RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH SOOS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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TRANSCRIPT BY

FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Nicholas Molnar: So, this begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Soos on June 4, 2012 in South Amboy, New Jersey with Nicholas Molnar. Thank you for having me here today.

Joseph Soos: All right. Good.

NM: Just for the record, could you tell us when and where you were born?

JS: I was born in Keasbey, New Jersey, April 18, 1928. Today, I'm a little over 84 years old.

NM: Now, to start the interview, I just want to go a little bit into your family background. Could you tell me about your father?

JS: My father originally came over here--as a young man, he came over from Zeplan … from Hungary. I don't know if some relatives in Ohio sponsored him or who, but he came over as a young man and he finally came back to New Jersey and married my mother around 1920, around that area. He had one sister that came over, but she located in Allentown, Pennsylvania. So, that was the only relatives from my father's side, but my mother was born--My father was born around 1890 and my mother was born in 1900. My mother died. She was in New Jersey here. Her maiden [name] was Kouacs, Julia Kouacs. She had four brothers and two sisters, one sister who was a stepsister.

NM: Did your father ever talk about why he came to the United States?

JS: Not really. He never told me why he left that country. No, he never told me that, no.

NM: Did he ever tell you about why he came to New Jersey?

JS: Tell you the truth, I really don't know. But some of the things I can remember. He was doing some schooling and learned to get his citizenship. He went to night school so he could get his citizenship right away, so he could talk English and everything like that. When he was in Ohio--the reason why I say Ohio is that one of the relatives, when I was a kid yet, somebody died and my mother and him in the '40s, they went on a train to pay their respect for this gentleman whoever it was. Must have been close to my mother and him. I think maybe my older sister, maybe, but both of my--I didn't' go; I was too small. They went to the funeral that day.

NM: For the record, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

JS: Do I have? I have two sisters. One sister, the oldest one is still living yet. She's around eighty-nine. Another sister that would have been--she would have been around eighty-six because I'm eighty-four. But that one there, my first sister, she had one boy and a girl, and my other sister had a baby boy. I'm blessed with two daughters. Two daughters and I have four grandchildren.

NM: Your father, what was his trade? What did he do?

JS: Oh, I was going to tell you about the trade. When he was younger, I think he was learning to be a tool and die maker for a while, but I guess when he came to New Jersey. One of the things I could remember about--things are bad in '30s. We were never really on relief and my mother always managed to be working the cigar factory and he was working in what they call--in Perth Amboy, the Holbrook Hat Factory. Up until the war broke out, that's when the government, at that time, [what was popular] everybody was wearing derby hats and everything like that. That was a big thing at that time, but when the war broke out, he had to go get a defense job, so he wound up working in the Hayden Chemical Plant. I remember they had the Hayden Chemical Plant over there, when I was going to high school and all this stuff like that. I remember his clothes. He used to come and he'd stink it used to be the [formaldehyde] or whatever it was. It would just eat--the acid on his body, would be eating his clothes and very smell, too, a bad smell.

NM: After the war, did he continue to work there?

JS: No, no. Like anything else, when the war ended he got knocked off and then like everything else, like the economy, he went from this job to that job. I remember him working in the … factory, wherever he could try to get a job. The last place that he worked was--for a while he was working in the general cigar factory as a floor man, because my mother was over there working with the machines. Even when you talk about the cigar business, going back in the '30s and '40s. They were all making cigars by hand and like anything else, because of the rent or what, one time she's working in South, next time she's working up in Fords, or something like that, but she wound up working in Perth Amboy. Over here in Perth Amboy, as the machines start coming in--first of all, they came up with a machine that they'd have four men on one machine. I mean, four ladies up … everybody was making it by hand. So, all these nice beautiful cigars. Then, later on, they came out the machine, only two ladies. Eventually, they came out that the machines start making the cigars automatically, so that was the end of making cigars by hand, unless with the so-called--now, the Cubans claim to making some with special …, but my mother used to make beautiful cigars.

NM: Can you talk about what you recall about your mother and your mother's side of the family?

JS: Well, let's see. My grandmother, they used to have a farm, but even in Keasbey, I don't know exactly when it was, but in between there, my grandmother owned a farm in Demott Lane in Somerset. It was still over there, yet. I mean, as far as it's right next to the Jewish Center place around that place there. She has a farm there, but then with boys, it was so hard. The thing I remember all the uncles--let's see. There's a Bill, uncle Bill. John. Bill, John, (Johnny?), and Mike. That's the four boys. Then, the Aunt Mary and Aunt … and my mother. So, there was around six or seven of them, but they used to go ahead--this I remember, like you see in the history books. They used to cut the corn by hand and they would go ahead and stack it up in the center fields just like you see in the history books, tie it around and stack it up like that for the corn stack to dry like that. Later on, they would take the corn husk. Later on, when it would dry, they'd put it in the

husk in the hand machine and so they could make food for the animals, especially like chickens or pig or something like that. This I remember. But later on, getting back to Keasbey, my mother was--I remember my grandmother dying right in Keasbey. The thing about that, my grandmother and grandfather--I never saw my grandfather, but when they both died, they were both fifty-seven years old, at different times, but my grandmother died from cancer because I remember them trying to--didn't have no hot water in the house to bring it in to try to steam or trying to relieve her pain. In Keasbey, sometime there, they had a couple of cows in the back shed and [it] must have been before--so, they got married in 1920. So, it had to be in the '30s, sometime early '30s. They used to even deliver--they didn't pasteurize the milk, but it was regular milk from the cow. In the neighborhood, they had certain customers. They would deliver milk to the local people and that's with the Kouacs family over there. I mean, … my one uncle, he wound up in …. He was working in Copper Works in …. My uncle John, he always had a farm, too, but he was really a handyman. My uncle Bill, he worked at the General Ceramics plant in Keasbey, but like anything, like companies that are ruthless, after so many years, they just kick them in the butt and they laid them off and they just do it … but I've even seen general managers--I got hired in 1950. I worked thirty-five years in this plant I'm talking about in Keasbey, thirty-five years. Even after being--when they wanted you and later on when they downsize you, they gave my uncle Bill a job doing floor work and everything like that. Even the general managers, they did the same thing with--I remember (Doc Payne?) and he used to be a big manager and they did the same thing with him. They made him go, just get mail and stuff like that. But we're on the family?

NM: Yes.

JS: Yes. Bill, in fact, my uncle, he's the one that got me a job back in the '50s. When I came out of the service in '48, what do you call--? I worked with the Celotex plant in Metuchen. Then, later on, I got laid off from there. Then, my uncle got me a job--where I worked there for thirty-five years. Did every kind of a job. I won't go into detail into later.

NM: You talked about your mother's family had a farm. Did they always have a farm in this area? What generation did they come over from?

JS: I really don't know where my grandmother came from. I really don't know that much about them. My sister would know, but I remember as a kid, they had a nice big farmhouse. I remember they had the heat coming up to the bedrooms from the pot belly stove down stairs. There used to be a hole in the floor so that the heat would come up to heat up the bedrooms. I remember looking down there when I was a little kid. I was born in 1928, so I must have went there I was like, two, three years old on the farm over there. Later on, they talk about farms. My uncle John, before he got his farm, he was married and he was working as a handyman off Clark Street--I mean, what's that Plainfield Avenue main drag in South Plainfield there? Gee. But anyhow, he was working for this rich family and he was a handyman on a farm. I remember going there on vacation in the summertime with my cousin and my mother … there. Yes.

NM: Did you ever work on this farm growing up?

JS: No, not me. Not me. No, no. By that time, times got bad. They sold the farm. Even, they got rid of the cows. But I remember in Keasbey, when I was a kid, a couple doors away, they used to go ahead and kill pigs. They used to have pigs in the neighborhood and they would go ahead and once they killed the pig, they would singe the pig with straw to burn all the hair off of it and then they would gut it down and scrub it down with hot water and soap before they open it up. They would go ahead and cut out the different parts of the pig. Later on, a lot of them, they would go ahead and smoke it right away. Talk about times being hard. During that, when my uncle--later on, he had a farm. I remember him giving a little piglet to my mother. So, when he killed it and we cut it all up for my mother. The way we did it to preserve it all winter long was that she would have a vat and she would partially cook the different parts of the pig and cover it over with lard. Whenever she wanted … make up some parts of pig feet, she'd go down the cellar, because we didn't have no refrigerator. Our first refrigerator came in 1946. It was a little Crosley refrigerator. The refrigerator was only like, a little cube, box. Just you could put maybe a pound of chop meat or something in it. But it was a little refrigerator. That was the refrigerator we had in our life.

NM: You mentioned that your grandparents lost a farm at some point.

JS: Like I told you, when the times were bad, they had to sell it. They couldn't keep up with the tax there. You know what I mean? Whatever. But eventually, my mother was with this home, this home that I'm talking about in Keasbey now. My grandfather helped build this house, around 1920s and all that stuff. That's where I was born and raised. Eventually, this house, the state bought it out because of the expansion of the Parkway bridges in Keasbey. The first expansion of the Parkway was around 1953, because I got married in 1953. Then, they were just the first … the bridge before that was built in 1941, 1940, what they called Edison Bridge going across. Before that, the only bridge that they had was the Victory Bridge in Perth Amboy, [New Jersey] that was going to down to [the Jersey] Shore. So, this was a expanding of highway 9 and 35. So, just before the [attack on] Pearl Harbor, they dedicated this bridge here. They called it the [Thomas] Edison Bridge. I think it was five lanes. The way we controlled the traffic going down the shore, they used to have two red lights going to the store, three green going. Coming back, they would reverse the lights. If traffic was going down the shore, they would make three lanes going down the shore. Then, only two going north. Then, when they're coming back, they would change the lights on the Edison Bridge. It'd be three lanes going north and going south, it would be only two lanes. Eventually, like I said, they expanded the Parkway. They started that first bridge on the Parkway. It was maybe only around a six-lane highway. They started that in 1953, because I remember I was getting married then. Over the different years, there was different phases of that Parkway Bridge to today. Now, it's like, over a twenty-lane highway. That's why eventually it was around maybe five or six years ago, that my sister, she had a home there. She had to give it up and she's relocated in Fords, because the state condemned all

the street--Dahl Avenue was wiped out with the last expansion on the Parkway Bridge in New Jersey.

NM: Tell me about what you remember about this home in Keasbey and growing up there.

JS: Well, I went to grade school. I went to Keasbey School. For some reason, I don't know why, they kept me back in first grade. They kept me back in first grade. So, in order to get out of eighth grade, I had to go nine years. I was always weak spelling words, but anyway, I finally got--I graduated eighth grade in 1941-1942. Then, I went to Woodbridge High; was the old Woodbridge High School on Barron Avenue. I graduated over there in 1946. I was there four years in Woodbridge High. After that, that was during the '40s, being that the economy and everything like that, we were on what they call a split session. The freshmen and the sophomores would be either going from one to five o'clock. When you were a junior and a senior, when you got older, then you had to get school bus around 6:30. Then, you'd be going to school like, seven until twelve o'clock. This I remember because while I was in school, I went ahead and I got my written test for getting a driver's license. The bus driver, his name was Johnny from Super Bus here in South Amboy. During the '40s, I worked part time delivering papers with my bicycle and everything like that, but in the '40s, there, when I was going to high school, I used to work in a local [mom and pop] grocery store. That's where I was--delivery truck, he let me, without my license, let me drive it a little bit, like down one or two houses. Then, down all through Keasbey there. At that time, everybody was buying food [on] credit. We would go in the morning. We'd go in the morning. So, if I'd be working in the morning, that'd mean I was going to school in the afternoon. We'd go in the morning. Go ahead and take orders from different members. Most of them was Hungarian and Polish people like that, but take a little order, like put a loaf of bread, some milk, some kind of canned food or something like that, because in the '40s, there was no supermarkets around here. The only thing I could remember, later on in the '50s, the closest thing was even in South Amboy, when they got married, there was a little A&P Store in South Amboy, but up around Keasbey, as far as anything--in Keasbey alone there used to be around four or five [mom and pop] stores, because I remember delivering papers. They used to be up there. Saint Stephen Cemetery, which is still there. There used to be a store over there, a … Then, they used to have down near the post office, there's Fee's Store. Then, where I was, on my street, Demeter Store and the Matusz Store. Up Keasbey Heights, they used to have the Kesco and another one, … Store and these are all [mom and pop] stores that were surviving. One of them was (Evan's?). That's it, as far as the stores.

