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Early Life in Metuchen

Donald J. Wernik was born in 1925, the oldest child of Abraham, an immigrant from Russia, and Ida, the daughter of immigrants from the Czarist Regime. Donald had four siblings, Charlotte, Malcolm, Joseph and Morton. Much of his youth revolved around the family pharmacy, Wernik's Pharmacy in Metuchen, and his studies in the Metuchen school system, which culminated in his graduation from Metuchen High School in 1943.

Shaun Illingworth: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Donald Wernik: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on May the 12th, 1925.

SI: For the record, can you tell me your parents' names?

DW: My father's name was Abraham and my mother's name was Ida.

SI: Beginning with your father's side of the family, can you tell me a little bit about the family background? I know your father was born in Russia. Can you tell me anything you might know about the family's origins in Russia?

DW: Yes, all I know really, that I can give to you as being accurate, my father's father was on the run. There was a war going on between Poland and Russia--whether they were called that or not at that time, I'm not sure--and the boundary changed like from year-to-year, and then, from day-to-day. They were trying to actually enlist his service in the Army. He was really not that interested in serving at that time, so, he took his family and took off. They went--actually, I'm not sure where it was in Europe, but he settled there--and then, he came to the United States, leaving them, my father and my grandmother, in Europe. He came to the United States with his brothers in about 1904 or '05. He came to try to build a home for his family, who he had left behind, so that they could come to this country.

SI: Do you know what your grandfather did for a living when he came here to raise that money?

DW: He worked in a wholesale drug packaging company. He was a pharmacist--I guess you could call it a pharmacist--in Europe before he came here. I am actually a third-generation pharmacist and my son is a fourth-generation pharmacist. My son also graduated from Rutgers, I'm proud to say.

SI: Do you know approximately when your father and grandmother came to the United States?

DW: I'm assuming that my father and my grandmother came to the United States somewhere around 1908 or 1909. I know that it's not exactly specifically accurate, but it's generally so. They came and lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

SI: Do you know roughly where in Russia the family lived? What was the nearest major city?

DW: Well, my grandfather was born in Slonim and my grandmother in Bialystok. Now, they could have been Russia or Poland, according to the day, because there was a war, a continuous war, going on in that area. You were actually a member of whatever country that was on that property at that time.

SI: Your father was about eight or so when he came to the United States.

DW: Right. That's my assumption.

SI: Did he ever tell you any stories about what his life was like growing up in Russia?

DW: No, not really, except that he had an adjustment period. He did mention that from time to time. Actually, he had two uncles that were here for a while. It's interesting, when they came through Ellis Island, my grandfather came through with the name of (Wernikowski?), my granduncle, his brother, (Warner?), and the other one (Warren?). They just gave people names as they came through, because, many times, they could not pronounce them. So, the three brothers came through with different last names and they've developed families in this country. They were so happy to be here. They couldn't speak English in many cases, most of the time, and a lot of the people that were registering them couldn't speak their language. So, they came through with some information. It wasn't always a hundred percent accurate.

SI: Do you know when the family name was changed to Wernik?

DW: It changed to Wernik sometime, I would say, before they came to Metuchen, because, when we opened Wernik's Pharmacy, that was the name. We came to Metuchen in 1926. My father graduated from Brooklyn College of Pharmacy in 1921 and he was practicing pharmacy in New York. He married my mother in 1923. My grandfather on my mother's side was a vegetable peddler and he used to sell his wares as far as Metuchen from New Brunswick. He had a horse and wagon. He saw that a pharmacy was up for sale and he thought it would be wonderful to have his family nearer to him, if he could. So, he talked to my father and my mother and suggested that they just come to see it. My grandfather on my mother's side wasn't the kind that would tell people what to do. He would only suggest and he was a heckuva wonderful guy. They came and looked at the store and they kind of liked it. That was when I was about seven or eight months old. I told my father it was time that we got out of Brooklyn and moved to Metuchen, New Jersey. My mother and father agreed with me, and so, they came out and took a look at the store and they, of course, bought it in 1926.

SI: That brings me to your mother's side of the family. At that time, they were living in New Brunswick.

DW: Right.

SI: Earlier, however, they had lived in Massachusetts.

DW: Yes, Massachusetts is where they're from. They came through Canada to the United States.

SI: Had your grandparents been born overseas?

DW: Yes, but I don't have a lot of information concerning where they came from in Europe or anything such as that.

JW: But, your mother was born here.

DW: My mother was born in Salem. As a matter-of-fact, there was a family joke about Salem--you know Salem, Mass., is the place where very special women lived. They were called witches, I believe. That was a family joke for many years. My mother was a very wonderful person, a loving person. There wasn't a person in the world that had anything bad to say about that lady. In 1960, unfortunately, my mother and father died within one-and-a-half days of each other. They were only fifty-nine years old. He had had multiple sclerosis and he had developed cancer. At the time that my mother was told--I was the one that had to tell her, I'm the oldest in my family--she had a stroke and never came out of it. She died that day and my father died the next day. So, we actually buried them both together. That made me the oldest member of our immediate family very quickly. I was thirty-five at that time.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

DW: They were introduced by some people in New Brunswick. Berkow, I think, was the name of them. Somehow, I don't know the circumstance, but the Berkows had met my father's family at some kind of event. They introduced the two of them and the result is obvious. It was successful, very successful, I might add.

SI: Did your father ever tell you any stories about his time at Brooklyn College of Pharmacy?

DW: We never really discussed that, except that he was very loyal to it. He and I had many discussions about that. I had another school that I was interested in--I think called Rutgers. He enjoyed the school there. By the time he was going into college, he had learned the language, and so, it wasn't like he'd just got off the boat. He felt it was a good education.

SI: Out of curiosity, do you know how long the program was when your father went to Brooklyn? I would imagine it was not as long as in your day.

DW: Oh, no, it was two years at that time. When I went, it was four years.

SI: Did they have licensing in your father's day?

DW: Oh, yes, they did. I have his license, in fact, downstairs. Yes, he was licensed and he was one heck of a pharmacist. He was a very caring pharmacist. He taught me that it's very important to take care of the people that you're serving, more than just to make a sale.

SI: Please tell me about your earliest memories of growing up in Metuchen, what you remember about your neighborhood, that sort of thing.

DW: When we moved to Metuchen, I guess there were about four thousand people in town. There were only about six Jewish families in town, so that it was an unusual change for us. In Brooklyn, there were any number of people who had come over just like my father and my grandfather. It wasn't a ghetto, but there was a Jewish community that they came from, but my father was able to adjust. Was it difficult? To a certain extent, it was, because it was an adjustment from being familiar with everyone to not knowing six or eight families at the most. They weren't practicing, because there were no religious services available to them. I might tell you that, going to 1934, my grandfather, who was a very religious man, started the religious movement in Metuchen. From there all the way through, my grandfather, my father, our family was a very active part of the Jewish community. Getting back to our discussion about being new in the community, after a while, you become adjusted, but it was not easy. It was not easy because there were a lot of problems that had developed through the years, which we had to erase, as far as racial and religious relations. Some people, not meaning to be harmful, were having trouble adjusting to the fact that there was a change in the neighborhood, but my dad and mom blended into it. Actually, as far as my situation in school was concerned, I was very much involved, because I wanted to be. I've been very lucky that way. I liked school from the time I started--I still like school --and so, it was okay, but did I run into some problems? Sure, I did. There was certainly some anti-Semitism still in existence in the school system at that time. I recognized that and I could live with it and I did. Frankly, I was involved a lot because it was a good outlet for me. There were a lot of social things that I was not involved in simply because of what we were just discussing. Everyone was very nice, but I didn't get to a lot of the parties and things like that, but it was not a problem for me.

SI: When your family first settled in Metuchen, there were six families when you arrived. How many would you say were in the community by the time you entered high school? Had the community grown much?

DW: Just to give you an example, in the senior class, I was the only Jewish boy and, in the junior class, there was one Jewish boy. My sister and another girl were in the sophomore class. There were only four in the high school. The increase in population of the members of the community that were of our religious affiliation started after the war ended. When the young people whose parents lived in New Brunswick and in Perth Amboy and Plainfield came out of the service, they wanted to live in the suburbs and Metuchen was that. When we built this house, there was nothing really around it, one or two houses. It was all fields.

When I was in high school, I would say there was less than a dozen Jewish families in town. My father came to Metuchen in 1926 and opened up the pharmacy. My grandfather and

grandmother on my father's side joined him about a year-and-a-half or two years after that. My grandfather opened up a candy store. He was a pharmacist in Europe.

My grandfather found out that he could have been licensed as a pharmacist as late as 1910. He found this out in 1911 or '12. He would've had to go back to school and he was busy supporting a family. He worked in a crude drug packaging company called Backs Brothers. They were packaging crude drugs, which were in great use in those days in the compounding procedures. My grandfather was an entrepreneur, right from the word go, and proved it when he opened the candy store.

SI: Where in town was your family's pharmacy located?

DW: Right on Main Street in Metuchen. It had our name. My dad developed multiple sclerosis, probably in the late '30s, but no one really recognized it at that time. When I graduated from high school, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. I had to enlist before I was eighteen, which was May of that year. I enlisted in the Marines and I went into the service in August of 1943. I didn't know at that time that my father had MS. My father was involved with the Board of Education. He was on the Board. He was involved with the Delphic Drama Association. He was a very active man, and then, he started to really slow down and we found out what it was about. When I went into the service, I was kind of a young fellow that didn't really know where he was going, except he was going to win that war, with a few other people helping him. Then, he was going to get out and do something, but, when I saw the situation in our pharmacy, my father wasn't well--and I have no regrets--I went to pharmacy college. I was discharged in 1946. I went to Rutgers College of Pharmacy and I graduated from there in 1950. At that time, I went in with my father in the pharmacy. My grandfather already had come from the candy store, which he opened, to help my father, who remained mentally sound, but, physically, he couldn't negotiate well walking or moving around in any way. My grandfather used to do the running for my father, if you will, in the store. My father, most of the time, sat at the prescription counter and handled everything. He was perfectly sound, right to the very end. When I got out of the service, I went right to school. At the same time, I was doing part-time work in the pharmacy all the four years that I went through the College of Pharmacy.

SI: Was your grandfather's candy store next to the pharmacy?

DW: It was right next to the pharmacy--he wanted to convince my father to break through, to make it a larger operation. My father wasn't ready for that. Most of the pharmacists at that time weren't ready for that. My grandfather was way ahead of his time. I have to tell you one of these stories. One day, a lady came into the pharmacy and my grandfather was waiting on her. She said to him, "Mr. Wernik, I would like a bottle of Phillips' Milk of Magnesia," and he said, "Oh, thank you, sure." He got a bottle and he said, "That'll be fifty-four cents." There was another pharmacy in town, at the same time--she said, "Fifty-four cents? I usually pay forty-nine cents." He said, "Where do you get it for forty-nine?" She says, "I get it on the corner," which was the other pharmacy. He said, "Why don't you get it there?" She said to him, "They didn't have any today." He said, "When I don't have it, I sell it for thirty-nine cents." I thought that was pretty good. They used to have soaps shaped like pears and colored that way and they were in a big

basket and he made a sign, "Eight cents. Three for a quarter." So, he got an extra penny if they bought three. Nobody ever took one for eight. They all took three for twenty-five cents.

SI: It does sound like he was a very entrepreneurial person.

DW: He was an entrepreneur, absolutely an entrepreneur, and he operated the religious movement that way.

SI: Were your mother's parents involved in starting the religious movement as well?

DW: No, they were in New Brunswick. They already had a synagogue. In fact, my grandfather on my mother's side established the temple in New Brunswick, coincidentally. So, of course, they stayed in New Brunswick. It's eight or nine miles away and their whole side of the family, my mother's side, grew up in the New Brunswick area.

SI: Which temple was that?

DW: It still exists, the one that was created.

JW: Poile Zedek.

DW: Poile Zedek, thank you.

JW: And it's a historical site, actually.

DW: And my grandfather, my mother's father, purchased a brick factory during the war period. As a youngster, I had hay fever and, believe it or not, the first two weeks of August, if I went to New Brunswick, I didn't have any symptoms. If I stayed in Metuchen, I did. I would spend two weeks with my grandparents and no sneezing. I had a lot of fun at the factory as well.

SI: Having these two family businesses right next to each other, did your grandmother help out in the candy store and did your mother help out in the pharmacy?

DW: My grandmother was not well. She didn't. By the way, this is 207 Highland--55 Highland Avenue was where my father built our home, a three-bedroom bungalow, and that housed five children. I have three brothers and a sister, my favorite sister, because she introduced me to this lovely young lady. They both went to Trenton State College, Teachers College, and that's how I met her.

JW: It's the College of New Jersey.

DW: College of New Jersey now.

SI: Before the house was built, did your family live in the same building as the pharmacy?

DW: Yes. When my dad bought the pharmacy, he also brought the family to live over the pharmacy. We lived up over the pharmacy for a few years, and then, my father built, on 55 Highland Avenue, the bungalow. It had three bedrooms, one bathroom. My father and mother had one bedroom. The five of us figured out a way: my sister and my youngest brother had a room, the two middle brothers had a room and I slept in the pantry with my feet in the kitchen. You mentioned my grandfather--he built a home on 33 Highland Avenue and that home is still in existence. He and my grandmother lived there. Our pharmacy was just on the first block from the railroad station on the right-hand side coming from the railroad on Main Street. So, everyone could walk to work. We never had a car in our family until I got out of the service, in either one of the families, but we never really needed it either, frankly.

SI: You said that there were some continuing issues with people not accepting the new communities coming in, different ethnic groups, different religious groups. Do you remember any incidents from when you were growing up?

DW: No, I don't want you to misunderstand that. No one did anything like we see now, defacing property or anything silly like that. You just had the feeling, the atmosphere was such that we didn't quite fit into the regular routine of partying and things that were going on. That was into the school system as well. No one was a bad person. This was historical almost and people had to learn, okay--just like we learned a lot, later on, about the racial problem that we had to overcome and other problems through time. I had a situation in the Marine Corps, which I'll tell you about. It was just different. It was because I was a Yankee. It was nothing that you could just say, "Hey, this is a racial thing." That never happened, that I'm aware of, certainly not to our family. Did it happen to others? I can't say it didn't; I don't know, but that never happened to us. No one was not nice, I want you to understand that. I was a thespian student. I loved being involved. In fact, I played football and used to go to play practice in my cleats for my part. Then, I'd go back to the field. It was only about a block from the high school. The high school in those days was the same school I went to from kindergarten to twelfth grade, Franklin School. It wasn't where it's located now. No, there wasn't anything like that. It was just that you were not involved in certain things.

