophy.

ER: Oh, yes. Oh, God, I've forgotten the name, Peterson, Peterson. Then the statistics course, the fellow became the Federal Reserve Chairman. What the hell was his name?

TK: We can probably look it up [Arthur Burns].

ER: Yes, you can look it up, no question. He's a famous, worldwide-known economist.

TK: What about the Ag professors themselves? What did you think of them?

ER: Oh, the ones I had, yes. Professor Joffe, very good, the soils man. Lipman I had no association with; he was dean of the school. He was Jewish, you know. … His sons were not

raised Jewish, but he was Jewish. … Plant physiology. Professor Helyar in economics, but then I took a lot of economics courses over here …

TK: To backtrack, because you are the only person that I know who has mentioned it so far, what were the things going on the first Ag Field Day? What was offered?

ER: [laughter] Exhibits mostly. I remember I worked on the exhibits for the Ag economics. I can't remember exactly what it was, but each, the dairy department, the plant department, the poultry department, each set up ...

TK: Were you able to convince the Rutgers College guys to come over?

ER: Oh, no, they came. We were pleased with the first couple of years. It was nothing as big as it is now. Myself, George Luke and one other fellow were the prime builders. But we had some well-known people [who] graduated from the agricultural school who went onto … Out in California, there is a tomato breeder, who is worldwide-known.

LV: You mentioned that you took a lot of classes over at Queens. Despite that, did you feel as if you separated from the main campus?

ER: No, all the guys from the Ag school, no. I took regular biology here and zoology here and some stuff like that.

TK: A lot has been made of the North-South tension with the Ag guys from the South and the ...

ER: You mean in South Jersey?

TK: The North-South Jersey tensions. Did you see that at all?

ER: No. If it was there, it went straight over my head. [laughter]

TK: Also, you took your first two mandatory years of ROTC ...

ER: Yes.

TK: But then you decided not to stay in it.

ER: No.

TK: Did you have any interest in the military?

ER: No.

TK: I also noticed that you belonged to the non-fraternity, the Scarlet Barbarians.

ER: The Scarlet Barbarians.

TK: Maybe you could tell us a little bit about that.

ER: Well, [it was for] those who didn't belong to fraternities. They were big then, and the big rush was on and everything else. So the house that's at the corner of College Avenue and Hamilton Street, the south ...

TK: Yes, I know the one.

ER: That used to be the Scarlet Barbarians'.

TK: Oh, really. So it was actually almost like a fraternity house.

ER: Well, it wasn't a fraternity house, no, but it was a place for meeting and stuff like that, although [in] our dormitory rooms, especially when we got the three rooms, we had commuters from Newark, from Freehold, from all around ...

TK: People would come and crash at your place.

ER: Yes, because it was a place to sit down. … We enjoyed that. That was nice.

LV: How did you know that fraternities weren't for you?

ER: First of all, expensive. [laughter] I didn't feel that it would fit in with the way that I was raised.

TK: So it was not for you, even the SAMs [Sigma Alpha Mu] or something like that.

ER: No, although I played tennis with all of the Phi Eps. They were most of the tennis team, so I knew them all.

TK: But the Scarlet Barbs, did a lot of things socially. For example, you held an annual football dance.

ER: Yes, it was a dance and this and that, which I did not go to until my last two years ...

TK: Really, why?

ER: When I had a steady girlfriend, [laughter] the girl that I married.

TK: Where did you meet her?

ER: In Toms River. She was a chicken farmer's daughter. [laughter]

TK: Were you introduced, or had you met ...

ER: Well, we met, we'd seen each other socially, this that and the other thing, but we were very young. [When] we got married, I was twenty-one and she was eighteen.

TK: Okay, so you got married ...

ER: Right out of college. She was finished [with] one year of Douglass, and then we got married. Then she did not finish until 1968.

TK: Did she go back to Douglass?

ER: Yes, after the kids were grown. The two boys were still home when she started. My daughter was at Douglass.

TK: Were they there at the same time?

ER: Yes.

TK: Oh, neat.

ER: I don't know how neat it was, but my wife thought it was neat.

TK: We don't know what your daughter thought.

ER: We were convenient when she needed something. After I started with the Farmers Home Administration, I was assistant county supervisor in Toms River. … Then I became a county supervisor up here in Somerset, so I commuted up here everyday, anyway.

TK: Where did you move initially?

ER: Move? I've been on the farm ever since August of 1941. ...

TK: Right, when you were married.

ER: Right where we are.

TK: Just going back to a few things while you were still at Rutgers, in 1941, it was the 175th anniversary of Rutgers. Do you remember much celebration?

ER: No, I don't remember much celebration about that. I don't recall that at all. I remember more about the one-hundredth anniversary football game, [laughter] 1876, 1976. They came up with …

TK: It was of the first intercollegiate football game.

ER: That's right.

TK: I think Rutgers loves to remember its one great bit of dominance over Princeton.

ER: Well, the big dominance was the game in the fall of '38, when we won the first game against them, since the first game was ever played.

TK: You are right. Rutgers had been on a losing streak since the first game.

ER: Right from the first game.

TK: Then in '38 you won.

ER: Yes.

TK: Were you at that game?

ER: Yes.

TK: Were you cheering for the Scarlet Knights?

ER: Of course. I had a piece of the goal post. [laughter]

TK: Did you enjoy supporting the sports teams?

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: Did you support all of them?

ER: Well, I played tennis. For four years, I was on the tennis team. Actually, I enjoyed crew, but I was a skinny kid. I weighed 142 pounds when I came up. Coach Logg would say, "If you keep it up, we will put some meat on you." It never happened. [laughter] Then the 150-pound crew was still a club, you couldn't get your letter, so I stuck with tennis.

TK: Right, and you lettered in that.

ER: Oh, yes. Played regularly, didn't play the top man, but I was satisfied.

TK: Do you remember attending any student-faculty smokers? That was another thing mentioned as the Scarlet Barb.

ER: There were some. I wouldn't be able to pinpoint any of them, but I remember being at some and the discussions going on.

TK: You also belonged to the History Club.

ER: [laughter] Yes, I did.

TK: Maybe halfheartedly.

ER: No, I thought it was important to be part of activities, other than the ... But I vaguely remember the [History Club]. I wouldn't want to make any comment, but, yes, I joined. I was part of the Liberal Club, too, which I thought was interesting. They met all the time at Winants.

TK: What kind of things would you discuss, the political issues of the day?

ER: Oh, yes, sure. That's right.

LV: How had your religious views changed upon coming to Rutgers?

ER: How?

LV: Yes.

ER: When I came to Rutgers, I told my father I really wasn't interested. He blamed it all on college.

TK: Did you tell him after you had been here for awhile or right when you left for college?

ER: No, I did not tell him right away.

TK: Do you think that he sort of wished that you could have had a religious university training?

ER: Oh, sure. … Now I'm a member of a Reform congregation, but even that can be a little much. [laughter]

LV: How did you come to change your name?

ER: Oh, back in the early '30s, the Jews were discriminated against in the hiring, you know, corporations and stuff. [When] two brothers had become lawyers, they changed their names. Then my oldest brother did, then the next, then the next, so I figured, I fell into line. My father did not object to that, because ...

TK: He understood the reason.

ER: Rabinowitz was not a family name. In Russia, the oldest son of a family was exempt from military service, so if you had more sons, you changed their name early on. [laughter] So it was not a family name. Robinson could also be, Rabinowitz is a rabbi's son, so Robinson ... He did not object to that. Also, I wanted, if not agriculture, to take up chemistry. The discrimination there was rampant.

TK: Was there discrimination within that department, specifically?

ER: Well, not in the department here.

TK: Within science?

ER: Within the corporate sector. No, I never felt any discrimination at Rutgers.

TK: How about growing up in that area? For example, in Somerville, New Jersey, there were a lot of incidences of Klan activity. Do you remember any sort of ...

ER: Oh, yes. In Toms River, they had a Klan clubhouse. We knew about the Klan there.

TK: Were you aware of their specific antipathy for Jews?

ER: Of course, against Catholics, too.

TK: Did you have any particular run-ins with them?

ER: No, I didn't. By the time I moved to Toms River, when I married my wife, they were a dead issue.

TK: But in the '30s, this was something ...

ER: Early '20s and in the late '20s, oh, yes.

LV: Do you recall what sort of activities they engaged in during those years?

ER: Well, they had marches, I understand. I did not see any. I know one who was a Klan member, whose daughter married a Catholic. This was after the Klan died, and this was "whoa."

TK: A bitter pill.

ER: Yes, a bitter pill. There were some Italian lawyers I had contact with that had big run-ins with them. There was really no overt thing that was done to the Jews in Toms River that I can remember, but I know they had marches there, oh, yes.

LV: Do you know of any instances of Klan activity in Lakewood?

ER: I don't know, don't remember anything in Lakewood, but [there were in] Asbury Park and places like that.

TK: Do you remember any other small-scale incidents of prejudice?

ER: No. I was cursed out a couple of times as a kid, but it did not bother me.

TK: Did one of your brother keep his name?

ER: No.

TK: No, they all changed.

ER: See, I can still think of Rabinowitz as being my name, but not my children. They are Robinson. My daughter got divorced, and she took her name right back.