NM: We also like to--

[Tape Paused]

JS: I want to tell you about Keasbey. Keasbey was divided into different sections of town. The part where I was, they used to call it Keasbey Loop. The Keasbey Loop was because there was two taverns and as you're coming from Perth Amboy, Keasbey's

located exactly between Perth Amboy and Fords. I think Keasbey was famous for--they used to have the national fireproofing companies, two or three big brick companies that they used to--even mined the clay in Keasbey. There used to be big clay pits over there. A lot of the bricks that were manufactured over here in this national fireproofing company was, they built the Yankee Stadium. There was always a lot of barges going out of Keasbey over of here. Even though … I mentioned that during the '40s. I remember the Raritan River frozen over, even though they used to have the icebreakers come over here. At that time, even during the war, they used to go ahead and have the barges, shipping ammunitions from the Raritan Center, which was right down Keasbey over there. But the Keasbey loop. Then they used to be--the big Keasbey--the school section where the firehouse used to be. Now, I mentioned the firehouse. Later on, when I get out of service, I did join the firehouse. At that time, there was such a demand for people volunteering that people were dying to try to do volunteer work. If they didn't like it, they would even blackball you until later on, they liked you. Then, they would let you join. Not like today; nobody don't want to volunteer for nothing, but one of the things bad about that time when I was very fortunate being a fireman for around three, four years. When I got married, they had the ruling; once you left the town, you had to give it up, but the same thing reversed now. Now, they have members that are in a volunteer fire company that they're all over different sections of--they could be living in Fords or even Perth Amboy, or even South Amboy. It's okay. This is funny how they change the rules and regulations about volunteering, being a fire company. Then, they used to have the one down in the part of Keasbey--used to be what they call around the carborundum section, that was going down towards the plant where I used to live right there. There was two big plants right down there. Carborundum was next door to the old General Ceramic plant. Now, you mentioned the General Ceramic plant. I got hired there in 1950. I worked there thirty-five years. While I was there, the company changed over to around--let me try to see if I can remember. First of all, there was a merger--Electronic--no, Indiana Steel, was the first company. Eventually, while I was there, what was famous about the General Ceramic Plant during [World War II] was they used to make out of porcelain the electric socket for the radio and the insulator for the elector--the old plant down there; they used to have to plants. They used to make big chemical plots by hand for the chemical … out of clay and they used to mold by hand, but the plant where I was at, they used to make sockets for the radios and different things for it, even electronic, electrical, for wires, … wires, porcelain insulation, all the big white ones. You ever see them on tanks …? They used to make all that. They also used to make--before the war, they used to make regular even ceramic stuff at Ceramic, but when it was wartime, then they start making the different parts for the thing. They used to make gas--the old type of gas stoves, where they used to make those--the gas was burning up, but then they would make a couple bricks like that. Even they'd make a lot of brick electric stove--parts for stoves that was out of porcelain. They used to make them at--until eventually, when porcelain, we eventually went to change our name. For Electronic Memories, we start making what they call ferrite. Ferrite is a material which used to be powder, would be mixed in together with iron, copper, magnesium, zinc, and everything like that, that would contain electronics and they started with the television business. We used to make yolks in the back of the old big TV sets, and also transformers. Even like, if you could remember going back when you had a little radio, you used to have a ferrite

rod in the handle. Sometimes, you turned the handle one way [or] another, and a little radio and you got a better signal because in there was a piece of ferrite, what they call, and that used to pick up the signal. Eventually, we went in to Electronic Memories. They used to have the ladies … on wire and it'd be like the new technology today. Your old movies are going obsolete. Their eight millimeter camera and everything. I look at how the … advanced. Same thing with the advanced … they got it down to chips, a little chip. I'll give you an example. My daughter just bought me a new camera for [Christmas]; I could take a thousand pictures on my little camera and it only costs fourteen dollars or something like that. I could take and see the beautiful pictures that--that's how it was at … with the increase with electronics. Now, then, there was the other … store, up there where you have to two cars up near Saint Stephens, over the old summertime--the Saint Stephen, I stayed at, that's the cemetery over there that belongs to the old church in Perth Amboy, the Polish Church in Perth [Amboy]. They still own that. A lot of Polish people get married there. That was another part of Keasbey. Now, another part of Keasbey, they called Keasbey Heights. This was as soon as you left Perth [Amboy] coming on Smith Street. Used to be like Highland Avenue and (Florence Road?). Going back, in the '30s, we used to walk, go to church down to the Lady of Hungary Church. We would walk right up Keasbey Heights, go through (Mannings?). We'd go through (Mannings?), walking through (Mannings?). Then, we walked Washington Park in Perth Amboy. Walk all the way down Hall Avenue. Hall Avenue, if you can remember, that used to be a steep road. Going back, they used to have for the kids--that was the highest high road in Perth Amboy. They used to have these derby wooden--for the kids who used to race down the hill there. We used to go down to the Lady of Hungary's Church there. That's where I got my first holy communion, but later on, they decided to make us start a new parish and we had to go to Fords. So, my mother, I wound up going to Our Lady of Peace Church in Fords. That's where I got my confirmation, in Fords there, because there was an order from the diocese, either from Trenton or [wherever], but now they start to be diocese in Metuchen. But anyhow, in this church, like I said, [Our Lady of] Peace, my sister, my brother in law--I was an usher. They got married there 1948, in September '48. That's about all for Keasbey.

NM: What did you do as a child and as a teenager for entertainment in Keasbey. Were there movie theaters? Hang out with friends?

JS: There was no movie theaters in Keasbey. What I did though, I went to join the Boy Scouts when I was a kid. That was the program that--his name was Mr. Larsen, the Boy Scout leader, and it was sponsored by Keasbey Fire Company. The number was 56, Troop 56. What I really enjoyed about that was that the Raritan Council, when it … Boy Scouts. Once a year we went camping up at Camp Cowaw. It was located on the Delaware River. One of the things I remember that we went there and they had Army tents and it was on wooden platforms. It was so nice to go there as kid. We'd go swimming in the Delaware River. They used to play a game by greasing a big watermelon and I remember doing that. I remember I went for my fourteen-mile badge because we went seven miles down and seven miles back to get that one badge. That was one of my badges that I earned there. Also, with the cot now. You think the cots today, they make them real light out of aluminum and everything or just air or anything. At that

time, they had the wooden. The damn cot used to be--even as a kid that was pretty damn heavy. It was all wood and canvas and folded up and put it together and put it in the bag. It was really--I mean, the technology, like anything else that used to be real heavy. But that was--I volunteered to be a Boy Scout. As far as that, we used to--when we were kids, as far as entertainment, once a year, always had a big bonfire from the grocery stores, we'd collect cardboard boxes, old tires, etc. from stores, and all that stuff. They saved all the cardboard, everything like that or anything that you could burn. It was some kind of big celebration. I remember running around in Keasbey [neighborhoods]. We used to have, with the girls and the boys that were running around in the neighborhood in the nighttime. Even like I told you, a couple doors away, they still had the cows there. I remember when the cows would make a cowflap out in the field, playing baseball. You'd be over base one, base two or three or something like that. That's how much there was no worrying about the dogs running around. Or even like that, you're talking about that, there was no such thing as … everybody had dogs and the dogs all ran free. Nobody said, "Oh, the dog is in there." Like as soon as got where I'm here now, when I got married, I had a dog here and even though I chained him and everything, he broke loose and then I had to give him up because he broke loose and the neighbors start going, "Oh, he wants to get in the swimming pool or he's pulling clothes on the clothes line." My wife was pregnant at that time, so I don't get her upset. I had to get rid of the dog, but the times were good. … Keasbey there. We didn't have no central heat. In my house, we used to have what you call a summer kitchen. It was down in the cellar. It was in the cellar. The other two floors, it used to be like, three rooms in a row. In other words, the house consisted--let's see. Twelve rooms. This was a brick house with a flat roof and a summer kitchen. In the summertime, we would look forward to--we didn't have no air conditioning. We had our meals in the cellar in the summertime and then when it got cold, we went back upstairs. Now, in reference to heating it, all summer long, me and my father, we'd always cut wood, get wood, even old railroad ties on Saturdays or something like that. Me and my father cut wood. That would be the job of my father. We would cut the wood, chop it, and put it in the shed, get it ready for the wintertime. Pile it up nice. Then we used to go pick soft coal from the National Fireproofing. Even when we dig some of the coal that came off the boxcars, we used to go back down to the plant, they would let us do that. Once soft coal burns out, it's coke and coke also makes heat. So, my mother only used to buy some blue coal for the kitchen. Up in the bedroom, she used to buy maybe a ton of (pea?) coal, which was a fine coal. We used to have a big potbelly stove up in the bedroom, in one bedroom there, and that was the way the heat was. When it was very cold, then they would warm up some bricks or something like that and then put it in the bedroom when we would go to bed and to warm it up underneath the covers. That's the story of that.

NM: What language was spoken in the home?

JS: We spoke English, but Hungarian. In fact, we used to go like this--some of the school for Catholic religion, but it was half English, half Hungarian. I never really went into the strictly Hungarian school. The little Hungarian that I picked up, I learned from my mother and father, but no, there was mostly--not like today. If you take notice, the different Spanish people and all that or any Orientals like that, if you go today, as a white

person, we are minority, because everybody else--like, even when we go shopping now, they speak their own language even though they're here and I know they could speak English, they always--I don't know if it's Polish or whatever you want to call it, because that's not too much Hungarian. But different languages like that. Even the Orientals, they don't want to speak [English]. Even a lot of the Spanish, especially the Spanish people, instead of speaking English, they speak Spanish all the time. So, this I'm telling you, you're like--when I say to white people today, when they go to the supermarkets or even the farmer's market here, you're a minority, because you can hear them talking different languages, not English.

NM: Growing up, you mentioned some experiences and it sounds like you were involved with church. Was church a big part of growing up?