SI: You said that it seemed to be related to social things, like parties. Were there other things where you would just say to yourself, "I cannot do that because I am Jewish?"

DW: I was outgoing, I guess--some people would say that--and I was a campaign manager for many people, in the school system, all over, but I never ran for office myself.

SI: Okay.

DW: I guess that's the best way I could explain it to you, but, again, nobody was ever mean. I don't want to brag, but I guess I have to say it, now that I started it, I received letters in football, basketball, tennis and track in high school. I was involved. Was I great? no, but I was not bad. Football, I was pretty good. I did make All-State in football. So, I was involved in everything and that helped me a lot. Some of the members of my family had a more difficult time adjusting, because they weren't involved in a lot of things. They didn't have a heck of a lot to do and most of the social events happened after school. When you're in school, it was okay. It started to

change a lot after the war was over and other people kept coming in. Hey, I was elected Mayor of Metuchen--I'm not saying that's great for me, but it's great for the fact that tolerance took hold.

SI: It is a sign of the change.

DW: If there wasn't tolerance, I couldn't have done that, the same thing at the freeholder level. As time has gone along, we've been learning. We've got a long way to go in racial tolerance. Maybe there'll be more new problems as a result of what's happening in the Middle East, but we'll make it.

SI: Outside of the Jewish community in Metuchen, how would you characterize the population of the town then? Was it mostly one ethnic group, for example, Irish or German?

DW: I'd say it was divided between Presbyterians and the Catholic groups and they were almost 50-50, with some other groups, and there's subdivisions of the Presbyterian group, I mean. So, yes, that's what it was. It was about half and half.

SI: Was there an African-American population at that time?

DW: It was a small one in town. There were never any problems in Metuchen and we'll talk about something later on, when I was involved as mayor, where we proved to the world that the way to live was to get together, rather than to pull apart.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit more about your early years? Obviously, the pharmacy and the candy store business were very important to your family, but what would you do with your free time? What were you interested in?

JW: What free time?

DW: I think I was most interested in anything that would come along. I got in the Boy Scouts only for a year. In fact, I was working on First Class. I enjoyed it and football came along and that ended that, because you couldn't do both. I was involved in a harmonica club. That was something that I was so happy I could play when I was in the service, because that was our only entertainment overseas, my harmonica, until I played, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," and then, they were throwing everything they could at me. I was in mostly athletics. I had to keep moving. I always liked to do that, but, in the school system, if there was anything that came along, I enjoyed being involved.

SI: When you were, say, a teenager, did you have to work in the family pharmacy?

DW: When my father could catch me, I worked in the family pharmacy. As I got a little older, though, in the last couple of years, I worked a little bit more, when I was in high school, because I could see at that point already that my father was ailing. I did work more the last couple of years, I would say, but not full-time or anything like that, in the summer. In fact, I can tell you another anecdote--my father wanted me to get an experience outside of the pharmacy. So, he was very close to the postmaster in town and the post office, in those days, used to employ high

school students during the Christmas holiday. The mailmen used to actually have to be in the mailrooms, because there was so much extra mail coming through, and they hired us to deliver the mail. In those days, there were two deliveries. My father got me a job. I'm not being disrespectful to the postal department, but I have to tell you this story. The first day I'm in there, I'm gung ho. So, they give me a batch of mail, and there wasn't that much of anything in town at that time. I ran with my batch and I was back in an hour-and-a-half, two hours. As they saw me coming, "Get out of here. You're not allowed to come back until twelve o'clock." I said, "What are you talking about?" "You heard me. You want to ruin this for everybody else?" The bottom line was that I found out that I had to make do with some extra time each day, in the morning, and in the afternoon. We've come a long way from then. I'm a very happy recipient of all postal services and I don't want to see it ever stop in Metuchen.

SI: Since you had this long exposure to pharmacy through your family, and then, your own career, what stands out about the business that you grew up in, things that were different in the way the pharmacy operated, the general atmosphere of the business?

DW: The thing that always comes to mind to me is that my father developed a term called, "Front, please." I could be in the back making Citrate of Magnesia. That would mean, "Get out to the front--somebody's in the store," and I realized, later on, through his example, that pharmacy was more than delivering a package which had some pills in it which was going to help them, hopefully. It was a service to completely service the customers that we had, help them if they have problems, that they needed to know what they were taking, what was it for, how is it going to help them? He was way ahead of his time and it taught me. In fact, I tried to follow through, the idea of a family profile card and having a record of all your patients and being able to save them from duplicating medications or from taking medication which might interfere with other medications they were taking and things like that. We were way ahead. That was before we were able to do that in the pharmacy, because we didn't have any records. No one really had any. They had numbers. You said, "Oh, this number, okay." You look up the number and, if it's a refill, we'd refill. So, what I felt I learned the most in the pharmacy is taking care of the customer, doing all that I could for them and recognizing that pharmacy was not just a delivery of merchandise, but was a professional service. That serves me until today, as a matter-of-fact. I really never changed my thinking about it and it developed as the profession developed, as there were greater needs, as there were more effective drugs, but a lot more dangers involved in medication being taken. So, yes, I would say that was it. The other thing was that I learned that, when you're working for yourself, you don't look at a clock. You just work until what you have to do is done. My father, he should rest in peace, he went into the store when it was opened. In those days, they didn't even have an associate pharmacist. None of the stores did. An individual was running the place. If they were open from eight until ten at night, it was that way six days a week. Maybe they would close in the afternoon on a Sunday. Actually, it carried through for me for the first eight or nine years of my profession, after I graduated and was licensed in New Jersey. My father, at that point, already was not in good shape. He couldn't be in the store alone by the time I graduated. So, I was in the store that way, but, then, already it was nine o'clock until ten o'clock at night, six days a week. Sunday, I would work nine to one. I'd have the afternoon off, one to six, and go back to work six to nine, but that wasn't just me, that was what pharmacy was. A lot of other businesses were the same way. So, I was plenty busy and I enjoyed that. I really didn't get involved in things until the late '50s, I

would say, because I was just concerned about the business. My father died in 1960. By that time, we were able to get an associate pharmacist, who'd been with me already part-time, because she was from Metuchen. She was in Metuchen High School. She graduated three years after me, went to pharmacy school, but she graduated three years ahead of me, because I was in the service for three years. Actually, I was her extern in my dad's pharmacy.

SI: How did the Great Depression affect, first, your family business, but also the town in general?

DW: I really can't relate to that. I know it was not an easy time. My father and my grandfather had often told me that, many times, they would go without paying themselves. I'm sure that was true of other situations. Those businesses, you wanted to stay in operation, and so, you'd pay your help, but you didn't pay yourself. That happened to me a few times after I was an owner and after Dad had passed. No, I can't really relate to what effect, directly, that it had.

JW: Can I just interject something?

SI: Sure.

JW: His father was a very kind man and related to everybody. If a customer could not pay their bill, he would let that bill go until they could pay it. People never forgot that. They used to come up to Don and tell him, "We remember your father very well, because he was very kind and generous to us," and that carried over to Don also.

SI: Back in the 1930s and early 1940s, were you strictly dealing with pharmaceuticals or were there other services that the pharmacy offered? I think of pharmacies in those days as having soda fountains, that sort of thing.

DW: Yes. My father was not interested in anything other than pharmacy and related items, so that we didn't get into that. It was never an argument in our family, in those days. Later on, we had some.

JW: You had a soda fountain, though.

DW: Yes. I was just going to say, we had a soda fountain, but that was traditional in all pharmacies in those days. A soda fountain was part of the pharmacy. As far as the groceries and all the other things that you're talking about, my grandfather, I told you, at one point, wanted to break through and my father's problem with that was, "We have enough room for what I want to service the community with." He just wasn't interested in it, and so, he didn't do it, but all we had was drugs, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and some cosmetics we had. What else did we have, Dear? We got into the surgical supplies. We got in surgical supplies a little bit when Dad was here. We carried it a lot further later on.

SI: Did your mother work in the pharmacy?

DW: No. My mother had five kids. She was busy all the time and she was so wonderful. As a matter-of-fact, she had a problem. She would serve five different meals. If you wanted this, that's what you got or, if you wanted that, that's what you had. In our house, of course, we're all the different ages. My youngest brother was twelve years younger--I guess he was kind of a surprise --than I was, and so, my sister was two years younger. Then, my next brother was four years younger than she was, and then, my next brother was two years younger than he was, and then, my last brother was twelve years younger than I was. So, she was a busy lady, but she was involved with the Sisterhood and she was involved in the PTAs, but she was never actively involved in the store. One thing she did for the store, though, which was important, every day, when my father had become ill and couldn't leave the store during the day, she would send his lunch down. She got the right paraphernalia and metal containers and, every day, his lunch would be delivered to the pharmacy by somebody in the family, so that he had good, hot meals every day. She made sure that that was so. The story is interesting about my brother who became the rabbi. He's the one who is eight years younger than I am. Don't forget, we lived only two blocks away--it would take him about forty-five minutes to make the trip, because he would stop and discuss the issues of the day or family problems with everybody he'd meet along the way. We always *kibitzed* him, "You've got to stop this. By the time it gets there, it's going to be cold."

SI: In your household, were many Jewish traditions kept up? For example, did your family keep a kosher household, that sort of thing?

DW: In our household, my mother kept a kosher home. She used to have to go to New Brunswick in those days for the kosher food and we used to get it there. We used to take a train, as a matter-of-fact, to New Brunswick, because there was no kosher food available in Metuchen, understandably. How could you make a living out of five families, half of whom weren't observing anyhow? We kept a kosher home. She kept separate silverware, she kept separate dishes for the holidays. We have gone to the point where we're traditionally observing--we observe the holidays, of course, and we have kosher food--but, realistically, once we started getting involved in the community, we couldn't be asking for kosher food. Actually, even if you eat off a plate that hasn't been in a kosher place, that's bad, I mean, according to the religion, in the strict, Orthodox sense. So, we recognized that, "Hey, listen, when we're out, we're not going to be foolish. So, when we're out, we eat whatever's being served." When we're home, this young lady keeps a kosher home. Our kids used to *kibitz* us. They would say, "Oh, you're not really religious. It's a façade. Look, you're going to this affair and that affair," and we tried to teach them that, "That's true. You have to learn where you're living, to be part of what's going on where you are. That doesn't mean you have to lose your belief." Traditionally, we do what we can at home, meaning buying kosher food, keeping meat and milk silverware. There's nothing wrong with that, because we're doing what we can do. I think they've accepted it now, but I'm not sure they did when they came home from a Jewish Y camp or something. They were instilled then, "Hey, this is wrong."

SI: Since your family was so involved with starting the religious movement in Metuchen, would you go to services often growing up?

DW: When it started out, my grandfather, we didn't have enough people for a *minyan*. I mean, he used to go in the surrounding area, in Edison, and bring some people in. When he started, he used to have nothing more, really, than Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which are the annual New Year holidays, and that's what it was in the beginning, not much more than that. He rented a hall, the Arcanum Hall in Metuchen, was over the bank on Main Street. That was their synagogue or their headquarters, whatever you want to call it, and my grandfather was--well, the word is *shammus*. He kept the place clean. He was a cantor, he was a rabbi, he was a public relations man--he did it all. I mean, he was very active and he had a beautiful voice. So, he was the religious service in its completion, and then, as things went along in the mid-'30s, there were enough people where we had an organization. By that time, I guess there were fifteen or maybe even twenty families; I'm not sure if it was that many, I don't know exactly, but not more than that. They had an organization that was created and, at that time, then, he started having services a little more frequently for other holidays. Then, in the early '40s, I guess it is, we bought the house on Highland Avenue. On 17 Highland Avenue was Metuchen's synagogue. It was an old house. My grandfather convinced Mr. (Kramer?), who owned the department store in town, who was a Jewish member of our kind of group, to loan fifteen hundred dollars, so that they could buy that building, which was in total disrepair. If you walked into the living room, you could end up in the cellar very easily, but that was the synagogue. That was it. They didn't have any money to do much repair, but they did have that. Then, my grandfather decided he wanted to have services. I was in the service already at the time and he used to enlist my brothers. The three of them were the only ones present, but he conducted the service on Highland Avenue there. So, he kept the program alive, and then, as I said, when the war ended and people came in, then, what happened was that they helped. The younger people got involved, too, and they parlayed the land and money of it into enough to build a building on Center Street, a synagogue. It wasn't much, but it was our synagogue. I was involved in it at that time and that was until '54, I think it was, when they built this building, Temple Neve Shalom. My grandfather was involved in every step of the way. In fact, I was actually a president of the men's club in the '50s. I remember fondly our quartet that we had for the program, but only two of us showed up. So, we had a two-man quartet for a program that we were putting on for the Jewish community. We had a lot of fun, and then, it developed into this. My grandfather stayed involved. In fact, in the back of the building (they don't allow pictures in the building) is a picture of my grandfather dedicating the cornerstone. They embossed it. He was involved until about that time, and then, of course, it's a beautiful community center now. It's been making it because a lot of the Conservative synagogues have been having a rough time. A lot of people are joining the Reformed and others are going towards the Orthodox. Two Conservative synagogues in the Metuchen area closed their synagogues and their members joined Neve Shalom in Metuchen.

SI: In the 1930s and up to the outbreak of the war, was your family involved in local politics? You said your father was a member of the Board of Education.

DW: Yes, I think my father was involved. He didn't run for any office, but I think he was involved in the Democratic group. There wasn't an organization much of anything in those days. It's like a group of people. He wasn't actively involved, but he supported the Democratic Party in town.

SI: Please tell me a little bit about your education. You said you went to the Franklin School.

