

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HAROLD L. SAKS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

SEAN D. HARVEY

SI: This begins an interview with Mr. Harold Saks on February 14, the year 2000 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

SH: Sean Harvey

SI: Mr. Saks, first we'd like to thank you for coming down and allowing us to interview you.

HS: It's my pleasure. It took a while, but we finally made it.

SI: Yes. We finally got this show on the road. We were wondering if we could start by asking you a few questions about your parents?

HS: All right.

SI: First, I noticed that your father was born in New York.

HS: New York City.

SI: New York City.

HS: Yes.

SI: Was all of your family from the New York area?

HS: Not all. Father was born in New York City. My maternal grandmother was born in Poughkeepsie, New York. My mother was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. And, staying on my mother's side, my maternal grandfather was born in Germany. I believe [he] emigrated to England, and then to this country. In fact, he became a wine merchant, and it was down here in New Brunswick that he had his business. My mother was born here. She was ... the only child of my grandmother and grandfather. Now, on Dad's side, he was born in the city, New York City, Manhattan. His mother and father were Hungarian immigrants, came over on a boat that went to Ellis Island, and they came from the city of Budapest. I don't know much about their homeland, what their occupations were over there, whether they knew one another over there, or they met on a boat, or whether they met in New York City. One of the sad things about my understandings is that I never asked any questions, and nobody ever really wanted to discuss, too much, the family background. They always say about Hungarians that, "Whenever you're Hungarian, you're probably a horse thief."

SI: Oh?

HS: [Laughs] That's an old joke; don't put any truth in that remark. Another thing, as a family story, was that my grandmother had a wonderful voice. She was a very small woman. That's my dad's mother. She sang beautifully, and she so pleased the captain, the captain gave her free passage. But that's another story, completely without any founding in certainty. My [grandmother] on my mother's side ... became quite wealthy. He was the main buyer of a

woman's chain of shoe stores in New York City, and enjoyed good success. Grandma saved a lot of her twenty-fifth wedding anniversary invitations, rather, party invitations, and I kept them, and cherished them for quite a few years. It was very interesting to see, back in those days, what was considered a fancy party menu. As a single child my mother had a ... great many advantages. She was well-educated. Went to Hunter College, graduated Class of 1918, and kept up her college contacts for a long, long time. I can remember, as a kid, her going to meet her alumnae friends. She attended alumnae dinners. I remember her friends coming out to our house, and they were close friends. Also, she was a great baseball fan, and her mother's brother, which would be her ... [uncle] took her to all the opening games of the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds. Taught her baseball, taught her how to keep score, and she really loved it. The Polo Grounds were demolished, the Giants went out West, but she kept up going to baseball games. She went to see the Yankees with her husband, in her later years, and became a Yankee fan.

SI: Oh, okay.

HS: After Dad retired, she would talk baseball with my brother, Gene, and particularly Uncle Harry, who was her favorite. And she was his favorite. He was a bachelor uncle who lived with us in Hackensack and introduced my mother to baseball lore, *vis a vis* the New York Giants, as mentioned earlier.

SI: Okay.

HS: We moved to Hackensack, New Jersey when I was one year old. It was about 1927. I was born in 1926. Her father, in his early sixties, suffered a bad heart-attack, had to give up his life as a businessman, and the family had to move from Yonkers, where they had lived many years, out to Wyckoff, New Jersey. After he passed away, my dad's business, which was also in shoes in downtown New York, required that he travel back and forth from the city. He bought a home very near a commuter line, the Erie Railroad in Hackensack, so that he could make an easy run from his home into his place of business, and took the ferry boat across the Hudson to Chambers Street. I remember those trips, going back and forth on the ferryboat, and when you got onto the New York side ... It left from Hoboken. He took the train from Hackensack, went down, stopped at Hoboken, everybody got off, got on the ferryboat, over to Chambers Street. We had to walk through the Washington Market, it was called in those days. This was where all the meat came in and was sold. Their work of cleaning up began in the early morning hours, and the place was, you know, a mess.

SI: Yes.

HS: You'd be seeing the carcasses, and animal parts all over, but that's just an aside comment. After that, just traversing that one block, you'd get over to West Broadway, where my father's place of business was. He was in business for a good number of years, and then, retired. I worked for him for about three or four years. This was after college, so I'm getting a little ahead of the game explaining to you about the family.

SI: That's okay. We can always go back.

HS: Right. Dad's father also owned two or three retail shoe stores. My father worked for his father, became interested in shoes. Then when he met my mother, her dad was also in the shoe business. So there were several generations doing the same thing. And eventually, of course, Dad's father died. His wife became severely ill, and had to be cared for at home by my mother and her family, and lived in our house with us. So we had quite a gang living in our house in Hackensack. There was my mother and father, my brother, Gene, my Uncle Harry, my mother's mother, and my aunt, named Florence, my Dad's sister, and myself.

SI: Right.

HS: I have no other siblings. My brother, Gene, is five years older than I. I'm seventy-three, so he's seventy-eight. His career was through the New York theater and Hollywood, after World War II. He both acted and directed, and he earned several "Tony" Awards. We went to the local schools in Hackensack, elementary, junior high, high school. And he got a start, actually, in the theater, by performing on the high school stage. My dad had a successful business, and after his retirement, I then looked around for a job in retailing. It wasn't my forte. I left it and went eventually into the field of education. My undergraduate work was here at Rutgers. I got a B.Sc. Everybody took business administration. When you got out of the army, the business administration department was flooded, hundreds and hundreds of GIs. I think 1950 was the largest graduating class that Rutgers had, and it was the end of the influx of soldiers who got the GI Bill.

SI: Right.

HS: And even though I was in the army only a short time, twenty-one months, it still paid for three years of college, though my father could have paid my tuition, or I could have done something about paying for my own. The GI Bill was perhaps one of the government's greatest gifts to its people. It's almost as big, I think, as Social Security.

SI: Yes. Oh, yes.

HS: Because the GI Bill educated, you know, a few million men and women, and they got their degrees that way. Let's see, I've been rambling on a bit, and if you want to give some specific questions, do so.

SI: Sure. Sure.

HS: Because I'm sure I'll leave out some material.

SI: I have a question, just going back to your grandparents. It sounds like you knew them fairly well. You lived with them, and ...

HS: ... Unfortunately, my mother's father died a year before I was born. Died in his early sixties. I never knew him. My father's father passed away when I was a little boy, maybe three

or four years old. Unfortunately, I inherited, I believe, you know, through the genes, some of his illnesses. He died of cancer. ... In those days they had nothing, no cures for cancer, and so forth, and he died of bladder cancer. I picked it up, but it's under good control and doesn't offer me any problems. As I explained to you, my grandmother on my father's side, had the misfortune of receiving an injection from a doctor, which went, and I don't know the medical explanation of it, went awry, and caused her to be bedridden. She lost control of some of her internal functions. That's why she had to come to live with us. She suffered a great deal of pain until she passed on. Now my mother's mother, who lived in the house with us, was in her late seventies or early eighties, and one night stepped out of her bedroom, was going to go to the bathroom, took a wrong turn, and toppled down the stairs. When she got up at night she just lost her orientation. She was fairly aged, but she was able to still sew, and cook, and do a lot of needle work. She was very loved by me and she was the one that I knew the best. I knew neither of my grandfathers, and that one grandmother was so ill that, although I knew her, it was from going into the bedroom and standing by her bedside and saying a few words, because she was always in some pain, and the visits were quite short. I knew her though before she became that ill and had to come live with us. She maintained her own home in the same time, Hackensack, and she was a very talkative, and matriarchal woman. My other grandmother was much more of a nurturing-type person, and since I lived in the house with her, it was a grandmother, grandson relationship, you know, an apple pie situation.

SI: Yes.

HS: Grandma's apple pie thing. She was obviously a good cook.

SI: Sounds like it.

HS: And it was with some sadness that I experienced her death. All those graves are out in the Brooklyn area, and once I visited all my deceased grandparents. You could go across the street and visit Grandma and Grandpa from my father's side, and on the other side of the street was my other grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side.

SI: Right.