JS: Not really. Not really. I mean, we used to go to church once a week. Then, also, listen to this, when I was in public school, in order to go ahead, they used to--when I had to communion and everything--I mean, CD confirmation, they would have the CD program and on the weekend there, I think on a Friday or something like that, they would excuse me to go to the Lady of Peace School, over there to learn the catechism to prepare myself to get confirmation. That part, I remember that part. … But I was not--I used to go with--when I was a kid, my mother always used to go to novena. Even today, I go now to novena, once a week to novena at St. Mary's here in South Amboy, but it wasn't that--I volunteer now. I work what they call the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Once a month we give out food to the poor people here in South Amboy. My job is usually, I get the donuts and rolls from the local bakery to treat the workers and then when I'm over there and I cut up all the cardboard and tie up all the cardboard and stack it on the side for recycling. Usually, I'm up [at] quarter to six. I'll go pick up the first donuts and rolls around quarter to seven. Then, they let people pickup food in bags 8:30 and it's over by ten o'clock. So, you're back home around 10:30. This is once a month, but there's other more work. Whenever they have--just recently, they have what they call the postal donation. Then, they have a lot of food that got to be … a lot of people don't realize that they think that by donating food, if it's outdated, they're just wasting their time, because they have a lot of people, we have to screen every one of those foods. If it's outdated under law, it's not like you at home, you could buy something … date, and then you forget about it. Oh, the can … you eat it, but no, they try to go give it to the poor, something like anything else, there's a--"Oh, no. You can't give it." There's nothing wrong with the damn can, which you know if you take notice that how they … they got so damn smart. You pick up a can today and it's five years in advance. How could life preserve that long? Never had that before like that, but they wised up, the manufacturers and they predated all them … but like I told you, normally, when I buy something today, I put my date on, when I bought it, and then before you know it, a year went by. Oh, but you look at it's date, but then it might be out of date, but how would you use it?

NM: You would have been very young, but if you do recall, in the 1930s, did the economic downturn affect your family or the community in any way?

JS: Well, I mean, things were bad that time. You understand what I mean? You could look in the history about how bad the '30s was. It only started out when Roosevelt started the CC program [Civilian Conservation Corps] and everything like that, to try to get the economy going. It seems like even what we're living in now, that seems like the economy isn't the greatest, that it's going back and forth with the president there. He's been trying to stimulate the economy. For some reason, in my opinion, the only time it seems like any of the countries get back is when they start a war, then they make--then the government got to go ahead and start manufacturing war stuff like that, but for some reason, I don't know, it was the same thing in the '30s. At that time, the government started the CC program and all the young guys went out, started up these national parks. A lot of the parks that I know of, they use, I remember, the CC guys. This was a program men would be gone. Young guys, before the war and everything like that, they would go away, leave home, and then build roads or something like that in different national parks and everything like that.

NM: Did the CCs build anything in the Keasbey area?

JS: No, no. But I remember, even one of the programs right here, me living here. I forget the name of the program was. We had some trees out here; we bought them from the borough. In fact, I still got one left right here. Neighbor got them still out there. At that time, I didn't have to do nothing. They had a program that they came and cut the trees down for me free of charge. I got married in '53, so I got here around '57, '58. So, it must have been in the '60s, something like that. There must have been a government program where they did have from the borough, supplement helping out, cut down trees … here in the neighborhood.

NM: Your mother and father, were they working steadily throughout the '30s?

JS: To my knowledge, yes. Like I said, they struggled, because … You mentioned that, in the '30s, I remember going back and where I was working, the grocery store before I was there. There too, they had some kind of a program. This was during the war or just before the war. They used to give away food if you qualified for it, like now we have … but it's not like today we go by your income and everything like that; we screen people to make sure that they're qualified income wise, but I remember the truck coming down with cheese or either fresh vegetables or something like that and pass it out to the food. They did have some kind of a government program, giving away food and stuff like that for some of the poor people that weren't working, but like I told you, my mother was always working in the cigar factor [or] some damn place. My father was able to work some damn place, too, but then after the war, they couldn't get a decent job though.

NM: In Keasbey, was there a large Hungarian community?

JS: There was a lot of--but, Keasbey, at that time, in '28 and '30s up to '40s, even later on, it was mostly, I would say--Keasbey was, at that particular time, I would say eighty percent was Hungarian. Eighty percent were Hungarian. Like anything else, even like Perth Amboy and everything like that, it used to be a lot of Hungarians in Perth Amboy.

Then, eventually, either a different clientele of people, but the latest ones I remember--one time they turned Perth Amboy into a little Puerto Rico, but now … even like, New Brunswick now. New Brunswick's starting to turn into Mexico. There's a lot of Mexicans. Different times, immigration, different people, Oriental people. Different parts of New Jersey, all turned over to different Koreans. They come … now, take Iselin, Woodbridge, New Jersey. What is predominant there, they have little India, right? They took over that one section of--when I say Woodbridge Township, this is what I belong to, Woodbridge Township. Woodbridge Township used to be divided into Keasbey, Fords, Hopelawn, Sewaren, Avenal, Iselin, Colonia, and now, all of a sudden, there was such a big influx in the past ten years, if not more than ten years--they call it "Little India" and you should see the stores over there, all loaded with--they took over Oak Tree Road and [Route] 27 over there. It's all loaded with Indian people. I'm talking about Indian people, not the American Indians that were born [here]. I'm talking about from India, from down near the Indian Ocean.

NM: Do you remember when Pearl Harbor happened?

JS: I remember [Pearl Harbor]. I was coming home from over here when it happened here. My mother took me to the movies. In Perth Amboy, there used to be around five movies. They used to have the Roxy, the Crescent, the Majestic, and Ditmas, and the Strand. Those were the five big movies in Perth Amboy during the '40s. I remember--or even in the '30, during the '30s. We used to go see the newsreel, but anyhow, that particular day, about Pearl Harbor, it was Sunday and we were coming home--then we were coming home. We heard on the radio or when we got out of the movies that the Pearl Harbor--that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and I was walking home. We didn't have [a] car then. We were walking home and that's [what] I remember. Like you said, if I remember Pearl Harbor, yes.

NM: What was the reaction in the community?

JS: Well, to my knowledge, it didn't--being it was so far away, it didn't faze us like what happened in New York on 9/11. As a kid, where's Pearl Harbor? Way the hell over there. So, it didn't faze me or what. What happened was bad, though, was what it was. Eventually, when the war started, a lot of our young guys that I knew went in to the service. Some of my friends that went right away, they used to have what they call "Gold Star Mothers," whenever they got word that the government came, "Oh, your son died," or "Your son died, missing in action," they used to put a little flag in the window, gold star, gold star mother, that one of your sons gave up their lives for service. Or even during the war there, they used to have air raid practicing with that--I remember my father volunteering in the neighborhood [to] make sure that no lights were showing or anything like that, but they used to have practicing at the air raid shelters and stuff like that. Even in school, you did it for bombing and everything like that; used to have a drill, duck underneath the chairs and stuff like that.

NM: Did you follow what was going on with the war in Germany and in Japan after Pearl Harbor?

JS: Well, let me put it this way. We didn't have no TV or anything like that. We did have radio. We used to listen to the radio to see what's going on, everything like that. Every so often, they would have--when you did go to the movies, they always used to have the movie up that you would see a film. It was mostly in the movie theater that you were able to see some real things about the war. Later on, after the war though, there used to be beautiful--on TV, our first TV we got--let's see. I think we got our first TV at home in Keasbey before I even got married. I think one of my brother in laws, brothers went [and] got one. At that time, this is after the war; they used to have--what's the name of that series? *The War at Sea*, black and white, or something like that, but then it would show the Merchant Marines going over, bringing stuff to England and stuff like that and the submarines shooting, bombarding, sinking the ships and stuff like that. That was the only contact as far as seeing something after the war, but during the war, the only time we saw something about the war was in the movie.

NM: Now, how did--?

JS: Or even in the newspaper. In the local newspaper, every so often, because I used to deliver newspapers all during the war. I remember when the war ended or something, they always have a special "extra, extra," running around, "the war ended," or even when Dewey lost the president. [Editor's Note: Thomas E. Dewey was the 1940 Republican Presidential nominee. President Roosevelt won the election and served an unprecedented third term.] He thought he was going to Truman, but … with the politicians like that, at different times, they used to have the--I used to deliver papers, be a helper first and later on, I had my own route. My mother bought me a bike and everything like that. I used to deliver papers all during the war for *Perth Amboy News*. I remember at that time, the paper for the week only cost--in the '40s, let's see, used to be say, maybe eighteen cents or something like that. Then, they increased it maybe twenty-one, twenty-two cents, something like that. Sometimes, used to make a penny or something like that. Penny tip or something like that. That used to a big tip when you're getting a penny, when you didn't have the right change or something like that.

NM: You mentioned that the factory that your father had worked at as a tool and die maker.

JS: I don't remember nothing about that.

NM: Okay. You mentioned that during the war, the factory changed over and he started working.

JS: He left the Holbrook Hat Factory.

NM: Okay. The hat factory.

JS: The hat factory. Holbrook [Hat] Factory. Perth Amboy, used to be on Sheridan Street. When the war … the government made everybody to help the war effort. So, he

had to go ahead and take a defense job. So, one of the defense job was this Hayden Chemical Plant in Fords there. They used to make some kind of chemicals there.

NM: Did any other industries in Keasbey change?

JS: The brick factory, different ones shut down different times and everything. That used to be the carborundum plant there in Keasbey and my plant there, like I explained to you different things that I did in my plant. The carborundum, they used to make different kind of brick. They used to make fire brick, carborundum, and grindstones. That was the big plant. Grindstones and everything like that. Big carborundum plant. But the National Fireproofing Companies, they were making bricks, like hollow tile and everything like that. Later on, they start to build homes for … like my house there is what they call cinderblock home. Later on, they changed the cinderblock into concrete blocks. It's a different technology. Later on, they even start building homes where they would pour foundations and walls with solid concrete, but when I was having my home built here in 1957, '56, I put the foundation down and then they had twelve-inch cinderblocks. Then I had a brick … home built here, a ranch.

NM: Did rationing affect Keasbey at all?

JS: It affected everybody. One thing I will say, you mentioned rationing. Even with the local guys that had cars, like I told you … business, they used to give away stamps and even if you had a car, something like that--like I said, we didn't have no car. Even with [his] store keeper business, being he had a grocer business, he probably was able to get a little more gasoline because he had a little business, but then he could only go for gas certain times. They used to give out A, B, C, D, stamps or something like that. Even about the war effort, in the schools and everything like that, we used to have what they called savings bonds. They used to have a program in school like that. Maybe a quarter or twenty cents or fifty cents a week or how often. We'd buy for the war effort. We'd buy stamps and then once we accumulated 18.75, then you cashed it in. Then you got a twenty-five dollar war bond, some many years later. But during the war, it affected different people because not everything was--the sugar wasn't the greatest and different things. The food was rationed. You know what I mean? Everything wasn't all available.

[TAPE PAUSED]

JS: --the war. I was going to tell you about the war now.

NM: Yes. First, what was the most vivid memory of Keasbey during the war? What's the most vivid memory you have of the war affecting the community?

JS: Well, as far as the war affecting Keasbey? Like I told you, a lot of the--especially, this plant where I got hired and for the war effort, they start making different parts for the Army and all that, for the government, as far as that, but I didn't get hired there until after the war. I only got hired there [in] 1950. As far as the brick factory, they weren't affected with the war, but of course, they were making different kind of bricks.

Eventually, when the economy broke down, they shut one or two, a couple of plants down. As far as the war, what affect Keasbey? Like I said, I went to high school. It was double session. There was no time to--no money to build another high school. So, I explained that before about going to school. So, anyhow, going back to school, that's when I got out of school in '46 and it was hard getting a job, but I did get a job, getting eighty-five cents an hour. I did get a job in General Cable Works in Perth Amboy. That used to be a copper mill, different kind of copper. What I did, I didn't go there after I got back, out of service, because I took advantage of the GI Bill for a while. Went to school after … but I went to service in September of 1946. I got out of service in March of 1948.

NM: I just want to back up a little bit before we get in there.

JS: Okay. I'm sorry. All right.

NM: I want to ask, do you remember when the war ended in Keasbey?