DW: I went to the Franklin School, which was only two blocks away from here, right. Right now, it's a garden type development. In that area there, it was a high school, but it was kindergarten through twelfth grade. Then, there were two other elementary schools in town, but the elementary school serving this area was in the same building as the high school. So, I went to that building for all twelve of my years, kindergarten through graduation from high school.

SI: Does anything stand out about your time in elementary school, any teachers who were particularly influential or any subjects that you really enjoyed?

DW: I could only say this, that I really enjoyed elementary school. When I got into high school, there were some teachers that certainly impressed me, especially in the area of science. I think that probably led me toward ending up in pharmacy, to a degree. In those days, there was a different situation with coaching. The football coach wasn't necessarily a graduate of a phys. ed. school. He was a teacher who needed a couple hundred bucks. So, they'd give him that to be the football coach, and the same thing with basketball. So, I became related to all these people through their being coaches for our teams. I was impressed to one extent especially by two of the teachers and their devotion to their responsibilities. They weren't getting paid. They're aren't getting paid a lot, although, now, I think they're a lot better off than they were. In those days, my wife, Joyce, being a teacher, got eighteen hundred dollars the first year she graduated.

JW: When I started out.

DW: This young lady taught for two years, then, she became kind of busy.

JW: Then, I got a raise, I made twenty-three hundred.

SI: Please tell me a little bit about those two teachers who were influential in your life.

DW: One of them was (Ray Herb?). He not only was a teacher, but he also had to work part-time. So, he worked part-time in my dad's pharmacy, in the evening. So, I got to know him and he got me involved in the Board of Health later on. He was involved with the Board of Health. His example of dedication, I think, is something that I would say was definitely important to me. I mean, I didn't know a lot about it, what teachers are. At that age, what did I know? Not a lot of anything, other than where I was going to be the next ten minutes, maybe. He was a great example of a person who was dedicated, who was involved in the community and who was interested in serving the public, because I saw him working at night in the store and he was terrific with people. So, that was important to me. George Harrison was the physics teacher and he was also the football coach. In fact, we had a song. Are you ready?

SI: Sure.

DW: "H-A-Double-R-I-S-O-N spells Harrison. Harrison, Harrison, he's the guy, you see. Harrison, Harrison, the only one for me. So, H-A-Double-R-I-S-O-N's the guy. He's a rootin', tootin' son-of-a-gun from MHS and we love him, don't we, you and I?" I can't believe I remembered that. He was not only a teacher, but he taught in such a way that he kept you so

interested. All of a sudden, something would go off in the corner--he had it set and timed for a little explosion. We used to come into his class--he was on the first story--we used to climb through the window into his class, instead of going up the stairs. He didn't mind. He was a student's teacher and I never really forgot him. Miss Haitch, who was our English teacher, she was very artistic and she was a very nice person. We kind of called it "affected," but, as I grew up, I realized that it wasn't that she was affected, that's the way she was. She was a very good person also.

SI: You were in high school from 1939 to 1943, correct?

DW: Yes, I graduated in '43. Actually, some of our class went into the service. That's how I ended up on the track team. I told you I was in track. The only reason I was in track, because I was playing tennis in the summertime also, was because of the war. A lot of the students who were going to be eighteen between December and June, when we would be graduating, would've been drafted, or else they would have been, maybe, allowed to finish, but they would've had no choice in what they wanted to do. So, a number of them--and, of course, don't forget, we only had about seventy-five in our class in Metuchen when we graduated--they decided they would go early into the service. They got credit for the last six months. They did get credit for that. As a result of that, in the last half year, we were short guys for all the teams, if you please. So, that was how I got involved, for instance, in track, and other people did other things.

SI: I was just curious about the years, because World War II would have overshadowed your high school years.

DW: Yes. In 1943, that's when I determined I wanted to join the Marine Corps. The folks weren't that excited about it right away, of course, but that was a different time. We knew we had to fight that war, because, if we didn't, we weren't going to be existing much longer, the way Adolf Hitler was moving through Europe and every other country. It wouldn't be too long. So, it wasn't a question. Oh, there were some people who didn't believe; they were conscientious objectors, if you will, but they were legitimately so. Some weren't, I guess, but, other than that, everybody understood that we had to do what we could do.

SI: When you entered high school, before Pearl Harbor, were you following the news from overseas closely? Were you aware of what was happening in the world?

DW: I think I followed it more than most people my age. I was interested in what was going on--closely, no, but aware, yes, yes, I was aware.

SI: Do you remember where you were when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

DW: No, I really don't. I don't remember. Do you remember where you were?

JW: Yes, I do.

DW: She'll tell you. Where were you?

JW: We were at my family's, all together in our living room. We had the radio on and we were listening to it. When we heard the President speak, I'll never forget it.

DW: I remember the President speaking, yes, but don't remember where I was, what I was doing. I must've been in my home and it had to be on the radio, because we didn't carry radios around with us at that time. So, it must've been at home.

SI: Did it come as a shock to you?

DW: It came as a shock to all of us. In retrospect, when we look back now, we realize, if they had had the capability of coming to the West Coast, we couldn't have stopped them there, because we didn't have any real preparation. We weren't ready to really fight a war. We weren't thinking we were going to fight a war and that was our mistake, but the luck that we had--well, it wasn't luck--we were far enough away. They could get to Pearl Harbor, which was bad enough, but, by the same token, they couldn't get to the United States. That's what saved our butt. As a matter-of-fact, I had a problem with Pearl Harbor, a little different problem. All right, you going to get into this story?

SI: Was this based on something you learned later?

JW: This was a trip we took.

DW: Our daughter and son-in-law were in the Hawaiian Islands. My son-in-law was in charge of the food kitchen at Honolulu Airport for United Airlines. We went to visit them. They had just been married. United Airlines was doing great in those days and they took him and their dog and my daughter and they moved them there. We went to visit them, and then, we went to visit the *Arizona*. I got on it, we went, and they had a program then there, not as sophisticated as now. It's a very sad thing, more than twenty-one hundred guys still down there, or whatever is left of the remains. As we're coming out, a group was going in and they were a group of Japanese people that looked like my age. The first thing that flashed through me was, "Oh, my God, heck, any one of those guys could've been the guy in that plane that dropped the damn thing." I'm a pretty rational guy, I think, normally. She'll tell you, I was beside myself for almost a day. The truth of the matter is, it bugged me so, and they were chattering and taking pictures. To me, that was a tough thing to be part of.

SI: What year was that?

JW: Oh, God.

DW: She was only married a year, thirty years ago.

DW: The early 1980s?

JW: Married thirty-two years.

DW: In the '80s.

SI: Do you recall, at the time after Pearl Harbor, if there was a lot of hatred expressed towards the Japanese and the Germans, as America got into the war?

DW: I won't use the word hatred. I don't like that word, but a lot of Japanese people in this country paid a price that was just not fair as far as I'm concerned. Yes, there was a lot of unrest. We had a lad in my class and he was a good friend of mine. He never came back the next year and I found out that his family had been relocated. Now, I didn't even know what that even meant. I didn't find that out until later. All I knew was that they moved away. I didn't know anything more than that, but they set up these camps and I found out that their family was delegated for one of those. I don't even know where it was and there's a lot of it that went on that we just didn't--the average person didn't--have a clue. The government, certain aspects of the government, I mean, took charge of what they felt was protecting this country, in my mind in a way which didn't do anything for us except hurt our image in the world. I mean, what we did to them is what we said nobody should do to anybody. They took people that were citizens in the United States, productive citizens--I don't mean somebody that just got off the boat even. You've got somebody to question, take him, put him out of action, so that they can't do any harm, but ... I was in school with this youngster for at least six or seven years, I think from sixth grade on. So, I felt it after. When I was in school, no, I didn't really even notice it, okay, because it was done very quietly. Nobody said, "I'm moving to a camp." You didn't hear. I just assumed they moved during the summer. So, I didn't have any clue at that time, none whatsoever, but it was wrong.

SI: Do you recall if any of your classmates were harsh towards this student after Pearl Harbor or if he faced any prejudice after that?

DW: No, I don't.

SI: In-between Pearl Harbor and when you entered the service, did you notice many changes on the home front in Metuchen?

DW: I can't say that I did. The changes that took place were when I went into the service. Somebody, one of my friends, wrote to me, "You don't know how tough it is," and I was overseas at the time, on Okinawa. "You don't know how tough it is for us here. We've got to have food stamps. Our gas is rationed," and I wish I had a copy of the letter I sent back to that guy.

SI: Did the rationing program affect the business at all?

DW: If it did, I didn't know about it. My father never did any complaining. My family, they never did a lot of complaining. They were awfully nice to me. They kept sending me things.

Called to Serve His Country

Donald enlisted in the US Marine Corps in August 1943. From September to December 1943, he completed boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina, and then, was sent to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for specialized training as a radar technician. By May 1944, his unit was preparing to deploy overseas and, in September 1944, he sailed for the Hawaiian Islands to join the 16th Antiaircraft Artillery of the First Marine Division. Sergeant Wernik served in the Pacific for over a year, including service during the Okinawa Campaign following the initial invasion on April 1, 1944. He received his honorable discharge as a sergeant from the US Marine Corps on May 6, 1946.

SI: You said earlier that you decided to enlist in the Marine Corps in May 1943. Then, you were called up in August.

DW: No, I had actually decided to join, I would say, at least seven or eight months before that. I had decided I wanted to go into the Marine Corps. As I said, my parents weren't that excited about it, but, when they felt that I really was serious and that I really felt that I did want to join the Marines, they supported me.

SI: What motivated you to go into the Marine Corps, as opposed to the Army, the Navy or the Army Air Corps?

DW: I think I had a couple of friends that had joined the Marine Corps. That was one of them, one of my closest friends. I think I was taken back, maybe a little bit, by the glamour of the Marine Corps--I was going to join the Marine Corps and I was going to win the war.

SI: Had you seen any films or any other material that depicted the Marine Corps?

DW: I'm sure I had. I had a lot of respect for the Marine Corps. I guess it was propaganda that I was being subjected to, not directly, but generally. Marines, they were really into it, they were really fighting this war. I found out, later on, everybody was fighting it. Whether they were in the service or not, they were still fighting it. If they were providing the food from home and if they were having their lives disrupted, they were in it, too. There was nobody that really wasn't in it, but I didn't know that at the time. I was very serious about wanting to join the Marines. When they realized that, it was okay.

SI: Please tell me about the process of entering the Marines, the physical, reporting for duty, that sort of thing.

DW: Actually, the headquarters for our group was in New York City, to do all the paperwork and to be sworn in, etc., which for me was in August of 1943. I graduated from high school in June and I was, yes, made a member of the Marine Corps in August. In September, we went to boot camp with a contingent from New York, people from the New York area. There were actually seventy-three of us. When we got to Parris Island, they set up the platoons, seventy to a platoon. Being done alphabetical, there were three names left over after the first seventy and it was Wernik, Widener and Yelencsics. So, we formed the next platoon and the next sixty-seven

members of that platoon were from South Carolina. These young fellows were still fighting the Civil War and they couldn't see having much use for any Yankee and they couldn't even see how we could be fighting on the same side. They showed that to us during the first few evenings, after lights were out, and we reciprocated by defending ourselves. After about a week of that, where it wasn't every night, but there were incidents pretty regular--nothing during the day, because the drill instructors kept us pretty darn busy during the day. From when we got up, about five, five-thirty in the morning until lights were out, which could've been any time from nine to ten o'clock, we didn't have to worry about anybody. We just had to worry about ourselves. Then, it was during the period after that that there were some incidents that occurred. We defended ourselves pretty well, I have to say, and they, I think, established the consensus that they were going to coexist with us through this period of time, this nine-week period of time. From then on, we didn't have a lot of problems, a snide remark every once in a while, which we did not reply to. We played it cool all the way, because we didn't want to get started all over again. We had enough the first four or five days, so that we didn't need that, and it wasn't every one of those, by the way. It was just a few leaders. Their fathers were generals in the Confederate Army, I guess. I don't know why, but they didn't want to leave go. Ultimately, they put it on hold, at least until we got out of boot camp.

SI: Was it all verbal or were there any physical altercations?

DW: It was physical in the beginning. Really, the way it stood, no one would start right out, but they would, you know, "Here's a chip on my shoulder. What are you going to do about it?" "Nothing," and then, they shove you or maybe something like that. If you didn't respond, you were going to be finished for the whole rest of the nine weeks. You knew that for sure. So, we did and we did good, and it wasn't like we were fighting against sixty-seven people. There were a few guys that were the wise guys and, after a little bit of interaction, things seemed to work out.

SI: I believe you told me before we started recording that one of the other three Marines who was pulled out and put in this group of Southerners was from Metuchen.

DW: Right.

SI: Did you go into the service together or did you just happen to be there at the same time?

DW: No, we didn't go in together. He lived in Edison, I lived in Metuchen. He went to Metuchen schools, though, because, in those days, they didn't have a high school in Edison. It was Raritan Township. So, I knew him before, but we became very close, of course, and then, after the war was over, we even became closer. We've been together many times and he's a lovely guy. "Pooch" (Steve) went into the bus business. It's the Raritan Valley Bus Service. You'll see them every once in a while and that's who they are. No, we were never buddies before. We knew each other, but we became buddies as a result of just the boot camp, really. We weren't together after that. He went into a car pool, and that's important--you know, everything is important. I don't care what you did, you were part of the war effort.

SI: Tell me about your initial experience at Parris Island. Every Marine I have interviewed has a story about getting off the bus, that sort of thing.