HS: In those days immigrants had to form societies for purposes of obtaining grave sites. So I can remember, on one side it was the Hungarian society. In fact, the deed is written in Hungarian. It wasn't the case, though, with the other side of the family. I recently got a letter which said that I owed money for upkeep. [Laughs] My mother had paid for ongoing care. Of course, in those days it wasn't very much, and I guess they were deciding that, "Well, if they can locate somebody, they'll try to get a little more money out of them." ... It's called Perpetual Care.

SI: Right.

HS: And they were all set to give me a contract to sign. I showed it to my brother. He got furious. He said, "Mom paid for all that already." I said, "But those were years and years ago."

In any event, he showed it to his lawyer and his lawyer wrote them a letter. We didn't hear anything more about it. God knows what's happening to all those. You know, you can't sell any of these. For instance, the plot that my father's parents are in has eight grave sites in it. Six remain empty, and they will never be touched. And the same thing occurs, even to a greater extent, on my mother's side of the family, because there were twelve plots bought, and only occupied by four people. So there's another eight. So, should I choose to be buried, there's all kinds of places available. [Laughs] It's not come to that point, however.

SI: No.

SH: Does your family have any relation to Saks Fifth Avenue?

HS: No. I'll explain to you that my name was not originally Saks. ... It's I-S-A-K-O-W-I-T-Z. Isakowitz, which is the Hungarian name. And my ... father's dad maintained his name. His first name was Max. And he saw no reason to change. Now, when my father began to start his own business, which became quite large and had a nation-wide distribution of women's shoes, he felt that he was hampered with a name like that, such an obviously foreign name. And there was some prejudice about that, 'cause he sold shoes all over the South, had salesmen going out to the West, Los Angeles, mid-West, and so forth, and he wanted something American. Now it so happened that his cousins had the same name, and they all changed their name at the same time. I still have the court document which legally changed his name from Isakowitz to Saks. Now, again, on my mother's side, her name, maiden name, is Lewkowitz. So it was Lewkowitz on one side, and Isakowitz on the other. And Lewkowitz, I think, was a well-known name in the city, of opticians, because I've seen advertisements in the newspaper about that company. It had nothing to do, though, with my grandmother or my grandfather. An interesting anecdote about the name of Lewkowitz: my mother graduated Hunter College ... and, under each person's name in the yearbook, they'd write a little ... saying about them.

SI: Oh, yes. A little quote.

HS: Yes, a quote or something.

SI: Yes.

HS: And they ... used the difficulty of pronouncing my mother's name as that quote. "The young woman with the hard-to-pronounce name." This later became a point of, to me, of prejudice, because, when she ... became a teacher in the New York City public school system, she majored in, I would say, domestic science, it was called in those days. It was sewing, and so forth. She went for an interview, and in those days the New York public schools were the tops.

SI: Right.

HS: The people [who] ran the board of examiners were extremely autocratic. She went down to Livingston Street in Brooklyn, where she went for her interview, where the board of education is located, which Giuliani would like to tear down, and she went for her interview. And this

woman behind the desk said, "Beatrix Lekowitz." And my mother said, "No, Beatrix Lewkowitz." She said, "Well, how do you think, Miss Lewkowitz, the children will be able to pronounce your last name?" My mother said, "I think they could pronounce it quite well." But that was the attitude. It would have been better to be Smith, or something like that.

SI: Yes.

HS: But, in those days you did these things. I'm sure nowadays, I would like to believe my dad would have never changed his name, 'cause I certainly wouldn't have done so. There's a famous store out West called, "Sakowitz," a very fine department store and a lot of merchants at that time did make those changes. And a lot of people try to tell if you're Jewish or not by your name. And a lot of Jews, having changed their name, have given Gentiles a bit of a ... kick, because a lot of them have become Greens instead of Greenbaums, you know, and so forth. So, nobody knows who is what, and where, anymore.

SI: Right. I was wondering, ... with your parents and your grandparents, did they keep any traditions from Hungary or Germany, like in food, or customs?

HS: Food, yes. Yes.

SI: Or in language?

HS: No language. No. Well, I shouldn't say that, because I was *der kinder*, which means, "the child." And when elders in the family wanted to have a conversation, "*Sha, der kinder*." And then, they would speak in German. And I'd be left imagining, but ... it wasn't that frequent. Yes, it did occur. Your question is a useful one. But my dad didn't know much German. My mother, I think, did study German in college, along with other subjects, as well, and a lot of her friends were German majors. It was a tough language. And I tried to take it, and flunked it my first year in college, and was advised by the teacher not to go on.

SI: What about the other things, like food for instance?

HS: German food was always very tasty, very heavy. A lot of the food was of a traditional origin, also tied into Jewish religion. At Passovers one of the traditions is a matzo ball soup, and, also, geffilte fish, which is a mixture of several different kinds of fish served with horseradish, I believe, or some other condiment. The favorite of everyone, of course, was potato latkes, they called them, and this is very fattening, very cholesterol ridden.

SI: Oh, yes. Good though.

HS: A potato pancake is quite delicious. Of course, downtown New York was filled with Jewish restaurants, German-Jewish restaurants, Hungarian restaurants, and I recently read, in today's *[New York] Times*, that one of the most famous (Ratners?) ... is finding that they're gonna have to make some concessions to modern times, and they're going to have a whole different format. They're gonna shut down the restaurant, redo it, and have a young people's

club in the back. What that is gonna be like, I don't know. The man who wrote the article had tongue in cheek. He said, "I think the place will be closed in five years." But go down to (Katz's?) delicatessen. I remember, the saying in World War II was, "... Send your boy in the Army a salami." It was written all over the inside of the delicatessen. They had them hanging by the dozens, and a lot of GIs got their salamis in a ... food package.

SI: Right. Sure.

HS: So everybody got a salami. Other foods were quite American, because my grandmother was born in Poughkeepsie, using American style cooking. And my wife always says, though, that both grandparents boiled the hell out of everything.

SI: Oh, yeah?

HS: [Laughs] Which actually ruined the food. But ... I still have some of my grandmother's cookbooks. And there's some great stories of my wife trying to duplicate some of recipes, because the way my grandmother would write it down was, it'll say, "A pinch of this, and a handful of that." And nothing was ever specified in ounces, or metrics, or tablespoons, teaspoonfuls, or anything else. A lot of it was done by making it and then tasting it as you were cooking it. But there're some lovely recipes for coffee cake, which is a German-American style pastry.

SI: Right.

HS: And she made a wonderful white cake with chocolate icing, which immediately causes me to salivate.

SI: Smiles right away. [Laughter]

HS: I start to drool when I think of that, 'cause I was always licking the pot.

SI: I see.

HS: You know, when she finished the chocolate, and covered the cake with the chocolate, she'd call me down to the kitchen and let me finish off what was there. The dinning room table was always in use, you know. Eating out meant that the whole family was taken out by my father for a Sunday meal, on occasion. But my mother got up, cooked breakfast for my brother, myself, her husband, and then my grandmother and she had their breakfast. Same thing for lunch when I came home from school. School was two blocks away, and she had lunch for us. Same thing for dinner. There was a huge dinner, and tablecloths, linens, silverware, you know, dishes, good dishes and all. So there was the ... comfort, as well as the effort, of running a, like a three-masted schooner. You know what I mean? 'Cause there was a hell of a lot of work involved in running that house.

SI: Did they keep a kosher household?

HS: No.

SI: No.

HS: ... Well, they wouldn't have any pork in the house, but when eating out, pork ... was eaten. I think it caused a little friction between one side of the family and the other, because my father's mother tried to keep kosher, although she wasn't able to cook that much anymore. But there were no, really, no arguments about it. Our family, as far as the practice of Judaism very early on, were Reformed Jews. Now, my father's side was Orthodox, but on my mother's side the only temple that was Reformed was in Paterson, New Jersey, and we had to drive from Hackensack to Paterson to attend temple on the holidays and it was considered different because of this, because, in Hackensack, there was one synagogue, Orthodox, men downstairs, women upstairs, the whole works like that. When you went to Paterson the family sat together, children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, all had their assigned seating arrangements. That temple in Paterson is gone. It's moved out into upper suburbia, up in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey. My father started another congregation of Reformed Jews and he and my mother were very honored members of it because they were founders of it. They got a lot, in later life, out of their attendance. It became a very warm group and when they passed away I went back, and my wife and I were greeted with great warmth. I belong to a Reformed Temple, but I do not attend it that regularly. There have been huge growths, where we live, in Reformed Judaism. But they're having a tough time.