JS: Wow. Let me think. Let me think now for a minute. Well, I remember, first of all, that the war--World War II in Europe ended first and the Nazis gave up. That was sometime in '45 or something like that. Then, I don't know how many months after that, after Truman, they dropped [an] atomic bomb on Japan at Nagasaki. It went into Hiroshima over there. Then, later on, General MacArthur, they had the signing of the peace treaty in '45, around in June or something, '45 on the Missouri Battleship, to my knowledge. [Editor's Note: V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States. Japan formally surrendered on September 2, 1945, in a ceremony held onboard the USS *Missouri* (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay.] Around that area.

NM: Were there any celebrations in Keasbey?

JS: Not really. The only celebrations they used to have in Keasbey, every so often, they used to have a parade for the fire company, but I mean, it was no celebration for the war or anything like that, no. Of course, like any town, take New York City, you say, oh, the war is over, the guys are coming home and the troops are coming up. The few men that did come out, there was--like even now, they say was the war going on. I don't know if the guy up the street is in the service or what, but they got they wives with them or anything. I feel sorry for this war. This war sucks, because now they think that they're National Guard guys, in my opinion. I don't know nothing about them too much, but that they go ahead and they do their duty for six months or something like that. Give them a week home or something. They ship them back again. That sucks. No, no. I mean, of course, we don't have no volunteers. When I went in, it was volunteering. I went in '46 to more or less, get the GIs, the regular GIs to come home, so they could start their life over. So, my primary occupation was I was in what they called the GI occupation of Japan between '46 and '48.

NM: After high school, what did you think you were going to do?

JS: Well, like I told you, I got out of high school in 1946. I had the business course in high school and the jobs weren't that great, trying to get a job here and there, like that. So, I got disgusted and then the government had signs out at that time, '46, they want you to volunteer, we want you to volunteer to get the regular GIs to come home. So, that's when I decided to join the service in September '48. I went down from New York or Newark. Went down to Fort Dix for a while. Then, from Fort Dix, I went--did my basic training in [Fort] Lee, Virginia. Even went to basic training. I didn't have eight weeks. I only had seven weeks because of the holiday and everything like that. The last week would have been like a bivouac about the sky and stuff like that, that you'd go out night training. So, anyhow, what is that? They let me have my Christmas vacation to come home before Christmas. Then, when it was Christmas time, I was already being shipped from Oakland, Camp Stoneman in Oakland in California. I was on the Pacific Ocean going underneath the Golden Gates, just about when it was Christmas. Of course, I had to be home. I was on my way going to the port that we pulled into. We pulled into Yokohama, Japan. One thing [that] was fascinating about it, these troop ships, was not like today. I just got through a cruise now. Me and my girlfriend, we were on a royal Caribbean cruise. The ships today, compared to the troop ships, they were like tin cans. I remember going over we had a storm and this is no lie. Even as soon as we got on to water, everybody on the troop ship and there was hardly any waves or anything. It wasn't that bad. Everybody started to vomit. All the young GI guys started to vomit. The whole troop ship stunk like hell. Even going down to get something to eat and stuff like that, holding on to the trays, but first I want to tell you about this. I don't know if you ever heard of this, and this is no lie. We had ran into a big storm. With these troop ships--I forget the name of the ship. (General Langford?) or something like that was the name of the ship that we were on going to… When the waves were so big, we were down in the hole for three days. When the waves and the ship was rolling the waves, when the propeller would come out of the water, the whole ship vibrated. [Imitates vibration] Like that. Every time the ship shook and vibrated. Then, when they did leave us, come out of the hole, we went--all us young guys held onto the railing and said, the waves--I'm not imagining this. Ain't no lie. The waves were just like you--how tall the Edison Bridge is. That's how I remember as a young guy. Was only around nineteen or twenty years old. The waves were as big as the Edison Bridge. Big giants ones. This was after the storm was over and just imagine how there's such big different--nature's very funny. So, this I remember going over to Japan.

NM: Before we go into your time in Japan, I want to go into your time training in the States. Did you find anything challenging, either physically or mentally, about the training?

JS: Not really. No. When it came to basic training, it's like anything else; you take it as it is. I mean, you ain't going to rebel about it, as far as, if you got punished or whatever. You try to do your best to try to be a good boy, stay in line, and everything like that. One training there we learned how to shoot the carbines, M1 rifles, in range. Also, what they call a grease gun [M3 submachine gun]. It used to be an automatic one. That was the basic training. Like I says, I didn't get--eight weeks is supposed to be basic. What happened was--let me tell you what happened here now. When I went to Japan, there

was thousands of guys. We went to a repo depot [replacement depot] just like what the call Camp … or Camp Stoneman here, on the West Coast. We went there. We were there one night. Everybody's sleeping. I woke up in the morning. Everybody had to go down to another thirteen weeks basic training down in one of the infantry division … but I was one of the ten guys that being that I had the business course in high school, and I had a little bit of typing and I had the business course, I was one of the very fortunate guys that we went on--did what they call the detach service to the 3rd Engineers in the island of Kyushu [Japan]. From Yokohama, I went on special orders down to the island of Kyushu, (Fukuoka?). In this place, where 3rd Engineer, believe it or not, a friend of mine--I didn't talk to him at that time. Later on, I reminisced with him. He used to be with them. His name was (Tony Naggi?). He was originally from Keasbey, but we were on detach service over there, where our primary job, what I had to do was we set up a stateside laundry. We got the equipment coming in. With us, there was only a major, a lieutenant, around five or six GIs and the rest of it was workers with the Japanese. We set up a stateside laundry. What we did was, we were responsible for washing clothes for all the GIs in that division, the 24th Division. That was my primary job. Eventually, I turned out to be a clerk. I came up a Corporal T5 [Technician Fifth Grade].

NM: You told us how you got into this duty. What I wanted to ask is were there a lot of World War II veterans who were still sergeants and officers?

JS: Didn't see them. Didn't see none of them. The guys that were getting discharged, I didn't see none of them. I didn't see them. Like I said, we were on our own. We were going over there to replace them and our primary … '46 … '48 and I don't know how long it was up before the Korean War, but we had what you called a buddy system. Whenever we did go to town with them, even though they were friendly, but sometimes, like anybody, because it's human nature, some people used to resent the Japanese. Sometimes, I knew they used to be very nasty. Sometimes for no reason at all, sometimes they'd go to town or something like or an alley, something like that, and they would abuse another human body. In that same token that we used go to the local barbershop or something like that, for a cigarette, something, they would give a massage, and shave you and everything like that for a couple cigarettes, like that. But we were always with the buddy system, because you couldn't trust them or turn your back on nobody, but not like--my personal opinion, and I'm not ashamed to say it, I was just very fortunate. To me, it was one of the best vacations in my life, being in the service from 1946 until 1948.

NM: Did you ever go sightseeing when you were in Japan?

JS: What?

NM: Did you ever go sightseeing when you were in Japan?

JS: The only thing that we had, what you saw, after a while you were there, is like anything else, they called--I forget the name of the word, but you're out to a week's vacation or something like that or even sometime like that--I don't know if I paid for it or

not. During the holiday, we were to call up home to speak to my parents. I don't know how we did it. Did I have to pay it or what? But at that time, I was in service, I signed up and the money that I used to get paid, I don't know, it's seventy-five dollars a month or something like that. I would go ahead and send it home to my mother and my mother would go ahead and open up a bank account and accumulated that money. That was how I was able to get my first car when I got out of service in 1948. The first car I bought was a 1941 Chevy. I paid a thousand dollars for it. The thousand dollars that I paid in 1948 was the price of the car when it was brand new, but my mother saved the money for me. That's how I was able to buy my first car. What else did I want to say? That was it?

NM: I was asking about sightseeing.

JS: Oh, sightseeing. So, getting back to sightseeing. Over there, you're entitled to vacation. So, I went to what I call a resort. I got to tell you, at that time, too, it was run by the Japanese and the government like that, but it was like a week's vacation and I went swimming in the South China Sea. It was on the other side of the island of Kyushu. It was near another Air Force Base, what used to be a beautiful resort. Over there like that, they pampered you, in reference to--you had … food and everything like that. Even taking a bath, they had special baths in that resort where you could sit down, like they have these new type of tubs now coming out that you can--but this was all tiled down. You just went, sitting down and you could soak your whole body right in the nice hot water. Like I told you, when I first got there, they used to have a lot of GIs before I got there, but they did away with them. The Japanese used to have a caddy or one of the younger Japanese boys would clean their barracks and everything or shine their shoes for them, and everything like that, but when I got there, they did away with that. We had to do our own--like I told you, I was fortunate. I was on detach service, which means I didn't have to pull no guard duty. I didn't have to no KP [kitchen patrol] or anything like that. We were exclusive on that. In fact, one of the things I remember, going about that, dry cleaning or washing clothes, especially when it came to the officers like that, they would be in, they would say, "Hey, do us a favor. … day or two, would you please rush through these clothes through. Have it clean and have it there." We used to that for the--they used to have a patch, a black and white patch. I don't know if it was the CIO or what they were. They were special officers. So, the bottom line, one hand pays the other hand, was that sometimes they liked us so damn much that when it came to one of the big Christmas parties, me and (Freddie Frye?) we went to nice Christmas Party or a New Year's Eve and boy, did we tie one on that time. I remember getting drunk at that party.

NM: [laughter] During your time in Japan, you mentioned that you had a buddy system established. So, was there frequent contact between members in your unit and civilians?

JS: Yes. That's the way you went into town. In fact, we had a lot of civilians working for the government and you really knew them close. You knew their families. You understand what I mean? Brothers or sisters or later on, sometimes, we would see them off the job. In fact, while I was over there, I had a girlfriend over there. I met her and she was a widower. I guess she lost her husband during the war, but I was with her all the while I was over there. I think she had a son, but I used to go sometime off the buddy

system, sneak over her house on the weekends or something like that, but there was always contact with the family on the outside, on the weekends or something like that when you're off base. Because while we there--here's one other thing we want to tell you about. Let me tell you about the operation. The operation was, like I told you, all the immediate areas, we would be servicing as far as washing all the GI clothes. So, one of the jobs that had--we didn't have money. We had what they call paper money, script, at that time. Every so often, maybe you'd wake up a month later or something like that, and they would say--they would come in, "How much money you got on you?" If it's blue, all right. Turn it all in. Let's say, if you had fifty dollars in blue money, because sometimes, the Japanese somehow, they used to start forging the damn money. So, this is what they did to try cut down on the forging of the Japanese people making fake money. They would turn it in and change the color of the money, but because lots of times, some of the work was getting money or something like that, where either they'd trade and then give you some money for it and you get a carton of cigarettes for our money, cheap. You understand what I mean? At that time, I forget what the hell--a carton of cigarettes was so damn cheap. It would get you in and everything like that, but that's about that on that stuff there.

NM: What are some of the moments that stand out in your time? You were there for quite a while. What were some of the most vivid memories you have of your time in Japan?

JS: Well, I remember one of the highlights was that--I remember Truman coming through and picked up pictures, but I don't where the hell they're at, showing the picture of … Nagasaki, where the first atomic bomb was dropped on, how the city looked before and how the city looked after. I had postcards someplace. I can't find it right now. But that was one of my highlights. Here's another thing. I remember this, different countries celebrating. In the month of May, they used to have a big holiday sometime in May. They would go walking in the woods and we joined them, on a festival, like going out to have a little party with them. You want to hear a crazy story about me? I don't where the hell we rented--we went to one place where we rented horses and for some reason--this is the truth. I was young at that time. The horse started to run away. I said, "How the hell am I going to get off the damn horse?" So, anyhow, we're going to start running wild, something. We left the other guys. So, also, we're running and there was a tree coming up and a big branch … So, what I did was to get off the horse, I put my hands up in the air and I let the horse run away without me in the saddle. So, that's my experience about riding a horse on a vacation there.