DW: Yes. We had a drill instructor who I think was probably one of the more humane of most of them, but he was tough. He was really tough and I was all of seventeen--well, I was just eighteen and a couple of months--and I didn't know what to expect. I heard it was tough, I heard that they were rough on you. I was looking forward to that, but I didn't realize how rough it was going to be until I got acclimated to it. No one was ever really un-nice, but they were tough and you had to toe the line. They made you do things, like standing out at four o'clock, or, well, five-thirty in the morning, with the mosquitoes, and standing at attention and not moving. If you moved, you were in deep you-know-what, which I always felt that I don't know how necessary they were. In retrospect, when I think back through the time that I was in boot camp, I think I have an average intelligence, but I was effectively brainwashed, because, by the time I got out of boot camp, I didn't think there was anybody I couldn't whip and I didn't think there was anybody I was afraid of. I think that was the purpose of boot camp, because where we were going, it wasn't a pleasant place and you had to be that way. I mentioned to you once before something that I think is an important thing in life about wars and being involved, when we were going overseas, how important it was to be a young guy like me, because nothing really bugged me that much. I was ready to move on whatever it was, but there were a lot of guys, they were twenty-seven, twenty-eight, they had families at home, they had children at home and they were concerned about that. I think you can fight the best when you've got nothing else on your head to think about. Another thing happened to me, I went to radar technician's school. Ultimately, we had a radar unit, which was like a landing type unit. It was set up right near the beach and it was set up to catch low-flying planes that went below the radar. The radar wasn't that sophisticated in those days, from the ships and things like that. This was set up to get those low-flying things that were coming in. Essentially, I went to technician's school and, actually, when we were finished with that, you learned how to put it together under fire, because, a lot of times, we were putting them up, it was before anything was really secured. Again, it had to be near the beach, but, hey, that was just part of the responsibility. Everyone had one responsibility or another. I went to technician's school and I graduated from that, and then, we had some advanced programs that we had at Camp Lejeune.

SI: Was the radar technician's school after boot camp at Parris Island?

DW: Yes, it was after. In boot camp, you had nine weeks of various exercises, learning how to be a good Marine. It was obstacle courses, under barbed wire on your belly, in the water with a backpack, doggy-paddling, if you had to, in water that wasn't too deep, and many other things, but it was all physical. It wasn't much mental responsibility that we had to assume while we were in boot camp. We just had to be careful.

SI: I know that the Marine Corps puts a lot of emphasis on rifle training and marksmanship.

DW: Yes, naturally, and I had that in boot camp. I had a very interesting experience there. (By the way, my service number, 886353, I'll never forget it.) We used an M-1 rifle out on the rifle range and we were out on the range for about a week. After the fourth day, they finally got around to me. I'm a lefty. I'm firing it and the ejection's going right in front of me. "We're not allowed to fire one of those lefty. You've got to learn how to fire it righty." So, I had one day-and-a-half left and I didn't know what I was going to do. I was doing pretty good this way, if I

didn't kill myself with an ejection from the rifle. So, the drill instructor was very nice after he read me off pretty good at first, and then, he put it right. He says, "Now, here," and, believe it or not, I made marksman. I don't know how I ever did it in one day. I think I was up for a lot more if I'd have kept going, but I could understand their point. So, for after doing it wrong eight-tenths of the time, the other two-tenths, I did end up at least a marksman, which I didn't think I'd ever make in switching it from one side to the other like that, but I didn't kill myself in boot camp with my rifle.

SI: Did you go directly into radar technician's school? Was that also at Parris Island?

DW: No. It was at Camp Lejeune. It wasn't like a school, I guess. You had to learn this piece of equipment and that's all you had to learn, because that's all that they were worried about. It wasn't an education in radar; it was how this thing works and how you can take it apart and how you can fix it, etc. I guess that's it.

SI: Do you know if you were selected for that for a reason or did they just assign people as they needed them?

DW: No, I think I was selected for it for a reason. They gave us some questionnaires, occasionally, and the only thing that happened, as a result of all of this, I made buck sergeant too early. I made buck sergeant and I didn't realize the problem I was going to get into later on, but, when we were broken down into platoons, later on, for each unit, I had guys with me that were twenty-six, twenty-seven, three kids in the family, five kids in the family, career Marines. It was tough for this eighteen-year-old kid to tell these guys what to do. It took me a while before we got a good feeling for each other, but we did. They helped me a lot, but I felt that I wouldn't have minded still just being a private or a corporal and still doing the same job. Again, there was nothing done in the way of fighting or anything like that. It was just that I could see it, "Oh, that kid, he's still wet behind the ears," that kind of thing. Then, after that, we did a lot of things in conditioning. From Camp Lejeune, I went out to Pendleton and, there, it was just kind of an embarking place. We left the country from San Diego. When we were a few months in, whenever they're going to move someplace, they've got to get everybody together. So, there's a lot of time that's just wasted--not wasted, but getting ready. When we shipped out, I have a story for you there. LST, landing ship, transport--it's a flat-bottom boat. It's used for landing tanks and landing equipment and they were trying to get as many people as possible overseas at that time, because we hadn't won the war. It was turning around already in '43, but we had a lot of places that we still had to go. So, they were bringing the equipment out. They put fifty cots, they stacked them there on these LSTs, so that they could bring fifty guys on each one, so that, actually, five hundred went with it. They tied them together, because those boats are flat-bottomed. They went from San Diego to Honolulu and that was one heck of a ten days. That was maybe the toughest ten days of my time in the Marine Corps, and not just me, everybody was heaving. They'd say, "You've got to eat." So, you'd heave, you'd eat, you'd go up and heave again and eat. The captain of the ship was only a lieutenant. Anybody higher than that wouldn't take that job. He was heaving, but, for ten days, every one of us--I got land sick when I went ashore. That's how it was. So, that's a story which I don't even want to tell again, because I start to get a little woozy when I think about it. I'll never be a good sailor.

SI: My grandfather served on an LST and he said that was constantly an issue with the waves. How long were you stationed at Camp Lejeune before you were sent to Camp Pendleton?

DW: Three or four months.

SI: Were they training you as a radar unit?

DW: Training on that and conditioning. It was a mixed bag, to a degree, and then, we went by train from Lejeune to Pendleton. Now, if I got out of boot camp in November, eighteen months from May of '46 would be May of '45 and six months from that, about December of '44. That's when I shipped out, December of '44. I was at Pendleton, I would say, for two or three months before that, and then, I was at Lejeune the time before that, after boot camp.

SI: In general, what were your reactions to the different areas of the country that you saw? Were you able to interact with any civilians in those areas?

DW: When we were traveling across the country, we never had any interaction with anybody. When we were in Pendleton, we had some time off. Up until that time, there was no interaction with anybody, other than you could have a night off to go into town or something like that, in some places, but that's all. We really didn't have any time off. When I was in Pendleton, we did. In fact, I had some relatives in the Los Angeles area and I would go up on the weekends and spend a night or two with them while we were waiting to ship out. I did get to see Los Angeles a little bit, but, other than that, on the trip across the country, we never got off the train, and so, we never saw much of anything. Yes, we got off to stretch our bones every once in a while, don't misunderstand me. We didn't have to sit on that train for three or four days, but, no, we didn't interact with anybody. If we went off on a liberty for an hour, it usually was with another guy. You didn't ever go alone. So, no, I would say I didn't have any real interaction, except when I was at Pendleton, when I went up to Los Angeles. It was my grandfather's brother's family. Some of them lived up there and they were very nice to me. I really appreciated that.

SI: You sailed on the LST from San Diego to Honolulu.

DW: Right.

SI: Once you arrived in Honolulu, what were you assigned to do?

DW: We went to the Island of Kauai and, there, we were joined by other groups. It was basic preparation for what was going to be the invasion of Okinawa. We didn't know that either, by the way, at the time. It was suspected that it was that, because it was after Iwo Jima. There was nothing left but Okinawa or Japan and we just figured it was going to be Okinawa, but we were never told that it was. I guess that was just as well, didn't matter.

SI: Were you assigned to a unit before you arrived in Hawaii or were you put into the unit that you served with on Okinawa there?

DW: It was into units as far as those who were the technicians, with the assistants. The other people, no, the units were really created on Kauai.

SI: Can you give me a sense of how large the unit was, how many people made up the unit?

DW: For instance, in our unit, we were in the First Marine Division, the 16th AA (Antiaircraft). You see, in those days, the antiaircraft wasn't what you know antiaircraft to be, because they weren't hooked together simultaneously. You couldn't do that in those days. You picked them up, and then, they shot at them. It was a whole different ballgame. In our group, there were sometimes nine, up to ten or eleven, with one Mark XV radar unit. It was just stacked, one, two, three, four, and an antenna above it. That's all it was, a box like that. So, we were able to set it up ourselves. It was like a portable, except that it was pretty fragile. I'm not sure how effective we were with that, by the way, but we worked hard at it. We were all set up in areas right near the beaches, just a little bit from it, because the idea was to catch the Japanese planes that were coming in below the radar. While we were coming into the landing, we saw a half a dozen of those suicide planes that the Japanese launched. They never aimed themselves at us--we were nothing--and they did get one of the cruisers, we were told. I mean, we didn't see it happen, because it was a big area where there were a lot of naval vessels outside there, but those *kamikazes* were giving their life up, that they knew it, and that's like these people today with the bombs, strapping them to them to go blow themselves up and a hundred other people in Iraq or someplace.

SI: Within your unit, was your specific job just to set up the radar? Were you trained to use it? Did you do both?

DW: We set it up and we did it the whole nine yards. We also had to protect our own area, because, at nighttime--we hadn't secured the island yet, but we were on the way--there were some people who would still filter back. Frankly, even after it was secured, there were some people and they'd be looking for food. So, we had to protect the place at night and we'd set up a guard unit and we kind of took turns at night. One of our units was attacked. We didn't lose anybody there. We had a couple people that were out of action after that. Even though I was the sergeant, I took a turn, too, at night. I felt everybody ought to do it. We had to protect our own unit, but the island was fairly secured. In the beginning, we had help, because it was more dangerous. Once we almost secured the island, I would say, then, we had our own responsibility for it.

SI: How effective do you think the training you had on Kauai was?

DW: It was training and there was waiting at the same time. By the time you left, you knew your responsibilities, you knew what you had to know. I don't think there were any surprises that we hadn't been indoctrinated to understand. The most important thing was, "Keep your head up, on one hand, and then, put it down at the right time," is the way they used to say it. There's always a waiting time. You wonder, "Wow, there's so much time wasted," but they have to. I mean, you can't just bring thousands of people together in one day. They bring them and put them in position and it takes a period of time.

SI: During this period of waiting, you said you felt awkward being a buck sergeant and much younger than many of your men.

DW: That didn't hit me until we actually invaded Okinawa.

SI: Tell me a little bit about forming up for the invasion of Okinawa. What was that process like? How did you join the invasion fleet?

DW: It didn't all go at the same time, either. We were put on to a boat and we went. We didn't travel all the way on our LST or landing ships; we were transferred to them later on. We stopped at a couple of islands along the way, also--not to fight, just cleanup operations were going on there.

SI: You were placed on ships and went out to the area where you formed up for the invasion.

DW: Right.

SI: Tell me about the days before the invasion. What do you remember about that late March period, before you actually went into the island?

DW: We were apprehensive. We were resigned. We knew what we were going to do. We felt we were prepared. Were we a little scared inside? I think probably so. Did we admit it? Probably not--no, definitely not. Then, as we approached, a lot of the naval vessels were in place before we ever pulled out and that's when we saw the *kamikazes*. We didn't see them hit the cruiser, but we were told that one was hit, but those people were crazy. I mean, they were just crazy.

SI: Did you see other ships get hit?

DW: I didn't see anything get hit, but I saw them come down. Most of them splashed the water. They just, "Plop." I only saw two or three that I could see go right down and they missed. I'm sure that for every one that hit something, they lost ten or fifteen. I don't know that, but I'm sure of that.

SI: Do you recall the name of the beach that you went in on?

DW: It was Orange Beach.

SI: Tell me about the day of the invasion. What did you do that morning and how did you go ashore?

DW: We didn't go ashore the first day.

SI: Okay.

DW: We didn't go ashore the first day. The invasion the first day was the infantry. We were now in place on the ship that we were going to be going in on and we were waiting to just go in. It was about the second or third day that we actually went ashore, because we had to get the equipment in. They had to have enough room for us to at least safely get on to the land. The locations we were going to be at had been predetermined. So, we knew where we were going to be. There was still fighting going on, of course, when we landed. It wasn't secured for, I don't know, about a month or so after that.

Then, we set it up, and then, we became a separate unit, just the nine or ten of us. We were in communication with the other ones. We had about six or seven different units that were set up around the island, not too far from us, actually. Our type radar was used near the invasion areas, because that was the problem areas, you had to have a situation where you could command what was going to be happening in that area, but we weren't on the beach itself. We were right adjacent to the beach. I would say it would take us maybe three or four hours to set it up, but we learned to do that ourselves.

SI: Given the equipment that you had, would it all come ashore in a Higgins boat or would it come in on a larger vessel?

DW: It was brought to us, so, we didn't bring it ashore with us, but it was orchestrated so that where we went, it went.

SI: Tell me about the first couple of days you were on Okinawa, setting up, and then, doing your daily operations. What do you remember about that?

DW: What do I remember about that? I remember that we were very busy, not only working, but looking, too. We were looking--hey, to say you're not concerned is silly. You're still hearing, there's still fighting going on, that's for sure, and you don't know who's slipped through the cracks. So, you're concerned about that. We had our rifles, but we were busy doing things where, if we needed the rifle, it would've been a little late to pick it up and use it, if you know what I'm saying. We had the job we had to do, we knew what it was and I guess that's all I was thinking about.

SI: What were your living conditions like?

DW: We had a tent and we had cots--not in the beginning, actually. Ultimately, we had cots.

SI: For the first few days, however, were you living in foxholes?

DW: Not foxholes, but it was tough living.

SI: Did you pick up any aircraft on your radar?

DW: Yes, we did, and we relayed it on. Do we know what happened? In those days, you didn't necessarily know anything. You knew what you had to do and you did it. It was relayed on to maybe one or more than one artillery, probably. We don't know how they handled that part of it.

We knew what we had to do and get the message out and that's what we did. From there on, we got word back sometimes that two or three were shot down, but it might've been ours, it might've been one of the others. We were all, sometimes, zeroing in on the same thing.

SI: How far away was your position from where the guns were?

DW: God, I don't know. It was physically not visible. It wasn't like having the gun next to the thing. It wasn't that at all. They weren't as sophisticated in those days, you have to understand that. In fact, what we were doing was now state-of-the-art. I don't think anybody ever built another Mark XV after that war. I don't think they ever used it again. I don't know that.

SI: Do you recall approximately how long you were in that initial position before you were moved to another location?

DW: No, we didn't move to another area.

SI: Okay.

