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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIC SCHWARZ

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This begins an interview with Eric Schwarz. The date is January 8th, 2015. The interview is being conducted at 88 College Avenue in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interviewer is Molly Graham. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Eric Schwarz: Sure, I was born in September 1970 in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

MG: What was growing up in Atlantic City like during the 1970s?

ES: Well, I lived in Atlantic City until about March or April of 1975. I lived in a somewhat suburban part of that city, at the southern part of the city, a couple blocks from the ocean. My cousins and their parents lived more or less around the corner. I don't remember a lot. My father's mother also lived about a half mile away and I spent a lot of time at her house. From what I do remember from my early childhood, it was fairly happy. I was an only child at that time. But we, my parents and I, moved to one city over, to the north, another island named Brigantine, and that's where I grew up from 1975 to adulthood. We moved there because, like a lot of urban cities in New Jersey and other states, Atlantic City schools struggle with different socioeconomic issues and my parents thought that a suburban school would be better and it probably was. In Brigantine, it's another shore town at the ocean, I wasn't much of a, and still am still not really an outdoor kid or guy. I sort of look at it as sort of just a suburb. It didn't stick out at me as a great place to grow up, but it was a really nice place to grow up too. We actually lived in the home of my mother's parents, which had some issues, as opposed to just finding a place of our own. They didn't live there. We rented it from them. My brother was born in '76, a year after we moved there. But going to the schools in Brigantine was actually pretty good. I don't have a lot of specific memories, but I remember my education mostly fondly. I don't know. I don't have a lot of specifics, but that's what I can tell you for now.

MG: I have not been to Atlantic City, yet. Can you describe what it was like back then first?

ES: Okay. Well those were the few years before the casinos opened. As a kid, these things didn't register, but I had heard it later and it's well known that Atlantic City was sort of down the dumps at that time and it still struggles a great deal. It was actually a place that my father was born in that same city and grew up there, and worked as a bartender at a hotel, and a small independent bar, a couple of them, actually, for many years and really is an Atlantic City guy through and through. It was a neat place. As I said, I don't really appreciate the beach. I don't swim, but being near the boardwalk and amusement piers, it is a nice little thing as you're growing up. It's a little different from what most people experience. I look on Atlantic City in particular, sort of fondly. I try to follow what's happening in the town. I feel bad about some of the struggles it's going through and also happy about some of the real good things that are happening, like this Stockton College opening a huge campus in that city later this year. I do feel it is like my hometown and a place that I am proud to come from and I appreciate its people and its history and so forth. As a kid, I was really a bookworm and I spent a lot of time at the library. In Brigantine, when I was a young teen, the first public library opened outside the school's library and it was this small little prefabricated thing that outgrew itself, was outgrown by the time it opened, but we went. I remember going to the library in Atlantic City, which at the time was in the Carnegie Building, and it was like big city type thing to me, sort of. I do appreciate the culture and history of the town. I like it. I don't know if I answered your question really well. At the time, it was struggling and it really didn't have--the tourism industry had sort of died down from the '40s and '50s and the '60s, and it was highlighted by, I think, the '64

Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, or it was in '68, one or the other. [Editor's Note: The 1964 Democratic Convention was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The 1968 Democratic Convention was held in Chicago, Illinois.] It was affected by a lot of problems that happened in urban communities and was, to my recollection, probably influenced or were affected by white flight and racial tensions. Those and also I guess the ability to--there were planes and other public transportation that took people wherever they would go, further away. It really needed something, I guess, to change its fortunes and casinos did that for a long time. They lost the monopoly maybe ten, fifteen years ago and the industry has been on decline since. In the early '70s, again, as a kid I didn't, the forces of industry and society didn't register with me, but those things, I think, were taking a toll on the city and by extension, perhaps, did affect the school system and the historical, ethnic, immigrant type communities that were around when my father was a kid, that had sort of diminished by then.

MG: I think I might have to turn this off Eric. I am sorry.

ES: Okay, that's okay.

MG: If you get hot will you please let me know because I do not want you to be uncomfortable, but I want to make sure I can hear you.

ES: I could also take off my sweater.

MG: Let me open the window a little bit. What did you mean when you said they lost the monopoly, the casinos?

ES: Casinos. I mean, this is long after I was a kid and really even long after I moved out of the area. Well for many years, probably from like '78 for another twenty five years or so, well, maybe twenty years, like the places you could gamble in a casino in the United States were Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Then casinos opened in Branson, Missouri and some riverboat casinos in Illinois and some other places, but they were a bit smaller. Then there were also some smaller Indian or Native American casinos in some places. Then, maybe fifteen, twenty, years ago, Connecticut opened up the gaming industry. I haven't been there. There are two large Indian or Native American owned casinos in Connecticut; Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun, I believe they're called. Delaware and Pennsylvania and New York opened some of these larger casinos and Atlantic City really didn't have that monopoly anymore, but again, that sort of, I moved out of the area at the end of 1996. Those forces really hadn't hit Atlantic City by then.

MG: How was the city that you moved to different than Atlantic City?

ES: You mean the city I moved to as a kid?

MG: Yes.

ES: Well, Atlantic City is part of an island that has two other communities on it, well actually three. Brigantine is an island unto itself, it's a city and an island and it has one bridge and it goes to Atlantic City. Anybody who lives in Brigantine, you have to go through Atlantic City, so they're inextricably linked. Just socioeconomically, Brigantine is wealthier and more suburban and whiter. I mean, those are the simple explanations. It attracts, not as much as some of the northern shore towns, but it attracts people who vacation there year after year often. Brigantine

has a large year round population, but also a large summer population. It's always been even, sort of like Atlantic City, really dependent upon tourism for much of its industry because Brigantine doesn't really have a lot of industry. It has banks and real estate offices and a supermarket and stores and things like that, but you can't buy a car there. There's no movie theatre, no bookstore. It's really sort of a bedroom community. You're always leaving that town. If you're a resident, you're probably not spending all your time there. But how is it different? As I said, socioeconomically it's a bit different, but our fortunes are really tied to Atlantic City because physically it's tied to Atlantic City and a lot of its' residents work in the tourism industry; casinos, but not just casinos. Tourism and service industries and so in that way it's very similar. Yes, at the time when I was a kid it was probably, I mean, the population is probably a little higher than it is now. I don't know these numbers off the top of my head, but I think it was a relative time of expansion of schools. My mother, for part of her grade school experience, went to the same middle school that I did, but it was one of those suburban schools on a large lot where it has lots of different wings and expansions, so like every