TK: So they are definitely Robinsons.

ER: And all the nephews and cousins.

TK: One other thing I would like to ask you about is President Clothier. What memories do you have of him?

ER: Oh, fine gentleman. He always impressed me, spoke well. I never had any personal [contact]. The only personal connection I had was [with] Dean Metzger.

TK: Tell us about Dean Metzger.

ER: Well, he was a very religious man. We had chapel once a week. When I came, they had Saturday classes, and I didn't want to go. My father didn't want me to go Saturday classes ...

TK: Where you able to get out of that?

ER: I juggled my schedule, rather than try to get out of it. Dean Metzger was a pretty straight-laced guy, Victorian attitudes and everything. But I survived it.

TK: What did you think of the mandatory chapel?

ER: If you had to go, you had to go. Listen, I went to mandatory services for how many years, but it was very, I found it not intrusive, would be the word. I was sitting with ...

TK: It was kept sort of broad.

ER: Yes. George, George, George Ritter, he was on the tennis team with me.

TK: Do you remember any of the speakers particularly? I've forgotten what year Wendell Willkie came to speak.

ER: I saw Wendell Willkie down at the station. Oh, yes.

TK: Did you hear him speak?

ER: Yes, I heard him speak. I was here when Paul Robeson gave a concert.

TK: Do you remember anything about those incidents?

ER: Oh, fantastic. The gym was packed.

TK: So Paul Robeson was still very popular still at Rutgers.

ER: Yes. They knew his tendencies and his leanings, but he was still a Rutgers All-American and everything else. I don't remember anything in the *Targum* against him, and I read the *Targum* pretty carefully.

TK: Was the Liberal Club particularly fond of Paul Robeson?

ER: No, they supported [him]. I don't remember any encouragement. We all wanted to go; we all went.

TK: Tell us a little bit more about the dances.

ER: You had all the big bands, are you kidding?

TK: Who played?

ER: I found, I was throwing out some stuff in the attic this year ...

TK: Throwing out.

ER: Oh, yes, old checks that went back to 1947, and there was a picture of my wife and me at the junior prom, flowers, the whole bit.

TK: Was that a big part of your social life?

ER: Oh, yes. The first year, I went home a lot, but I was not with my wife then. The second year, I stayed up here a lot ...

TK: Did it make a big difference?

ER: Yes, it made a big difference. I was living on campus, and it was better, no question about it.

TK: Did you mostly make friends with people in the Ag school, or was it a mix?

ER: No, it was a mix, like I said. I played on the tennis team. George, George, George Ritter, Bob Satter, Murray (Schwartz?). The whole tennis team was Jewish except for one guy, and he was a very fine basketball player, the non-Jew. My junior year was his senior year, and we took a tennis trip down South. He came up to me and says, "I'm glad you're going." [laughter] I said, "I'm Jewish, too." He almost died.

TK: Maybe from your name he assumed you were not Jewish, although your first name would beg an explanation.

ER: Yes.

TK: What do you remember hearing about the war in Europe during your last two years of college?

ER: Oh, we followed it, there's no question about it. Of course, the big thing that happened was when Russia made the pact with Nazi Germany, which was a big shock and everything else. But we knew it was going to come, especially then, and it was soon after, September something, when Germany invaded Russia. Then when Japan attacked the United States ...

TK: Do you remember where you were?

ER: I remember exactly. My brother-in-law, my wife and I went down to Seaside. We were walking along the ocean. It was bitter cold; it was bright. We came back and my father-in-law, now, it wasn't my wife's father, stepfather, her father passed away many years previously, he said, "Japan attacked Pearl Harbor," and we did not believe it because ...

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

TK: So when you got the news in December 1941 that Pearl Harbor had been attacked, did you think you'd be drafted?

ER: That's right.

TK: Did you then decide to enlist?

ER: No, I did not enlist. No, I waited … I had already had the farm and I waited 'til the fall.

TK: There were sometimes deferments for farmers.

ER: Well, yes, but not where they were all farmers. … I was drafted and a fellow came out of the City. We rented the farm [to him], and he was not drafted for the duration. [laughter]

TK: Oh, really?

ER: I mean, he escaped the draft for the duration.

TK: By being on your farm. [laughter]

ER: Yes. But I knew what I was going for. There was no question about it. I was not reluctant ...

TK: You were willing to support the war effort.

ER: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

TK: So you had just gotten married ...

ER: We got married in August. The war broke out in December, and I was drafted in November 1942.

TK: In the meantime, you had started your farm ...

ER: Chickens.

TK: The same way that your father had started it before.

ER: We did not have a hatchery, no. Actually, my mother-in-law had this piece of property. Mildred's uncle had bought ten acres and took an option in the adjoining ten acres. … He did not want it, so my mother-in-law picked it up, and when we got married, she said, "Here it is."

TK: A wedding gift.

ER: A wedding gift.

TK: So it was a different piece of land than your father's farm.

ER: My father was still in Lakewood. He was still on the original property at this time.

TK: And you were on this new farm in Toms River.

ER: That's right.

TK: How was business in that first year?

ER: Oh, it was fine. It was okay. ... When I came back, I just expanded and expanded.

LV: What sort of numbers did you start out with?

ER: I started out with 800 and I end up with 30,000.

TK: Oh, my. [laughter]

ER: Laying eggs. Then they started to want chickens crowded into cages, and that meant a big investment. My wife says, "Instead of investing in the cages, invest in my education," and we did that and it was a very good move. She became a speech teacher in Brick Township.

TK: So when you enlisted in 1942 ...

ER: Drafted.

TK: Sorry, excuse me. When you were drafted in 1942, you knew that these two years of ROTC would mean ...

ER: Well, it was sort of helpful.

TK: And the college degree meant that you were ...

ER: I took regular basic training. I was sent Fort Eustis, Virginia, and … they had two tests they gave, sort of intelligence tests and then the mechanical aptitude test.

TK: And you did well on those.

ER: Yes, I did well, so they sent me to antiaircraft artillery. Fort Eustis, Virginia, I took basic training, and I applied for OCS and was accepted. [I] went down to Camp Davis, North Carolina and I was one of the last of the "ninety day wonders." In other words, I got done in three months, and if you were set back for any reason, you had to stay another four weeks, besides making up the week you loused up. So it was ...

TK: So you got off in the minimum time.

ER: Minimum time. It was the end of May, June 1943.

TK: You were in Camp Davis, North Carolina. What was your impression of North Carolina at that time?

ER: Oh, North Carolina. The camp itself was out, it could be a desert, sand ...

TK: Very secluded.

ER: They used to say that the mosquitoes used to land at the airstrip there and fill it up with a hundred gallons of gasoline, before they saw it was not an airplane, because they used to trail big targets, shoot at ... Then I was sent to, [in] June, Cape Cod, Camp Edwards, and spent three months there at a replacement training center. Then I was back to Camp Davis for a communications course.

TK: Did you have any sense of what they were preparing you for?

ER: Yes, they were preparing us for ... We had these search lights that got passe. Then we brought in the radar searches and tied it into the big antiaircraft guns to shoot them down. That's what we were trained for. By the time that rolled around, they had too many officers. ... Well, first, they sent me to Fort Bliss, Texas. That used to be a cavalry school, a cavalry base, and that was a good time. Then they decided we had too much artillery officers, and they sent us to Fort Benning, Georgia to become infantry officers. If you ever saw a bunch of POed men who showed up at Fort Benning ...

TK: So you were not expecting the infantry.

ER: No.

TK: You were not happy about it, either.

ER: No training in it whatsoever, which they trained us sort of. Then I went to Fort McClellan, Alabama, and I stayed there from about May to December 1944.

TK: What was your impression of Alabama at that time? Did you get off the base much?

ER: Yes, we lived off the base, and it was all right. An incident there, we made friends with two Jewish couples there.

TK: Who were living in Alabama?

ER: No, they were in the service. One wife was a blond and one was dark-haired. They were teachers and they applied to be teachers in Anniston. The black-haired got hired and the blonde did not get the job. The black hair said, "What happened?" They says, "Well, we know you were Jewish, but we thought the blonde was Catholic." [laughter]

TK: They did not believe her as being a blonde Jew.

ER: Yes, and the Jew was less of a problem than the Catholic.

TK: Oh, no.

ER: Yes, down South, you know, and in the Bible Belt, the temple has to be rebuilt before Jesus comes back.

TK: So it's different attitude.

LV: Had you traveled outside of New Jersey before joining the Army?

ER: No.

TK: You had mentioned before that with the tennis team ...

ER: My first trip was with the tennis team, yes. That was what I was going to say. My first trip was the tennis trip, and that threw me when I saw colored facilities, colored everything.

TK: So you saw segregation for the first time.

ER: Really, for the first time.

TK: Had you been aware of it?

ER: Oh, yes, I was aware of it, but there it was in black and white.

TK: What did you think of it at the time?

ER: Well, I thought it was terrible.

TK: Did that trip give you an idea of what things were like in the South at that time?

ER: Yes. [I] learned to eat grits, too, not bad.

TK: Did you learn to like them?

ER: Yes, they're not bad. When I go down South and they're available, I order them. They're good.