DW: We didn't move to another area. They had space when they set it up, so, there was no need. Shortly thereafter, when we secured the island, they didn't really even need that, although we kept in operation.

SI: For the first few days, were you within enemy artillery range? Could they shell the area?

DW: They weren't doing much shelling. We had some planes go by, though, and they were dropping stuff, when they'd think they would find something. I don't know how they did it, but we did have some damage, not to us, but other of our units, by planes, the ones, again, that came under the radar that were coming through.

SI: Tell me a little bit about what you would do on a daily basis. How long would you be on duty? Did you have time to do anything other than what you were assigned to do?

DW: Everybody had responsibilities, of course, but it was wait, and then, do, wait, and then, do. You're waiting for your certain time on the scopes, for instance. Then, you're waiting for, at nighttime, your duty on the thing. There's a lot of time when you've got to keep yourself busy in some way, and that's true. That's true of anything like that. Even the infantry, once they got engaged, that's one thing, but there's a lot of waiting no matter what you're doing. So, it isn't that you're nonstop the whole day. It never happened that way, for us, anyhow. I can't speak about somebody else.

JW: Don, how about the prisoners that you had there?

DW: Oh, that was after the war. After the island was secured, we had some prisoners that they gave us to help package things up, to start to return things. So, we supervised them during the day, but that's because we were no longer, at that point, even using the radar, after it was totally secured. They'd gotten to the point where they had prisoners and they distributed them to help

package things up and get things back. By the way, the prisoners that we had, they were the people that the Japanese took over, if you will, and they were the young people. I wanted to bring one home.

SI: Did it seem strange to be in close contact after being at war with them?

DW: I didn't find that. I know other people might've, but I didn't. I adjust fairly well.

SI: After the island was secured, did you get to visit other parts of the island?

JW: Tell them about the doctor that you met on Okinawa.

DW: There was a doctor in town. In fact, he came to Metuchen and he was broke. My father let him set up his office in the back of our pharmacy. Today, it would be considered unethical, but it didn't matter, because no one came to him. In those days, the doctors went to the houses of the patients. They didn't even have to have an office. We became very friendly. He was probably about fifteen years older than I, maybe twenty, fifteen years, I would say. We used to play tennis together. I was in the Marine Corps and he went into the Army before. When I was on Okinawa, after we had secured the island, I got a letter from my mother saying that Dr. Gurshman is on Okinawa and he was in the 77th Army Infantry Division. There were any number of groups that were different groups that attacked different beaches along Okinawa. It was a pretty large invasion. She said, "And I have his address." So, I wrote to him and arranged to come down and meet him. This was after the island was secured. I mean, it was about fifteen or twenty miles. He was about two or three beaches down, not that far, and it was the 77th Army Division there. I drove down there and I come to the headquarters and I'm asking where the sick bay is. They said, "The sick bay is over there. Who do you want?" I said, "Is there a Dr. ..." "Uncle Sol? Sure." I walked out and I see a sick bay and there's a big sign out front, "Smiling Sol's Solarium." I've got a picture of he and I standing in that, around that sign. It was just so terrific to get to see him like that, under that circumstance. He was a wonderful guy, a good doctor. He told some stories that were--believable, because that's the way he was. If he thought somebody was hurt, he would get them and do something, wouldn't think too much about himself. He went on to be on the Board of Education when he got home and was very much involved in the community.

JW: He delivered our first child.

SI: How long did he operate out of your family pharmacy?

DW: Not long, just when he got started, yes, because he didn't have enough money to get out of there. He didn't want to stay there and my father wouldn't have let him. My father was an ethical man before ethics were even thought about. They could've written a book from his mind.

The only time I went anywhere was when I visited Dr. Gurshman. Otherwise, I never got to go any other place, no. You didn't get time off to go for a drink or something like that. They'd bring you a drink, occasionally. I think I told you, I didn't drink beer.

SI: Yes, you said you traded it for baked beans. Did they have any kind of recreation for you after the island was secure?

DW: Not formal recreation, but, sometimes, we'd get a ball or something to chuck and things like that.

SI: During this waiting time, I know that, in the military, there is a lot of gambling. Was there a lot of that where you were?

DW: Yes, there was a fair amount of that, and they always waited for me, because I always lost. I never won. I'll tell you a good story. For a while, when we were at Camp Lejeune, when I made buck sergeant, I had the duty of the day one day out of a month, because there were maybe twenty sergeants. About every three weeks, I had the duty of the day. Otherwise, I had to get lost. This is a short period of time, but a couple months. I went to the golf course. They had a golf course at Camp Lejeune. You talk about gambling, every hole, and you couldn't move the ball--they'd take your hand and rip it off--and I never played golf before in my life. I haven't played but a couple times since, because a pharmacist doesn't have a lot of time for golf. Tennis is a different story. You can do it in an hour or two. Golf is four or five hours. I never had that kind of time, but, so, I started playing golf and I was pretty good at it. I was playing righty, because they didn't have any lefty clubs. We'd play eighteen holes in the morning, sometimes eighteen holes in the afternoon. We were kooky at that time. I got to where I wasn't that bad, but I didn't get to the point where I ever won any money playing, I have to tell you that. That was gambled for a lot, a lot, boy, and they would follow each other out. If you were in the bushes, that's where it was--you couldn't even move it where you could hit it. You had to thrash at it. So, I played golf for two months and I got down to where I actually broke eighty-five one time, but I had no swing. I had a lot of strength and I was great with a putter, but I never was going to become a champ; I knew that right away.

SI: After Okinawa was secure, did they immediately start training you for the invasion of Japan?

DW: We had not really gotten in any organized training yet, but we had been informed that there was going to be a program established. They didn't say where we were going, but where else could you go? There was no other place.

When the war ended and the way it ended, I had a problem for a short period of time with the atomic bomb. After the war was all over, the Veterans of Foreign Wars or somebody sent out a plan that they had for invasion--boy, that was going to be gangbusters. It was going to be Army, Navy, Marine Corps. It wasn't going to all happen at the same time. It was virtually the east side of Japan, every place along the way where there was a proper way to invade, in other words, where there was a beach or something like that. It was going to be horrendous. They were going to do what they did in battle--they're going to fight until they were dead. We were going to lose millions of people and they were going to lose millions of people.

So, when you analyze 100,000 people being killed, which was terrible to me and still isn't something I'm happy about, but compare that with the millions of people that would've been gone--and the result would've been the same, because we had them whipped. They wouldn't

admit it. They wouldn't surrender. In fact, even after the first bomb, Truman asked them to surrender and they wouldn't. We had to drop a second bomb before they would quit. I guess, I think I'm a people person and it doesn't matter who the people are or what their color is or what their nationality is or what their race is and I felt badly about it, I have to say I did, and I didn't condemn our President. I knew that there was an upside to what happened--the war ended.

Yes, World War II was something that we had to fight and I think the young people were ready to do that. As a matter-of-fact, the one problem I did see, and this is in combat areas, I believe if there's ever going to be a conscription or draft again, people ought to go right out of high school before they get into college and do anything else and serve their time that way. The reason is that when we were overseas, I was a kid. Hey, what was I thinking of? I was thinking of tomorrow. I used to swap my beer for baked beans. I didn't even have beer in those days yet. So, my problems were miniscule, but by my side was a guy who was twenty-six, had a wife and family at home, was a whole different ballgame for that person. I guess the only thing I could say is that if you have to be into a war, and I don't want to see it here, conscript me right out of high school. Don't let me get married and let me go to college; let me do it when I come back home again.

SI: I have a few more questions about World War II.

DW: All right.

SI: You held these views of the bomb. Did you ever discuss them with your fellow Marines? Did they ever share their views with you?

DW: I think a lot of the people felt that when the war was over, that was good enough for them. There were other people, but the discussions about, "Was it ethically right or a problem?" that discussion never occurred while I was in the service. After I got out of the service and I spoke with a lot of people, they mean well, but you've got to be there to know what the hell's going on, to think better about what the result might've been if it hadn't been for those bombs. I would say to you, while I was still in the service, I didn't hear of any real objection to it. I heard comments from some people, that if there was another way, it would've been better, but there wasn't another way and I'm convinced of that. I'm absolutely convinced. I wasn't for a while, but, in my mind, I can't think of any other way. The other part of it is, the First Marine Division, and I happened to be in the First Marine Division, our assignment was going to be Tokyo Harbor. So, they gave us the best of the last, but we didn't need that.

Now, when we came home, we stopped off at Tokyo, but we never got off the ship. We didn't; some people claim they did. They picked up some more people. We had a big transport ship coming back to the United States.

SI: During your time with your radar unit on Okinawa, did you have much interaction with your officers?

DW: None. They left me alone. I shouldn't say none; I'm sure I had some sometime, because I had a lieutenant who was in charge of our whole group. I probably did, but it was nothing that I can remember that was worth talking about at this moment.

SI: Did you have an opinion of your lieutenant?

DW: Nice guy, that really is so, young guy, very nice, and almost as green as I was. A lot of the lieutenants were just out of college. In our kind of a situation, you didn't go for top brass, you went to the bottom of the line, one of these radar units there, our whole 16th AA.

SI: Did you ever have any issues with the radar equipment breaking down or not working properly?

DW: Yes, and that was the trick, getting it going. It broke down a lot, frankly. I have to say I was pretty good at it, but there were two of us, actually, assigned to each set, two who had technician ability. To say I was a technician may be over-bragging it, but I was a guy that was there that could keep it going, I hope, and fix it if it broke down.

SI: Did you ever have trouble getting any parts that you needed?

DW: Sometimes, we didn't get it at all. We could improvise certain things. As far as the mechanism itself, I think it worked and, as far as anything that I needed, I don't ever remember not being able to get it. There was a supply area and we would call in and get what we needed, but it wasn't like going to the store and picking it up and bringing it home. We were sometimes out of action for two or three days, but we didn't tell the enemy.

SI: Did you have any difficulty getting other supplies that you needed, such as rations?

DW: I don't remember any large difficulty with it. If one of my mail calls would finally come in, I had enough to take care of people for a long time, all those things that my aunts and uncles were sending to me.

SI: When you were overseas, were you able to attend religious services? Did you have a desire to go to services?

DW: Actually, I went to services at Camp Lejeune. They had a chapel service a couple times at Camp Lejeune, but Camp Pendleton, I didn't. I'm a believer and I've got a rich heritage between my grandfather and my father, who was also the head of the organization in town when they first got started in Metuchen, and my other grandfather. So, it was shame on me if I didn't and I'm a believer, but I'm a realistic believer, too. You have to kind of move on, yet, you can't forget your tradition. I think that's what we've accomplished and we're satisfied within ourselves. Since I met this marvelous, beautiful, young lady there, I've had a good life.

SI: You indicated earlier that you encountered some anti-Semitism in the Marine Corps. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

DW: The only time I felt any anti-Semitism in the Marine Corps was at the same time that those people in the Confederate Army didn't want to admit that they had lost the war.

SI: Back at Parris Island.

DW: When they found out that I had an "H" on my tag, that was commented on a few times. Otherwise, it didn't matter much and I didn't run into any problems like that, no. "Hey, Hebe," you know, a couple of things like that--well, that's what I was, I'm proud of that. That was only a couple of kooks. They were the same guys that were still fighting the Civil War.

SI: Do you remember the month that you were sent back to the States from Okinawa?

DW: I really don't. I know that we got on a big transport ship and we went to Tokyo, picked up some more people, and then, came home. I really didn't want to go ashore and I don't think I could've. Some people said they did get ashore. I don't know the circumstance of that, but I didn't. I came right back here and I was discharged in May of 1946.

JW: Why don't you tell him about what you did with the equipment that you couldn't bring back?

DW: I'm not bragging about that, really. When the war ended, they had a lot of equipment that they had to get back. Some of it, they gave away to certain official authorities that they dealt with, but they had some old jeeps. One of the games they used to play was, you'd get in a jeep and you'd go into the ocean and the one that goes the furthest before it conks out is the winner. So, we got rid of a number of jeeps. I was not involved in that, I watched it, though, and they were all beat-up things. I mean, they were things that were not going to be ever brought back anywhere else. So, maybe they're a reef there someplace now, I don't know, but that was a "party day."

SI: Did you ever have any interaction with any native Okinawans?

DW: No, not really. I'm not sure, though, of that. That's what I was going to say before--the prisoners that they had, that we were working with, I think most of them, or a lot of them, were Okinawans. In other words, they were prisoners of the Japanese and, obviously, they became our prisoners as a result. We couldn't sometimes tell the difference, because they looked the same and spoke the same language. I think they spoke Japanese; I never learned the language. That's what I think, though.

SI: In your unit's area, did you ever have any issues with Japanese stragglers, those who were hiding out in the jungles, coming into your area?

DW: Yes. Well, we didn't have any at our place, but other ones did. The other thing is, every once in a while, the Japanese tried to get their dead with them, but, half a dozen times that I was there, you end up and you find a dead Japanese. The danger was that they used to booby-trap a lot of them. Somebody reaches for a flag, they wanted to get a flag or something, and so, we knew enough just to stay away, report it and have somebody come in, just take them away and

do what they had to do. The thing that impressed me the most was how young those Japanese dead soldiers appeared. They looked to me like they were only in their young teens. I really believe that. I guess at the end of the war, that's the way it was, but they were so young. We had the same problem, though. The 77th Army came into us before the island was secured and they were still fighting after we were fighting, after we secured Orange Beach. Other parts of the island still weren't secured and they'd come and land on our beach, and then, move down to where they had to go. I looked at these 77th Army guys--those kids looked like they were seventeen. I mean, they looked like they were just out of high school. This was at the end of the war time. It bothered me a little. I mean, they had to, I guess they had to. I'm not telling you that they didn't, shouldn't have brought them or whatever, but so young, I mean, didn't live at all.

JW: You were young, too.

DW: Now, that doesn't mean they were killed. I don't know that, but I guess I'm a fairly humane person. I don't want to admit it sometimes, but I am.

SI: I know that at the time of the Okinawa invasion, draftee Marines were put into action, men who had not enlisted in the Marines. They were actually drafted and told to go in the Marine Corps. Were you aware of that? Did you have any interaction with those Marines?