ES: two hundred feet you'd see a plaque saying, "Addition in 1975," or, "This wing out of 1983," with a cornerstone with the Board of Education president's name and things like that. It was an expanding place for families at the time in the '70s and '80s, I could definitely say that. Even though there were a lot of summer and visitor residents, I think the year round in-family population was growing. Brigantine probably started growing a bit before some of what are called the mainland communities, like Northfield and Egg Harbor Township and Galloway Township and Absecon. Well, Absecon also probably grew earlier, but some of the bigger towns expanded a bit later for whatever reason.

MG: Do you remember making the move?

ES: No, not really. I mean, if I was four-and-a-half, my parents probably told me in some way without going into, "You'll like the schools better in Brigantine," or something. "Your mom went to school there." They probably told me the reason, maybe not going into a lot of detail, but I don't remember. We had lived in like a two bedroom apartment at the time and the house we moved to was a little bit bigger. I don't think we had a lot of furniture and possessions to move. I'm guessing probably my dad had his friends help us move or something. I don't think it was a big monumental move. My parents drove. My dad still worked in Atlantic City and my mom wasn't working at the time and we had family there. We never went back. My father's career was still there and we still, we're there all the time. It was like a second home.

MG: How did you feel about getting a new sibling?

ES: I was happy to have a brother. He and I are very different, but a story my mom told me was when I was like six or something and my brother was downstairs and there was some laundry downstairs and my mom asked me to bring something up and I brought up my brother and a six year old probably shouldn't be carrying a baby, but I did anyway. I don't know, but I liked him and I think we got along well as kids. We were very different. He was more gregarious and athletic and less bookish and things like that, but I did like having a brother. I don't know if I had expressed to my parents an interest in having a brother or sister. It's just not something I remember or afterward I don't remember saying, "Gee, I wish we could expand the family." I was happy to have a brother. We had a small house and a small family and that was fine.

MG: For the record, can you tell me your mother and father's names?

ES: Sure. My father's name is Edward Schwarz. My mother's name is Claire Schwarz. She passed away about a year ago.

MG: Oh, I am sorry Eric.

ES: Thank you, about in late January. Her name is Claire and her maiden name was Douglas.

MG: What is their family history? Where are they from?

ES: Well, I can answer it, honestly, as well as I can, then I can tell you something else that I recently found out. Basically, what I was always told about my parents' heritage was not a lot. I think on both sides of the family there just wasn't a lot of interest like a lot of people. I don't know if it's really endemic particularly to Americans. In other words, I knew there were some people who are second, third generation people in the United States and they sort of consciously want to be American and not, German-American or something else hyphen American, but anyway. What I got was, basically, that on both sides of the family that there were sort of German, Irish or my father's ancestors were German or Irish and so were my mother's. That's sort of what I was told. The truth is a little more complicated than that, but basically, the story was that my mother's father was from an Irish background. My mother's mother was from Germany, which that's the one thing we knew for sure, because she was actually a naturalized citizen, an immigrant. My father's parents were both born in the United States and his mother, her maiden name was Gallagher so she was of Irish descent. My name, and my father's name, and his father's name is Schwarz, which is a German word meaning black and so there was the idea that we came down from a German heritage. I don't know too much of my grandparents. The one I know the least about is my father's father and that's partly because he died. My father's father died in 1959, long before I was born, so that's the obvious reason, but the other reason is that I don't think my father had a lot of interest in his heritage. I'm married to my spouse. His name is Seth. We married in May of last year and we've been together since 2002. He is, like me, he is a librarian by training and by profession and journalist by training and profession. He's a news librarian at the *Daily News*, but he also formerly worked as a genealogy librarian, which is a very special field because there aren't a lot of genealogy libraries. In fact, one less because the one he worked for closed a few years ago. Anyway, he's also been doing genealogy for many many years, long before we met. He's really interested in genealogy and he did, for his own purposes, to find out about his heritage because he's adopted and there's a big story about him that involves me, and that I'm interested in that we're together, but otherwise it doesn't involve me. But anyway, he was doing some genealogical testing with these companies that do saliva samples to figure out your heritage and I just learned. I'm somewhat interested, but I didn't jump and say, "I had to know these numbers right away." He gave me over the phone when he was at work and I was at home. I haven't been absolutely eager to log in and make sure that I see it exactly, but basically, he told me that--and I don't know if I have these numbers correct--but basically, that saliva test of DNA that we sent for me to Ancestry DNA showed that my heritage was about thirty-eight percent European Jewish and maybe a total of about thirty percent English, British and Irish, and maybe five percent Greek/Italian. The rest of it I don't remember. It was a little surprising to me, those numbers. Anyway, I was surprised it wasn't more Germanic or German.

MG: Does that mean you definitely have some Greek, some Irish-English?

ES: Yes.

MG: In those networks?

ES: I mean assuming that, yes, in those numbers yes, and if I thought of it, I would have made sure that I had the numbers with me, but in a way it's like I don't need to know the exact numbers, although I guess I will in the next few days I'll probably make sure that I know.

MG: Does that do anything different to you?