TK: A little local color.

ER: Yes. … Well, wherever we played, it was strictly white. There were no black [students]. We stayed in athletic dormitories of some of the colleges, and it was all white.

TK: What was your impression of things in Texas?

ER: In Texas, the problem there is not the color; the problem was the Mexicans.

TR: That was the tension.

ER: Yes, that was the tension there. My wife and a friend of hers went over to Juarez, across the border, and they were giving them trouble coming back. Of course, the friend of hers was high cheekboned and everything else, and they thought she was Mexican. They jabbered at them in Spanish, but neither of them knew what was happening, so they finally let them through. But that's where the tension was there.

TR: That was more what was going on.

ER: That's right.

TK: In Alabama, did you see a lot of the same things that you had seen in North Carolina?

ER: Yes, it was going on then, too, sure. There were no black troops in our replacement training center, that they brought in periodically.

TK: As you were training, were your fellow officers from all different regions?

ER: They were from all different regions, yes. … As a matter-of-fact, the first company I was assigned to at McClellan I didn't like. They were all spit and polish. The second lieutenant I reported to, he says "Is that the way you report to your new officer? Stand back and salute," and everything else. I saw to it that I was transferred. … The second one I went to, they were out on maneuvers, so, I guess, they thought they were going to give me the business. So I went out there, and there was this colonel from Alabama, Colonel Robert Watkins. He gave me all these jobs to

do out there, out in the woods and everything else. … Then I said to him, after the field visits, the work was over, I said, "You know, I have not been home on leave since I became an officer," no, that not true, "since I came to the infantry, and I would like to go home." … My wife preceded me, because out in maneuvers, there was no sense of her being in Alabama. … She was pregnant, just about. The baby was born in February, so she was just about pregnant. So he said, "Fine." I went, came home, came back and was a first lieutenant. He promoted me. So there was a Southern fellow, a cracker and everything else, but I did not find any trouble with him.

TK: You were able to get along with all the Southerners.

ER: Oh, yes, I got along them. I make allowances.

TK: Was it a real departure in a way, considering how much everyone from Rutgers was pretty much from New Jersey or New York?

ER: Oh, yes, sure. You got people from all over. I will never forget, I always used to pick up the *New York Times* down at Camp Davis, and one guy got mad at me. He says, "You know I want the social page." I said, "You want the social page, here's the social page." [laughter]. It was some social guy from New York, and he wanted to see what was going on in his hometown. ...

TK: Upper crust.

ER: Yes, what the upper crust was doing.

TK: Did you let him have it because you were not interested?

ER: Of course, I wasn't interested. I wouldn't read it anyway.

TK: Where did you go after Fort McClellan?

ER: All right, Fort McClellen. As long as Colonel Watkins was there, I stayed at Fort McClellan. Usually, it was a three-month stay for the officers and out they went, and so I said, "Well, I'll take a troop train home. Then I don't have to pay the fare and stuff like that," which I did. He assigned me to a troop train, and I came back and found Colonel Watkins was on orders overseas. The next day, I was on orders overseas.

TK: You knew what that meant.

ER: The next day I was on orders. … It was just as well, because right after that the Battle of the Bulge broke out, and everyone went to Europe, and I was headed to the Pacific.

TK: So it was good timing in a way.

ER: Yes.

ER: Where did you ship out from?

ER: From San Francisco, Fort Ord, near … What's that famous place where Steinbeck wrote about?

LV: … Santa Clara.

ER: No, it's right on the, they have a fishing pier and oh, my God. I know I went to Carmel ...

TK: Yes, we can look that up as well [Salinas].

ER: … and visited there, but we visited there. I wasn't there long. They process you right out. But I'll show you what I looked like in California.

TK: Giving us a picture ...

ER: Oh, we got a lot of pictures. We could have made it before twelve o'clock that night, but the hell with it.

TK: When you stayed in San Francisco.

ER: So we stayed over.

TK: You were actually fined twenty-five dollars a day for being late.

ER: Twenty-five dollars a day for being late. That's right. … I shipped out to, I was put on the *Marine Corporal* and stayed on that boat all the way to New Guinea, Helandia, New Guinea, and stayed there several days and then went up to Leyte. I was off the boat thirty days after getting on, carrying two big duffel bags up there. I almost died coming off. [laughter] Sailing up the Gulf of Leyte, they were getting ready for the invasion of Iwo Jima, and you can't imagine the flotilla of ships for miles and miles and miles, getting ready to ship out. … I got off the boat, and two weeks later, I got right back in the same one. … They sent me up to Luzon, came into Luzon in the Bay of Santiago or something like that. … The next day, they sent us out to the Sixth Infantry Division, which was then east of Manila, right in the hills, and they sent us the next night to the regimental headquarters, Sixty-third Infantry. It goes division, regiment and then battalion. We got there and guys lined us up, "Anybody have any experience firing 90mm mortars?" … I raised my hand; I figured anything is better than a line. He sent me to M Company, which is a heavy weapons company. We were east of Manila, and that is where I heard the first artillery barrage. … This is a picture of the first sight, [with the] box camera, which I got for bar mitzvah, and I lugged that thing all through [the war], and that's the battlefield in front of us. This is back at the mortar emplacement. … I'll tell you something. We had a night, one of the first things that I went on was a night attack up that hill, and I got into a hole, which I thought was as big as this room. [laughter] My job was to direct mortar fire wherever the infantry line platoon that I was with and we would string wire, and radios were just coming in then. After we passed through this, I went up there to see how big that hole was, and I don't think it was half the size of this table. [laughter] But I felt safe up there. You notice, you will see some other pictures, all these guys are big husky fellows. This is another one, too.

TK: And these are all guys in the ...

ER: In my platoon. … The M Company consists of three platoons, two of which were machine guns and one of 90mm mortars, and that is about this big around and that long. They had to carry that tube, and then there was a base plate, because otherwise when they would drop the shell into the mortar thing, it would be banged in and it would knock the thing into the ground. So it was a big, heavy base plate and then the ammunition, so these guys were all big, husky fellows, and you can see from these pictures. The first rest area we were in, it rained and rained and rained.

TK: So you did get a little bit of free time for ...

ER: Oh, yes. Once we [were] back of the lines … or you were in a stationary position, I was in a position to grab a Jeep and go to town.

TK: Was there a lot to see there?

ER: Well, Manila was pretty well bombed out. The areas where the government buildings [were located] were in shambles. It would be like seeing Washington, where all the government building are, blown to bits. There was a big sign as you drove in [which said] how many guys got sick from drinking wood alcohol, how many went blind, how many died from it. There was a big distillery in Manila, a famous distillery. I don't know for rum or whatever the hell it was, not being a big drinker, but, I guess, a lot of it was sold on that label and guys died from it, Rizal Avenue. This is an emplacement. … Here we go. This is a ravine, and there was water flowing down here. Now, this pipe was made out of the empty shell case canisters. Know that each shell came individually packed in a round tube. So the boys stuck the tubes together and the water would come out here, and we took showers.

TK: So you were able to make it into a makeshift shower.

ER: Yes, makeshift shower.

LV: When you were in New Guinea, did you have any contact with the people there?

ER: No, I never got off the boat in New Guinea.

TK: Really?

ER: No, just stayed there and roasted. [laughter] So, no. The division that they sent me to … had been in New Guinea, they had fought in New Guinea, but I joined them later on.

TK: Did you have any contact with the Filipinos?

ER: Yes, we had a lot of contact with Filipinos. As a matter-of-fact, this fellow, David, attached himself to us and helped us clean up and do everything. Of course, they wanted soap and things like that, so we had a lot of contact. As a matter-of-fact, I went into Manila one time and I met this

minister. I don't know what denomination he was, and we were chatting and he found out I'm Jewish, so he says, "Then you play chess." [laughter] So we went up [and] we played chess. Then all of a sudden, I heard my Jeep start up and somebody stole it. [laughter]

TK: Oh, no.

ER: Yes, it happened all the time. The next morning it was in a compound, and I reclaimed it and went back to the base. [laughter] Yes, I was telling last night, at the Seder, that when I got to Luzon and joined the outfit in the middle of March, about two weeks later, they said, "All the Jewish men who wish to attend the Seder in Manila report so-and-so." So, like I said, over there, no one wore any insignia rank. They were called "aiming stakes." So we put on our rank and everything else and we went to Manila. At Rizal Stadium, they had a Seder. I met two guys from the boat. We got a whole bottle of wine, and we finished that. We went back to his barracks [and] had some Stateside [alcohol]. I got stinking drunk. Then I got stinking sick, and I threw up and that was it.

TK: That was the end of it.

ER: That was the end. One more time I got drunk in Manila, but never since, never. Once I feel I've had a drink, that's enough, not that I have any objection if anyone else drinks.

TK: It's just not for you.

ER: Not for me. So, anyways ...

TK: Did other men in your group drink quite a bit?

ER: Yes. I'll show you pictures. I have one that ...

LV: You had more than four cups of wine for the Seder.

ER: Well, you see, we used to get a six-pack of beer once a week ... and I would drink one each night. … Then we got a case a month, and these guys would finish in one day, two days, and here I am, I'm lugging it around, this and that, one beer, one beer. [laughter]

TK: Some people did not understand the concept of moderation.