NM: Are there any other memories that stand out?

JS: About the May walk, about this horse thing, about driving to the … Oh, one of the things, like I told you before, and how it's so fascinating when you're out at sea and then all of a sudden, you see what they call Mount Fujiyama. In the morning when the sun is coming up and all of sudden you see this first snow and as we closer to Yokohama, then you see this big mountain. That's what I was really fascinated by, to see Mount Fujiyama. It was very pretty.

NM: How close was the town in relation to where you were stationed on the base?

JS: I would say the town, the main town--the name of the town where we were, it's name was Fukuyama. Fukuoka or something. Fukuoka. It's a pretty big city. If you look at the island of Kyushu, it's on the northern part of the island, not like--now, what recently what happened with this here big storm, we were on the southern part of the island over there. While I was there, there was no big storms as far as no earthquake or anything like that. Not like whatever happened to the poor Japanese people on the northern part of the islands, but it was pretty nice over there. But from town, maybe it was maybe fifteen-minute ride. Let me tell you this, about going into town to try to remember the thing. You ever hear of the word honey buckets? Listen to this now about the Japanese at that time. They did not have no sewer system and what they call … they used to have these [oxen] and they used to have these big buckets and they used to go ahead and call them honey buckets. Here's what they did, the Japanese did at that time. Every house instead of you having an outhouse that used to have--even when I was in Keasbey, they used to have outhouses. But the way they built the house, they had a pit in the cellar or in your closet or something like that and if you had to go get … or your stool or something like that, you went into this room or a closet. The way the house was built, they could come along with big buckets--not big buckets, like a big dipper, a big dipper. What they would do, once it gets filled up, they would put this here waste from human waste, they would put it in buckets and when they're coming down the street, they'd stink like hell. But here's the bottom line. They would go ahead and put all this human waste in the rice patties for fertilizer. This is the truth. That's the story on the honey buckets.

NM: Could you describe this town? What I'm wondering is, that being that it's 1946, and '47. '48, were there signs of rebuilding from World War II?

JS: Not while I was there, there was no--because here's what it is now. Keep this in mind. The only cities that they really, really built up really bad, is the ones that were damaged from the atomic bombs or even maybe part of Tokyo. One time, this here about [the] Doolittle [Raid] before the war, '44, when they bombed parts of Tokyo. [Editor's Note: In April of 1942, the United States bombed Tokyo in an air raid that became known as the Doolittle Raid or Tokyo Raid after James Harold "Jimmy" Doolittle.] Outside of that, where I was at, there was no major building up anything in the area I was at, because nobody was damaged. You understand what I mean? Here's the things I wanted to mention about. Now, these Geisha girls. So, I don't know if there were professional entertainers. I myself, maybe I was only a commoner, but I don't know who they really entertained. Maybe they entertained the higher--but they used to have special clothes, special hairdos, special face. You know what I mean? Maybe they used to go entertain a different class of people or something, but they used to have the Geisha girls. I remember the beautiful clothes that they used to have at that time, but like I said, we were right mixed with the common people, just like us. Then, we used to think--they used to wear regular clothes like that. They used to eat a lot of rice. In fact, I'm in the hat factory with the irons and everything. They used to warm up their fish and their rice from the electric irons that we had in the shop there, steam and all.

NM: Did you know when your service was going to end in Japan?

JS: Yes, I knew when that was. Then, they prepared me to go ahead and get ready to ride back. I can't remember. Vaguely, I remember going, but coming back, I eventually wound up in what they call Camp Stoneman in California. Camp Stoneman was right on the outskirts of San Francisco in Oakland. That was the repo depot. Like on the New Jersey Coast, we used to be Camp Kilmer here in New Jersey. That's where I got discharged in Camp Stoneman. At that time, I had muster out pay around three hundred dollars or something, but that was supposed to pay for my transportation and some money that I didn't get vacation for. It's all on my discharge, with the money that I'm talking about. I'll give you a copy of that or something if you want. Anyhow, what I say is that, at that time, I had an opportunity to fly and what went through my mind, I said, "Oh, my god. I'm here on the West Coast. I don't know when I'm ever going to have the opportunity." This is 1940. "When am I going to get a chance to come back to California?" So, I drove across the country in a Greyhound bus. It was one of the nicest experiences coming across--the Greyhound bus, the driver would drive four hours one way, stop, and then he'd go another bus back the other [way], where he started from. On the way, we were going, we'd stop. We'd come through the whole central part of the United States, which was very enjoyable. We used to sleep on the bus. The bus would stop, like for breakfast and you'd get half hour layovers. Get a bite to eat, cup of coffee or something at any of these rest areas, just like now. Like anything else, even going back in the '50s or something, they all changed. They used to have different bus stops, different to every … people. You know what I mean? … But I really enjoyed it.

NM: What'd you think that you were going to do after your time in the service?

JS: I didn't think … it's just that I got home. I don't know what I was going to do, so what I did was I tried to increase my education. Like I said, I'm very weak in reference to--even with the English and the thing, but I took advantage of the GI Bill. I went to school up to Newark, New Jersey. What they call Commerce Avenue. What they call the Washington School for Secretaries. So, I went for one year. That was when I got my car. In reference to the car, the car was burning oil so bad, I remember going up to Newark and back in one quart of oil. That cost a lot of money. At that time, money was--you know what I'm talking about. A quart of oil, gee. But I was very fortunate, which my brother is still living there. He's around ninety-two. He tore the engine down and replaced all the burning, the rings on the cylinder and it was a six cylinder Chevy. That same car went ahead--me and my buddy, we took a ride down to Florida with it. We come back, but anyhow, I used to pick up some of the people from Perth Amboy going to the same school, but I went there for one year. I had--this was typing and shorthand, what they were pushing at that time, which was popular at that time, shorthand, but I never pursued it because after that, I got a job. I was working in the Celotex Plant in Metuchen there, knocking around. Then, I got laid off from there for a while. But then, later on, like I told you, in 1950, my uncle got me a job at the old General Ceramics Plant, which I worked there for thirty-five years.

NM: So, before we get into your career there, you mentioned that when you were in the Army, at a point you became a clerk.

JS: Clerk, yes.

NM: Could you talk about that experience and just give us a timeframe of when that was and what your duties were?

JS: Well, that period started, like I told you, once we got to Japan and we went on detach service and we met with these officers and he told us what we have to do. So, he got the right forms and everything, because you had to keep records of that. In fact, I even have a record someplace of where I got a recommendation from this major. The unit that we was with was just a major and a lieutenant and then a staff sergeant, a couple corporals, a couple private guys. There was only around, all together, with the officers, there was maybe around eight of us. What our responsibility was with the Japanese government. We used their labor. The Japanese used their labor. We got stateside, like the big dryers. They set them up. Big commercial washing machines. Then, of course, as far as--there used to be some special for pressing clothes, but a lot of the clothes was pressed by hand with the irons, you understand, different kind of steam irons. But that was eventually--and like I told you, we used to go ahead this troop so many, check off the clothes, like I told you. Getting back with the clothes now, with the money, we had paper money. So, every so often, one part of the Japanese … we had to make sure they checked every pocket to see if there's any money. A lot of GIs when they got drunk, they left a lot of money in their pocket. What we did with that money, there used to be a Coca Cola plant. There used to be a Coca Cola plant on this base, with bottles, not like plastic … you still bought the original Coca Cola plant. We would treat them. When we … so much money, we'll send somebody over there with the amount of money, pay for one or two cases, treat everybody in Japanese in the laundry plant to Coca Cola. That's what we did with that money.

NM: So, it was within this unit that you became a clerk? Okay. I get it now.

JS: Got it?

NM: Yes.

JS: So, that's …

NM: That's good. How many Japanese were working with you?

JS: Believe it or not, forty. Maybe forty, forty-five. I don't know if I could get some pictures or show you something. Here's another thing I didn't mention there, what I was fascinated by in that city. You ever see these big three, four hundred pound Japanese wrestlers? In town, I really enjoyed seeing some of them wrestling like that. These guys, they're really heavyweight. Three, four hundred pound. They walk around and different

kind of wrestling. I saw a couple of those shows. It was very nice, you know what I mean.

NM: How often would you go for entertainment in the town?

JS: Well, I mean, like I told you, I had a girlfriend there. So, I was out every week. Every week. Once a while. After a while, I was going to town or something like that that. You know what I mean? Yes, while I was there. Once I was established, yes.

NM: Did other GIs have girlfriends in the city as well?

JS: Yes, my buddy (Frye?) he has his girlfriend there … but like I told you, some of the guys that I know I was with, because they resented that they lost a son or a brother or something or someone during the war, so that they resented them and if they'd go into town, if nobody was around, and beat the piss out of some of them. I never saw it, but I've heard of it. They would really abuse the Japanese.

NM: Did you go out to a lot of restaurants when you were in town?

JS: No, no. In fact, even when I would bring--oh, it's raining out. It's raining out. Shit, it's raining. … Sometimes, I would bring stuff from home--I mean, from the camp home, but sometimes, my girlfriend, she used to go shopping like that and she used to a little cooking in the kitchen. They used to have these hot charcoal stoves, a little something like that. … Some beef, not too much beef, but then they used to have a little sake, a white wine, a thing, and with rice or something like that. Supplement it maybe with potato chips or something like that. But I didn't eat much in restaurants. No, no. There was no big restaurants, say like we go there today. No. Not to my knowledge. No, no. It was not--the only thing that was open--you got to excuse me.

NM: Go ahead.

[Tape Paused]

JS: All right.

NM: So, I'm just going to continue.

JS: All right.

NM: Was it hard to get around to get around this town, in terms of language?

JS: No, because they used to have a trolley. They used to have what they call electric trolleys or something, right from the base, go right into town. Either walking, but mostly it was--there were a Japanese trolley.

NM: Was it hard to communicate? Did the Japanese speak English? Did you learn Japanese?

JS: Oh, you learned to speak some Japanese, yes. Oh, yes. I was … I still remember some Japanese words. I kid around. Even on the cruise there. Ohayō … Sayōnara. Good morning, goodbye. [Speaks Japanese] What time is it? [Speaks Japanese] What's going on right now? It's raining outside. I'll sing you a song in Japanese. [Sings in Japanese] That was a song about rain in Japan; I learned a bit about it. But the basic ones, I think--in fact, while you were there, you learned how to write. So, they would teach you how to write I love you with making the things, but you forget about all that stuff. One thing you mentioned that--let me refresh that thing. Anything like us, if you don't do it all the time, you forget. So, here's what I want to tell you. … Because talking about writing, during the war, you learned to even write a little Hungarian when I used to go to pick up orders from working in the grocery story. Bread, I used to write down one kenyér. Tej, a bottle of milk or something like. Or hús for meat. Different things. But like anything else, when you come back from [service], you forget you even know how to even write that or start talking about that, you forget about it.

NM: Did Japanese in the town learn to speak some English?

JS: I guess so. I guess so. In fact, now that we were on that cruise there. One of the mandatory--with any of these cruise lines, one of the mandatory, with anybody they hire from the islands or anyplace out in the world, they have to still be able to speak English. Of course, they just had that question asked on the cruise ship. Any of these guys that they hire, whatever they're doing, even if they're doing just labor or painting, they have to know how to speak English, otherwise they won't hire them.