ES: Yes, how do I feel about that? A little bit. I mean, when I told my dad this over the phone, because Seth had said, "Oh, maybe your Dad could do a test. You could find more about this." I told him a little bit quickly and said, "You know, it was a bit surprising." I said, "Well, if you want to do it, you can too." I sort of left it at that. I really didn't want to push him into it because again, he really doesn't care. I don't know if it shatters some ideas that he has, if that upsets him or doesn't upset him. I don't think it would upset him, but I don't know. I think it's interesting. I was saying my mother's father was, we thought of him as from an Irish family, but after he died, it was actually after my mother's mother died in early 1999. It was a January, sixteen years ago, we found, well they weren't hidden, but she had papers showing her naturalization and also, I guess it might have been the naturalization papers of her husband's or my grandfather's father and it said that he was of Albanian descent and Albania is sort of close to Greece geographically and culturally and ethnically sort of. So, that's sort of at that time they thought they found out that I was sort of Greco-Albanian heritage. I wonder why that wasn't talked about, if just people weren't interested and I didn't show any interest, so people didn't talk about it or if it was just easier or more acceptable to say German-Irish or something. But at the largest part of my heritage, and I guess this is a pretty large swath of territory and culture is that European Jewish. That's interesting because my grandmother, my mother's mother, who was born in 1917, had lived in Frankfurt, Germany until '37, '38 or so, when she came to the United States. She was born Jewish, but her family, from what I have gathered, was very secular. Later, Seth and I went to Frankfurt and went to the S*tadtverwaltung* or city hall and got a birth certificate. I don't know if I had to prove that and it said "*israelitisch*," or whatever the word in German is for Jewish. She left in the late '30s and I don't think so much that she and her family were… I wish mom were around too, if she were around I could ask these questions. But I mean I don't know if they left because there was a rising anti-Jewish atmosphere. I don't know how palpable it was, but obviously it's good that they did. Maybe secular Jews in Germany were spared to some extent. I don't know. Anyway, but we knew that she was Jewish. She was basically agnostic, if that's the right word. Her husband raised my mother as Catholic and so I was raised as Catholic, but I always knew I was a quarter Jewish or whatever. By Jewish law the Jewish identity descends from the mother, which means, if someone ascribes to that, that I'm Jewish. But I didn't go to temple. I just didn't grow up Jewish, but I always knew that part of me so in the back of my mind I appreciated that to some extent. So, anyway, to find out that I'm a third or a little more than that of Jewish heritage is nice. It honors that part of my grandmother's history and my heritage. My spouse, Seth, grew up Jewish and considers himself Jewish. He's not extremely observant, but he certainly identifies that way and his family is pretty close knit, more close knit than mine, and they celebrate their Jewish culture and heritage, and Hanukkah, and Passover and things like that. Since I've been with Seth I've celebrated those things with him. I appreciate

much of Jewish culture, some of the things I don't, generally. I don't want to get into it, but I'm happy to celebrate that identity with Seth. As I said, if somebody wants to consider me Jewish by heritage by basis of my maternal line, I'm not going to say that I object to that. I'm not a good Catholic either, but I don't feel a desire to become a Jew or learn Hebrew. I think I would revel in visiting Israel with Seth, if that's something that's in the cards for us. Anyway, so that's a long answer to what I knew about my heritage from my parents and what I've learned and appreciate since then.
MG: When did Seth discover about his ancestry?

ES: Let me think, he actually got the pie chart and put it on Facebook and as I said, he's more interested than I am. I mean, I'm interested in it too because he is. He's actually done tests with three companies and you have to pay for these. I don't know, they're like thirty or forty dollars apiece. From one of the companies he bought a package of four. That meant he had an extra test, so that's why I did it because it was already paid for. But anyway, I think he's gotten results from two of them and one of them showed that he was I guess about forty-eight percent, forty-seven, forty-eight percent European Jewish. Another showed 50.1 percent, so it's about half. I forget what the other makeup was. He sort of knows that his birth father was Italian or of Italian heritage and that his birth mother was of, I guess, European Jewish heritage, and so a large percentage of that other fifty percent or so, I think was Italian and there might have been some Asian and things like that in there. I mean, when I've seen some of the genealogy programs, television programs like, *Who Do You Think You Are?* and there are a couple of others, a lot of times when you do these sort of tests people come back with trace this--trace heritages of Asian heritage, or African or Native American, that people don't really identify with for whatever reason, because it's far removed or what have you. Yes, he learned that he was about half Jewish and some other things. I don't remember exactly what, but I think it really didn't surprise him. Mine, I think, was a little more surprising to me than his results were to him. Again, he's doing a couple of them too, because I guess these things aren't like binary one and zero. They're not foolproof, so he wanted to see what the consensus was.

MG: Do you think he is more curious because he is adopted?

ES: Yes, I mean, I think so. I mean, there might be other things in his childhood, his bookishness and academic nature and family nature that attracted him to genealogy and family history. I mean, I think it's not just that he was adopted. I mean it's like one of those things, well, are you this way because this is part of your history you can't know otherwise. But like I said, I basically would call his adopted family his family and his birth family, birth family, so when I say family I guess I mean the family he grew up with. I think his father was close to his siblings and I think the family in general had an interest in family history. His mother had an interesting family history and many of them grew up in Brooklyn and I guess it was a tight knit Jewish community. There were just that community in general and that expanded out to Long Island where he grew up, I think just has a stronger identity as a Jewish community than most people who grew up say in Piscataway, or North Brunswick or whatever. That urban community has a real interest in family history which I guess is passed down through the generations. I think that's part of it, in addition to his being adopted.

MG: Getting back to growing up, you said you liked to read.

ES: Yes.

MG: I was wondering if you are remembering the books that stood out to you during that time.

ES: I'm trying to think. I mean I guess I, one of the authors that sort of comes to mind was Mark Twain and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and his satirical writing. I mean, as a kid I read like books about television and pop culture and I read newspaper columnists, collections and comic strips. I probably could've been reading more interesting stuff, but I never really have been a guy who reads, or a kid who reads a lot of novels. I do remember, I was in college by the time I read it, but *Gone with the Wind* was a great novel. I mean, I'm a librarian, people ask this, "Tell me what books? You must love books," and you know, "What books affected you?" I don't really have a strong answer. I'm more interested in non-fiction than fiction I guess.

MG: Tell me a little about going to school and favorite subjects and memories of it.