DW: It didn't matter to me. Now, did other people? I don't know, and I never asked anybody, "Were you drafted or did you enlist?" To me, that would be ludicrous. As I said to you, somebody who was working as a "Rosie the Riveter" was important to the effort.

SI: Once you returned to the States, how soon after that were you discharged?

DW: Pretty soon. I was discharged from the West Coast.

SI: If you were discharged in May 1946, you were probably overseas on Okinawa for quite a while after the war.

DW: Yes, we were there for a while. We became laborers, to a degree. There was a lot of work, there was a lot of stuff that had to come back and they had us there. They weren't going to use us anyhow. I'm sure guys in every area were thrown into action. Hey, there was nothing wrong with that and, if they could've watched us on those Friday afternoons with the jeeps, they would've known it was worthwhile.

SI: After you returned home, did you have any difficulty readjusting to civilian life?

DW: I don't think I did.

SI: You mentioned off the record that you used coarser language in the Marine Corps. How long did it take to get that out of your system?

DW: I adjust pretty quickly.

JW: He knew when to use it and when not to use it.

DW: I like to say that I can adjust to situations. I'm very lucky that way. I guess it's something you can do or you can't do. There's something up there that's telling me, "You can do it," or can't do it, and that's what it's all about. I guess, being a minority member myself, to a degree--not anymore, but in those days--I never had any animosity toward anyone who didn't quite understand what relationships really were, because I understood that they inherited it, mostly. There's a show, we used to go to all the shows, "You have to learn to hate." What I'm saying is that every human being is subject to their surroundings and certain things developed that they don't know there's another way. This is the way it was. Like, when my father first moved to Metuchen, as I said, no one was not nice to him, but he had a feeling. He never said that to me; when we came to Metuchen, I was not even a year old. I told you how I told him to move to Metuchen.

SI: You knew about anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany before the war, but when did you first learn about the Holocaust and the camps?

DW: I heard discussions of it, but I didn't really learn about it until after I got out of the service. I heard about it and I heard from relatives that they lost relatives and things like that, but I didn't hear any of that until after I was out of the service. When I was in the service, I didn't hear anything about a Holocaust. We knew that there were Jewish people getting killed, but we knew also that Polish people were getting killed, we knew that British people were getting killed. They were put in the concentration camps, too, but nothing like what happened to the Jewish population. They were trying to wipe out a race and probably would've done it if Hitler had won his war. I wouldn't be here talking to you.

The GI Bill Years at Rutgers College of Pharmacy

Donald began his affiliation with Rutgers University in the Fall of 1946 when he entered Rutgers College of Pharmacy, a relationship that continues to this day. He excelled in the classroom, becoming a member of Rho Chi, the pharmaceutical honorary society, in 1949, as well as in extracurricular activities, serving as president of this class and a member of the College of Pharmacy basketball team.

SI: What did you intend to do when you got out of the military?

DW: When I was discharged from the Marine Corps, I really didn't know specifically where I was headed as far as the future or at that point. When I came home to Metuchen, my dad had already developed multiple sclerosis. He was fine mentally, it didn't touch him, but he really couldn't handle himself on his feet. My grandfather, who was a pharmacist, but never practiced in this country, had already sold his candy store. While I was in the service, he was helping Dad out in the store. I thought, right away, that I wanted to be a pharmacist, mainly because I wanted to help him. I had no other ambitions at that point that were specific. I was thinking of getting into chemistry, some field of that nature, but I've got to tell you right now, I don't regret one moment going to pharmacy school. I've enjoyed every moment. I even enjoyed pharmacy school, so, I guess there's something wrong with me. At that point, it was up in Newark and it was a lot different than here. So, from that moment on, I had no questions about what I wanted to do or what I planned to do, even when I got out, because I knew that I wanted to go into the pharmacy and that was a big deal, because they needed me. I needed them as much as they needed me. Together, we worked as a family for ten years, until my father passed, and then, the next year, my grandfather passed.

SI: You got out of the Marine Corps in 1946. How soon afterward did you enter Rutgers School of Pharmacy?

DW: That September. That year, I got into the College of Pharmacy, in '46, and I graduated in '50. I didn't wait around a long time, because I've kind of been that way through most of my life. I try to think things out, but, then, when I do, I try to move on them. It didn't take me long to realize that pharmacy was where I was going when I got home. I think it was almost immediate.

SI: How did you decide on Rutgers?

DW: How did I decide on Rutgers? First of all, I was always kind of a Rutgers fan, but the main reason that I decided on Rutgers, it was the nearest school to our pharmacy and I was working part-time while I was going to school. So, it was convenient for me, even though it was in Newark. I'd just hop on a train and come home, but, to me, I was hung up with Rutgers pretty early in my life--out of the womb, I think.

SI: Did you commute every day to school?

DW: Yes, I commuted through the whole four years, actually. Joyce and I were married in 1949, the year before I graduated, but she graduated in '49 from Trenton State Teachers College.

JW: The College of New Jersey.

DW: Sorry. Please note that correction. We were married and that was the only year or so when I did not live in Metuchen. I lived in Metuchen eighty-seven-plus years. We lived in Roselle in an apartment for a year. We lived in Roselle and, when we lived there, I had a car. I would start in the morning and I would pick up a couple of friends that were going to pharmacy school and take Joyce. She was teaching in Elizabeth at ...

JW: School 19.

DW: Right near the circle there, off of Route 1. So, I would drop her off at school, and then, I would go to college with the two or three guys that I'd pick up along the way. I did that regularly. The train I used probably for the first two couple of years, and then, after that, the car. I met Joyce coming home on a train. She was coming to Metuchen at the same time to have dinner with my sister, who was her classmate. That's how I met this gal. I got off the train and my sister tells me I ignored her, my sister, and I picked up her books and her bag. We had dinner, and then, their friend came to our house to pick them up and take them back to college. That's when I told my mother I was marrying her. Her reply was, "Does she know it yet?" It took me a while, a lot of time, for her to really accept the fact that she could be Mrs. Donald Wernik.

JW: I thought he was too aggressive.

DW: Actually, we were engaged about six months later, but we were engaged for two years, because she was still in school and I was just starting school. So, we were engaged for two years, and then, we were married in 1949.

SI: At Rutgers, do any of your professors stand out in your memory or any of the classes that you took?

DW: Professor Cox was a Professor of Pharmacy. He was, if you used the expression, called an "old timer" and he got his message across very clearly and everybody loved him. He didn't like it, but everybody really loved him. There were a lot of people, Dr. Roy A. Bowers, who was the Dean a little later on, but, actually, it was more after I started to teach than at the school; Dean Tom D. Rowe, who was the Dean then, he was a wonderful guy. I was involved with the student government there, because of my involvement with our class, and so, I had to meet with him, but there were a lot. George Kadersha taught and he was a professor, but, also, he was the basketball coach. We had a very unusual situation with that, in that those who coalesced at the Pharmacy School, we were all from different classes. You would never get a mix like that again and it just turned out that we ended up with seven or eight very good basketball players. We beat schools like Panzer, which was a phys. ed. college in those days. It doesn't exist, I don't think, anymore. We almost beat Newark-Rutgers there. We really had a very good team and we won the Pharmacy League.

SI: Can you say what the Pharmacy League was?

DW: The Pharmacy League was a league which included Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, Columbia, Fordham, St. John's, Philadelphia and Temple College of Pharmacy, all pharmacy colleges, and Rutgers. We played home-and-home series each year and our team, we actually won the league all four years and, actually, only lost one game in that four years. As I said to you on the side once, we feel we were cheated out of that one.

SI: Which position did you play?

DW: You would call it a point guard today. We had on our team a fellow who is now deceased, (Aaron Green?). If he were playing in this era, he had a shot which would be a three-point shot today. He could make nine out of ten of them. We had a couple of big boys then. Six-foot-two then was a big guy. Today, six-two is a point guard. It just was different. I played football in high school and I was 180 and I was the heaviest guy on our team. So, things kind of have changed, but we had an excellent team, we really did. We were together for three of the four years. Then, a couple of them graduated ahead of the rest of us, but we still had enough that we were okay.

SI: Were all of the basketball players veterans?

DW: No, we had a couple out of high school, Allen Yard and Eddie Moshinski. Ed was an unguided missile. He would cause a terrible uproar to the opposition. They wouldn't know where he was going or what he'd done and he played a good game of basketball. He was a freshman when we were--I'd say when we started--but he was a freshman, a true freshman, because he had just gotten out of high school, just like Yard did. Then, we had some guys that had already two years in school, but, then, the curriculum changed. So, they ended up starting over. None of them that came back had less than three years before they could finish and that was the big plus for us also, because we would never have all been together for three out of those four years.

SI: Do you know how the curriculum had changed? Had they made it more stringent?

DW: What changed in the curriculum is the position of the pharmacist, which has changed. Now, I'm getting back to my teaching days, but I talk about the three different eras: the compounding, the count-lick-and-pour and the clinical part. The compounding was probably until, and I was involved in that, the late '40s. Then, we were making our own pills and we're making our own capsules. We were actually doing all those things in the pharmacy. Then, the count-lick-and-pour was the era where the manufacturers started developing new drugs and making packages of tablets and capsules, and so, we weren't doing the compounding like we did. We always did some, but less, and that's where the count-lick-and-pour came in. Then, after that, when we finally developed the profile record card system--I think you saw that I was kind of involved in that--once we did that, clinical pharmacy started. Really, that was the beginning of it, because you couldn't do anything if you didn't have the record of the patient. So, it wasn't until 1972 in New Jersey--that was when I was President of the Board of Pharmacy--we required that all pharmacies in New Jersey have profile record cards, which is a family record card. So, when somebody brought in a prescription for a refill, you pulled the card, because there were no

computers in those days. You pulled the card and you knew what they'd had before, you knew what their allergies were, you knew if they had a problem. Until that time, we were shooting crap. A prescription would come in, we might fill the same prescription the next week and not realize it, if it was a different pharmacist. This way, with the family record card, you'd pull that card all the time. Pharmacy wasn't excited about it in the beginning, because it was something new. Any time there's something new, people kind of react, but it turned out to be the best thing in the world. That profile record card, family record card, developed into the practice of clinical pharmacy, where, now, pharmacists are working with physicians. A lot of the pharmacists are given authority, through certification, to give injections, to take on patients for periods of time. For instance, my son, Hal, has a certification in diabetes and high blood pressure, two or three other things. Once you get certified, there are certain things that you have; you could be assigned a patient, still under the doctor's care, but they'd come in and you review their medication with them. You can recommend to the doctor changes in the medication. It relieves the physician's office and the patient, too, because, then, you don't have to go running to the doctor. There's nobody that doesn't go to their pharmacy at least once a month and most people more than that. So, they have that relationship with the pharmacist and it's improving the lot of people who have chronic conditions. They can't run to the doctor every month, but a pharmacist can see, "Hey, there's a change in this person. They don't look right to me." That even happened when I was in pharmacy. A pharmacist is the best guide, maybe, on how the patient's doing. They come in one time and they're looking great. The next time they come in, "Hey, there's something that isn't just right." Many times, we would call the physician, and not just me, all pharmacists. That's their thing. You're there to help people. A lot of times, people would never know it. You could wean people off of medication. This was before we got into clinical. So, things were going on a long time even before I got into pharmacy, I can tell you that, but the record-keeping that we had changed everything. At that point, the pharmacist became a full member of the health team and, today, there's no question about it.

SI: At Rutgers, you mentioned that there were a lot of veterans on campus, GI Bill students.

DW: Right.

SI: How did the veterans affect the atmosphere of the campus and the classroom?

DW: They affected the school. You have to understand that we were Rutgers, okay--in fact, I have a varsity Rutgers basketball letter--but we were in a separate building. It had been a factory before. There were about seventy-five to eighty people in a class there, less than four hundred people in the whole place. So, when you had one quarter of that, immediately, mostly veterans. A lot of things changed as far as how things were handled in the school. It isn't that the veterans took over, don't misunderstand it. I'm not trying to say that, but I am trying to say that there were a lot of changes that were made subtly in the school because of the presence of the veterans, and the faculty was very understanding that way, too. They were very helpful. I was a busy guy for a few years. A lot of things kept coming up and I was one of the younger veterans, actually. I went into the service when I was eighteen years old. I'd just made it to my eighteenth birthday. There were guys in the service that were twenty-six, twenty-seven when they went in. They had a wife and two kids and things like this. Essentially, you had somebody who was twenty-five and twenty-six years old who wouldn't accept *carte blanche* things that they felt were not

absolutely right. They wouldn't rebel. We never had anything like that, but we had a very good class that way. We worked together and we worked with the faculty. There was no "them" and "us." It was "we" and we had a good faculty. I could think of eight other guys that were faculty members.

SI: For a commuter, you were very active on campus, with student government and other groups.

DW: Right.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about some of the other activities you were involved in, besides basketball?

DW: Yes, well, they had basketball. They had various clubs, too, a culture club, we had student government organizations, there were a number. If you look through the yearbook, you'll find some more, too. If you're looking at the yearbook that I showed you, you'll see pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Don Wernik, because we were married already. We used to have a junior prom, senior, we had things like that. Even the veterans, they went along with it all. In the beginning, they thought that was kind of kid stuff, but, as we got along into our years, we became very, very close to each other. So, it wasn't like a junior prom, it was like an opportunity to get together, and we would do that.

SI: I am looking at the Class of 1950 yearbook, *The Scarlet Ray*. You were president of the class this year.

JW: All four, weren't you?

DW: No, the last three.

JW: Oh.

DW: The guy who was the president the first year flunked out. No, he was a really sweet guy. He was the first one to get known. We had our elections the first time, we didn't even know each other. It was "flip a coin" and he was a shoo-in, but, unfortunately, he didn't last very long.

SI: What kind of activities would you do as the president of the class?