SI: Right.

HS: A lot of people are just taking their kids for a bar mitzvah, and forget about it after that.

SI: Forget it, yes.

HS: I'm sure this might be the case in other religions as well, where it's important that the children get their religious education, and then after confirmation, and so forth, go less frequently.

SI: Right.

HS: An article in the paper recently, in fact, today in the *Times*, Catholicism is having a very tough time getting young men to be priests.

SI: Yes, they've had to recruit from other countries.

HS: Same thing, I think, in Judaism. But there's a growing group of Jews now, who ... are not Orthodox, who are not Reformed, who are more holistic and they're getting very involved with having discussion groups. They have a service, but then they break up into discussion groups, and things like that. They study Hebrew and they study religious interpretations of the Bible, and meet at their own homes for little seminars. We're in our seventies now, we're kind of away

from that. So we celebrate Passover and have a wonderful time. We invite several lovely families, who we have known many years, are Gentile to come to our seder, Passover dinner and that seems to be the big gathering point for observance of our Judaism. Lighting the Passover lights, Chanukah, is observed yearly.

SI: Yes.

HS: I'm rambling a little bit, but ... every village green in every town, has got the menorah, it's got the Christ child and three kings, the crèche. Now we're starting in with the Ten Commandments on state house grounds. ... Pretty soon I should imagine my town is gonna want to put the Ten Commandments there, too.

SI: Right.

HS: It's running away with itself in that regard.

SH: How did your mother find time, with all of her obligations at home, to teach as well, in the New York City school district?

HS: Oh, she was single then.

SH: Oh, this was before she got married then?

HS: Yes. Yes. Right. No, she ... did not have two careers.

SH: So when she got married she stopped teaching altogether.

HS: Yes.

SH: Okay.

SI: How did your parents meet and marry?

HS: I really don't know. I never heard the story of their courtship. I have found postcards. My father, in his early ... career as a shoe salesman, traveled a good deal and ... he would mail my mother postcards from all the hotels ... in all the towns. So I found some of those, but he was very brief in his remarks. He'd say, "It's cold out here," and, "I'm going over to see this one at such and such a store," and, "I'll be in this city tomorrow." So a traveling salesman was a lot of his work. My uncle, Harry ... has an interesting career as a traveling salesman. That's my mother's brother, the one who loved baseball and took her to all the games. ... In those days lace, particularly imported lace, was a fashionable part of women's finery. He was a salesman for a large lace firm in New York City and he had a route out in the mid-West. And, my God, you talk of Willie Loman, you know, traveling town to town to town. Of course, the Loman's merchandise was totally different. But it's the idea of the loneliness, of being away from home. He didn't marry. The woman he was engaged to passed away and he never married anyone else.

I don't know how many girlfriends he might have had along the way, but ... you know, he never talked about that. He was a salesman for fine lace and he died with his boots on. We got a card about his death from the owner of one of the hotels in Detroit that he always stopped at and those were the days where he was all alone.

SI: Right.

HS: You know, ... he had a heart-attack, died, and who was there to know of it, except the man who obviously was a good friend of his. [My uncle] stopped there, had done so for so many years. And he immediately telephoned my grandmother, and told her that Harry had passed on. He died of high blood-pressure. He ate like ... Diamond Jim Brady. He loved eating, and literally cholesteroled himself into a heart attack.

SI: Yes.

HS: He must have had ... high blood-pressure, very high blood-pressure. And liked a good time, and being on the road, and dining with friends, and so forth, fellow salesmen. He over-extended himself until finally, in his mid-sixties, he died.

SH: At what point in your father's life did he serve in the hospital corps? Was that during World War I?

HS: Yes. Bad eyes, so they put him in the hospital corps. He had thick eyeglasses. I do not know, in those days, I think he had a very healthy physique. He could play ball very well, he ran track in high school. He was a great ice-skater. His honorable discharge, such-and-such a company. I don't know how much training he had, but I presume it was, you know, adequate and according to regulations.

SH: So did he work in a military hospital for veterans that were coming back?

HS: Have no idea.

SH: No idea?

SI: ... Your mother sounds extremely interesting, going to college in such a time when it was very unusual.

HS: Yes. It was unusual, very unusual, for a woman to do that. And she had a number of companions. I have old photograph books that I can't identify anybody in them. Nobody wrote down any of the names of the people, but they all would go out in the summer time to summer homes, up in Rye, New York. They moved early from Harlem to Yonkers and lived there many years. Then there was the move out to Wyckoff, New Jersey when Grandpa Lewkowitz had the heart-attack.

SI: Was she ever involved in any movements? I guess, political, or any women's causes?

HS: I don't think so. Her group [was] very intellectually oriented. ... They were more involved in artistic things. My grandmother was an avid fan of the opera and listened every Saturday afternoon to the opera, which still is, you know, going on, and I used to listen, too, along with her. She loved classical music. She played piano very well. My mother played a little bit.

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HS: ... I can remember the piano music. She kept it in the piano bench. I took some piano lessons, too, as a child. They wanted me to have them. I can remember taking that damn thing out, and looking at it, and saying, "I'm never gonna be able to do this." Once in a while my grandma would play, but her fingers became arthritic, you know, and it was tough for her. ... When I was a very young person she played a little. But they loved music. My father wasn't [home] that much at all. My mother came from a very well-to-do family, and took advantage of many of the things that New York City offered. Went to museums. Don't know that she knew much about, or liked, art very much. More ballet, theater, and concerts.

SI: So, it sounds like you got your love of music from her.

HS: ... Yes. I've still maintained a subscription to the New Jersey Symphony for many years, go down occasionally to Newark, to the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. But I don't go into the city, and I don't subscribe to, you know, Carnegie Hall subscriptions and so forth, 'cause that whole thing has gotten to be much too difficult to pull off and packing up, getting into the car, finding a parking space, paying the garage fees, and all that, when there was something available locally, I saw no sense in that. Although I think going to the ballet is terrific. And I should have seen, by this time, more than the one or two operas that I've experienced. So I'm a listener to WQXR and attend the New Jersey Symphony. It performs in Englewood at a theater called John Harms. But other than that, you know, I'm not that deeply involved. I love photography, and I've gone to a lot of major exhibitions and I've taken a lot of pictures myself. I've gotten an awful lot of posters from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, when ... they have these fantastic shows. I'm invariably buying the book about the show, or picking up some posters, and have absolutely no room to show any of this stuff, besides being able to afford framing it.

SI: When did you get into photography?

HS: Oh, I got into photography through my mother, who had a little Kodak camera that folded up and you could put in your pocket. It's called a vest-pocket Kodak, one-twenty-six was the size of the film, and I loved it. I was the family photographer. We had a summer home up in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, and whenever crowds of people came up from my father's company, or my mother's girlfriends and all, I was always photographing. I learned to process black and white film, and print, and I used to go down to the basement, put paper on the windows, you know, set everything up, and had a marvelous time with that. I enjoyed that hobby very, very much. In fact, I can remember the UPS truck coming out when we were at Pompton Lakes. ... I always wrote to Macy's for my hypo and my ... D-76 developer, and some rolls of

film. And I would just wait there 'til that truck came out with my order, so I could develop a few images. That was a lot of fun.

SI: Yes. It sounds it. ... How did the Great Depression affect your family, or the business, or anything?

HS: ... We escaped it. My father was very well established. He was a shoe wholesaler. The product that he had was not expensive. Women's fashion shoes sold for four or five dollars a pair, even though it might be that many women could not even afford that. In those days the family shoe stores were his customers. He supported the family very well. We did not live in a part of town that required him to "keep up with the Jones." Nevertheless, I always wore had-me-downs from my cousin, Jack, and my brother. ... My mother and grandmother were very frugal. They did a lot of sewing, made a lot of their own clothes, as many women did in those days.

SI: Right.

HS: I can remember homeless men coming to the back door.

SI: Oh, yeah.