ES: Sure. Well, when I was a kid and as a teenager, I guess I was basically a bright kid. I probably had a high IQ, but I don't know what it is, or relatively high I should say. I don't want to brag. I was bookish, but probably didn't apply myself as well as I could, but I liked English and civics, history. I did fairly well in grade school in math and science. I didn't do well and didn't particularly like gym. I wasn't athletic. I did okay in woodshop and home ec., sort of, but I wasn't handy that way. I guess I just liked the academic subjects. I don't know. Basically, things with words are what I liked--English, civics, and history. Art I was sort of okay with. Science and math I was okay with, but I sort of lost interest in those in high school. When I was in seventh grade, our school just started just then, a foreign language program in Spanish and never had had a foreign language class before that. So, I picked that up and I was somewhat interested in that, but haven't kept it up. I really see the world fairly verbally. For whatever reason, I like to watch television with captions on and as I absorb it, I hear, I think of the words being written out. When I think of music, I don't write music, I started singing the last couple of years, but I always think if I did write the words would always become before the music. So, anything involving the written word is something that probably would attract me more than art, other arts and sciences, and those are the subjects in which I did best. I guess I had pretty good grades in what's called elementary school, from kindergarten to fourth grade, and then the middle school in the town where I grew in Brigantine is grades five through eight and I remember doing pretty well and getting almost all A's, even in subjects I didn't like. Except for the home economics I could never really master that. I learned that in the less academic subjects, I don't know if this is still true in schools that grading was somewhat based on the child's ability as opposed to overall aptitude and so I was able to do fairly well in those topics as well. When I was a kid and today, to a greater extent, there's a lot of standardized testing and that's something I can do pretty well on. The things in verbal I can do pretty well in terms of like. I've taken the GREs a few times, when I was thinking of or actually did go to graduate school. Sometimes I thought of it, but I'm pretty good at analytics too, but like medicine, or chemistry or engineering, things that are involved more intense science and math skills just didn't appeal to me. I certainly knew that wasn't the way I wanted to go and so as an undergraduate here at Rutgers, I mean we'll get to that someday. My major is English and I actually completed a second major, sort of as an afterthought, in English. I think I said journalism, that sort of shows that I was on that path and kept on it. Then, some years later, I went for library school again here at Rutgers. As you may know, Rutgers is probably one of the not too many universities that allies, journalism and library studies in one program. Anyway, it shows that my sort of what I wanted to do when I grew up or what I thought I was going to do when I was a teenager that's changed a little bit, but obviously if

I were a seventeen year old looking at what I'm doing now in my forties, I'm sure I'd be very surprised at some of the things that happened or that I'm doing, but my career choices might not be so surprising to my younger self.

MG: I think it was hard to imagine, being a librarian in the '80s and '90s and not being a ninety-year-old woman or someone in a cardigan with glasses.

ES: Right. Yes, I mean that stereotype is there all the time. *It's a Wonderful Life* is a wonderful film, but as a librarian you have to sort of make fun of that scene where George is shocked to see that Mary has become a librarian because she's dressed very conservatively and looks like she's unhappy and lonely, and only interested in books. Librarian still is a largely female profession and so it is. Yes, so, when I was a kid I spent a lot of time in libraries and I knew that there were librarians and because I just spent so much time there that there was a difference between a librarian and library assistant and that there was a degree involved in being a librarian, but I guess at the time I thought people who got library degrees worked in public libraries or school libraries. I didn't know of the opportunities in corporate America and in academics. I had no reason to think about those things. Yes, I mean, when I was growing up I certainly had a much more limited view of what a librarian does than certainly I know now which I hope I would know a lot more. I was with a group last night and somebody came up to me and said, "I just saw a cartoon that said the card catalog was Google of the old days," or something, or people post to my Facebook page, "Want to go anywhere in the world? Get a library card." It's like okay. Yes, I mean, libraries are special places. I have a great appreciation for them and I work part-time in a public library as a reference librarian, but I don't have this great nostalgia for libraries as sacred places of books. I mean, I appreciate that they are, but nor do I think that libraries have been supplanted by the internet. I think there's a much grayer area in between, though I do think that the fact that polls have shown that people think very fondly of libraries and appreciate them in the abstract, but not in real life. I think that's a bit of a shame. But my full time job is in corporate life and it's not a battle that I really think about all the time, but I am pretty aware of the, I think, of the perceptions of libraries and librarians and it's a topic that professionals discuss all the time, maybe I don't want to say too much, but I think sometimes dwell on things, dwell on the wrong issues sometimes. I dwell on the wrong issues or unproductive things in my life sometimes too. I don't know if other people to have the same quality, but I think it's easier for me to see problems in perception in other people before I see them in myself.

MG: I understand. You had said earlier that your mother was not working at the time that you moved.

ES: That's correct.

MG: Did she eventually work?

ES: Yes, she did eventually work. Actually, a few years later she worked part-time as a substitute teacher which is also something that I did briefly for nine months or so. It wasn't my calling, but it was something that she did for a few years and she enjoyed it. I don't remember. She didn't have any long-term assignments really and she sort of just did it for some extra money and she enjoyed it. I had her as a substitute teacher one or two days ever, something, yes, which is a little odd, but wasn't a big deal. So, she did that for a while, but by the time I was maybe