ER: No, listen, they hit it like crazy, and, let's see, this must be … this is a rest area. Now, [when I] came back for rest and rehabilitation, they decided to put me in charge of a Filipino guerrilla outfit, as perimeter protection around an airfield.

TK: Oh, no.

ER: Well, it was all right.

TK: Yes.

ER: … My tent, whatever we had, whatever provision they provided for us to sleep on, was next to this outfit that flew rescue missions over the water [with] the B-17. … They had a boat strapped to the bottom, a lifeboat, and they would go out if they had downed people, out in the water. They would send them out searching for them. … I guess, the guy always sees me hanging around, so they were going out on a mission, so he says, "Hey, Lieutenant, you want to go for a ride?" I says, "Yes, I'll go for a ride." So he says, "Go in our supply room, grab a parachute and climb aboard," so I grab my little camera. I forgot I only had one roll of film. I took a lot of pictures, which you can hardly see, of the rice patties, flying up there. But anyway, we spent the day making passes, and we went for the last pass and there was a grid they followed. In a break in the clouds, we spotted these guys floating in the South China Sea, so we stayed around and we dropped a lifeboat. I was up in the nose with the bombardier; he was the one who dropped the lifeboat, and it landed right between two life rafts. There was two groups of them and they got in. Then we waited around for the destroyer to come pick them up. This is a picture from the airplane.

TK: So you were actually able to rescue them.

ER: Yes. … Here, oh, the destroyer's there already. You can hardly see the smoke, but they had smoke bombs or something, and they were floating there. … Here's the destroyer coming up to rescue them. This, we were just flying around the area. This is a better picture.

[tape paused]

LV: Do you know what happened to the men who were rescued?

ER: No, I have often thought about that, whether they ...

TK: You don't know who they are.

ER: I don't know who they are or anything, or whether the crew ever got a medal for this. If you got a medal, you got home a few weeks early, once the war was over, because it was based upon the number of points you had. So I never followed up on that. I really should have. I don't know what the outfit was or anything, but these are the pictures. I had eight of them.

TK: For how long did you have one roll of film?

ER: Well, just now. My brother would send me film. But instead of grabbing an extra roll of film, I just grabbed the camera.

TK: Did you take a lot of pictures during the war?

ER: Yes, I had quite a few, but I didn't want to bring a whole bunch of stuff from when I was a recruit.

TK: Did your whole family write to you?

ER: Oh, yes. Some more or less, but my wife and I corresponded everyday.

LV: Where was your wife while you were in the Pacific?

ER: She was home taking care of the baby. … I left home in January. The baby was born February 22, 1945, so I did not see her until I came home a year later. But,yes, we had regular correspondence, with my parents, too. They sent me a telegram when the baby was born, and I got the letter months before the telegram. I didn't get the telegram until May or something, but the mail was pretty good. So, anyway, then we went to northern Luzon. This is around Clark Field, a satellite field of Clark Field. Then we went up north, and then we set up an area for training, for training for the invasion of Japan. Then one night, we are sitting in the tents, and over the radio, we heard Japan officers surrender on the spot, and that was it, nice spot away from the front.

TK: Do you remember hearing about V-E Day?

ER: Oh, yes. I looked around, I had a picture. … The division or the regiment issued a paper, and the two things that struck me were when Roosevelt died and V-E Day. Yes, we heard about that right away …

TK: But at the time you were still training for the invasion of Japan.

ER: No, V-E Day was when, no, we were still fighting. That was late spring, right?

TK: It was May.

ER: Mid-May. No, we had, there was no let up, no, there was no let up. We had steady combat, sporadic [because] the Japanese were pretty well beaten by then. I only saw one Japanese airplane the whole time I was there.

TK: Did you have any idea of how long the war would go on?

ER: We figured it was going to go on. We had no idea. We figured it was bad. They were pretty well beaten here in the Philippines, but we knew how they defended their positions in these other battles that went on. So we weren't kidding ourselves. Anyway, the next morning after that, these two fellows had bottles of liquor. Where it came from? Says "war is over" on that, and then they turned around and that's what is on the back. (No shit.) [laughter]

TK: It's swear words that we can't read.

ER: Swear words, and this is my platoon. You can see fellows, almost all them. Maybe the cooks weren't [there], but everybody else [was there], because they had to lug these heavy things.

TK: Right, so they were very muscular.

ER: The air-cooled machine guns were not so heavy, but they were all big guys. I have their names on the morning after the peace, so that's it.

LV: What were your feelings on Hiroshima?

ER: Got me home alive.

TK: You see it as being necessary.

ER: No hesitation, no question about, because I don't know where our division would have been in the invasion, but it would not have been easy.

TK: Where were you when the bomb was dropped?

ER: Same spot here. It was about three to four days before the offer to surrender came through. We heard about it. We couldn't believe it, but we still didn't think it was going to end the war.

TK: And how long did you remain in the Philippines?

ER: Remained in the Philippines through September. Then I was, we were all issued dress uniforms, and they were going to send us to the ancient capital of Kyoto. And at the last moment, some outfit with more pull got to go to Kyoto, the Sixth Infantry Division got to go to Korea.

TK: What did you do in Korea?

ER: We were there on occupation repatriating the Japanese back to Japan and bringing in the Koreans, back into Korea. Then, the Sixth Infantry Division ...

TK: Were you curious about going to Japan?

ER: Oh, yes. I looked forward to that. Well, beautiful pressed uniform, the whole deal. … The Sixth Infantry Division is a regular Army division, so it did not take long [before] they started to replace guys like myself, officers, with West Pointers, career men. So they made me company commander of a medical company, and all we did then was … There were no doctors anymore, they were all at the headquarters hospital, so we ran an ambulance service to different sick calls to pick them up. So I did that and we used to go watch, got the spit and polish back at the regular company, where I'd left. I was pretty much on my own. I still got the allotment of the Stateside liquor and alcohol. I don't know, two bottles, and I used to dole it out to the guys [laughter] and let them finish mine. I didn't touch it; I can't stand liquor. Beer [is] all right. But then they started sending us home by points, so many points overseas, so many points for medals you had or anything. That's why I brought up about, I should have checked up, I would have gotten five points for any recognition the crew got.

TK: You personally received the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Bronze Star.

ER: Oh, yes. I got that and I got the Bronze Star Medal and a couple of battle medals, but I never got a Good Conduct Medal. [laughter]

TK: Is that a confession?

ER: I don't know. It's a reflection or something, who knows.

TK: Just a comment.

ER: Just a comment, yes.

TK: So you remained in Korea until January of 1946.

ER: January of '46. Then I got on the Marine *Flasher*, which is still in use, I saw the name in some paper, it's still plugging along. The one I went over … [in] was an old, not an old, but a new, one of those C-3s, a transport, converted into troopship. That was terrible, but that was a pretty good liner, but that was pretty rough leaving California. Going over, I was seasick, you would not believe, until we got past Hawaii. Then it got level and it was all right. Coming back, it was not so bad. What always astounded me was when we got into Los Angeles, [on] the Marine *Flasher*, at six in the morning, there were hundreds, maybe even a couple thousand people … ready to greet us. They were relatives. They knew they were coming in there. They got off the boat, and, man, we had to spend four days in a troop train, all cattle cars, going across the US. [laughter]

TK: When you came into Los Angeles, did you feel like you were given a hero's welcome?

ER: No, not a hero's welcome. It was nice to see the people there. I had been up all night, because coming back, every night, you set the clock back a half an hour, ahead, ahead. So … what was two weeks before was day was now night and night and day, and I could not fall asleep. I had been up the whole night.

TK: You had sort of "boat lag."

ER: Boat lag, yes, that's right.

TK: That being Los Angeles, your family wasn't there, so your homecoming was delayed.

ER: Delayed until I got in to Fort Dix. I jumped off the train at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, called home and said, "Meet me at the main Officers' Club at Fort Dix." I assumed there were several clubs. By the time I got back to the train, the guys thought I missed it, but I got on. It must have been thirty cars long. … I got on and I got to Fort Dix and everybody was there. My folks were there, my wife was there ...

TK: Did you see your daughter for the first time?

ER: Not 'til I got home. They did not bring her.

TK: Oh, okay. They did not bring her down. What was it like to return after all this time?

ER: Great, of course.

TK: Were you nervous to see your daughter?

ER: Well, I don't know if I was nervous, but it was a little strange. But I was kept well-posted. She sent me pictures, I could have brought them, a whole stack of stuff. She sent me pictures regularly, so I followed her development.

LV: What was your rank when you were discharged?

ER: Captain. We served for the duration plus six months. So the duration, President Truman declared ... When did Korea break out, '50 or '51?

TK: '50.

ER: '50. So he declared the duration is over December 31, 1949, and June 30, I got a nice plaque supposedly signed by Truman, and five days later Korea broke out, ten days. I could have been called back in.

TK: Oh, really?

ER: Sure. I wouldn't have liked that.

TK: So you were glad you were not called back for Korea.

ER: That's right. I had enough. I was overseas a year, and that's enough experience.

TK: What was it like readjusting to civilian life?