NM: You mentioned that in your unit you had about forty or so Japanese who worked with you. How did you communicate with them?

JS: All right. It was nice. Yes. It's just like anything else. When you're working in a small factory or something like that, you're more or less remembering their names after a period. Especially after a year and a half, you start to know them well. This is how I met this one girl and then her sister worked there … later on. But they used to have a foreman, that he was responsible for them. Make sure that they're doing--he was the key man between us … and he used to give out the orders to them, what was expected of them. You know what I mean? His name was … I forget what the hell his name was. It was nice. Like I told you, I enjoyed it very much.

NM: So, if there isn't anything else, we can move forward. Back in the States, you mentioned you used the GI Bill to go to business school for a year.

JS: Right.

NM: Then, you started going to work.

JS: Right.

NM: Please talk about that.

JS: Well, I got out of service [in] '48. I didn't go to school right away; I had a job. Then, I said, I want to go to school for a while. I went to school, to this here Washington School. Then, after that, I did try to get a clerk job. I did go get an interview from Hess Oil Company. I'm sorry I didn't pursue that one more, to try to be a little better, but I was not--to be truthful, I was not topnotch. I was not topnotch, which I forgot to mention to you. My time. I played guitar. Even in the service, even in basic training, we always picked up a guitar someplace, have a little sing-a-long with the guys. Even in basic training we would go on--if I could dig some pictures up and show you some of pictures, but that's all. I got a picture of the whole platoon from Camp Lee, Virginia downstairs. I'll show you. It's got names, all the guys, officers. But talk about the guitars. So, even until today, in all my lifetime, to supplement my income, I did play a guitar, especially when I was getting married. My brother-in-law, he let me join him. He used to have a little band. Then, we started out playing in Perth Amboy, (Manny's?) Tavern. This is going back to 1952, because I got married in April of 1953. My brother in law, the name of the group, Eddie Lock Trio and we were playing two nights a week over there. At that time, it was money under the table. Anyhow, at that time, we was getting twelve dollars a night, which was a lot of big money, because in the plant I was getting two dollars an hour, only working in the plant at that time. Eventually, he liked us so much in this local tavern there that we wound up even working four nights there. We start working there Wednesday and Sunday nights over there, working at (Manny's?) Tavern there. While we there--it used to be a shady joint. When I say shady joint, they used to have the dark booths in the back there, the couples would come in and try to make love with one of their girlfriends or something. We'd be playing in a corner there. But while we were there, he went ahead and built a bar where we start playing in the middle of the bar. He never shut down while they were building this bar, nice bar. They called it (Manny's?) Tavern in Perth Amboy, right on Smith Street. The building is still there, but after the Tavern gig with Eddie Lock Trio, we went ahead and I wound up … I met my friend (Jack Olsen?). He's a good singer. We used to play throughout the whole county. He used to be with the American Legion and we were playing all the American Legion clubs and everything, like the three-piece, four-piece. It all depends. Sometimes, pick up weddings from the plant and stuff like that. They wanted to hire a five-piece, we've got a five piece. … used to be three or four piece, but we used to play a lot. Then, later on, right here … they used to have the dinner theater here. (Joe Bonato?), he used to be the boss guy and he was [a] friend of my friend Jack. We used to play there after the dinner show and encourage the people to stay there after the show. They used to have professional actors. It was a dinner theater and they used to have dinner shows from Broadway. Later on, it was students that put the plays on, not me. But one of their big … that did come down here. Margaret Truman, President Truman's daughter, she was in one of the shows that she came down here and performed here. In fact, in that time, in the '60s, even up until around the early '70s--I forget what his name is. He's a big comedian. They used to televise from Club Bene over here in Morgan on TV sometime. Yes.

NM: One of the questions I had is you used the GI Bill for education. When you had your first home, did you use the GI Bill at all?

JS: No, no.

NM: Okay.

JS: No, no. I didn't take no mortgage, no. I just took a loan on my own. At that time, I figure what the hell was the GI Bill? … One of the things I want to tell you about that. I think maybe I was only getting seventy-five, a hundred dollars a month or something like that. First I want to tell you, this sticks in my mind. I was coming from where I met my wife at the dance hall in the South River, on Whitehead Avenue. We were coming home, through Sayreville. I live right here, Sayreville. A cop stopped me. He tried to bribe me to buy some tickets for a dance. "I want to be a goody, goody guy." Says, "Give me the ticket instead." So, this son of a bitch, he gives me the ticket. At that time, I went to the judge. I had to pay a dollar for every mile over the speed limit, which at that time, being I was getting … money from the GI Bill, I think, it was fifty-five miles over the speed limit--thirty-five, thirty-six dollars at that time, forget a fine at that time. That was big money for me because--well, how much money I was getting going to school? I was only getting like seventy-five or a hundred dollars a month; that's all. So, that was a big fine for me.

NM: What I wanted to ask is the Korean War, when that breaks out, were you--?

JS: See--

NM: Go ahead.

JS: Now you mention that, being I was an enlisted man. Here's what I'm talking about now, what they're doing with the guys now. Being that I did my term, whatever I had to do, they didn't bother me. I didn't join what the call--oh, you want to enlist into the National Guard to get some more money, supplement you and everything like that, to induce you. A lot of the people that signed up like that, they were indirectly off being out of service, but on alert. They were the first ones to drag back. Because I remember my friend in Keasbey, (Jimmy Hedley?). He was with some kind of a armored division. As soon as the Korean War broke out, they grabbed his ass and he dragged him right back into service. They didn't let me--they didn't bother me. They didn't bother me because I didn't try to induce more income by doing National Guard or anything like that. One of the biggest mistakes I made. What a stupid jerk I was. I didn't keep up my GI insurance. They had GI insurance and like a stupid ass, times were bad, so you figured the hell with it. Who the hell wants insurance? But later on, a lot of these guys, like anything else, there came a point where the government figured that this was a big burden. They called in all the insurance and a lot of the guys that kept paying the insurance off and they're still living, they still got a big dividend on that insurance. Like me, like a dummy, I dropped it. As soon as I got out of service, I said, well, I can't afford the insurance

payment … even though it was like a ten thousand dollar policy at that time. That was good, but what I'm saying, while I was in service, the government paid for it, but when I got out, you could take it out as a civilian and it was real cheap. But even though it was real cheap … but eventually, the government did away with the program.

NM: Although you weren't called up, when you heard that the war broke out, was there a concern that you might be?

JS: What's that? Oh, no. It didn't bother me, no. No, no. No.

NM: You talked about that you always played guitar, you have a band. I'm trying to recall the name of the company where you worked for thirty-five years. General Ceramics.

JS: General Ceramics was the original name, right.

NM: Could you talk about getting that job and also some of the duties you had when you were there?

JS: Okay. All right. Like I told you, I got hired there in 1950, I guess. I worked there. The plant shut down in '85. In that period of time, I had whatever kind of job you want to mention that was going on at [the] plant. I'll start off. When you first got a job, you start doing floor work. The floor work involved was moving material from this place to that place with a hand truck like that. Then eventually, they had an opening maybe for a garbage truck driver. They used to have the local garbage thing. So, I signed up for that. Then I would take the garbage around in the plant and drive that. Get tired of that. Later on, there was maybe a … driver in a plant. Even that, it only … if you got the seniority, you qualify for it, you sign [up], they put bids up. … used to drive a tow fork truck. Later on, I got into what they call the machining with the machine shop work in a tool and die--not with steel or anything, but this was with ceramics and with … and drill bits and everything. You learn how to do stuff like that. Used to set up plates, where the girls used to make the pieces by hand and would make up different pieces. Later on, I liked that work. I started to be called what you call a setup man with this here particular work while I was there. Also, another part of the job I did was I had what you call quality control. Used to read … and veneers and stuff like that. When the product was finished before baking and after baking, to double check and keep records of that, everything like that, I was quality control, but one of the better jobs I used to do was--used to call the die setter when they started to come up with the ferrite. The die setter, we used to have these big presses that they imported from Germany and we set up dies in the big presses for making parts out of ferrite. Like I told you, the material was Ferrite. What do you call--?

NM: I can pause.

JS: No, no. It's all right. No, I'm just showing--I'm going to show you something. Here's what you call ferrite. These are some of the products, the electric--I don't know. This is ferrite. This is still … in the garage there, I got what you got in the garage there, a

yolk that they used to put in [the] back [of] TVs. But this is what they call ferrite. In fact, I used to be a sample maker. I used to make a sample before they made a die out of iron and tool and die makers. You know what I mean? I used to run this here press where they used to have a water … I forget the name of it, but we would the material in big rubber vats and then we'd put it and seal and put it in water. We'd put it in water. Then, we'd go ahead with the water. I forget the name of this process, but it was like a pump … and everything like that, but it would compress the material under so much pressure that it would shrink and suck--suck the air out of it to suck out all the air out of it first. You put it down there and then under the pressure with the big rubber vats, you make big blocks of material. That's where I used the machine. Cut it. You could cut it with a saw, like a carbine saw and all that stuff and make out pieces like that. They're magnetized. This here, it sticks on metal, but this is like [what] I told you about, the original radios. They used to have a rod skinnier than this. Like I said, in the handle of little radios, they have a signal. They'd pick up the signal on the radio from the air waves. Then, later on, they used to make--tying the little … before they start this here. What's the word? They got now on the computer … Shit. Semiconductors. Yes. You know what I mean? All these different advanced technologies, plus memory cores.

NM: Was there a union in this plant?

JS: Oh, yes. We were union. In fact, for the union I was also secretary for the union. You write checks out. In fact, when I had a stroke, I remember I had to write check and I had a slight stroke that they came up here. I couldn't even sign one of the checks. They had to come to Robert Wood Johnson Hospital. I had the shakes and everything, but I was treasurer for the union. Later on, we had what you call a credit union. I also was the president of the credit union. We had the Ceramic Credit Union. Then, what happened with the credit union, like anything else, like the banking business, you always had a cushion. A certain amount of money was always building up for emergencies. So, when it came time--I'll tell you a little story about this here credit unions. Like us, we didn't have a time to go ahead and stay and try to get rid of all our loans. So, instead of making everything--whatever we had was--everybody that was involved--I was president at that time. We went ahead and treated everybody with their spouse for a big party. We used this money, this cushion money. We went up to North Jersey to the famous, "The Manor" in East Orange. Anyhow, we took our wives. Anybody that had … credit union, we treated them at that time. I went ahead. I bought a gold chain or something for Paul Rusin who was treasurer of it. Paul Rusin had a wooden leg. Chip, his nickname, let him rest in peace. I bought him a gold chain. Even lots of times, the other one--she was a secretary or something like that. They treated her. Her husband used to be Steve (Pinsman?) in Perth Amboy. No, it was a nice experience in the plant there, but getting back here, I want to tell you about this story. Eventually, under government rules and regulations, another big credit union took us over and we had money. They also took over our loans and everything, but this is when they come and check you and everything like that, but anyhow, this is when that was coming down. This is when we start spending some of our money on that. Compared to what my--indirectly, a relative of mine, … Perth Amboy, New Jersey. What they did, they had their credit union when the plant was shutting down. They kept their office open for even a year or two after the

plant shut down on a little street office on State Street in Princeton, New Jersey. So, they dissolved all their money and they paid off all their loans or paid off two years time, whatever they had, and they still had money. Then they … the big defendant. Whoever kept with the credit union, they … extra amount of money. They divided the money up like that instead of letting another credit union take over. The one that took us over was located, it's still over here in Raritan Center that took us over there. There's a big credit union that took us over. So, this, I know I little bit about the credit union business. I used to go ahead and get on the telephone and say, all right, we're going to make a jumbo hundred thousand dollar investment with one of the banks in New York, get a higher rate and everything like that. So, I really enjoyed doing that work.