about eleven and my brother was about five we needed a second income and she probably wanted the challenge of going to work so she worked probably for about fifteen years in various casinos. She started out in some sort of administrative position in what was called the Great Bay Casino or later opened as the Sands Casino which is now closed for a while. I don't know exactly what she did, but she also worked for Caesars, I think, Casino, doing some sort of administrative or secretary. I don't know; something administrative, back office type of stuff. Then she worked for a number of years on the casino floor. One of the things that she was proud of was that she had the skill to do so and to get a what's called a, I don't know if it's still called the same thing, but to get a New Jersey Casino Control Commission 2-1 license it's called, 2-1. You had to. I guess it turned a lot of people down for background reasons and she's proud that she was able to get that license and kept it for the time that she worked there. I think their regulations have changed a bit; although, I'm sure that these employees still have to be licensed. She worked for a number of years as a pit clerk which is somebody who does data entry in a pit, which is an area of table games, table casino games like blackjack, roulette, and so forth. Basically, you're standing at a computer terminal and typing things all the time, sort of in the middle of a semi-circle and she didn't really like that, but she did that for a number of years. Somehow she got into the business of being a slot attendant, which is someone who deals with the problems that come up with slot machines--it jams and technical things. Also, deals with filling the machines with coins and dealing with payouts and it's a position of trust because it does involve money and so she was proud of that. She really liked it. She dealt with customers all the time and I'm sure some customers were difficult and problematic, but some weren't. It's also a tipping position, which she liked, and she was very gregarious and personable and just really liked working with the public. That position to the extent it exists now I'm sure there are fewer slot attendants nowadays because at that time the casinos purposefully made the, this is what I heard, coin trays built with a shallow metal or some sort of metal so when the coins hit, when you hit a jackpot, the coins would come out and hit the tray and be very loud because it added to the certain atmosphere that encouraged people to keep gambling. I guess it's labor intensive to fill the machines with coins and cash them in and keep moving them around, so casinos in the last ten years have made, I guess there's some way you can put in coins and I guess they have to be emptied, or more likely dollar bills, or twenty dollar bills, whatever, but they pay out slips of paper and you have to take them to a cashier to get your jackpots assuming that you win. Maybe there are fewer technical problems. There are also fewer casinos and perhaps fewer slot machine players. I think that job has changed quite a bit and so that type of position wouldn't really be open to her today. She did that for a number of years. Then she went out of the work force for various reasons I don't really want to talk about, but she looked back on that time, especially as a slot attendant, with some real fondness and she really thought that was her calling. Earlier she might have wanted to be a teacher, but for various reasons that didn't work out, but she enjoyed working with the public and that really was a bright spot for her.

MG: What kind of work hours did your parents have?

ES: They both worked evenings pretty much. I know my mom was on something they called the swing shift. I think it was 6 PM to 2 AM most of those years or something like that. My dad worked nights too. I mean, I'm sure because these places were twenty-four hour operations, I think maybe my dad's bar wasn't twenty-four hours. They probably worked some days for various reasons, but basically they worked evenings and were home during the day. I think they both worked evenings. Maybe it made me more independent in some ways. I don't know

exactly what effect it had on my brother and me, but they did work evenings. You know, I knew that was just part of my family's, whatever, our history, but what part of our truth, whatever, that my parents worked at night and so that's it. Right now I work a 10 AM to 6 PM shift and I'm fortunate that I have a fairly steady shift, but I know people work all sorts of hours.

MG: Then what was high school like for you?

ES: High school, academically, it was okay. I took up an interest in, like there was a journalism program at this school that I took, junior and senior years and that was pretty good for me and in terms of like history and English, and social studies I did pretty well, but I lost interest in the sciences and the math, then sort of dropped out of them as soon as I could which probably is a shame. I was sort of proud of myself that I actually tested out of the computer class. I just had to know a little bit of the BASIC computer language that I sort of learned on my own and that's pretty cool. It was okay academically and I liked my teachers. Socially, I didn't really not get along with anyone per se, but it was not a good time for me socially. But one of the things I didn't mention about high school was that I went to a Catholic high school. If I had gone to the public high school it would've been Atlantic City because that's the high school feeder for Brigantine, and so my parents, it was a bit of a struggle for them, but they paid the tuition for the Catholic high school in the area. As I said, I sort of grew up Catholic and maybe we went to mass on Christmas Eve or Christmas and maybe one or two other times a year, but otherwise I didn't have a lot of Catholic knowledge. When I went there and we had to say certain prayers every day I actually had to learn them. The school had a mandatory religion class every year, and for every semester. I guess I appreciated that, but it didn't leave a lasting impression on me. It didn't encourage me to become more Catholic or get involved more in the church, but otherwise it was a good academic school. There were people of other faiths who went there because they appreciated the academics. I guess there were class masses from time to time and things like that, but the prayers weren't forced upon anyone. The religion courses were mandatory, but whether you believed in them or what have you was up to each student's own conscience and mind. It was a regular like high school. It wasn't boarding school. I went there on a bus in the morning and I came home in the afternoon. I guess a lot of Catholic parochial schools are like that. That they're based on Catholic teaching and so forth, but it isn't really overly emphasized. Of course, if the Catholic teachings in dogma are something that you really don't believe in, then I guess you find a different school. At the time, if you didn't want to go to public school that was sort of the option. My father was of somewhat Catholic heritage and my mother was too so it wasn't foreign to me.

MG: Did they teach creationism and abstinence only, and things like that?

ES: No, not creationism. I don't think we went that far. I don't think it was that conservative. Yes, there are two courses under the religion banner. Well, there were eight that I took. I don't remember. One was catechism and sacraments were another, old testament, new testament; that's four of them actually. I think those were the titles. Two others were sexuality and family living and they fell under the religion banner. Well, I took those things in, but whatever, but didn't have a dating life at the time. There were Catholic teachings in there, but they're about abstinence, but I don't remember the teachers saying anything to the effect that you'll go to hell if you have sex outside of marriage. It wasn't a fundamentalist or fire and brimstone education, but definitely the Catholic teachings were emphasized, but I don't think we had to ascribe to them or pledge to them. There was none of that, but maybe some of the tests may have asked, "What

does the church say about this possibly?" I don't remember. I would probably say that I don't ascribe to many of the dogmatic teachings I was taught then, but I didn't consider it oppressive.

MG: What did you envision doing when you got out of high school?

ES: Well, I envisioned going to college, but do you mean in terms of career?

MG: Yes, just sort of next steps.