ER: Readjusted right away, back in Toms River. But in the meantime, my father had sold his farm and moved back into town. My mother always wanted to be in town. … This man bought this house in 1940, that my mother always liked, and he refurbished [it] tremendously. … He had a business in New York, and he was going to commute, but then he could not do it because of the war. So he sold it very reasonably and my father bought it for my mother and they moved … That's where they lived until my mother died, right on the lake in Lakewood.

TK: In the meantime, this man had been renting your farm.

ER: Yes, he had rented it and then he went to a bigger farm. Then another guy rented it, from the City, and I came back. … When the war was over, I said, "Look, you tell him this is it. He's got to be out by the end of the year. " And I came home two months later.

TK: When you came back, was it about the same size as you had left it?

ER: Yes, same size. We weren't going to add anything to it. It was exactly the same size and there was no real home in it. We took what was called "the feed room" and had finished it over. Even after we had built our regular house, I rented it out until this past January, for fifty years. Then I

decided not to rent it anymore, too much responsibility. When you are younger, you can take it but ...

TK: It gets to be too much.

ER: Gets to be too much.

TK: How did the farm expand?

ER: Oh. the farm expanded ... The original farm is the same as the original ten acres. Then my wife's mother and stepfather retired, so I rented that from them. Then across the street from them, my mother-in-law's sister lived and I rented that. … Then next door was her uncle and he had a big capacity there, six, seven thousand [acres], and he got a heart condition, couldn't run it, and I rented that one. Then my neighbor across the street, I rented that one. So it was pretty good, close by.

TK: So you actually expanded by taking over existing properties.

ER: Yes, just renting them. I had one, two, three and one guy lived off the place, because at each, at my mother-in-law's place, theirs was a place for somebody to live, my place, there was a place to live, Uncle Henry's place, there was a place. Just George's, across the street, didn't have [a place to live]. So I had four people, three couples, although only one couple helped out, the wife helped out. The others did whatever they want. And a man coming in off the place [helped out], so I had four help, four and a half, and 30,000 chickens. … Then we decided, as I was talking about before, we would consolidate. We would build this expensive coop, cages and all of that, automatic heaters and waterers. My wife says, "I would rather go back to Douglass," and I said, "Okay, that sounds good to me, too."

TK: So you kept the farm at a moderate size.

ER: We kept the farm ... Well, she started back in '64, so we decided that you don't sell all the chickens at once, because you [would] lose a lot of money, investments. So what we did was let them lay out. In other words, in the first years, in two years, you would get the most of the eggs out of them. So it took two years, 'til August, October of 1966. So she was going to college, and by April of '64, I started work for the US Department of Agriculture.

TK: What were you responsibilities in that position?

ER: Well, I was assistant county supervisor. We had the farm loans, and then they started this rural housing program, which expanded tremendously, especially in Ocean County, where there were few farmers. It became a big thing, especially with interest credits. … So then after two years, I went down to Somerset, right down here on (Amwell Road?) I had the office. I covered Middlesex, Somerset, Mercer and all the counties up to Bergen, not including Hunterdon, [because] Hunterdon had its own supervisor, they had alot of farming there, and Morris and Sussex County. But it was a very small office, and I did well. Then I moved over to Freehold, and then … Toms River opened up and went back there until ... '78. New Jersey used to be part of Maryland and Delaware, was one office. That was down in Newark, Delaware. They separated New Jersey

from Maryland and Delaware and started a New Jersey state office. I applied for the job Farm Programs Chief and I got it, and that's where I stayed until '82.

TK: Would you make individual visits to different farmers?

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: What kind of things would you discuss with them?

ER: Well, [we'd] discuss their progress, their problems. If they are having trouble paying, then how can we set up a refinance. All the debts that are combined. They come in, they want some money for equipment. They knew pretty much what they wanted. Occasionally, you had people who wanted more than we felt [they needed]. We could have been patronizing. But we were … a last source of credit. A farmer who could go to the bank, a farmer who could go to a Federal Land Bank and get production credit was not eligible ...

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO----------

ER: They had not developed enough equity in their farms to be eligible for commercial credit, because the interests rates were lower. So it was very, very, very interesting.

TK: What general trends did you see in those counties at the time?

ER: Well, the general trends were that the farms were getting larger and [there were] fewer individual farms, there's no question. Originally, the Farmers Home Administration was called the "FSA," starting with the Depression. You see some of those pictures with the people sitting on the front porch with a lot of kids, that was the FSA. They really got down to the nitty-gritty farm life.

TK: Were there any incentives to help small farms stay in business?

ER: Incentives, in what way? "Pay me more money." [laughter]

TK: Help from the government.

ER: No. Incentives were, they wanted us to go out and make loans. If you felt they were ineligible for a loan, you would be darn sure that ...

TK: Not to recommend them.

ER: No, you would be darn sure that if you were going to turn them down that you better have plenty of documentation … [to] why you are doing that. In other words, you want to justify your turn-downs, so the emphasis ... I didn't join until after Eisenhower's administration, and then there was talk about cutting back the program, but right on up through and including Nixon, the emphasis was to make loans, I tell you. As a matter-of-fact, Nixon on the Emergency Loans Program instituted write-offs. The first 2,500 dollars of the emergency loan was written off. Then he increased it to 5,000 dollar write-off. Then they had a retroactive … [for] the guys who missed

out on the extra 2,500 dollars. [laughter] It was all during Nixon's administration. And the Interest Credit Program … was instituted during Nixon's administration, a politician of the first order, because once Johnson, well, Nixon is after Johnson, but Johnson also. Eisenhower, I understand, was, kind of backed off, but through Johnson, Nixon and Ford ... Where did Carter come in there, someplace, after Ford?

TK: Next.

ER: Yes, after Ford. But then when Reagan came in and all these state, well, our state director, anyway, was a total, person with no knowledge of farming and an attitude that you could not believe. He immediately took an attitude of antagonism towards older men in the group and anything. It was jut an awful situation. So I turned ...

LV: What became of him?

ER: He got sacked two years after I left, because they serve at the pleasure of the President. About a year after I left or so, an investigative officer came down and wanted to know some of the things he did, and he was off the wall. I says, "What's the investigation for? He's serving at the pleasure of the President. If you're going to get rid of him, get rid of him." So his father, I guess, was very well wired, but he was removed later on, anyway.

TK: What was his name?

ER: Well, I don't know if ...

TK: You would rather not say.

ER: Yes, but it would not be hard to find out. [laughter] Anyway ...

TK: You actually used your GI Bill for a poultry training course.

ER: Oh, yes. Well, everybody did. We were all farmers, all experienced farmers, but we all signed up. We got 180 dollars a month for it. [laughter] I got more, because I came back with malaria.

TK: Where had you picked that up?

ER: Probably in the Philippines … and I had one recurrence. I came home and I got sick right away, and I spent the next two weeks at Fort Dix Hospital. … One other time, I got a recurrence, but it has never recurred since. But they will not take my blood for blood transfusions or anything else, because somewhere hidden in the corner is the bug. … So if you didn't have the disability, you didn't get the 180 dollars, but I used to get 180 dollars a month for two years or three years, so that was nice. But that's the only thing I brought back with me; I had no injuries. I should have known, I had hot shrapnel fall on me, but I never said a word. … I didn't know it could be worth five points. [laughter] One of my brothers served with the Second Armored Division. He was the MD. He finished his residency, went in July, and he was in on the invasion of North Africa that

fall.

TK: So you decided to stop farming and work for the Department of Agriculture when your wife went back to school. Then she went back for three more years.

ER: Yes. They gave her credit for all the courses she took back ... twenty years before and a couple of courses that she took on the outside … [laughter] Whoever she talked to said, "Look, we are going to have a gentleman's agreement. We will give you credit for these two courses, but don't take them as a prerequisite for anything." They had a whole group of, they had started this ...

TK: Continuing education.

ER: Continuing education back then and there was a whole group of women ...

TK: Who had raised their children ...

ER: Right, who had raised their children and were doing it at the time, so she enjoyed it. She was a good ...

TK: Then she went into speech therapy, right?

ER: Well, she majored in speech therapy. They have a good, at least then, I'm sure it is now, a good major in speech therapy. She aced-out her last year. Imagine that, commuting and acing-out. That's my girl. My scores, my grades are not that good. They're all right.

TK: She had years to prepare.

ER: Well, she was good when she started.

LV: When were you honored as the FHA Farm Family of the Year?

ER: Did I write that down?

TK: Well, we must have found it out somehow.

ER: When? When I was still running the farm, and it had to be before '64. (Phil Alampi?) was Secretary of Agriculture in New Jersey.

LV: Why do you believe you were honored?

ER: I don't know.

LV: At the expense of modesty.

ER: [laughter] … Well, you see, you had to be a borrower of the Farmers Home Administration. My friend was supervisor down there, and he always wanted me to join the Farmer's Home, but I

tried a [loan] for a short period with my middle brother, who had a manufacturing place up in Union City. I borrowed some money … and it did not pan out, the money, so I had to borrow money to refinance that, so I got a Farmers Home Administration farm loan [in] '58, just about then.

TK: The whole time that you were farming, were you starting to feel like you would like to get an administrative position?