DW: We had class meetings and they were very democratic, because I had to be careful. I was the new kid on the block and, here, I'm telling these guys, twenty-six and twenty-seven, what is right and what they ought to be doing, but we became friends right away, because nobody was trying to outdo anyone else. We're just trying to get things done. There were some times when we felt that certain tests were not even appropriate. We would meet and discuss it, and then, usually, I'd have the--I won't say unpleasant--the opportunity to meet with the faculty people when there were some problems about curriculum, about scheduling certain events, the normal situations that you would run into with any class organization that you have in any school. It wasn't any different, really. The only difference was that the only thing that we had for an

activity was a Ping-Pong table, down in what used to be, I guess, the cellar. That was headquarters--that was the big deal--and the yard. We had a yard behind the school. I would say it was sixty-by-sixty or a little larger, fenced-in. That's where the factory used to use it for whatever purposes. That was our playground and we used to go out there at lunchtime and different classes had teams. We'd come back from lunch filthy dirty, our clothes ripped. We would play baseball, but, if you hit it out of the yard, you were out. You had to hit it within the boundaries of the fences. Football, the goal line was the fence. I've got to tell you, we had a lot of fun. We kept doing it the whole four years. I just brought old clothes in. I would put them on and go out.

SI: Do you remember an example or two of an issue that you would have to work out between the student body and the faculty?

DW: I think there were a couple of things that came up because a lot of the guys, and gals, were working and doing other things and the scheduling of exams came up as a problem not infrequently. We'd have special meetings of our class if problems came up, and then, I would go to the faculty member involved. You know something? They were always cooperative. There was no argument, there was no dissent or anything like that. Sometimes, we wanted some classes to be changed, as far as the timing went. So, that would be the most frequent problem. Did specific problems come up? Yes, they did, but this was the one that I think is more worth discussing, the fact that either exams or classes or events were scheduled and it didn't fit into the pattern. A lot of the guys were working after school. The guys that were twenty-six and twenty-seven, they'd been working in some stores before they even went into the service and they were back working part-time. Since we had so many guys that were working, we had some problems that would come up, but I can't think of one time that they didn't help us, if they could. Sometimes, they couldn't.

SI: Having the veterans in the classroom, I have heard about this in other interviews, they would sometimes challenge what the professor was saying. They would question whether it was right or wrong. Do you remember any incidents?

DW: Yes, in pharmacy, at that time, you didn't have that kind of a situation. You were being given knowledge. There was nothing sociological or confrontational about it. The only time was, once in a while, if somebody would give an unreasonable amount of some homework. Homework was a problem, because most of the guys didn't have a heck of a lot of time to do anything. After a period of time, that leveled off. So, what a lot of them would do, they would give us some time in class for it. I think they changed their presentations so that you were home reviewing, you weren't home doing homework of the nature that we think of, reviewing things and writing texts and stuff like that. That didn't happen after a while.

SI: I know that at many other schools within Rutgers University, the student body grew substantially during the GI Bill period. Did the College of Pharmacy pretty much keep the same level of enrollment or did they increase as well?

DW: No, during the years when I was there, there was very little change--a little, very little. Don't forget, we were only there for four years. By the time they got to Busch Campus, I think

by then you were talking about 125, 130. Now, they're talking about 250. Don't forget, we're graduating only Pharm.D.s now. That came long after. I was involved in the establishment of the Pharm.D. program, but that came in the late 1990s.

Reginald Best: When you were in pharmacy school, it was only a four-year course.

DW: It became five years and, now, it's six years. When I graduated, it was four. When my father graduated, it was two.

SI: When you were a student at Rutgers, was there any effort to expose students to different aspects of pharmacy, for example, what was happening in the pharmaceutical industry at the time?

DW: When we were in school, that hadn't come yet. It was just, "Get out of college, graduate, and you've got a job waiting for you or find a job." It was going to be, in most cases, an independent pharmacy, but not only. There were some chains that were starting out already.

JW: And industry, too.

DW: A noted graduate became the CEO of Home Depot.

JW: Oh, yes. Marcus was his last name, wasn't it?

DW: Marcus. I was one of his instructors and he went to Two Guys from Harrison for his externship. That was the last time I heard from him, until I found out, years later, he was the CEO. So, he must've learned something in Two Guys from Harrison, to learn how to deal with a multiple number of people in a multiple number of affairs, but it was a shock to me, I have to tell you, Bernie Marcus. I used to *kibitz* him, every once in a while--I haven't seen him in years and years and years--"If it wasn't for me, you'd have been no place," I would tell him. He didn't believe that.

JW: And some did go into industry, too.

DW: At that time? Yes, there were some that went into industry.

JW: And sales, too, for the companies, for the big companies, drug companies.

DW: Thank you; a very few, but some did. In fact, one of the classmates that we met, Bill Pfeiffer and his wife, graduated from pharmacy school in 1950. He went into industry. There were fraternities also.

SI: Yes, I wanted to ask about that.

DW: Yes, there was AZO. I am actually a member of AZO. If you look in that book, you'll see other ones, too. There were three or four and there was a sorority, too, in the school. Of course, they had their own organizations and their projects.

SI: How much of a traditional fraternity were these pharmacy fraternities? Did they have, for example, a fraternity house? Was there a social scene?

DW: There was a house. Not up there in Newark, for sure, but they had a place in New Brunswick for a while, and then, of course, when we got down to Busch Campus, AZO is now nonsectarian. Originally, it was mostly Hebrew/Jewish people who belonged. Anyhow, there were three or four, but a lot of them were religion-based, to a degree, but that's changed, of course, and you have different members. AZO, right now, there are members of all races and all religions that belong to it.

SI: I know that religious segregation was the norm up into the early 1960s.

DW: I guess, yes.

SI: In your fraternity, were most of the members Jewish at that time?

DW: At that time, yes, it was. I was never very active. I was involved in so many other things.

Following in the Family Business, Guiding the Field of Pharmacy

From the day Donald became a registered pharmacist in 1951, he continued on in his family's legacy of excellence in delivering professional pharmaceutical services and dedicated service to their profession. He served as the proprietor of Wernik's Pharmacy until 1989. He also became active in the Middlesex County Pharmaceutical Society, serving as President of the Society from 1957 to 1959.

SI: You were also working part-time at your father's store. Did you see any changes at that time in how the store was run? You mentioned that, in general, there was a transition in pharmacies from compounding to using the pre-manufactured pills.

DW: I always told the story, we had, in our pharmacy, the beginnings of patient recordkeeping, but it was done verbally in the beginning. How it worked was, I could be in the back, making citrate of magnesium, which we used to make up as a laxative, and my father would say, when a customer would come in, "Front, please." What did that mean? That meant, "There's someone in the front of the store, they need attention, let's talk to them." Essentially, that's what consultation started out as being. Instead of having somebody roam around the store, you greet them, talk to them, "How you doing? What's going on?" and I always think back and I say, "Oh, that's where I got the idea." I think, when somebody comes in the pharmacy, they're here not because there's just nothing else to do. Generally, they have a problem of some kind, having to do with medication or whatever, because, in our pharmacy especially, we didn't have a lot of nonrelated items. We had the surgical supply and we had regular over-the-counter drug items and very little else early on. My father just preferred it that way and that's the way we kept it. That's the way it was not only when I got out of pharmacy school but for a few years after that. Then, just like anything else, you had to adjust with the times.

We were one of the first ones to get into surgical supplies. Now, you'll see almost all pharmacies have some part devoted to surgical supplies, because it's a very necessary commodity, especially for senior citizens. We went out into the community, to extended care facilities, to hospitals, and we started to supply them.

By the time we sold our pharmacy, our surgical supply was worth more than the pharmacy itself, substantially. We had some vehicles on the road, making visitations to hospitals and nursing homes. Some other people decided that, for them, it was different, they had to put in groceries. Some people had to put in cosmetics, a lot of cosmetics. There were those who I felt were just not fair. Anybody that wasn't what they called "pure pharmacy," they were "killing the profession." That's baloney. The thing that's important is that they wanted to stay in business. They wanted to be able to keep providing a service and, if they didn't have some adjunct niche in, they weren't going to be able to make it financially. That didn't dilute their delivery of their professional services. The proof in the pudding is, a lot of the chains now have big prescription departments. In fact, if pharmacies, in those days, put something in there, there were those who would say, "Oh, they can't even be in our organization. Look at them, they've got groceries, they've got fishing tackle, they've got," whatever it is, and that just wasn't true. They were doing it so that they could stay in business and there's nothing wrong with that, in my opinion.

SI: Do you remember approximately what year you started the surgical supply section of the business?

DW: I would say in the '60s some time, we started it and it grew from there. This young lady here had mastectomy fittings and she went to school and she did the mastectomy fittings in the pharmacy. I have to tell you, someone would come into the store and I'd look at them and I could tell right away, the lady had an appointment with Mrs. Wernik, because she was just depressed. She always made it a point--first of all, she gave a treatment, she didn't just do a fitting--she always made sure she had stock, so that when somebody came in, as long as it was appropriate, she could fit them and they could walk out with it right away, instead of having to come back again. A lot of people would wait until they'd fit somebody--they didn't want to have any inventory--and then, say, "Oh, you'll come back in two days and we'll have it for you." They always walked out with it and it was like a different person leaving than the one that came in. It was that dramatic a change just by her doing it--terrific gal, this gal here. She was a counselor at the same time. I have to say, I'm very proud of her.

SI: Mrs. Wernik, you went into teaching after settling in Metuchen.

JW: Yes, I was teaching already, actually. I got a job in Elizabeth, teaching second grade.

SI: Okay. I was not sure if that was student teaching or a regular teaching job.

JW: No. Student teaching is before you graduate, the year before, and that was also in Elizabeth. I did student teaching, in first grade, and that was almost the end of my teaching career, because it was a terrible section. The kids were bigger than the teachers, but, when I taught second grade, I had a wonderful principal. The school was great and the people whose children went to that school were very supportive of the teachers. Teacher could do no wrong--it was always the child's fault. Now, it's completely different, but I enjoyed teaching. I taught for two years, and then, we started our own family.

SI: You left teaching in 1951.

JW: Yes, right.

DW: That was a loss to the teaching profession, for sure, but there was a gain at home. In seven years, we had all four of our children. She was a pretty busy gal.

SI: As the 1950s and 1960s progressed, you were finding your niche in surgical supply. You mentioned that you were the first pharmacy in the region to offer surgical supply.

DW: One of the first.

SI: One of the first. How did you get the idea, or did it just evolve naturally as your customers requested items?

DW: No, as a matter-of-fact, it didn't. I had a very dear friend, his name was Milton Kahn. He was very active in the Pharmaceutical Association and I became active through him and his encouragement. He and his wife were fifteen years our senior, but we became so close. We'd go on vacations together. We just had a wonderful relationship. At that point, he was out of community pharmacy already. He was managing a hospital pharmacy, Somerset Hospital. He suggested to me that I think about getting some surgical items, Chux underpads, some catheters. So, that's how we started out. We started out with a half a dozen items and it kept growing. As the people saw that you had it, then, they'd ask for things that you didn't have. I'd say, "We'll get it right away." We built an inventory, and then, we started visiting hospitals and extended care facilities and servicing them and delivering to them, so that they didn't have to spend the time going out and looking for things. They'd give us the order and we'd deliver it. It just grew from there, but Milton Kahn and his wife, Molly, were very, very dear friends.

JW: She was a pharmacist, also.

DW: They're both deceased, now. He became like my big brother. My father passed in 1960. This was probably in the late '60s, when we really got into surgical supply.

SI: Can you tell me, in general, what the role of women in pharmacy was at that time?

DW: Actually, most of them worked part-time when they graduated, but not all. Some of them went full-time. They would start full-time, and then, they would get married, maybe, and they would go part-time. A lot of them, later on, had a home, they could work when they wanted to. It was good, but a lot of them worked full-time.

SI: At that time, do you think there were any barriers to women getting into the profession or any prejudice against women at the time?

DW: There might've been, but I never noticed it. We had a woman in our pharmacy. We were very happy to have her.

SI: How early on in your career did you get involved in the Pharmaceutical Association?

DW: I graduated in 1950--in 1951. My father was involved. In fact, I have a couple of publications, I didn't know Dad was the treasurer, at one time, of the county organization.

JW: Really? I didn't know that.

DW: And his multiple sclerosis did him in. He couldn't go to meetings anymore. So, he asked me to represent him and I went. That was, I guess, in 1953. Like anything else, if you get involved, before you know it, you're an officer. I think I was president of the county group in the '50s.

SI: You were President of the Middlesex County Pharmaceutical Society from 1957 to 1959.

DW: All right, there you go. I'll tell you a funny story, how I really became involved. I went to a meeting of the county society and they greeted me as my dad's son, of course, and they were very nice about him. He couldn't make meetings anymore. They put me on a committee, Harold Kushel's committee, and it was public relations. I came home, I told my dad, "I'm on the committee." He said, "Already? You just went to a meeting." "They wanted me to get involved." The next meeting, I go back and Harold, the chairman of the committee, gets up and makes the report, but he hadn't had a meeting between the time I was appointed and then, or, if he did, he didn't invite me. He made the report. I just kind of jumped up--I wasn't as politically attuned as I think I became --and I let everybody realize that that was his report, but it isn't the committee report, because the committee never even met--a little controversial, didn't last that long, but I remember that as my first confrontation in pharmacy, maybe. Then, I stayed involved, of course, and I did become the president of the county organization in 1957. What it was in those days, like anything, if you're really interested and you're involved, you're going to move up, not because you're great, but because you have the interest and people are willing to work with you. If you can do that, then, you don't have to have a lot of talent. I never had a lot of talent, but I was able to get people to work with me.

JW: Very modest.

DW: Wherever I have been involved, I've been just very fortunate. In the county, when I was on the Freeholder Board, in the Association, I never had problems getting people to work with me.

SI: On the county level, what kind of issues would the Society deal with? What were the main goals of the County Pharmaceutical Society?

DW: I think the Pharmaceutical Society, at that point, had a problem with the chain stores. So, that was a topic many times. The hours of closing became a topic. At one time, when I got out of school, a lot of pharmacies were closing at ten o'clock. I think we were closing nine-thirty already, I'm not sure, might've been ten o'clock already.

JW: Ten o'clock.

DW: Ten o'clock then?

JW: Yes.