HS: And my grandmother making sandwiches for them. So my connection to the Depression was of that nature and I was fortunate, very fortunate. The word got around that if you stopped at 74 Ross Avenue, Hackensack, the lady would give you something to eat. And there was a, I wouldn't say a constant parade, you know, of men, 'cause I'm sure the neighbors would get a little uptight that Mrs. Lewkowitz was feeding ... an army of homeless men. But it was sad to see. Always grateful and thankful, tipping their hats, "Can I do something for you? Can I rake the yard?" Even being given a very modest lunch. So the Depression days, now, that's my impression. I don't know what Dad went through in his business. I'm sure that, because leather was the big thing as far as he was concerned, he had to, I'm certain, deal with problems that I had no idea about. But, as a kid, we still went outside after dinner and played baseball. That kind of stuff.

SI: What was it like growing up in ... Hackensack? Like, your friends, their families, and how was the atmosphere?

HS: Oh, it was very small-townish. We were the only Jews on the block. Me and one other chap, were the only Jews who attended the elementary school I went to. On the other side of Hackensack, more Jewish families lived, and I, as a result, grew up with up with a group of boys and girls who were non-Jewish, but who were close friends. It so happened that my Dad had a pool table in the basement, and that was the center of afternoon activities after school, but it was a nice group. Things were not so nice in high school, because by that time, adolescence and division of minorities became very apparent and the high school, as many high schools do, had fraternities and the Jewish kids didn't have any, so they formed one. When they formed a fraternity the Gentile group got on our backs and there was no fighting really, but there were some very hard-fought sport events. I had all Gentile friends and the Jewish fraternity hadn't

been formed yet at the high school. I pledged a non-Jewish fraternity, but I wasn't allowed to join it. I was told there was no more room in the membership. Then the Jewish kids formed a fraternity, which I joined. It was sort of okay, but very obvious.

SI: Yes.

SH: Did other minorities face the same problems, like black people in your community at all?

HS: Black kids had nothing like that socially. Their parents were workers, servants. They lived in a part of town where only black people lived. ... Well, in Bergen County there were three towns that had black people in them: Hackensack, Englewood, and Teaneck. Those were the three towns that had black families. But I never had a black school teacher. I never had a black friend. In fact, joining this Jewish fraternity in high school brought me into some conflict with some of the Jewish kids who thought I had always been snobbish because I was from the other side of town. But that was not something which caused me any anguish. ... There were some, I would call it anti-Semitic experiences in high school. There was a group of kids who did give the Jewish fraternity boys a bit of a hard time, and tried to start some trouble, but it never caused us to have a fight or something like that. It was unpleasant, though, to some extent.

SI: I've actually never heard of a high school fraternity. What kind of activities ...

HS: They were social, that's all.

SI: So, just like a club. Not like a fraternity that we think of in college, though?

HS: It was like a junior college fraternity.

SI: Okay.

HS: They'd have dances. Getting in, and pledging, and becoming part of a group, as is the case all over our society, that was the purpose of it.

SH: What was pledging like?

HS: You got paddled.

SH: In high school?

HS: In high school. If you cursed, for instance, if you cursed at a meeting, they had a file, and if you made too many curses, you get your ass paddled. There were some very testy kids who, you know, found a way to lord it over others by being the one who levied the fines, or was the vice-president.

SH: So when you pledged the non-Jewish fraternities, they let you go through the entire pledge process, and then told you ...

HS: ... It really wasn't long ... I was, early on, told that I would not become a member. No, let me correct that. ... I did go to a number of meetings and the time did come when you were either in or out, so there was an official notice given, but ... I don't recall their pledging being so ridiculous as that Jewish fraternity. I think Jewish fraternities felt they had to do something different, or be more, or do something more like the college fraternity. I attempted to join a college fraternity, here at Rutgers, and I quit. I just didn't want any part of that. It was very, you know, trivial stuff.

SH: And you had already been through the war at that point.

HS: I'd had a couple years in the Army, yes. And, you know, those one or two years, while they don't mean anything anymore today, if I'm seventy-three or I'm seventy-five, in those days, when you're nineteen or twenty-one, the gap is greater, more noticeable. But when the guy said, "Look, Saks, get your loafers off the chair," or, "Sit up straight," or all that silly [stuff], it didn't mean anything to me. And the only reason, really, was that my brother, who had gone to Cornell before me, had joined the very same fraternity, and I thought they were a nice bunch of guys. So, I looked them up when I came down to Rutgers. I said, "Look I'd like to join because my brother was ZBT." They had a gorgeous fraternity house at Cornell, the whole nine yards, and it was very much different down here. They said, "Sure, sure," and then I ran into this nonsense. I probably would have stuck it out had I ... gone directly from high school into college, but there was that two years, roughly two years, to change things for me.

SH: Now in high school, how were the fraternities there sponsored. Was it sponsored by a teacher, or ...

HS: No, these were national. On the high school level there was a national organization.

SI: Were they affiliated with a college fraternity?

HS: I don't know if it extended then into the college years.

SI: Okay.

HS: It might have. I don't know. The one that I belonged to was called Mu Sigma, and I don't know if they had any college affiliate. But, of course, you had to wear the jacket around school and Delta Sigma Nu, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Mu Sigma, they all had different color jackets. And, of course, the girls all went out with guys from certain fraternities.

SI: Oh, yeah.

HS: A lot of anxiety about that social atmosphere. But girls had no sororities. There were no girls sororities. Just boys with these high school fraternities.

SI: In high school, what was your curriculum like, and the teachers like?

HS: College preparatory.

SI: So, was it expected that most students would go on to college?

HS: There was comprehensive high school. The Hackensack high school system was well thought of. They had college prep, they had commercial, and then they had a vocational program. But I guess most of the kids did join the college prep. And I do not know if the diplomas made any distinction or not. I'm not sure about that. Oh, ... I never finished Hackensack High School. I didn't. I don't know if I wrote it on the questionnaire or not.

SI: Oh, the Dwight School.

HS: Yes. I screwed up in high school, and was lagging badly. My mother said, "You're never gonna get into college the way you're fooling around." So she pulled me out. She and another woman who's kid was acting the same way, you know, getting Cs and Ds. They both found this school in downtown Manhattan, called Dwight School, and I actually liked going there. It improved my outlook on going to school. If somebody would fool around in class in Hackensack, I'd fool around with them. And with many kids, if you do good in school, you know, you're not on the right side socially. The school that I went to in New York City, the kids were there for one purpose, to pass their regents and to get into college. Too much of that exists today, where students in high school will only do as much as they think they ought to do to look and maintain their social place within the high school milieu. It breaks down into groups of kids who will do only as much as their buddies will do. ... It's a rotten deal for educators to overcome. I think this is one of the most serious problems facing high school. School is secondary, but socialization is paramount. I was astounded when I watched the ... PBS documentary about sex in high school. It ran just a few days ago. And it ran late at night. I don't know if it was like that when I was in high school at all. I think it was far different. Sure, there were liaisons, but girls weren't passing themselves around, and guys weren't doing this, and the drinking wasn't like that. There was some pot, but not hard stuff.

SI: It sounds like, from what you said, that your parents really expected you to go on to college.

HS: Sure.

SI: They really, especially, I guess, after your brother.

HS: Yes. My brother was a star in high school. He was the only Jewish president of the senior class. So he made quite a reputation for himself, and was very well-liked. Not that he was an excellent student, but he was a good student. He took it seriously and I was the kid brother, who followed along and was a pain in the ass to the teachers. And as a matter-of-fact, the way that I got into college was through my mother writing a letter for an application for college in Newark. And there I was in Hawaii, and my mother sends me this application. Here I am in the Army, in Hawaii, and my mother sends the application. A "mother knew best." I don't know where I would have wound up going to college. I'm sure I would have made an application somewhere,

but she was that kind of a lady. She managed the home and she managed my education. I don't know if she had to do that with my brother. She could very well have, you know, selected Cornell amongst other colleges.

SI: While you were in high school ... World War II broke out.

HS: Yes, I can remember that very clearly. A friend and I were cutting wood in the backyard of his dad's home and he was a nut about maintaining a fire in the fireplace. He was an ... Old Guard type guy. And his mother, my friend's mother, leaned out the window and said, "George," that's her husband's name, "George, George, they bombed Pearl Harbor." And we all, of course, stopped splitting wood and came inside. But that's how I heard of it, about Pearl Harbor. My cousin, however, my first cousin, had been in the first draft in the Army, and was already in uniform. He was on active duty, but nobody knew when he was going to be activated for a role that actually had to do with going overseas, or entering the war. The United States had not entered the war, but ... they were getting ready to, and they got the draft going. My cousin had five years of service.