ER: No, things started, you had to increase and increase the size of the flock. [It was] more responsibility and it got to be not to my liking. [I was] not the best administrator. When you're in the Army and you give a command, you know it's going to be obeyed, but a worker, he can tell you "to go shove it," [laughter] as they say in French.

TK: Did you have a number of people working under you on the farm?

ER: Well, yes, that's what I was saying. I had the people at my mother-in-law's place, my uncle's place, my place and one person we had all along, so we had four people. … This breaks and that breaks, you know, you've got to go and fix it. You can't call in a repair guy, there wasn't that much money, and the price of eggs was going down. … Then the competition for eggs from the South increased. People bought themselves a farm, they had the farm, they bought themselves a job, they had to build a building, and then the feed company came around. It started with the broilers, Mr. Purdue, and they owned the broilers. They told you what to do, when to do, all you provided was the labor and the building, so a guy out in the boondocks could have himself a job. And they started that with eggs. It took longer, but that's the situation right now. It's all vertically integrated operations.

TK: So you've seen a lot of the Jewish chicken farmers ...

ER: Oh, they're all out of it. There is not one, there is not one that I can think of. I can think of one in Monmouth County. He has a place on Route 9, and he sells a lot of eggs right on the place. But there are none left in Toms River, none.

TK: It was sort of a generational thing.

ER: Yes, and once things got bad, even a lot of the people that came out on the farms were well trained with college degrees and everything else. It looked attractive and there was money in it the first couple of years, but as soon as it got bad, they got out. They went to work, they got businesses, they had jobs, they went to teaching. A lot of them went to teaching. They were well educated, even the refugee people.

TK: Your children growing up, did they play an active role on the farm?

ER: Oh, yes. They tell me now I would say, "Come on, let's go down to the egg cellar and grade eggs." They told me they used to hate it.

TK: They didn't have a choice.

ER: No. One of them could not stand going into the coops, and we found out later that he was allergic.

TK: Oh, no.

ER: Yes. Oh, yes. They were active in 4-H, raised quail. We were involved ...

TK: Was 4-H very ...

ER: Big deal with them.

TK: … important in that area at that time?

ER: Yes, it still is, but the emphasis has shifted to horses and stuff, flowers and gardens.

TK: Would you participate in county fairs?

ER: Oh, yes. I was chairman of the county fair down there.

TK: For Ocean County?

ER: For Ocean County. But when I retired, I went back. I tried it, but it was a different ...

TK: Was it a different kind of industry?

ER: No, it wasn't that. It was just a different attitude. It had changed.

TK: In 4-H or in the county office?

ER: In 4-H, in the county office, in everything. It was just different. So the only thing I'm still connected with a little bit is soil conservation. I'm on the nominating committee every year, you get a free meal out of it. [laughter] But after I retired in '82, I started a vineyard on the place, and we ran that 'til last year.

TK: In a way, a lot of people thought the vineyard would not be that successful in that area because of the soil.

ER: The soil is not a problem … the weather. You need a lot of hot, dry, sunny weather, which ...

TK: New Jersey is not famous for.

ER: Last year, there was a different problem, but the two real dry years we had, our grapes were fantastic.

LV: Had you thought about cranberries at all?

ER: No, first of all, you need the land ...

TK: Too much trouble.

ER: That's a big, big deal. It's profitable right now. They have a very strong cooperative, Ocean Spray ...

TK: It's one of the leading items for New Jersey.

ER: Yes, I think, I don't know if it's more than blueberries or not, but blueberries are tremendous farms down in South Jersey.

LV: Working with soil conservation, what are your views on open space in New Jersey and where that is headed?

ER: Well, you're not going to stop urbanization, I'll tell you right now. You take a right out to Monmouth County, western Monmouth County, you see all farms and here you see a development. Coming up now, oh, what's this, 527 or something, set back, a big gorgeous home. … Coming up (Applegarth?) Road, I don't know if you're familiar, from 37, goes up to the senior citizen development, the big one near Forsgate.

TK: (Rossmore?).

ER: Yes, and that was all farms. Now, they're still farming there. … They're harrowing and everything, but it won't take long, because then you go down past (Rossmore?), you go across 37, not 37, Cranbury, South River Road [and] all of a sudden, you see all of those big warehouses. That was all farmland.

TK: Have you seen the same thing happen in Toms River as well?

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: Only years ago.

ER: … The north side is development, the west side is development, across the road to the east are big homes, million dollar homes. [It's] just beginning on the south of me.

TK: Have you sold off any of your land?

ER: Nope, except what I had to give to the county last year, because they widened the road. I got sidewalks now, curbing. I can hook into water, I got sewers.

TK: Have all the farms around yours been developed?

ER: Gone, gone. [They were] either developed, or they let them grow and they ended up jungles.

TK: Is it a priority to you that your land remains agricultural?

ER: Yes. They have this Farmland Preservation Act, but they are not interested in ten-acre pieces. They are interested in bug chunks. They are trying to get it going in Toms River, and one of the committeemen is behind it. They are assembling contiguous pieces. Maybe it will make a large enough piece to interest the state to spend money on it. Now, how well wired the Republicans are in Trenton, I don't know, but my feeling is that they are not going to get it, because there are bigger pieces that people want to get out of it.

LV: Would you be willing to sell to the state?

ER: No, because they are not paying enough.

LV: Right, that's what I was getting at.

ER: I went to a meeting and I asked the price. They had some sold out in New Egypt, and I said, "Well, what did they pay for the place?" They said something like, of course, the land is not as valuable as the land that's around me, they said something like 3,500 dollars an acre, and you should have heard the groans, because across the street it's going for a minimum of 40,000 dollars an acre. So I got a descent piece of ground, but I don't want to sell it.

TK: Do you think that any of your children would be interested in that?

ER: No, the children are all involved with computers. [laughter]

TK: Did they backlash against the agriculture?

ER: No, they would, Danny would've done it. But, my oldest daughter, my only daughter, she's the oldest one, she was a designer, and this and that and the other thing, very talented artist. The youngest one, he's really an expert in computers and systems management and everything else. He changes jobs. Where he's working now [is] up in Parsippanny and moving up to West New York. He doesn't want to commute up there. All three of them live in Somerset County. So he calls a headhunter and in two days he has a job with Exxon. Now, Danny works for the Wilson Company, publishers of the *Readers Guide* and everything else. He's a systems tester up there. He worked his way into that. And Kenny told Dina, my daughter, he says, "Look, I'll get you trained and you can get into something." "No, I don't want to." [laughter] But, in the meantime, she got the job with Head and then another job with Lacoc Sportiff, and then she got familiar with the design programs. The work she turned out on that … She got a job in the City with a company that sells Primavision. She trains their designers on how to use the program. She turns out stuff [that] you'd think it was photography. So, finally, after being the oldest, she ended up also in computers.

TK: Getting back to the issue of open space in New Jersey, do you see the state efforts in the farmland preservation as insufficient?

ER: Well, in a way, yes, because the amount of money they have available is limited, but my

feeling is that it's not going to be a general thing. It's going to be a spot here and there and someplace else. My wife's cousin, up in Albany, fifteen miles east of Albany owns 300 acres. He put that into New York State's program. … He just did not want that land turned into development. But, no, I'm not going to do that. It's inevitable up the road, unless my kids want to pay the taxes. See, I dropped the farmland assessment since I went out of farming, so I'll find out the end of this year what they are going to hit me with.

TK: So by having it as a vineyard, you were able to ...

ER: Oh, yes, I operated a vineyard. We got a good reputation there for tasty grapes. It was all table grapes and there were a lot of sad people when we went out of business.

TK: Did you have a pick-your-own system?

ER: No, we tried that one year and it was terrible.

TK: I think that's what I saw.

ER: Yes, that's it.

TK: Was it terrible because people did not know when the grapes were ripe?

ER: Well, grapes pick fast, and they don't want a basketful of grapes. They want, some did, some bought pounds, pounds, every time and ...

TK: Made jelly.

ER: No, they ate them. They ate them. For jelly, they bought Concord Grapes. That's the best grape for jelly. But the other stuff, no, they ate them. Well, they bought and then they distributed to relatives. People would come down weekends and buy a couple boxes of grapes. They would call up and we would have them ready for them.

TK: Otherwise, how would you sell the grapes?

ER: Well, we sold them retail right on the place, and we sold them to stands. As it got more popular for retail, we cut down the distance we drove to the stands, until the last time, what did I have, one, two, three, four stands right in the close area that I sold to. Otherwise ...

TK: Everything was on your property.

ER: Everything was on my property.

TK: Would you and your wife do it all yourself?

ER: Did it all ourselves, because it wasn't that big to have the help, and they would be doing the job just to, I mean, then we would have all the headaches just to create a job.

LV: How many acres were you farming at this point?

ER: Well, we had ten acres and five acres were in grapes. The rest was in the vegetable patch and the fruit trees.

TK: Did you operate a stand yourself?

ER: We operated it ourselves. It was right on the place.

TK: So that was up until last year.