NM: So, this credit union was absorbed into the Federal Credit Union at Raritan Center?

JS: Yes.

NM: When the plant closed?

JS: Yes, when the plant [shut] down, we had to dissolve. You know what I mean? Right, right. So, they took over our books and everything like that. They took care of all the … loans and everything like that.

NM: So, are there any other moments that stand out in your time at General Ceramics that you want to talk about?

JS: I got a watch from them. I still got a watch here. It's a self-winding watch that they give me after twenty-five years. It's one of the--it's not really gold, but it's a nice watch. I never had to buy a battery for it. It's still going. At that time, when they gave it to me, the name of the plant was--when I first got hired, they used to call it the General Ceramic Plant. Then, later on, they called it the Indiana General. That's because something from Indiana merged with us. Then, later on, they called it Electronic Memories when we're a different kind of business that we were into. We were Electronic Memories. Then, later on, the last company that they shafted us was what the called the Titan Corporation. At that time, I did have around a hundred shares of Titan--I mean, of General Ceramics. And like a dumb thing, I got screwed at the very end with it. But it was every year I was getting a dividend just equivalent for whatever it was worth, but towards the end of it, when the Titan corporation took over, I got shafted with that, the way they called it over and dissolved the company. It's no more on the stock exchange no more. No.

NM: When the plant closed, were you immediately seeking work?

JS: Oh, yes. They figured out your age and everything like that. Let me tell you about that now. I think I was only 58 years old when the plant shut down in '85. So, with that, they figured out how much pension I got for all the thirty five years that I was in, my age and everything like that that, they took it back sixty-five. This company was not very good as far as pension. I was getting--until today, I still get--I only get a hundred dollars a month pension right now for after all these years. They turned around and they sold my

pension to an insurance company in Massachusetts. So, once a month, I get a hundred dollar check from them and the way that is set up, there was no increase, which I'll give you an example now. Now, after the plant shut down, I got a job as a janitor in the school system. Now, with the school system, one of the good things that was good about it is that I went to school and doing this janitor work. I went to school to get my Black Seal [Stationary Engineer] License over at East Brunswick over there in vocational school, I got it. At that time, with the band, the drummer, his wife was a secretary to the big shot in Piscataway. Let me tell you now a little story here. At that time, I was only getting not even twelve thousand dollars a year doing the janitor work. This is in 19--what was it? '85, '86. That's all right. After I talked to his wife, that they needed a janitor with a Black Seal license. I talked to my friend and she was a secretary. His name was (Koch?) and he was the principal. Right away, I left for the P.A school and I went to work for Piscataway school system. Being that I had my Black Seal license, I went to school to learn Black Seal license, about the boiler and steam heat. They had janitors over there. They didn't have nothing. The law required [that] they have a least one janitor with a Black Seal license, so you could put in the boiler room. About '85, '86, that's when I got a six thousand dollar raise, from twelve thousand … went over to [Piscataway], got a six thousand dollar raise. I start making eighteen thousand dollars a year, at that time. Yes.

NM: How long did it take you to get the Black Seal license?

JS: It didn't take long. No. I went to school, to the vocational school at nighttime. There was a course there that after maybe three months or four months, going so many nights to school, and you take the test and then they certify you. They give you a Black Seal license. It was good, nice. I enjoyed that, yes.

NM: I guess, you retired from Piscataway High School?

JS: Yes, that's right. What happened to me was while I was in Piscataway there, after five, six, seven years, from '92. I must have been there around seven years. In fact, I got a watch from them. When it came time to retire, the reason why I retired from there--I think I retired there in 1992. Whenever you're a janitor, and teachers that returned, they all got the same gift. So, I got a gift just like what the teachers got. It's a battery operated one. What I want to say to you [is] that I enjoyed that. The reason why I retired, I had my first heart attack. So, I retired when I was sixty-two. The hell with it. Yes, I retired, because it wasn't worthwhile working anymore.

NM: From what you mentioned before, it sounds like you're active in some volunteering activities.

JS: Oh, yes. Like I told you here, I volunteer, play my guitar in the Sayreville Senior Building parties. In this … where I live, they have what they call the senior clubs. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday club. They used to have the leisure club. I belonged to what they called the Thursday club. In there, I am active, as far as being a trustee because they check the books on them. I also make coffee once a month for when we

will be having our anniversary party next Thursday. The executive board meeting with them--I'm on the executive board there where once a month we meet a week before the regular meeting to go over what we're going to be doing, what kind of food we're going to have or if we're going to have any speakers or something like that. One of the duties is that the volunteer with the Thursday club, we're like any other club there in Sayreville. You have to go ahead and volunteer to have Bingo on a Monday and Friday and it's no big thing. It's just more or less like to keep the older people active. They like to--they only sell cards for a quarter. Some people, if they win Bingo and they only win one dollar. Everybody wins a dollar or something or two dollars or something like that. Now, in the money games, they pay a little bit more money. Maybe that five dollars for a round robin or four card maybe twelve or eight, depending on how many people. Most of the people that we get is around thirty people. It depends on the weather or what time of the year or what … is, but that's on a Monday and a Friday. So, even with that Monday and a Friday, I've volunteered to go ahead and make coffee. What we do as workers there from the club, sometimes out of our own pockets we buy cake or something, marked down cakes or something like that and cookies or these chips or something like that and donate it to those people. They look forward to it. We only charge a quarter for a cup of coffee. You know to supplement the thing, but that's one of the duties over there. Then, with the other volunteer, I'm active with what they call the St. Vincent De Paul Society here in South Amboy, St. Mary's Church. Once a month there, that I--I don't want to repeat myself; I said it before about buying donuts and stuff like that.

NM: I do want to backtrack. We're talking about Keasbey and I was just thinking about how Keasbey changed. You mentioned that the original house that you lived in, the state bought the land?

JS: Yes, the house is all torn down because of the expansion of the Parkway Bridge. Originally, the Parkway Bridge started the year when I was getting married in '53. That was only like a six-lane, but right now, since 1953, the parkway expanded that bridge around three times. Where today, it's now--a good guess around twenty lanes. Twenty lanes going down the shore. At least twenty lanes. What happened was originally from--I remember how they built--even with the technology about building the first original bridge in 1940, they used wooden frames to make piers. That's how we got a lot of firewood, too. They used wooden pallets or they would make a big frame. Later on, they increased the technology and used steel frames to make concrete piers. Oh, in reference to that, let me mention this here. In the '40s, there used to be a man that my mother let him live in the shed in the backyard, He used to cook coffee for the sandhog[s]. The sandhog guys were the ones that, at that time, when they were building the bridge in the water, they would be going down and decompressing and pressure with water would keep it away. They would have the men go down and dig in that … on land and rocks while he was down there. He used to be the cook for the coffee. So, he put my mother--my mother put him up in the shed in the backyard. I remember changing the water for him or something like that. I was only a kid. He gave me ten cents or fifteen cents when I would change his water so he can wash himself. Sometimes, my mother would treat him for a hot meal in the house, but he was like a loner. He changed his name so many--he used to roam all over the country, wanted to do nothing with his own family. They

finished building the bridge in 1941, the Edison Bridge, that he died and he was in the Bowery [Editor's Note: The Bowery is a neighborhood in the southern part of Manhattan]. He died in the Bowery in New York City. The little money that he had, he had my mother's name as beneficiary on his bankbook. So, the cops called up. At that time, nobody had telephones. The stores had telephones. They called up, police. Used to be on a cop called Charles Matusz and then he notified my mother. So, he come and notified and then my mother had to go identify him in New York. My mother went ahead and bought a plot out in Long Island, Metropolitan Avenue, over there, that big cemetery. We used to go once a year, after that. Even after I was married, we would go--my mother would go to Long Island. Then, my mother would treat us to go to Rockville Centre. Beautiful. Nice ride. We used to ride the old--go from Perth Amboy, they used to have the ferry, go across the ferry to …, and get on the Staten Island, the "rattle trap," and then from "rattle trap," we'd go from St. George Ferry over to lower Manhattan on another ferry over there. Then, we would get on the EL, the elevators or the subways. I would sit at the map and it'd take us way out to Long Island, to Metropolitan Avenue, way out there, where all the cemeteries were.

NM: Back to when the State bought your land, did they compensate the family?

JS: Yes. Well, they tried to compensate the family. You could have even appealed it and by seeing some--I'll give you an example. I think it was only willing to give a hundred and twenty thousand dollars for my mother's house. You know what I mean? My mother put the price on the house. I don't want to go into detail, but anyhow, my sister was the only--she got it after my mother died, but anyhow, I don't even want to talk about that. But anyhow, … when it came time that they're condemning the whole street, it was only a hundred and twenty thousand. So, what they did was my sister talked to one of the politicians. I don't know who were the politicians. They went and talked to the politician. Then the politician, I forget who it was, appealed it, they gave him ten thousand dollars more. So, they got the house that my grandfather helped build in 1920. They got a hundred and thirty thousand for it, instead of a hundred and twenty. At the same token, it still cost my sister for a little house at that time, to go in Fords, it cost her almost around the same amount of money to buy a little wooden house. It's a old house. It's not new …

NM: When was this? This is in the '80s?

JS: Geez, I kind of--geez, there's got a be a record someplace with this thing. You can get that …

NM: Okay.

JS: All right? Definitely. … Like I told you, the first part of the Parkway, definitely, I remember this. I got married in '53. They were starting with the Parkway. I remember when … some bridge was, they dedicated before Pearl Harbor, in 1940, the Edison Bridge. They expanded that Parkway Bridge three times. The last time when it was getting closer and closer to this part of Keasbey, which I call Keasbey Loop, was wiped

out. Wiped out completely because Dahl Avenue was the main drag down there. In fact, Woodbridge Township used to have a water treatment plant there, where they used to have the main sewers going down. Later on, the main sewers from the whole county is going right here to Sayreville. It stinks like a bitch over there, right in the county. Sewage treatment plant.

NM: Since you've lived in Keasbey or the area your entire life and you said that areas have changed because of the Parkway, in your experience, how has Keasbey changed? Has the population grown?

JS: No, the population as far as homes, a lot of the homes, like when I was in the '40s, there used to be company homes that the company built, the Brick Company homes. Even with the carborundum company homes, they all tore them down. There used to be the post office down around that section, even before … down there. Then, eventually, at that time, we used to have nobody delivering mail like they have today. You have to go pick up your mail in a rented little box. I don't know for how much, how much you had to pay for it. But while I was there in Keasbey, to my knowledge, since I'm living, there's been four post offices. Right now, there's still a post office because there's still some industry and stuff in Keasbey that they still have up; they didn't do away [with], but the original one used to be right near the carborundum company. Then, they moved outside of it there. Then, later on, they put the post office up near the school over there, near the firehouse. Then, they chopped that one down. The new one is located right down there, a little bit down from the Parkway Bridge. There's a big post office there.

NM: This is point in the interview where we're going to close it off, but before we do, I want to give you the opportunity. Is there something that you want to add or something that we skipped over that you want to talk about?

JS: Unless you can pick my brains, I think--trying to help you out. I really don't want to say anything no more.

NM: Okay. We'll conclude the interview. Thank you, Mr. Soos for having us today.

JS: All right.

[Tape Paused]

JS: --end of the war.

NM: So, this is an addendum to the interview.