SI: So he was still in the Army. Do you know where he was?

HS: Yes. He was an artillery man, and was on the, I think, on the southern coast. And he went to OCS. He became ... a first lieutenant, I think also a captain, of coastal artillery.

SI: So ... I guess there was a lot of fear in the family, particularly for him, but also for all.

HS: ... Everybody was drawn into this, and people were proud of having something to do with the war. When the war began, I was a youngster, and my brother was in college. He decided that he could best take advantage of his college education by getting involved in a Navy program, which he did, and he went to ensign school. I had finished my senior year in high school, and I decided to get involved, while seventeen years of age, to enlist in a program that would eventually send me to OCS. But I did so poorly in the sciences, that when I went to my program out in Saint Bonaventures, I couldn't keep up with the physics and the math because I couldn't do any calculus, I couldn't to any advanced algebra. I got sent home, and then turned eighteen, and then went right into service, not as a draftee, because I was already an enlisted man. Went down to Camp Blanding, Florida for infantry training, which was described by Walter Winchell as, "the hell hole of the training services." He was an ultra-dramatic person. I got assigned to a heavy machine gun unit. Then I got sick and went to the infirmary, then I got transferred into ... No, the first thing I got into was intelligence and reconnaissance, because I scored very well on the GATBY. The government had a huge test that it gave everybody. Its nickname was the GATBY. I think the damn thing has been updated and is still used. I would have been dead, I think, if I stayed in intelligence/reconnaissance, because these people were suppose to go out and get behind enemy lines, and find out what was going on. Illness occasioned a number of changes in my Army career. From there I went to a heavy machine gun company, which, again, is no picnic.

SI: Right.

HS: Got the flu, got separated from my buddies who were going through their training, and then got assigned to an infantry company for training, and stayed with that until I finished basic training in Camp Blanding. Got a ticket to go to the West Coast. I can remember the thing was ... this long.

SI: The ticket?

HS: Yes.

SI: Really?

HS: It had all these cities listed as we went West to California and the conductor would come by and tear off each one according to the city we'd passed.

SI: Okay.

HS: All the GIs had their tickets. I got home and had a few days leave. When it was time to go, my mom said, "Harold, you got your ticket?" and I started looking for it [banging the table] and I couldn't find it and the house went crazy. Who found it? My grandmother. I had put the ticket under a pair of socks, so I wouldn't lose it, and I turned the house upside down. But my grandmother went right to the bureau, started going through my clothing. She was always the wizard at finding things. So off we went on a seven day trip, an old railroad car to the West Coast, from the East Coast. I wind up in Fort Ord, California, which is a huge, huge Army base for transporting troops, and then we went up the coast to Portland, Oregon, and shipped out of the Columbia River, on a troop ship. And got very seasick going over. I got separated from my group, who landed as a unit, infantry unit, to join the invasion of Japan. I forgot to tell you that while at Camp Blanding, Roosevelt had died, and the war then shifted to the Pacific.

SI: The UK?

HS: Europe had been conquered, so everything started to go to the West Coast, including my brother, who was at Normandy, in the Navy, and then got transferred to go to Asia. And he hung out in the Philippines and the Bay of Manila. But I ended up on Oahu, where Honolulu is, and that's where I stayed for the rest of the war. Friends of mine were slated to invade Japan, but, of course, that didn't occur. I had a very innocent Army career, in that I saw no bloodshed. I had no experiences which were traumatic. What I did see were men who had come back from war, who had been under fire, and who had combat neurosis, and it was very sad, very rough to see these fellows. I also learned a lot about riflery, because I became a drill sergeant and put several groups of Hawaiian draftees through their shortened basic training. I was on the rifle range and the light machine gun range and I was, also, in the motor pool and drove jeeps and trucks. I swam off Waikiki Beach, and, on passes, drove a jeep. Drove some officers around with their dates, all over the island. I ... never had a wild time, nothing like that. But took a lot of snapshots and pictures of Hawaii. Never got off that island. Should have, because the other islands are so beautiful, but just chose not to, I suppose. So the Army life was not a bad one.

What I do remember very vividly was the return of the Japanese-Americans from their war in Europe, that they participated in, in Europe. This battalion were Nisei, Japanese-Americans from Hawaii, whose parents and families were interned in the desert camps, but who themselves enlisted for active duty and were sent to Italy. They went through very, very bad battles. They came home the most decorated battalion in United States Army history. These guys got discharged back at Hawaii, where their homes were, and I was a sergeant, a duty sergeant, and these men came in and occupied the barracks, which I was in charge of. So I had to give them KP and guard duty. These guys, who had three and four Purple Hearts, and all kinds of medals of valor, and said to them, "You know, you're gonna have guard duty tonight, such and such a time. You're gonna go to the kitchen and peel potatoes." [Laughs] And they all looked at me and smiled. I was all of eighteen-and-a-half, something like that, and these were bloodied veterans. I had a great deal of admiration for them, and arrived at a quick understanding of who was boss, of course, they were. I would just hand an assignment to one of them, "Here, you do this." [Laughter] But that's about the way it was.

SI: Were you able to forge any friendships, or establish a rapport with anyone? Did you talk with them a lot?

HS: No. They got a very bad deal. They got screwed. Many whites had bought up their farms, bought up their land while they were away, and they came back to homes that were occupied and to land that was not theirs. They had heard what had been happening. So what their main purpose was trying to get back something of what they had before they left. It was a great injustice, which has been talked about recently. In fact, some reparations have been made to the Japanese families who lived out in the deserts. I don't know if there was a movie, perhaps, made about their plight. But it was a very bad situation. Very rough for them. I got to know a few Hawaiian Islanders, young men whom I put through basic training, and they were very nice guys. I brought a book of Army remembrances with me and one of them has to do with the group of soldiers that I trained. [He reads], "A gift from all of us. Dear Saks, There may have been times when we gave you a bad time, but I guess it happens in the best of families. Before we leave Paradise Lost, alias, the 13th Replacement Depot, we want you to know that it was nice having you as one of our cadre. Here's a little gift for remembrance. Aloha. Boys of the 4th Platoon." And they all wrote their names on this.

SI: Wow.

HS: And the names are: William Valentine, Donald Towler, James Smythe, Benjamin Zane, James Takayca, Masato Tamiguchi, Edward Ayeda, Naoji Tamura, Albert Viera, Ventura, White, Yatsuya, Yuichi Yamashiro. So there was a whole mixture. Hawaii was a mixture of Japanese, Portuguese, Americans, and so forth. But the majority were of Japanese background and descent. Not many names that had anything to do with native Hawaiians. By that time, their culture had been quite decimated, and they were relegated to the background.

SH: Did you notice any patterns of prejudice in the hierarchy? For example, people from the mainland would be higher in rank than, say, Japanese-Americans who had been in Hawaii, or ...

the Portuguese, or anything like that. Did you notice that there was discrimination in advancement?

HS: I was so green, you know, and my highest rank was three stripes, a buck sergeant: PFC, corporal, then buck sergeant. I had no indications of this. I think the officers were primarily, from lieutenant up, stateside white guys. 'Cause when I was in the motor pool, driving officers around, those were the only names that I've had to deal with. There were no last name Japanese lieutenants, or anything like that, so ... I don't even know if there would have been prejudice in rank. It was much like what happened to the blacks in the Army.

SI: Was Hawaii still under military martial law when you were there? I understood that, maybe it was just Honolulu, but I think it was the whole island.

HS: It was all the Hawaiian Islands. Oahu was loaded with Navy and Army and had been for years. When I trained troops, I was up in the pineapple field, in the middle of the island, and we could see the pass through which the Japanese planes came when they made their turn down to Pearl Harbor and bombed Pearl Harbor. There were permanent barracks there which were magnificent, Army barracks, stone made. They had Olympic swimming pools. All the headquarters of Army and Navy had fine facilities there on the island. There are some very well-written books, well-researched, about why Pearl Harbor was a surprise attack. Whether it was guys having had too many parties, or too much golf, or too much this, or that. I don't know the truthfulness of any of that.

SH: What kind of treatment did the natives get from the military?