ER: I pulled out all but sixty grape vines for ourselves. I pulled out all but four peach trees. Apples, I didn't pull any out. I pulled out a cherry tree. … I tried a cherry that was not suitable for this area, European cherry. It just did not work, but I replaced it. A couple of cherries, a couple of pears, a couple of plums and about eight apple trees. I take care of them, mow the grass. [laughter] There's a lot of grass to mow. That's all right, I have the equipment. It keeps me active. I turn eighty in January. I can't believe it.

TK: Now when you came back from the war, did you ever become active in any veterans associations?

ER: No. I joined once with the Jewish War Veterans, and I got turned off.

TK: It wasn't your kind of thing.

ER: It wasn't my kind of thing with the hats and the whole bit. I served, I was glad to serve. I took it seriously and I liked my uniform and I liked the whole bit, but once I was out of it, that was it. You can't recapture it.

TK: As far as Rutgers, have you come back to your reunions every five years?

ER: I didn't start until the twentieth and then I came back, but I've been in contact other times, too. Some of my classmates have been honored, Sam Zagoria, he was a classmate. I visited him while he was assistant in the office of the senator, Republican senator, what was his name? … Then [there were] others who came back here, kept the programs. Then when Secretary (Alampi?) was Secretary of Agriculture, I had some amount of leadership down in the county, and he did not get along too good with the College of Agriculture, so it was always push and shove. … They would call me in and he would call me up and say, "Come on over." ... I was involved the New Jersey Promotion Council, the New Jersey Poultry Producers Association. I still go to the meetings down at the state, New Jersey Vegetable Growers, Fruit Growers, because [with] your pesticide application, you can't handle certain pesticides unless you are licensed, so I keep my license up on that. You have to go to meetings, where you get certain points for it. Three years ago, they came around and took a sample of my grapes, and they were sent to the Food and Drug Administration and they were tested for residues and came back clean. As a matter-of-fact, all the samples for the fruits and vegetables for all of New Jersey came back clean.

TK: Because they use reasonable amounts of pesticides.

ER: It is not a matter of reasonable. Your pesticides that you apply have a certain life to them. Some are four days, some are five days, some are sixty-six days. So if you haven't applied when they come to test, and they find something that should be gone in four days, and it's on there, then you know the farmer has not applied it properly. If you applied your pesticides properly, the residues are harmless. But we always tell our customers, "Wash the grapes," not because of the fact that there may be residue, but because they are out in the wild. There are birds around, and they should be washed. [laughter]

TK: "Wash the grapes."

ER: "Wash the grapes."

LV: How do you feel about the organic farming movement?

ER: It's all blown out of proportion, because what the plant takes, whether it comes from organic fertilizer, or it comes from a bag, the chemical is still the same. Whether it comes from a mixture of sulfur and a mixture with something else, or it's sulfur from what they call "normal" that comes out of the ground, it's all the same sulfur. What organic farming does do is it does improve the soil in the sense that you apply rotted vegetables or rotted manure, and that increases the water holding capacity and the nutrients, so you do improve the soil. But reasonable applications of fertilizer do not affect the plant one bit or the fruit. If it's not done right, maybe you have a problem with runoff, which can be a problem. But … they apply chemicals. They say, "This is all right. This is not all right. This is natural." There are a lot of natural poisons around. Take the nightshade plant, it grows all around. You don't want to eat that. Kids were doing that in Monmouth County. Seeds of the nightshade, it grows on our place. There are all kinds of stuff. So my feeling is that it's blown out of proportion. There are benefits to it. Other than the side of the economic benefits, it reminds me of the cartoon in the *New Yorker* [with] the farmer setting his son along side the road. He says to them, " If they want organic, give them organic." [laughter] It's like I told a stand owner, an old crotchety guy, I sold these grapes and I said, "These aren't, they look like Concords. They are early and they're not Concords." I said, "They're called Fredonias." He says, "You call them what you want to call them. I'm going to call them what I want to call them." [laughter] So what can you do?

TK: Your children all went to Rutgers.

ER: Yes.

TK: Did you have any influence in that?

ER: Sure, their parents went to Rutgers and that's the only thing. Danny, when he was in eighth grade, wrote a thing about what he'd like to do. He said, "I'd like to go to Rutgers, but if I don't get into Rutgers, I'll go to Princeton." [laughter] "Then I'll go to Princeton."

TK: He did not quite understand how things worked at that time.

ER: No, he did not.

TK: Well, it's a good thing he did not have to take second best.

ER: That's right. [laughter]

TK: Do you ever come back as a family for reunions?

ER: No, just my wife and I. We came to lots of football games.

TK: So they grew up with Rutgers as ...

ER: Oh, yes, there's no question. I remember we saw a football game when Dina was four, back in the '50s when the Yankees and the Red Sox were tied up for the World Series or to win the American League. … It had been going on. She had heard it, we had been listening to the radio. We were in the stands of the stadium. The other team came out first and it was quiet. Then the Rutgers team comes out and the stands cheered like crazy. Then when the cheers died down, she says to me, "Daddy, are those the Yankees?" [laughter] … When she went to Douglass, and I took her to the dormitory. … She got into bed, sat down there with her stuff. We were talking, and she says, "You know, I feel just at home." But our granddaughter is out in Purdue, because the boyfriend is out in Purdue.

TK: Oh, no.

ER: Oh, yes.

TK: No hope for the next generation.

ER: We only have two grandchildren. The oldest is attending Prudue. The youngest is a sophmore in Franklin Township High School.

TK: Both of your sons went to Rutgers, as well, so they just grew up with the idea in their heads.

ER: Well, Kenny got his Master's in computer science. He's the one who really knows. Danny got his Master's in teaching, and then he got a Master's in library science. That is how he got in with Wilson company, and he has been there ever since.

TK: Your daughter actually graduated one year ahead of your wife's NJC class.

ER: Right.

TK: Were there jokes made?

ER: Well, the joke at the time was [that] my wife graduated the year that movie about Mrs.

Robinson ...

TK: *The Graduate.*

ER: *The Graduate*. She was the graduate that year. She got plenty of ribbing about that. [laughter] That's right.

TK: Bad timing, right?

ER: That's right. That's why my wife isn't here. She's meeting our daughter downtown.

TK: Your daughter still lives ...

ER: She lives in, you know where Griggstown is?

TK: Yes.

ER: She lives in Griggstown. You know where Griggstown is?

LV: Yes.

ER: You do? You live down around there?

LV: I live down by Princeton Junction, but I ride my bike through Griggstown on my way home all the time.

ER: Oh, you ride your bike. You're one of those guys who don't get off the rode when a car wants to go past. [laughter] You go up River Road there?

LV: Yes.

ER: (Canal?) Road.

LV: It's one of the real nice areas ...

ER: (Neshanic?), and Kenny lives in Hillsborough. So when we're going up to see our kids, we call up, say, "We're going to need a restaurant ... "

TK: Get it all at once.

ER: Get them all at once.

TK: Just as a way of backtracking, you have also been active in the JCC and are now a member of the board of directors. Is that right?

ER: The Ocean County Jewish Federation.

TK: Yes.

ER: Yes.

TK: What are your duties?

ER: Well, I was secretary for nine years, until I could find somebody else to take it. [laughter] I finally said, "This is it." But now I'm on the board of directors and help them, but I have reduced my activity. I reduced my activity in the Jewish Community Center. I was chairman of the cemetery committee for eighteen years.

TK: How did you raise your children, as far as religion was concerned?

ER: We celebrated the holidays and that was about it.

TK: Were they bar or bat mitzvahed?

ER: No. My son, Kenny, did later on. He married a girl who said he should be bar mitzvahed, and so he got bar mitzvahed. It doesn't matter, to be bar mitzvahed, all you got to do is be called to the (Torah?) on a Saturday.

TK: Or you can throw a party.

ER: I tease my wife. The rabbi called her up, we have a retired Air Force colonel as a rabbi, he called her up and said, "(?)." So I said, "(Mazel Tov?), you have been bar mitzvahed." [laughter] No, but modest amounts of religion. I belonged to Hillel here, over there on Livingston Avenue. As a matter-of-fact, the rabbi, he's a retired rabbi, we're still connected with him. I try to touch all bases. I'm not prejudiced, not that I know of, [though] I suppose I have some.

TK: When you left working for the government in 1982, have you seen things get any better since? I know you were pretty disheartened with the Reagan's policies. Have you seen things improve under the Clinton administration, or is it more state by state now?

ER: With the little connection I have, [I know] they have reorganized the whole thing. The Farmers Home now is part of what they call Farm Services Administration, so they are back to the original concept, the FSA. They, now, these interest credit people, who got interest credit while their income was low, the note was written that the full interest rate, and as your interest increased, you had to pay more and more. When I left, the review was once every two years, but now it's every year, but they also have a recapture clause. Say you bought the house for 50,000 dollars and you sold it for 70,000 dollars. The government now wants part of that profit, recapture part of the interest credit that they got. How it effects them, I don't know. It happened after I left the agency. But they are still making rural housing loans, still making emergency loans and the regular farm ownership loans. They are still making them. The emergency loans, the level of loss that you had to have to qualify for the low interest has been escalating. It used to be quite ...

TK: Manageable.