ES: Well, I really envisioned going and becoming a journalist, probably a newspaper journalist and I sort of went right into that in college. For my first semester I took journalism courses and sort of knew that's what I wanted to do and that's it. I mean, I knew I could write a non-fiction narrative and appreciated the narrative in journalism storytelling methods and just that as a career and I knew that's sort of what I wanted to do. I applied to three colleges. Well, actually, I think I technically applied to and this goes back to something we're talking to. I'll tell you the other two colleges besides Rutgers I applied to. I applied to Stockton State College, which was the local undergraduate liberal arts college in the area, near Atlantic City, and two what's called Glassboro State College at the time, which is now called Rowan University, which is another liberal arts college in southern New Jersey. They were sort of backups. I sort of knew that I wanted to come here to Rutgers or a university. Here, I guess I would've had a backup plan if I didn't get in here, but I knew I wanted sort of like a larger university setting and a liberal arts setting. I guess I knew that Rutgers at the time [had] and still does have a reputation for excellence in liberal arts teaching. I guess I knew somewhat of their journalism program maybe. I knew that Rutgers had one and that it's something that I could go into. At Rutgers, I actually applied to--you had to pay extra to apply to each of these too--Rutgers College, Livingston College, and Cook College--the three appropriate undergraduate colleges in the New Brunswick campus. Of course, I couldn't apply to Douglass College because that's a women's college or was a women's college, still is. It is, sort of, but in a different format. I knew that Cook was basically, it had an agriculture and science college, so I don't know. I just applied to it out of whatever. I just did. Basically, I considered Livingston and Rutgers Colleges. Rutgers College, I saw it as the college based on the College Avenue campus that's sort of bigger and a little less personal then. Livingston College I saw as more of a college of a smaller, more intimate community. At the time, and for some years later, and perhaps one of the reasons why we're doing this project is to, I don't want to say to dispel the myth. One of the things that's part of Livingston College's history is that it was seen as, and I guess there's some truth to it, that it had different and perhaps easier academic standards. Well, even, early before I came here, it had academic standards where you could drop grades and there was more leniency in grading and figuring out your GPA and stuff like that, but even when I went the idea was that it was a college for athletes or people from underserved communities who couldn't get into Rutgers College. I sort of felt this complex about it for a while, that I'm telling people I am doing today, that I got into Rutgers College too, but I picked Livingston over that. It's kind of silly to say that, but there was this perception. It wasn't just in my imagination that Livingston was an easier academic school, which by the late '80s, it wasn't really. As I said, there were different academic requirements for graduation, but maybe you could see them as more lenient, but I don't really think I did. I still had to get 120 credits. I think the requirements for admission and graduation were pretty similar. Livingston College appealed to me because it was smaller and seemed real tighter knit and was based on a small campus where you can get to know people a bit more. I'm not sure if I took advantage of that as much as I could have and from the outset I also wanted to explore this wonderful university. I took

classes on different campuses, some of them because I needed to for scheduling reasons and some because it's fun to go to different places. I grew up at the shore. I wasn't like absolutely sheltered, but I was; it was a big change for me to live on campus, away from my family and I appreciated that, maybe not at first, but later you could go to New York and other places pretty easily. I was on my own. I didn't drive at the time. For whatever reason I was afraid of driving or there were family reasons why I didn't. I always lived on campus and I sort of later didn't like as much, like that, I felt a little more isolated living on Livingston and thought maybe I made the wrong choice, but I also, throughout most of my college career, except for my first semester, I also worked for the *Daily Targum* as a reporter and editor. That had its ups and downs, but it was a pretty good experience for me overall. Yes, I wasn't just sitting alone all the time. I kept busy, but I was also alone a lot of the time too. You see, one of the reasons why I was, I don't want to say hesitant about doing this interview, but thinking about it, is because well I think, "Well, I don't really have this strong Livingston College story that I was like affected in this way or that. Livingston College in and of itself made this great difference in my life." It did in some way, but it's hard for me to pinpoint that reason. It is something that I chose, a smaller college within a larger university setting. Overall, I'm glad I did. Actually, the institution on Livingston that I was most familiar with was the Kilmer Library and I worked there most of my college career except for my first semester. I got to know the staff there and that kindled my appreciation in librarianship which I took up some years later. It helped me make friends and develop some interest and work. One of the things that I guess I appreciated about Livingston was that you got to know the staff and the administration a bit. I really, for the most part, I didn't, but at the library I did. I knew the head librarian and the other librarians who worked there and all the staff members. One of them became a longtime friend. Others, I was sort of on a first name basis with. I think that was really a good thing for me. I could've done that at Alexander Library, I suppose, or some other place, but I saw that and appreciated that students on Livingston College. This might just be my perception, but Livingston seemed to have a bit more autonomy in being creative than students from other campuses. I hung around a lot with some of those students and as a journalist for the *Targum* I interviewed a lot of them. I was sort of on the outside looking in, but it did expand my world view of it.

MG: I think that is one of the reasons why your name came up for this is because for four years, or almost four years, you were covering the events and the climate of the university. Maybe we can talk about that experience.

ES: Right.

MG: So, maybe we can talk about that experience.

ES: Okay.

MG: The issues and the events that you covered.

ES: Sure. I was actually the Livingston College correspondent for the *Targum* for one, or maybe it was two semesters, and then the diversity and multicultural correspondent for another semester and so, yes, I think I did learn a bit about Livingston College. I knew the dean and about the university. Not that I was like buddies with President Francis Lawrence, but I knew who he was and I interviewed him a couple of times. I think, yes, he became president towards the end of my college career. The president for years, for a number of years, and when I started