HS: They were all very assimilated, like you and I. They drove cabs. They were service oriented, in the hotels, carried baggage, and worked in the fields. They still had a huge pineapple industry going, owned by Dole, and they had to have somebody to pick pineapples, so the men who did that were those who lived on the island or lived in the little towns, very small towns, with their families. I don't know what their school system was like, but I suppose the conduct of industry, which was mostly agriculture, kept going. There were several powerful, white families, shipping families, who were on top, politically and financially.

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

HS: There was a Hawaiian kingdom and they were taken over by the United States and there has been recent movement for the reestablishment of the Hawaiian royalty. I don't know if it's ever gotten anywhere, but mostly Japanese and Chinese have taken over Hawaii commercially. In those days, you couldn't turn your head without seeing a uniform and civilians were committed to serving the Army and the Navy. I doubt that there was mistreatment, but I can't say for sure that was the case. I see no reason why there would be mistreatment. Maybe in the old days, when Hawaiian population was larger, much larger, than it was when I was there in the '40s, there might have been mistreatment of them, just like there was mistreatments of black people serving white people. There was intermarriage, certainly, just like there was amongst blacks and whites here. I do not think there was exclusion from many white activities like there was here in

the United States. But yet, I wasn't in the position to go to a temple or a church, or see what the lives were like of the native Hawaiians. All that ... I remember were some Olympic swimmers. And I remember, in my outfit, one or two men, who were draftees, who had all the facial, all the physical appearances, of Hawaiians, but I don't know if they were pure Hawaiian. I doubt that ... there's maybe, what should I say, a few thousand left, or something like that. It's an inconsequential number. But yet, enough so that they have been able, like some of our own Native Americans, said, "This is our land. We're gonna have it."

SI: Yes.

HS: For instance, "The whole town of Syracuse, New York, really belongs to us," the Oneida Nation or the Onondagas, "because you took it from us." And, literally, the Hawaiians ... had this happen to them. That there will be any repayment of any kind, whether through money, or through giving them a position in government, I don't know. I doubt American Indian claims will ever be honored.

SH: Did you have any knowledge, at the time, of Bishop Enterprises on the island?

HS: Bishop. I might have ... I read Mitchner's book, *Hawaii*, and I think he did a thorough job of enumerating all the families, and their ownings, and I think that name came up. I know there [were] select schools for certain families and that after that followed their education at university. But it was a very cliquey group. I guess, it was a lot like, you know, the British colonialists in India who had it their way, and in many other parts of the world the ... conquerors conquered the natives. Whether they did it, you know, wisely, or ... whether they did it with cruelty, depended a lot on what the ruler wanted out of the natives. I should imagine, in the early days, the Hawaiian islanders were put to tasks ... which were quite arduous. But the island of Hawaii is so lush, and so beautiful, you know, that, in a sense, you don't go hungry. What's happened to it now, though, is very sad ecologically. There's a few islands which have still got some native species, but so many have been killed off, and farming has ... you see, that soil, so rich in iron, the whites couldn't pass it up. Think what they could get out of it! Also, a lot of the Hawaiian islanders now are very much against doing anything to their territory, because they fear that they will be kept from participating in its regrowth. But that's far afield from ... what we're talking about.

SI: With the people, the men who gave you the card, and the people who you trained in these units ... as a cross-section of Hawaiian population, what were they like in their educations and their jobs?

HS: ... Oh, they knew what they were doing. They were high school educated.

SI: Okay.

HS: Yes. They played on teams, you know, athletic teams, high schools, and had all the activities that we did, as members of our communities. I never met any of their parents. I knew nothing about them other than as draftees. They were about the same age as I was. ... By that

time things were so far gone with the war, that the army of occupation was then involved in Japan, and there was no point in any more draftees being drafted. So the whole program I was in stopped and disbanded, and the men were discharged.

SH: What kind of military cooperation was there, at that point, between the Army and the Navy on the island?

HS: ... The cooperation, I suppose, existed strictly ... Do you mean socially between the Navy's sailors and enlisted men, or the Army ...

SH: I mean ... the Navy and the Army, the two separate branches of the military.

HS: Oh, that was all under officers' command, all under military planning, and so forth. ... I suppose there were fights when guys got drunk, but that was handled by the shore patrol, or the military police, and ...

SH: Did you have a sense of cohesiveness between the two units?

HS: No. No. We were far apart. Far apart. The only connection I had with the Navy was on a troop ship, you know, which was run by Navy personnel, when I went over, and when I came back.

SH: What were conditions like on the trips over and back?

HS: Terrible!

SH: Terrible.

HS: Really. You were stacked six high, it was how they put up a scaffolding on a building, or something?

SH: Yes.

HS: They had a scaffolding inside the ship, and you slept on a canvas that was stretched between pipes. And to get down you'd have to, you know, shimmy down four or five other guys below you, dependent on where you are. I don't know if it was better to be on top, or on the bottom, or in the middle, because, we were packed in, you know? And a lot of guys would go out on deck because they couldn't stand being below decks, 'cause they just got claustrophobic. And others got seasick, like I did. ... I absolutely would have been a lousy sailor. I got a hundred-four fever, had to be put into the infirmary. I can remember, speaking of the relationships between Navy and Army, that the Navy medical personnel, were very good. They covered me with ice and sheets to bring my fever down, and really cared. ... I was thankful for that attention.

SI: You ... Oh, I'm sorry.

HS: No.

SI: You mentioned earlier that you had been sick several times ...

HS: This was crazy.

SI: Yes.

HS: I think it might have been psychosomatic. I got sick at crucial points, and probably saved my ass because of it.

SI: How was the Army medical treatment in the States?

HS: Good. Very good. Just as good as the Navy was, only the Navy conditions in a troop ship going overseas was special, everything was so packed and crowded, you know? But in the Army, you were in a medical building with a lot of space, you know, decent sleeping quarters, no privacy of that kind, you know, no rooms or anything. But it was like going into a large clinic and you had a chart, did the whole thing like they would do in a civilian hospital, and got me back on my feet quite rapidly.

SI: Were there nurses?

HS: Yes. Nurses and doctors.

SI: Were they WACS?

HS: I don't know that. Well, these were medical nurses. I do not know what they were called, except by the common word, "Nurse." [Laughs] So, Women's Army Corps? I'm not sure if nurses were Women Army Corps people. They probably were, or maybe women in the medical corps. I'm not sure that WACs, Women's Auxiliary Corps, were necessarily ... medical positions. I think those women who joined Women's Army Corps did different kinds of jobs. They did a lot of the, you know, steno work and ...

SI: Yes, secretarial.

HS: Right.

SI: Did you ever encounter any WACS at any time during the service?

HS: No, actually not. All the administrative work done in the Army companies was done by an Army enlisted man. He really was like the desk sergeant in a police station. He kept ... the records, he kept the attendance, duty lists, rosters, things like that. So, no women involved in that aspect of Army life. I came back and was discharged, and went to Newark University, which, in one year became part of Rutgers. It was run by a very famous man. A guy by the name of Dr. Frank Kingdon. He was the president of Newark University, downtown Newark, and it

was a very small liberal arts school. I don't know the circumstances under which it became part of Rutgers. When it did become part of Rutgers I transferred down to New Brunswick, and got accepted to Rutgers College, and spent my sophomore, junior, and senior years. I stayed in the Quad. But I first stayed in Camp Kilmer, and I almost flunked out, because going back into an Army barracks, a two story Army barracks over at Camp Kilmer, was really a shock. All the guys, because of the housing shortage, and the number of young men who were enrolled at Rutgers at that time, had a hard time.

SI: Okay.

HS: It's like you were back in the Army again and you tried to do your homework in the company room, because where you slept was like an Army barracks. So to do any homework you had to go, and I wasn't any big shakes on doing homework, you had to go into this large company room and there were guys in there playing Ping-Pong, and listening to the radio, and so forth, and so on. I got out of there, how that change occurred I don't really know, and I got into the quadrangle. I forget which of the buildings I first lived in, but was in a couple of them, and began my stay. I stayed during the week, enjoyed the university very much for its cultural life, you know, saw all the concerts, attended a lot of football games, and so forth, the whole thing. Got a gentleman's "C" in my studies. Dr. Mason Gross was the philosophy teacher and we met in a group of two to three hundred students. Handed out Aristotle and Plato, and I can remember the set of books that was purchased, that the bookstore had. That was a lovely course, and he was a great teacher. Also, the music course was very good, and I loved that. Got a lot out of that.