JS: This is in … now. I forgot to mention that in Keasbey, the fire company, besides there used to be two clubs. They used to have the Keasbey Eagles, which was around the Loop area and also the Keasbey Heights, which was up on the thing. The one that was famous about the Keasbey Heights was weightlifting clubs. One of the famous men that come out of Keasbey at that time, right after the war, it's in the records. You could

probably find out. Used to be in with the fit magazines, Mr. [Steve] Stanko. He used to be called "Mr. America." That's him. But in reference to down here, in Keasbey Loop, we used to have a nice club. We used to have a baseball team. Sometimes we used to go and do little gambling in the club like that. Or sometimes, we used to ride bus rides down to Coney Island or either go down to Atlantic City. Going to Atlantic City was like over three hours, but we'd always stop in the Tom's River area for the first rest to go down to Atlantic City on the old Highway 9. We also used to take a bus ride to Coney Island, which was very nice thing, but let me tell you the best stories in my whole life, in reference to about where my father worked with the hat factory. I don't know how they afforded to do it. This is when I was a kid, anybody that was in the plant over there, where they could take their family for an excursion, right out of Perth Amboy, a nice big boat. I remember going on it like that. We'd go as far as Rockaway Beach out on Long Island on a ferryboat and it used to have entertainment on the boat. They used to have food on the boat. How they could afford that at that time, I really don't know, but that was one of my enjoyable lives, when my father was working in the Holbrook Hat Factory in Perth Amboy on Sheridan [Street].

NM: Great. You're all talked out?

JS: That's it. I think I covered it, right?

NM: Okay. Yes, yes. I think so. Well, you were talking about baseball teams.

JS: Yes, well, they used to have baseball teams. They used to have different leagues, you know what I mean?

NM: The clubs?

JS: Clubs. Then, even with the club, also from other teams, they would travel. Sometimes, we even traveled in winter clubs. We used to play some baseball down at Tom's River with some other club. You know what I mean? I don't know if It was with the Tavern or … or what, but we used to do that. Even with the fire company, used to have a nice big baseball team for activity, there used to be a field right down from the firehouse, a nice field over there. They used to have different leagues. Girls' softball was not too much, but the baseball, they did have baseball playing for a little activity in Keasbey, yes.

NM: Did you play any sports when you went to Woodbridge High School?

JS: I forgot to mention that. Yes, when I was a senior I figured, let me try to go play football. At that time, his name was Coach (Priscoll?). One of the highlights about, before I tell you about Coach (Priscoll?) or whatever happened to me. During the war, I had a part-time job at the Raritan Center, where we used to salvage the copper cylinders that used to come back from the war and we used to work there. During the summertime, Coach Presco was in charge of it, you had a part-time job working up at the Raritan Center. At the same time, at the Raritan Center, they used to have a lot of Italian

prisoners over here in the Raritan Center. A lot of girls used to go in reference to the USO and all that and have dances for them. Different clubs would go and interact with them, but getting back [to] high school, when I was a senior, I did play football for a while. It was only at one of the practice games where I was playing guard. I was a guard and some colored guy threw a block--at a practice game in South Plainfield, a colored kid threw a block at my legs where I didn't break my legs or anything, but what happened with me, I was out of high school for six weeks. At that time, right after, I went to see the doctor. What happened was, all my ligaments in my right leg, especially my right leg--in fact, that's why I got trouble with my right leg right now, too, but … at that time, I had to lay in bed and I was very fortunate that I had a relative that was a physical therapist. His name was Louie Soos that he worked on polio cases during the '40s. He lived in South River. So, being that he was a relative, he used to come and give me special massages on my leg to try to rejuvenate my leg. At that time, like I said, we didn't have no hot water in the house. My mother had to heat the hot water and bring a big tub, a big metal tub, from the hallway into the bedroom over there on the third floor or second floor over there. I would somehow manage to crawl off the bed and soak my foot in Epsom salt hot water, sit down in the tub. After six weeks, it was like learning to walk all over again, but between being he was a physical therapist, Louie Soos, massage my leg. He used to come to my house twice a week and everything like that. My mother, every so often, or maybe once a week, they soaked a leg in the Epsom salt. That's how I regained my health from the football accident.

NM: One more thing I want to ask about. You mentioned that you had a newspaper route. You also worked at a grocery store. I want to ask you to talk about working at Raritan Center during the war.

JS: I just mentioned it now. That was on one of the summers there. Like I told you, what we were working down from the hill down there. At that time, they used to have these--what was the actual work that we used to do there? But one of the things I used to have--these 105 [mm] brass shells. The shells would come back, like anything recycling and that. I remember the Italian prisoners. What we had to do was--I don't know if we had to go ahead. Some of the shells had powder. Powder used to be in without the … shell. A lot of the shells that didn't go off or whatever, but there was still live powder. So, I think our job was we had to go ahead and clean it out to make sure every one of the shells was empty. You follow me?

NM: Yes.

JS: These were without the heads. Most of the heads were gone. You follow me?

NM: Yes.

JS: But I think that was one of the jobs that we did. This was a summer job that I was very fortunate to do for a part-time [job] while I was going to high school.

NM: How big was this facility? Could you describe this facility?

JS: Where?

NM: Raritan Arsenal.

JS: The Arsenal. You never heard about that? I'll tell you something.

NM: We know about it, but we've never interviewed someone who worked there.

JS: Well, let me put it this way. Before the war, my brother in law worked up on the hill where he used to be a mechanic. Like I told you, he tore down my car, but before he went to war, he was over there and he went pursuing the … with the government work, up on top of the hill, but this is down below the hill. As far as the operation I had, the little bit that I had, but even my girlfriend worked there doing clerk work there during the war. You know what I mean? But there's different faces over there. One thing, here's what I want to mention right now with the railroad. The railroad going down there, I remember my time now living in Keasbey and the railroad used to go right through Keasbey to go right down to Raritan Center. One time, I don't know what caused it, but the boxcar started to blow up. This is really true. One time, there's big explosions over there. In fact, I want to mention, going back in the '50s, before I got married, I was going with my girlfriend. We had the big explosion here in South Amboy. It was in the paper. Every so often they'd bring it up. I don't know, around 1952, right here, they were shipping some ammunition right here from the coal dock right here on lower part of South Amboy here and it blew it. Because I remember a lot of the homes in South Amboy--I was in Keasbey at that time. The school I went to, I was in a firehouse, all the windows from the concussion, all the windows facing the explosion, all the windows went out at that time. Even there in Perth Amboy, the oldest street was Smith Street. All the glass blew out windows from the stores. This was in '52, I'm pretty sure there was a big explosion. Now, talk about a different explosion, what I didn't mention before. Since my mother was living in Keasbey, there was another big explosion right in the area where we're living at right now. Right here, they used to have what they call the Morgan Arsenal, right in this area. When I built my house here, there was still some buildings visible over here. In fact, lots of times, when they expanded over here, they had to go ahead and they dug up all the mines, a lot of old mines and everything like that. Even at the end of this street there was a partial building, which they filled it up with brick there. But what I want to mention about this, during that, my mother had to take the whole family--I wasn't born yet then. That was before when there was a Morgan explosion, they all went to New York, my mother and my grandmother took the kids and everything like that because of the big explosion that was right on this side of the river. Yes, I didn't mention that before.

NM: You mentioned the trains. Were there a lot of cargo trains coming from … ?

JS: There was a one-way track that used to go right in from Perth Amboy. Used to go right through Keasbey, over to Black Bridge there and bypass, go down the Meadows there. Go the back way into the Raritan Arsenal that way. Probably, there was other

railroad tracks some other ways, but this was from this eastern part through Keasbey. Definitely, the railroad went through.

NM: Great. Is there anything else you recall about Raritan Arsenal that you can add?

JS: No, that's it.

NM: I think that's a good addendum and thank you for adding.

JS: Okay.

[Tape Paused]

JS: Listen. Let me tell you. … I got married in 1953. I met my wife in South River over at the Liberty Dance Hall there was famous. One of the things about that, I reminisce like that. I had that '41 Chevy at that time. That was a cold night. For some reason, I don't know what happened, but the car wouldn't start. So, what the hell did I do? There's water in the gas. The gas line was underneath the car. So, I don't even know how I got home that night, but the next day, my brother-in-law Steve--he's still living. He towed my car to Keasbey and fixed it. He's about ninety-two, ninety-three and he's got a stroke now for over ten years. I go over once a month. I cut his hair and cut his nails for him. He's been in a wheelchair. My sister's taking care of him. They live in Fords. But anyhow, I was telling you about this here car. So, we pushed it home on the rubber tire and at home in Keasbey, he had planks in the backyard over there. He had to put hot water on it and I had to defrost the gas line that got froze from where I met my wife. So, we used to go dancing there. I used to go dancing up in the Raritan Ballroom in Highland Park, where Lou Jacobs used to play over here. (Walter Cross?) used to play here in Whitehead Avenue. (Walter Cross?), I forget, he was in some other big bands. Then, we used to dance, go do a dance and then (Pulaski?) Hall in Perth Amboy and the Legion Hall in Perth Amboy and then (Pulaski?) Hall. But (Walter Cross?) used to live on the next block from me. One of the highlights that I experienced, which was very nice, there always used to be one union job. They did away with that stuff. They used to have what they called an Easter parade in Perth Amboy on the waterfront over there. The big band would be around fifteen-piece band. One time, they were short one man; needed to fill it in. He knew I was in the union, so he threw me a bone. I was able to go. That was on an Easter Sunday. They used to have the parade with the people with the bonnets and stuff like that. But I was playing some Easter music there then. Yes.

NM: I think you were going into talking about your family.

JS: Oh, yes, I forgot. I got married in '53. I was blessed with two daughters. I got a daughter (Susie?) and a daughter (Anna Marie?). My daughter (Susie?), got married--let's see. (Susie?) was born around two years--I got married April '53 and (Susie?) was born December the 4th 1954. That's just about the '54--her birthday's December 4th anyhow. A couple months later, that's when my father died. He died in February 1955. … my father died in 1955. In February, he just saw my first daughter's granddaughter

and at that time, with the insurance and everything like that, definitely that's all the benefit that they got from the social security. He only collected one or two social security checks and I don't even know how much all he had, but they paid them off with that benefit. That's all on that. My mother lived to be [seventy-six]. She lived be seventy-six years old. My father, he died right after he was sixty-five, but now with the two daughters getting married, she has one daughter and that one daughter, believe it or not, she's a teacher. Now, she got married around two years ago. She got married in Disney World. Jenny got married to Mike from North Jersey. They got a beautiful home up in North Jersey. Now they're married two, but no great [grand]children yet. Now, my other daughter has two sons and a granddaughter. The oldest son, he went to Seton Hall. He's doing some kind of accounting work, but he's not very happy with it. The other one, he's still going college, but he's almost ready to get his degree, but he's missing a couple of degrees in reference to a couple of points, so he has to go a little longer. I don't know what the hell he's learning, be a doctor or what. Just … around seven years … going to college. Now, my granddaughter Andrea, I think she's going to be a junior because she went to her prom. First time she went to her prom and my daughter's trying to get a car for her now. So, she's at that age where she'll be able to drive a car. So, that's what I'm blessed with now. I have four grandkids and I have two daughters. My wife died in 1999, September 25th. Since then though, a year or two years later, I meet a nice girl named Geri Grzyb and I've been keeping company now for the past twelve years or so with this one girl. So, I'm very happy. That's it.

NM: Great. Well, thank you Mr. Soos, again.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 11/24/14
Reviewed by Joseph Soos 12/23/14
Reviewed by Mohammad E. Athar 1/8/14