was Edward J. Bloustein. He died when I was a freshman. I think that was right around the time I had joined the newspaper and I wasn't involved in covering it, or it might have been right before that. He died in Bermuda if I remember correctly … which is neither here or there, but that was a big change to the university. I remember interviewing the interim president, T. Alexander Pond. So I got to know the workings of this university fairly well from that vantage point and also of Livingston. As I said, I was the Livingston correspondent and I covered some of the, there were some, and there still are, student protests and demonstrations and stuff about various social issues and probably as a much older person I look at that not with a jaundiced eye, but I think, "Well, I don't know how effective that is." But it did have some effect. I covered those things and one of the big things that I covered, though for some reason I didn't write the final story, but it was that the renaming of the Kilmer Campus to Livingston which was really spearheaded by a couple of people, three guys in my graduating class. I know one of them was in my graduating class; the other two either were a year behind or in the same class. I saw this real struggle for this sort of complex, this sort of struggle for recognition at Livingston College. I appreciated this sort of underdog mentality and I think still that's the real part of Livingston College's history that we're trying to prove, I think, with some of this current historical work, the impact the college had. I think there's this idea that people don't want to, aren't interested in it, but they should be and that's sort of hidden. I don't know if that's exactly true. Anyway, I saw that. I had a sense of the university bureaucracy and how it worked and worked well and didn't work well in terms of like the university's connection to the undergraduate colleges and just in general. While working through the system and also being a journalist covering it, one of the frustrations that a lot of people had with the undergraduate college system on the New Brunswick campus was that I think you could go to any of these different health stations, health centers, but if you had housing questions there was no central office. It was all separate. Livingston College Housing or Counseling or academic programs were separate. Even though the classes were, even though in reality there was, as there is now, this bus system that, because the campuses on the New Brunswick overall campus are inextricably linked and function as one unit, but they were broken up sort of somewhat artificially. I think that was part of their frustration. I mean, I didn't find it that tedious. I think by the late '80s early '90s, some of that had begun to subside because even though I guess the housing offices were separate and the dining office was one, you couldn't register on the Livingston campus. It wasn't that burdensome. I guess there were some courses that were only for certain colleges, but there weren't very many of them. Well, certainly one of the things I say for sure, is that the Livingston campus for a number of years, including the time I was there was, I think, largely underdeveloped. It had a lot of concrete buildings built in the '60s and the student center was actually built a year or two before I started there and it was new at the time, but I thought it was pretty small. It had a very poor concrete feel and institutional feel, but for some reason I liked it. There was this perception, which I think there was some truth to, that it was underserved and people didn't care about developing it, that the other campuses had more cachet and stuff like that. That was part of the reason I guess that the Kilmer Campus, a large part of that is the ecological preserve which isn't very high profile. I guess originally in the '60s, it's just three colleges on campuses, and then, only one came into fruition, Livingston College, but kept the name Kilmer Campus and I guess Livingston students felt that it should be called Livingston Campus because that's basically its identity. It's not really because, you think Joyce Kilmer was a native New Brunswicker and a poet and was well known, and lived in the early part of the 20th century and you think people might have more affinity. I don't think people had an affinity to

William Livingston the first, I don't know if he was the first colonial governor or first non-colonial governor of New Jersey, but it's like I don't know much about him and I don't think a lot of people do. [Editor's Note: William Livingston (1723-1790) was Governor of New Jersey from 1776 to 1790 and a signee to the United States Constitution. He was the son of wealthy merchant and slave trader Philip Livingston.] It wasn't an affinity for the name. It was an affinity for the name which happened to be his or something like that, for the college and a college's name is per to the person. That little name change, which took a while to get approved, was a big deal for Livingston's identity. Yes, so I think there was this idea that Livingston was underserved, but I don't think it was forgotten or anything like that. I don't know if the dean or the faculty of the Livingston-based academic departments had less pull or influence or anything like that than other staff or faculty members. Maybe that's true, maybe it's not. I think the student body was smaller than that of Rutgers College, but also, just as a vast generality, probably more vocal and more interested in social justice issues and social issues and also more diverse socioeconomically or racially. I think there was this different kind or maybe greater social awareness among Livingston College students as compared with other Rutgers College students for example. I guess that's something that attracted me to Livingston College, but I forget what the question was.

MG: I probably asked it a while ago.

ES: Yes.

MG: I am curious, just wanted to know, first when was the school founded?

ES: In 1969. Well, that's when it opened its doors. I guess it was, yes, and it's considered the foundation date. Its planning, I guess, started in '65 or '66. [Editor's Note: Livingston College was founded in 1965, but opened in 1969.] The *Rutgers Magazine* wrote an article a few years ago about Livingston College's history that sort of sums it up pretty well and somebody who's working on this historical project. I mean, there are many things that could be read about Livingston College history. There actually were a lot of academic articles and popular articles about Livingston College in its early days and its goals, and its missions, and its struggles, and accomplishments and things like that. It wasn't hidden. I mean, it wasn't some rural college in Montana or something that wasn't known. It was part of a large, well-known, public university in the northeast. It wasn't unknown, but anyway it was founded in 1969. That's when it opened its doors and the first graduating class was in 1973. There were some students I guess, who may have graduated as early as 1970, who transferred from other colleges. You could, when I was a student, I could have. Actually, if I really wanted to go to Rutgers College later, I could have transferred, inter-college transfer; could have done a college transfer. I guess maybe even then you could have. I don't know if anybody did, but basically the first full graduated class was in '73. I guess there were a few people who graduated before that who transferred from other colleges, probably not from Rutgers College, probably from other community colleges or other colleges where, I don't know, for whatever reason they transferred to Rutgers and they either wanted to go to Livingston, or that appealed to them in some way or that's where they got in.

MG: I am wondering if it was founded with this mission of sort of liberalism and looseness or that kind of happened anyway.

ES: Oh, I think it was founded with that idea in mind. I'll probably get his name wrong. W. Robert Jenkins, one of the deans of the college, I think he was also one of the people behind its founding. [Editor's Note: William Robert Jenkins was Livingston College's dean from 1977 to 1990. He had also been a biology professor. He died in 2015.] I'm not sure who said Livingston was supposed to be the MIT of the social sciences, meaning, I guess, a leader in social sciences as MIT is a leader in math and science, I guess. [Editor's Note: This quote, "the MIT of social sciences" is attributed to Ernest Lynton, who was the first dean of Livingston College from 1965 until 1973.] I mean, a lot of its faculty were probably of a liberal persuasion and I'm sure there were, as a group, more ethnically diverse than the overall Rutgers faculty partly, and I'm sure there's many factors behind that. Well, a couple of them are probably that it probably attracted some new faculty to the university and they might be younger and if they were just graduating in the early '60s, there's a good chance they may have been more ethnically diverse than their parents' generation. Also, Livingston College really had some academic studies that were ethnically and racially based, if that's the right word, like Puerto Rican studies and Africana studies that of course would attract faculty who are interested in those topics and most likely are of those heritages. What was the question about how the faculty were different? Oh, the culture was different.