SI: Was it jazz, or ...

HS: No, just classical.

SI: Okay.

HS: A music appreciation kind of thing. And did very poorly with algebra. What kind of algebra was it? It was taught by a graduate student who absolutely didn't give two cents for whether or not you knew what he was talking about or not. He just went right through the stuff. I took statistics instead. And for language I had Professor Pane, who earned a very fine reputation as an Italian professor. ... I had David Riesman, famous sociologist, who was an instructor here. So ... there was some good instruction at the university level. ... I made of it what I wished by going to all these different things that the school offered.

SI: Right.

HS: And, in those days, football was real small-time stuff.

SI: Really?

HS: The band ... Yes. The band wore red blazers, white pants, and no helmets, or hats. It was like the Princeton University Band. And we had fantastic Bucky Hatchett.

SI: Oh, yes. We've heard about Bucky Hatchett.

HS: He was quite a nice guy. Yes. And the stadium was, like a little college stadium. All our concerts were held in that old gym. You could sit up above, or down below. Went to swimming meets. Drove up to Yale for their swimming events. We played Lehigh, Lafayette, the "little three" in football.

SI: Right.

HS: Not sure if we played Williams, or Alfred, or Amherst, or anybody like that, but we kept out of the big time. I never joined a group of men who have strenuously objected to the course of Rutgers athletics, but I give them "hats off" for their attempt to bring the sports program back to earth. I don't know what's gonna happen with that whole fight.

SI: We may be out of our league.

HS: I'm not that much of a sports fan, but I can't even find Rutgers listed in the scores at the end of the week. *Times* posts this long list of, "who won, who lost." I mean, it's all fine print. I can never find them. It's a pathetic thing. Even Rutgers basketball was good for a long time, a while ago, and now it's getting shellacked. Rutgers' women's teams have proved very excellent.

SI: Yes.

HS: I got a masters degree from here in 1963. Let's see, I got my bachelors in '50. I worked for my dad. He went out of business. I was not successful working for Macy's and Sterns. I became a teacher. I went to Hunter, like my mother did. I took night courses, got an emergency certificate, taught middle school in Englewood, New Jersey, helped integrate the black and the white junior high schools, decided that guidance counseling was better than teaching. I taught for five years. Did a year or two of guidance counseling. Got an M.Ed. in counseling from the School of Education here. Then I found out that getting involved more with individual kids was what I wanted to do and I got a doctorate here, as well. So I never expected to turn toward an academic life, because my history as a high school student was so poor. I never won any academic honors, but I think that what I've done in my career, over thirty odd years of school psychology has been interesting. I still do some part-time work for the Emerson public school system. Not on a big basis. A couple, you know, a couple cases a month, or maybe one a week. That's always interested me. It's been fascinating to do, because I can see the individuality of every person. It just stands out. There are no two people alike. But I don't think many in education operate like that. They put you through a curriculum, and there's less and less attention paid to who you are, and the reasons for your being what you are. There's seldom a chance for close attachment. I had, in my graduate work, come down here and lived at Piscataway, because I had a summer fellowship in guidance counseling. And I got so much out of the daily contact with the professors who ran it that I said, "Look, ... if my further work in

graduate school can be like this, I want to be close to these professors.” So I moved down to Piscataway, right by the golf course, and the whole thing was absolutely different than that intimacy of the fellowship. Well, I moved back to Bergen County and finished the graduate school program in the school of psych. It was still under the department of education, graduate school of education. Winfield Scott was ... my mentor, very fine gentleman. Then I did my internship up in Bloomfield, in school psychology, another couple years at Tenafly, and landed up in the town that I live in as the head of the special services department in the regional high school district, and stayed there twenty years, and that was the major thrust of my professional career. I guess the major thrust of my life, as well. Rutgers was a good experience. I don’t know if I could get in it today, actually. Rutgers was sending students around New Jersey to drum up interest in the university. They came to Hackensack High School. There were six very knowledgeable underclassmen, sitting up there on the platform, with what’s-his-name, the president?

SI: Lawrence.

HS: Yes. I don’t think he signed my bachelor’s degree. [Laughter] Dr. Clothier did that in 1950, long ago.

SI: Okay.

HS: Yes. This was a public relations job. I said, “I might as well go.” I’ve never had this opportunity. ... Nobody comes up to North Jersey, regarding Rutgers. Everything’s down here, or central Jersey. I don’t even know anybody in Bergen County who went to Rutgers, although scads have, I suppose.

SI: Right.

HS: So he comes up to Hackensack High School with these nice undergraduates, and they sit up there, start extolling the school, how nice it is, and all that. I stood up, and I said, “Look. I’ve got three degrees from your university: bachelors, masters, and doctors. I know that university very well.” I said, “What’s going on with racial relations at that school?” And they looked at me like I was an alien. “What do you mean? We all get along great.” You know? And so forth. I just was so disappointed at the lack of honesty. Instead of saying, “We’re facing a difficult situation.” Blacks eat with blacks, they live with blacks. I sat, before I came to you, in the Art Library, and I saw every kind of person, and admired their diversity, and the way they were working their ass off. What the University is doing about its own internal affairs, I don’t know. It’s beyond me, except that this isn’t the only place that’s like that. But I just had to go to Hackensack High School, you know, where I went in 1944, and say to these young people what was on my mind. There weren’t that many people there. They kind of looked at me as if I was, as I mentioned to you, some sort of alien. They were all fumbling for answers, or explanations.

SI: Right.

HS: They said it really wasn't as much of a problem as I thought it was. I said, "Well, I've been reading about it."

SI: Right.

HS: I said, "The reporting hasn't been erroneous. Why aren't things getting better?" How come, you know, the college got divided, I think ... what's the one out near the Kilmer Campus?

SI: Livingston.

HS: Livingston. I think it became more black than anything else. I don't know if that's accurate, or still the case. I said, "But everybody gravitated toward their own ethnic origins." And the expansion of the university, I don't think, ever took into account the differences in people. How you unscramble something like that is beyond me. I suppose you'll find that up at Brown, or any other place. But it's a shame. And the other thing that aggravates me is the sports situation. It's become politicized, and Rutgers, as a state university, does not have, I think, the autonomy that maybe other ... Well, what do I know about other large, state universities, like Wisconsin or the University of Kansas, all the big mid-Western schools. Are they all so hamstrung racially?

SI: Right.

HS: I think a lot of the funding problems our state system has emanate from the legislature, and who the higher education commissioner is, how he's appointed, and how the money gets doled out. But, whether it's being done wisely or not, I don't know. So, the University's problems are certainly way beyond what they were. All they had to worry about in 1946, '47, '48, '49, '50, was, "Where are we gonna put the kids? What bed are they gonna be in?" Because all the dorms doubled up. ... Two-bed rooms became four-man rooms, and one-man rooms became two-man rooms. But that's understandable. That was the big problem.

SI: Going back to what we were saying before, about race relations today. ... One of the things we find so amazing about your class, the Class of '50, is, you know, an African-American was the president of it, and it seemed ... like a very cohesive group. ... We get the impression that there was less tension.

HS: Rutgers is a commuting school, a bunch of commuters, and hundreds and hundreds left campus every night, came back in the morning. Only a few stayed on during the week and on weekends. The non-fraternity guys, like Ford Hall, or the Quad, stayed here until the football games were over, the basketball games were over, and we drove home, it wasn't that far, and came back again Monday morning, stayed the whole week, and there was a comradeship, you know. So that might apply to what you had just asked about cohesiveness.

SI: Yes.

HS: I have no idea what the situation is now.

SI: Right. Do you think it might have also been because of the situation with so many veterans?

HS: Since we were a class of veterans, all discharged guys, I think there was a commonality about that. Yes, ... I do think so. I don't know if it pulled us together that much, but we were anxious to be here, you know? As it would be, I should think, to anybody to be in any university setting. ... Things seemed to be a little more mature. (Today's students look mature to me, the way they go about their work.) Maybe I wasn't as mature as I thought I was, but the fact that we were all ex-GIs gave us the sense of belonging to something.

SI: Okay.