ER: Manageable, yes. Now the proof is being more. This way we kind of felt [that if] the farmer needed it, "Let's do it," and we were told that, which was all right with me. … When I left Toms River to take the farm chief job, I had 1,800 rural housing loans. That does not include loans that you made and that you paid out. People with the modest homes … after a few years, they want to go up in life and they sell them. Then we made a lot of minority loans. The first office I was in, making loans, I didn't pay any attention. The state director said, "You have the biggest proportion, percentage proportion of minority loans of anybody in the state." But, of course, I had a small case load. [laughter] … I made them. One of the difficulties I had here in the Somerset office, when it became apparent that I was willing to make minority loans and women's loans, [was] that they found a house [and] you go to it and it's a shack. It could not be rehabilitated. So I said, "I'm turning you down, not because of you, but because of the house." … That was a tough thing, because it was too expensive to build up there, so you had to find them and we found them. Eventually, we found them. … Look, they were living in such awful conditions, but they are going to be just as bad if you stick them in a poor home. We had some money, on the other hand, where they had, like Carter now, has homes for all or something like that.

TK: Habitat for Humanity.

ER: Habitat for Humanity. Well, we had this self-help housing program. We had five homes built. When I was up here in this office in Cranbury, New Jersey, we had a couple and they were supervised very carefully by, well, they all happened to be Rutgers professors, or they were all attached to Rutgers one way or another down in the Cranbury area, and I think the people are still there. But the five homes we built in Ocean County, as soon as they were able to be sold, took the few thousands dollar profit and "goodbye." But, in general, the rural housing program, excellent, excellent program. How its board has changed, I don't know, but they are still making loans, but they are making high loans, because homes are expensive. I don't know how strict they are, but, like I said, they raised the limits on loss before you qualify for emergency loans.

TK: Were you pleased when you retired, and were able to get back into the nuts and bolts of farming?

ER: Yes. Well, I would have preferred to work a few more years until I was … sixty-five, but this guy, the state director, was impossible. So since I did not have to, I turned sixty-two on January 6th, and quit on January 8th. [laughter]

TK: Did any of your brothers come visit you in the old area?

ER: What?

TK: Did they ever express any interest in farming?

ER: No. You got two lawyers, a doctor and a teacher. No, they weren't interested.

TK: Was your father pleased that you stuck with farming?

ER: Oh, yes, he thought that was good. He liked my wife, too, even though she came from a more radical family.

[tape paused]

LV: What do you think the future holds?

ER: Well, it's tough to prognosticate. Look, agriculture in this country is the most, I don't like to use the word "efficient," because they used to tell us, the farmers, "You are not efficient enough," but it's productive, let's put it that way. It's the most productive you find in the world, I think. Maybe you find somebody on a rice paddy growing this much on a raised bed, but overall it's the most productive in the world, and they got lots of room to increase production. That's another thing, talking about organic. The people who complain about genetically engineered new species, new types of food and vegetables, what the plant breeders have been doing all these years, hit or miss, by crossing and crossing, making tens and thousands of crosses, so maybe you will get an attribute of one, say, eggplant into another eggplant that will make it not susceptible to the Colorado Potato Beetle. Now, they are doing it by gene splicing and all that. Now, that's exactly what they were doing hit or miss, and now they are making more possible. One time, I went to a Rutgers Field Day, and they had how many varieties of eggplant, or similar, the same family. You would not recognize them as eggplant, and they had several that were immune to the Colorado Potato Beetle, which is a big, big problem with eggplants and potatoes. So what they were doing was trying to cross these few that showed immunity with all these commercial eggplants, and maybe for some reason, the gene that accounted for that would be transferred to the commercial variety. Now what is wrong with doing that, genetically manipulating? I don't see what's wrong, and I think that those people that object to that are way off-base. They are way off-base, too, with making food pure with some type of radiation. It does not live in the food. The people who handle it, they might be subject to some problems … but once the food leaves where the radiation is done, I don't see that anything remains, and if it would, they would find it immediately.

TK: Is there anything that we've forgotten to add?

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

TK: Did you come back for the fiftieth reunion?

ER: Yes, I was here for the fiftieth.

TK: You got inducted into the Old Guard.

ER: Yes. I came back for the fifty-fifth ...

TK: So '96.

ER: 1991 was fifty, so, yes, '96 was fifty-five. I will be back for the sixtieth.

TK: In 2001.

ER: In 2001, that's right. George Ritter, I finally remembered his name, George Ritter.

TK: Who's that?

ER: He and Bob Satter were kind of big men on campus. They went up to Hartford, Connecticut and they served up there and they were on the tennis team. They were ...

TK: Was Ritter the token Gentile on the tennis team?

ER: No, no, no. I can't remember. Ritter was Jewish. Bob was Jewish, too. I can't remember. Look in the annual, he was a very good basketball player. Of course, he was only about 5'9" or 5'10". You know, then you did not have these giants. I'll never forget a game with USC or UCLA. They came to the gym, and all of a sudden, they are passing over the heads of the Rutgers guys.

TK: Rutgers wasn't getting any rebounds.

ER: No, my God, no.

TK: What sports do you follow now?

ER: I follow the Mets. It gets too complicated to follow all the other teams.

TK: Do you follow the Scarlet Knights?

ER: Oh, yes, Rutgers, sure.

TK: Do you come back for the football games?

ER: Yes. I come back for the football games, not as much as I used to. I saw the women play their game. I thought they were going to win that. There were mixed emotion there because our granddaughter is out at Purdue.

TK: Were your sons of draft age during the Vietnam War?

ER: Kenny missed it entirely. He didn't even get a number for the draft. Danny did.

TK: What were your feelings about that at that time?

ER: Well, I was not too happy about it, because I wasn't in favor of the Vietnam War. This, what is going on now, I have mixed feelings, too, because maybe if they had stopped Hitler in '35, we would not have lost fifty million people. [NATO air campaign against Serbia concerning the status of Kosovo.]

TK: So you can see it both ways.

ER: This guy is a crazy lunatic, obviously, and he is looking to expand his territory. It's a terrible thing that he's doing. So I can't not object to it, but I'm afraid they are going to be in a quagmire over there for quite awhile. They're putting Albanians on their transports, so if they shoot up the transport, they are going to kill Albanians. What went on in Africa, all the genocide, it's unbelievable. Cambodia, unbelievable.

TK: Any final thoughts on Rutgers?

ER: Rutgers ...

TK: How do you feel your years at the School of Agriculture prepared you for your career?

ER: College is more than just education, it's a broadening experience. I came up a pretty callow youth, very callow, because I … involved so much time with school and then in religious school, and I really did not get to expand that much. I would have wanted to, but I did not buck the trend until I got older. So I was very callow. So I felt I matured and I think Rutgers was a good environment for it. It was a nice school. I wouldn't say I would have preferred to go to Princeton if I didn't get into Rutgers, but there was no trouble getting into Rutgers.

TK: Back then.

ER: Oh, they had some standards back then. Not everybody got in. Of course, that was the time, well, they had quotas for Jews here, but the quotas for black people were one a class. He lived in Winants there, nice fellow.

TK: Did you know him well?

ER: Yes, I'm trying to think of his name, you got the annual? Moss, Moss was his last name, I'm sure of it. He lived on the top floor [Simeon Moss].

TK: Were any people you know affected by the quotas? For example, Princeton was not allowing Jews in at this time.

ER: Is what?

TK: Princeton was not really allowing Jews in at this time.

ER: No, at this point, no. I don't know, my nephews went to Princeton.

LV: No, during the '40s.

ER: Oh, I'm sure they had it, no question about it. My nephews turned out to be conservative Republicans.

TK: Nobody knows how that happened, right?

ER: I know how that happened, the older one went up to Yale ...

TK: Oh, no.

ER: … He got on the (?), I think it was at Yale. Then he went on to Harvard for chemistry, and then he went back to Yale for medicine, I don't know.

TK: You just chose not to.

ER: No, I'll talk to one.

TK: Choose not to be one, I mean.

ER: Oh, yes, it's all right. It's only when they get so, well, everybody gets hard-bitten, not everybody, but there's always a group of people that take such a hard stand on their, whatever they think about.

TK: What has been your favorite activity since you actually retired?

ER: Well, taking care of the place is a big job, and I can't play tennis anymore, [because] my eyes are not too good. … I've had people on the place, renters, that I didn't pay any attention, and the place is full of garbage. [laughter] I've been cleaning up the place. Other than that, we've been living a very tame [lifestyle]. We take short trips. The last long trip I took was back in '82 ...

TK: Where did you go?

ER: Yellowstone. A couple of years before that, we went to the Grand Canyon. We want to get out to the West Coast. My wife has never been out there. But we take short trips. We go up to Maine, we go up to New York State, Washington, DC, quite often. I enjoy Washington. I know my way around there. … Then we've been going in on a Saturday or a Sunday and picking up a ticket for a show [in the City]. So if there is a special show at a museum, we'll go in. But, other than that, organized activities, besides the Reform temple we're in, which is very small, not very much. We've kind of pulled away.

TK: Anything you would like to add to the interview?

ER: No.

TK: Okay, thanks then ...

ER: Did you interview any other Ag people?

TK: This concludes the interview.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy 6/12/01
Reviewed by Ephraim Robinson 7/01