MG: Just about how this culture was created.

ES: Yes, and there was this, it's in the *Rutgers Magazine* story, is well known that one like true Livingston College guy through and through is Leroy Haines. [Editor's Note: Leroy Haines was in the first graduating class at Livingston College and later became the Assistant Director of Residence Life for Livingston for over forty years.] He retired a few years ago as director of residence life. Well by the time he retired, Livingston College had merged into the undergraduate colleges, Rutgers. He wasn't working for Livingston College per se, but he was still on the Livingston campus. He was actually from my hometown, from Atlantic City, and he was a freshman in 1969 when Livingston College started. Actually, he was a transfer student. The story is that he sort of never left. He lived on campus I believe as a student and then got a job with Rutgers soon after that on Livingston College or right after college. Or maybe he started as a student worker and just continued, but basically he lived in the dorms, and as an adult remained at Livingston for years and years. Future generations of students coming through the doors and knew Livingston probably better than almost anybody. Mr. Haines is African American. As I said, there was, I'm sure, a larger percentage of African American, for lack of a better term, minority or non-majority identified faculty and staff members on Livingston as compared to the other colleges at Rutgers-New Brunswick, and it was younger. The faculty and the staff brought a different viewpoint, I think, than maybe some of the career people who had worked at Rutgers before then. It attracted, partly because of its more open admissions policy. I don't know if there were more financial opportunities for students from a struggling background. There may have been. I know there was an emphasis on EOF, or educational opportunity fund, student admissions [at] Livingston in the early days, probably because of its majors and because it was new and it had these. Until a few years ago, there were two sets of dorms on Livingston called the Quads and the Towers. They're still called that. The quads are innovatively called 1, 2, and 3. The new apartments are called A, B, and C. Supposedly, they're being held until somebody donates money [to] the apartments and then they'll be renamed. Anyway, the quads are this sort of very basic kind of dormitory, but they, the way they're designed, they're designed with houses and they attracted like minds, I guess, or people of similar interests. The towers

where I lived were a little less so, less like that. The nature of the student housing and the fact that you could pretty much take your classes in a small college setting … but I mean basically it was also known as a college that attracted minorities. I don't want to say to a large extent, but to a larger extent than majority people or white people, they were attracted to athletics or some other way of saying that. There's probably some other way of saying that, but so it was also known as an athlete's campus and so there was that. There was a lot of racial camaraderie, but also a lot of tension. One of the things that we've been doing for this project, and just in general, is asking alumni to submit stories of their undergraduate experience and we have about seven or eight of them. I wrote one of them which is somewhat interesting, but one of the ones we got just a few weeks ago talked about this student who was there in the '70s, talking about his experience with people coming back from Vietnam and how they were affected. I'm not sure if it was one of the Vietnam vets or if it was somebody else. The way I read it between the lines of these couple sentences was that this student that this other student knew was sort of reluctantly militarized. I'm not sure if it was Black Panthers or some other group. That was probably true on other college campuses as well, more so some places, less so other places that these students from non-traditional communities or those who might be the first-generation people to go to college. At Livingston, they saw a lot of people like themselves, but not a majority of people. I don't know the stats off hand, but Livingston, I think, was pretty much always majority white, even though it had a different perception, some people perceived it differently, but it was less white than Rutgers College. That group of let's say, Hispanic students might, or African American students might strongly identify with that group and develop that affinity which is great, but also might feel or want to be more isolated and develop that sense of community outside of the mainstream and sometimes overall. I mean, that's a great ideal to be proud of your identity and to have an affinity for it and develop that, but in reality sometimes that doesn't work well. So there's always this talk of self-segregation in the dorms or dining halls, and sometimes some racial tensions. I don't know any specific examples other than maybe some that I've heard and what that one alumnus submitted, but I know that that happened and that was probably true of other colleges too where there were more first generation or non-traditional students coming aboard. In fact, even in late 2014 there was some documentary movie called, *I am Harvard*, I believe. Actually, there's a photo campaign and play called *I Too am Harvard*. It's about the African American student community at Harvard and how they somewhat feel isolated or not accepted. You think Harvard is, and I might have the college wrong, I may have the movie wrong, but I think I'm right, Harvard is in a liberal bastion of Cambridge and it's 2014. You think that'd be less important, less of an issue now than before, but well, it's not. I mean, not to go too deep into current events, but look at some of the racially based issues and struggles, and killings that are happening today and the religious intolerance in France and throughout the world and these issues are still around. Colleges are a place where you meet people who are different from yourself and hopefully that increases your world view, and it did for me and I think it does from what I've seen anecdotally or heard for many or most college students. Coming to a large liberal arts college or university that, I think, for the most part does broaden people's perceptions and horizons rather than shrink them. As I said, that was definitely the case for me. Time?

MG: How are you doing on time and temperature?

ES: The temperature is okay. In terms of the time, we could probably wrap this up in the next few minutes or ten minutes.

MG: Yes, okay. I still have probably more questions.

ES: Okay.

MG: Would it be better if we figured out now another time to meet and just get a better sense of those four years at Livingston College and the things you covered as a reporter.

ES: Yes.

MG: Okay.

ES: Yes, and I'll try to focus my thoughts. For whatever reason, I'm not always the most organized person. I have the stories I wrote in a binder and perhaps I'll find it, perhaps I won't. [laughter] They're organized into a binder, but where that is in my house is another question.

MG: Yes, in the meantime.

ES: But that's not absolutely vital.

MG: Sure. I am going to turn this off.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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