HS: So I joined the Quad Club. The Scarlet Barbs, instead of ZBT.

SI: Oh, okay.

HS: I still belonged to things that gave me more experiences, like going to Jazz Club and the Sketch Club. International Relations Club was important to me. I did a lot of work on the Model UN Assembly and that gave me a feeling of university life. I was beginning to become more than a student, you know, attending class.

SH: As far as the Quad Club, how did that affect your dormitory life? Living, you know, in the quads, like in Hegeman and ...

HS: We weren't that organized, really. [Laughs] I think we tried to have some meetings, but I'm not so sure what was going on. [Laughter] I don't remember. That was a long time ago. It was, maybe, on the order of that high school fraternity I was talking about, but nobody was being fined or paddled. ... It was certainly not like fraternity life, and we didn't have access to the girls from Douglass, and stuff like that. It was just a bunch of guys and, you know, we were the Quad Club. Hegeman Hall was another name I remember that I lived in.

SH: What kind of social life did you have then? You said you didn't get over to NJC, or ...

HS: I had a kind of a screwed up social life, because I had gone to Newark University and met a couple girls there and those contacts were my social contacts with women during the rest of Rutgers. I guess it's like guys going back to their high school associations, you know? But, of course, the place to meet other people, and girls, would be in college, you know. Which is why the fraternity system, I guess, has some success. And, as I said, it had been because of Newark University attendance there my freshman year, where I met some girls, and they became my social life. I should have been much more amenable to trying to go over to Douglass, and go to some dances and get involved, but I didn't. I had become preoccupied with running up to Newark to see this girl who I knew. And then, after that, another undergraduate. So I missed out, of my own fault, the activities that they had held at Douglass. But the Quad Club wasn't into that. I think Douglass was sponsoring social things.

SI: You were in Hillel, also.

HS: I wasn't in that.

SI: You weren't in that?

HS: No. If I wrote it down it's an error.

SI: Oh, okay. Sorry.

HS: I wasn't at all concerned, at all, about going out with a Jewish or a non-Jewish girl.

SI: You talked before about how you helped integrate the Englewood schools.

HS: As a teacher.

SI: Yes, as a teacher. Was that difficult, or was it fought?

HS: It was difficult. Englewood was a segregated town. Hackensack also had two junior high schools. One was associated with the elementary school in the northern part of town, and was all white. The other was a middle school that accepted kids from the other elementary schools ... many of whom contained the black population. Well, in Englewood it was a demarcation that was much more pronounced. Lincoln School was a black school and the other junior high school was all white. How they got things argued out ... one way was, they built a new junior high school and they brought everybody together. I had a very mixed class, black and white kids, some were very resentful. Some white kids were resentful, some black kids were resentful, but there was not a name calling situation. I was asked some pointed questions by black kids, about my own attitudes towards black children, black boys and girls. But nothing that I couldn't handle, and I was very honest with them about the equality of the races. And what was troublesome was, as in every school is, they took the bright kids and put them in one section, and the next group in the second section, and the third, according to test scores, you know. So there were eight sections of seventh graders. Guess what the last section was mainly composed of? Black children. ... The top section had one or two black kids and mostly all white kids. And then it gradually ... I was teaching section 7-4, and I was right in the middle. So I had half a class of black children, half a class of white children. And I've never met kids who had a better sense of humor, and a better handle on who they were, than the black kid. ... They could look at themselves with open eyes, you know, and I found their honesty in that respect ... was good, was healthy. I would go on a class trip, and we'd all be mixed together, you know, and we'd sit down and eat together. ... Things worked out. Eventually, Dwight Morrow High School has become riddled with poor educational policies, and racially conscious. It's really a sad state of affairs. They're suppose to make a magnet school out of Dwight Morrow High School. They got two kids from outside Englewood to enroll. They want money and they're expected to finance this whole thing out of the local board of education. And it's a typical example of New Jersey screwing things up.

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

HS: ... New Jersey is considered to have fine administrators and excellent educators. They look at this problem. But nobody's wanted to put up the money. The legislature will not throw in the money for the support of it. And it certainly can't come from the towns. Is Tenafly gonna put its money in, or Englewood Cliffs? It's a ... bad scene.

SI: Have you seen that as a development since you started your career, or did it start at a point and then just continue?

HS: I'm not sure of your question.

SI: This whole question of funding, and misallocation of funds, I guess, or not being able to raise the funds.

HS: I believe every state legislature in the nation uses their state education funds as political tools for those who give them the most votes. Unfortunately, poor people do not vote and don't get the money. I've enjoyed speaking to you, but I don't know if I've wandered too far afield for you.

SI: Oh, no. We always ...

HS: You always wander far afield? [Laughs]

SI: Yes. We like wandering.

SH: What are you doing now? Are you still working in the school district?

HS: Yes, but not the one from which I retired, obviously. Before I came down this morning, I stopped off at Emerson Public School, at the child study team, and turned in some reports on two kids I had evaluated last week, and asked what the schedule is in the future. "The superintendent hasn't given me my budget yet, Harold, so I don't know what it's gonna be." ... But I'll get some more cases. I do remain active in a small sense, just right for a retiree.

SH: You met your wife while you were still working retail. What's the story behind how you met?

HS: How did I meet Marilyn? It had nothing to do with my occupation. I met my wife through a previous girlfriend. I had met a gal, who was very nice and we had not dated consistently. But I decided, "Yes, I wanna go back and see how Joan is." I called up. She invited me up to her family's home in Connecticut, and we went over to a friend's house, and they were playing ... this is really gonna date me, oh, the Rex Harrison, Julie Harris musical. Can you guys remember the name of it? It slips my ...

SI: *The Sound of Music*?

HS: Pardon?

SI: *My Fair Lady*.

HS: *My Fair Lady*. ... It was being played in a very lovely, large room, with a lot of young people around. Amongst the young people was my future wife, and I was with Joan, and we said, "hello," to everyone, and I noticed Marilyn as a very humorous, lively, and happy person. We listened to that whole record. I saw Joan, maybe, once again, and, again, up at her home. Only this time, she had Marilyn as a house guest. Joan, at that time, was getting serious with a young man and I said to Marilyn, "Would you like a ride back to the city?" She said, "Sure." So I drove her home and then began dating her. So that's how I met Marilyn. We've been singing that show tune ever since, with forty-odd years in between. [Laughter]

SH: Which show tune? I mean, with *My Fair Lady* that could be an awful wide range right there. [Laughter]

HS: I know. ... I'm being facetious. I think she'd be Rex Harrison, however, this time. We have two children, both adopted. One is married and has a little eight month old son, and the other has a six year old boy.

SI: Do they live nearby?

HS: One parent lives in New York and the other nearby, in the next town. We baby-sit the youngest grandson on Wednesdays and we see our other grandson frequently. He comes out to New Jersey often.

SI: I noticed on your survey, you said you were a Democrat.

HS: Yes.

SI: Now, have you always been one.

HS: Always. Yes.

SI: ... What did you think of Roosevelt? Do you remember his presidency?

HS: Oh, yes all of it. I was at Camp Blanding when he died and I can remember all of us being out on the parade ground. ... I can remember them playing *Taps*. Well, he's been vilified in the past by many, and his wife, too. ... But I don't think there's any doubt that his image on Mount Rushmore is there because of what he was, a great man. His leadership capacities, his intelligence, and how he worked with other world leaders. He was a man who was good also for the country and deeply revered by its people. He didn't forget them.

SI: ... You were probably a big supporter of him and Truman's UN policy, from your involvement with racial relations.

HS: Yes. I thought Truman a very honest, fine man. The Truman Committee, that Roosevelt appointed him to, was the beginning of his reputation. He was a ward politician, out in Kansas, in a corrupt machine. He got himself past that. He was able to stand up to corrupt practices, and he, essentially, remained an honest person. I truly admire him for integrating the Armed Forces when he became President.

SI: Do you have any more questions?

SH: No.

SI: Is there anything we forgot to ask?

HS: I've talked myself blue in the face. [Laughter]

SI: Okay. This concludes an interview with Mr. Harold Saks on February 14, the year 2000, with Shaun Illingworth, and ...

SH: Sean Harvey.

SI: Thank you very much.

HS: Thank you very much.

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

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/14/01

Reviewed by Harold Saks 7/01