DW: Then, there were some questions, sometimes, of the ethical behavior of some of our members. Some of the greatest leaders were the greatest finaglers before they became successful, and then, they become completely lily pure. It was a lot of problems with neighbors. They'd come to meetings and they would smile at each other, but, when they got home, look out. When I got out of school, there were three pharmacies, Boyt's, Wernik's and Metuchen Pharmacy. I was working Sunday. I was sitting there, looking out at the store down the street and the other store. I said, "My God, this is kind of stupid. We're all open and there's no need for more than one, if there's even a need for that. Why don't we just start to alternate closings?" I mentioned it to my dad, to Mr. (Burroughs?) and Mr. Belafsky--well, actually, Mr. Boyt was still involved there, too--and they thought I was crazy. I mean, you had to be nuts there. "We're

going to close and let the other guys get our customers?" After a couple of years, I convinced them to try it one summer and they said they would try, just to see what happened. That was the last time that they didn't alternate on Sundays, because it worked out fine. Then, they were cooperating on closing hours and vacation time and we got along so well.

We got to the point where somebody would come into the pharmacy, what would happen is, if they'd try to pit one store against the other, we'd put the phone up and ask the question across, "What are you doing for this and that?" The people would recognize that they couldn't play that game, because we weren't there trying to chop each other up. We actually were colleagues, rather than competitors. If we had to borrow something, we would call them up and we didn't even have to cross the street. They'd throw it across the street, and vice versa. When their store burned down, they filled their prescriptions in our pharmacy, for a number of months, while their store was being rebuilt. They would've done that for us, too. As it was, our pharmacy was filling prescriptions and, right next to it, in the same pharmacy department, they were filling their prescriptions for their customers, with our merchandise, too. They paid us for whatever they used, of course, but that's what everything should be about. Nobody wins when you start belittling your neighbor or your competitor, if you want to call it that, your colleague, which I prefer to call it. No one benefits from that.

Metuchen Pharmacy closed, ultimately. Boyt's was right across the street from Wernik's. Boyt's is there now, Wernik's was across the street. At one point, we had two pharmacies, one in Metuchen, one in Oak Tree. I had to make a choice, because my youngest brother had been a pharmacist, but he wasn't happy in pharmacy. With just myself and my other brother, who was not a pharmacist, and my brother-in-law, who was handling the surgical supply, we had to make a decision on selling one store. The practical way to do it would've been to sell the Metuchen store--I couldn't do that. My father had established that and it was a good business. So, we sold the store in Oak Tree. So, we had the Metuchen store and a blossoming surgical supply. I carried on in the pharmacy until about 1989.

We sold the pharmacy in 1989 to two young people. The people that bought the pharmacy from us really were looking for the surgical supply, because they could see it as an up-and-coming thing. We had initiated a lot of things that developed into a very good business, but they improved it tremendously through the years. They had it for twenty years. They liquidated it. They were not quite as much involved in the pharmacy part of it or the community, but they ended up with eight or nine trucks on the road delivering healthcare to institutions, to hospitals and servicing the public as well. So, they did well with their business.

When they bought our pharmacy, they kept the name. The reason they really kept the name was that all the surgical supplies that we had in the pharmacy were purchased through Wernik's Pharmacy. At that time, when we sold the pharmacy, the surgical supply companies weren't opening up new accounts anymore. They were going through wholesalers, because it was better for them, but they didn't close you out if you did a certain amount of volume, so that they could keep the accounts by keeping the name. When we sold the pharmacy, we had to let them keep the name.

I think, now, there's a lot less of the controversy between stores, but it still exists, to a degree. The independent pharmacies, you see, there are a smaller number of them now and they're niching, too. You'll see compounding pharmacies, you'll see a couple of them that are really chains, but they're small pharmacies, and they're making it. They're doing okay. They're niching, they're doing what they can do, they're doing it well and they're staying in business.

SI: You said that the County Pharmaceutical Society was, in some ways, trying to challenge the chains coming in. How were they doing that?

DW: The chains, of course, were reducing prices on everything, but the main thing that the independents felt was that the patients weren't getting the same care that they were getting from independent pharmacies, that independent pharmacies knew their patients, were taking care of them. They would get the same pharmacist all the time. In the chains, they weren't getting the personalized service. That was certainly one thing. The other thing was that the feeling was that the patient, by going to an independent pharmacy, he wasn't hurried, he was given attention and, in chain stores, they just didn't feel that they were getting the same treatment. Also, hey, part of it was, let's face it, they were getting hurt financially by the chain stores being there. Let's not kid ourselves and say that wasn't an important factor.

When I was involved politically, there were some people, they were very good friends of mine, but they went to my other neighbor pharmacy. I didn't expect that they would change and I didn't even care, really. I like people to be loyal to me and, thank goodness, we had enough of those. When I got involved politically, there were people that'd say, "Hey, you're going to have a problem, because you're going to get some people who are going to be upset at some of the things you do politically." They were right, but only very few and, for every one like that, you maybe even picked up a half a dozen new people because they liked what you were doing.

SI: I would like to go back to the development of the patient family record. You said that it started with your father.

DW: I was reaching I guess, a little bit, but that was the beginning.

SI: The spirit of it.

DW: The idea, the spirit was there, that's right. When I got out of the service, I started a record card. It was the name of the family, it was the date, the prescription number and the price, nothing else, and then, I said to myself, "Gee, I could do better than that." Then, I added the name of the drug, and then, a little later on, put down any allergies. Then, I realized it can't be just family, because, then, you get the card filled up and you've got to get the name on it also, the member of the family. So, it cuts down on the time that you're going to be wasting. I actually brought it to the attention of the county group, and then, the State Association. A lot of people believed in it and they thought it was a good idea, that they didn't think should be legislated. My feeling was that, sometimes, you have to legislate things. You wish you didn't have to, but, in order to get them started, if you're going to wait for people to all decide they're going to do it also, and it would've happened, but it could've taken twenty-five years before it got to that point. Then, when I was actually on the Board of Pharmacy, I had something that was a lot more

sophisticated that I was doing in the store and I brought that to the attention of the Board and they thought it was a good idea. I'm sure we're not the only people in the whole country that were doing something, but, in the state, there was no regulation, there was no reason. I'm not going to tell you there's nobody that was doing anything--that'd be silly to say, because I don't believe that--but we weren't hearing it from anybody. A couple of other couple guys, when I talked about it, they'd say, "Oh, yes, we're doing this, too." So, then, I suggested that we make it legislatively a responsibility for the pharmacists to keep profile record cards. The Attorney General thought it was a good idea, because it was in the interest of the patient. It was also in the interest of the pharmacists, by the way, because we knew if there was any allergy, we knew if there was any duplication of medication we were dispensing. There was no question about the point that service was being improved. One of the things they also knew was the price. That doesn't sound important, but, before the profile record card, you could get the same prescription filled in two weeks in the same pharmacy and there could be a variance of fifteen, twenty-five, fifty cents or even more. They didn't know what it was before if it was a different pharmacist, if it's a new prescription now, not a refill. There was no consistency in pricing, along with everything else. So, we passed a law in 1972, and then, at that point, New Jersey was the only state in the United States that had a law. There were other states where there were people doing it, there were recommendations, but it wasn't part of the laws of any other state when we did that. Then, slowly, it began. When the computers came in, it made it a whole different ballgame, because it was a piece of cake to do it. It wasn't like where you had to make a new card every time there's a new family. That was the problem in the beginning with the profile record card. For a while, while you're building up your clientele's names in this system, yes, it was spending some time, every time, to do that. What we would do is, we would put them aside and, at night, we would do them. It got a little cumbersome, and then, of course, when computerization came out, it was a whole different ballgame and you just did it as you filled the prescription. That's what allowed the pharmacists to come from just behind the counter to be an active part of the healthcare team. Many times, the doctors called up and asked, "Hey, what other medication is the patient taking?" With the permission of the patient, we could give them that information without any problem, and so, it helps the physicians as well to find out. If they've been given something for high blood pressure and it hasn't worked and they, for some reason, decided to go to another doctor, maybe they'll get more help, the doctor doesn't want to start out with the same medication the other doctor gave, because patients very seldom remember the names of medication. They just don't. This way, there was a resource there. In fact, I had an article in *Medical Economics*--that was with Dr. Wagman, a local doctor--giving examples of how this helped, in some cases, duplication, in some cases, something the person was allergic to, and that if they'd have given it, they'd have had a problem. Because we saw it, they didn't.

SI: When did you first get computers in the pharmacy and switch over to a computerized system?

DW: I wish I could tell you the year, but I can't.

SI: Was it in the 1980s or earlier?

DW: We got into computerization early on. We built our own computer, which turned out to be a mistake, by the way. By the time we finished it, we were working on it for two years, the

computer companies started up and, of course, theirs was much more sophisticated, and then, we could tie into other computers. Ours was a lone computer for a while. In other words, it worked perfect for us, but we couldn't communicate with anybody else. Then, we finally had to go with some vendor.

SI: Before computerization, was there any effort to try to network these record systems between pharmacies or make it a practice where you would check with other pharmacies?

DW: That came later. I'll tell you one thing that did happen, what we did start doing was, we started to communicate when people were taking medication more than they should, for instance, controlled substance medication. That's when we started calling each other. We didn't know, those of us who were doing it ourselves, before we started with the profile record card, that that's the other thing you could do, you could stop abuse. The other way, we didn't catch it--oh, maybe it was two weeks ago, maybe--but, here, we've got the record of when they had it last. Then, we found out, for instance, that a lot of people were getting it filled by us, across the street, down the street. We hadn't known this. So, we started communicating that way. In the county, we set up a system, as a matter-of-fact. That's one thing that the county organization did and I'll have to say I was kind of involved in that. What would happen is, we would call all the surrounding pharmacies. We ended up setting up a network, where we could communicate. Different people made calls to different stores, so that one person didn't have to call all of them. I don't know how many stores we had in the county in those days, but we had assignments. If there was a problem, a person couldn't just continually keep abusing the system. They'd have to leave the county if they were going to do it, because they couldn't do it in the county anymore.

SI: When you did find that someone was abusing the system, what could you do? Would you simply cut them off?

DW: We reported it to the police department and reported it to the Board of Pharmacy.

SI: You decided to get rid of cigarettes early on in your pharmacy. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

DW: A chain has just announced that is not selling cigarettes anymore and they were given recognition and everyone felt that that was the right thing. It just reminded me that, in 1972, when I was still practicing in our pharmacy, we determined that we couldn't fill a prescription for someone to make them feel better, and then, sell them a carton of cigarettes to ruin their lungs and whatever. So, we discarded cigarettes and all tobacco products in 1972. I thought it was kind of funny that we did it in '72 and it took them a little bit longer to get around to it, but you have to realize that a chain that has done something like this is giving up a lot more. Really, cigarettes, when you sold them, it was a companion sale. That was what made it worthwhile. They'd get cigarettes and they'd buy some aspirin or they'd buy toiletries or whatever it was. With us, we didn't give up quite that much, but, when I did do it, the Cancer Society and other groups felt it was the right thing to do and they commended me. I did not lose any business because of it.

Statesman of Pharmacy

Donald continued his quest to make the field of pharmacy safer and more responsive to the patient's needs by taking part in state and national initiatives within the profession. He became active in the New Jersey Pharmaceutical Association, serving as a member of its Board of Trustees from 1961 to 1967, including a term as President of the Association from 1965 to 1966. He represented New Jersey on the Legislation and Examinations Committees of the National Association Board of Pharmacy Blue-Ribbon Committee, which established the first nationwide examinations. He served as a member of the New Jersey Board of Pharmacy from 1967 to 1972. From 1970 to 1973, he served on the American Pharmaceutical Association's Judicial Board.

His relationship with the Rutgers College of Pharmacy deepened as well. He served as President of the College of Pharmacy's Alumni Association from 1957 and 1958 and on the Rutgers Advisory Council from 1961 to 1976. In 1972, he became an integral part of the Rutgers College of Pharmacy faculty, serving as the Director of Intern and Preceptor Programs for the Board of Pharmacy, Director of Community Pharmacy Affairs from 1989 to 1996 and Rutgers University's Coordinator of Pharmacy Continuing Education from 1991 to 1994, all while teaching courses on his specialty, community pharmacy practice.

SI: When did you start to become active on the state level, in the state pharmaceutical organization?

DW: I was President in '65. That means I was an officer in '61. I would say right after my father passed away, I became really active, I think. I was a member of the State Association from 1951 on and I was President in 1965, I'm pretty sure.

SI: Yes, 1965 to 1966. Once you became president of the county organization, did that propel you towards more activity on the state level?

DW: I became more involved. I was involved in a couple of committees of the state organization and you moved up that way.

SI: Was the state organization dealing with the same types of issues that you were dealing with on the county level?

DW: Yes, right, but multiply it by a lot of people. So, they were bigger problems and you needed the State Association to represent everyone. In the beginning, the Association really just represented independents. That's all. Then, later on, as the independent number decreased, the Association needed to do something to keep the membership involved and the numbers of members involved. So, we reached out to hospital pharmacy, we reached out to industrial pharmacy and, ultimately, we even reached out to chain pharmacy. They wouldn't join the Association necessarily, but they would work with the Association. A lot of members of the chain stores joined as independent members of the various counties that they lived in. We even had a division that was established--I'm not sure if it's still in existence as such--where they could meet, but, generally, they would meet with their county. Each of the counties had their own meetings throughout the year.

When we started continuing education--you'll notice, in the beginning, I was kind of involved in that a little bit--that was awfully important for clinical pharmacy, too. The Board required a certain number of continuing education credits to get your license renewal every two years, thirty credits to get your license renewed. So, the Association set up CE programs and, when certification came into being, they set up certain programs, so that it was advantageous for someone to belong to the Association. First of all, they got notice of all the meetings that were available to them. Secondly, it was less expensive for them than a non-member to participate.

SI: Can you talk a little bit about how the continuing education program for pharmacists evolved, requiring continuing education credits for pharmacy licenses?

DW: I think you probably would say that it started a long time before it became law, because it really evolved. We've discussed previously the profile record card and that brought the pharmacist from just being a merchant to being part of the health team. As it evolved, we found out that the pharmacy students in various states had different qualifications and, therefore, different credentials. Then, when it came to reciprocity, if a registered pharmacist in New Jersey wanted to move to New York, he'd have to start all over again taking all the exams. It just didn't seem reasonable. So, actually, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy established programs to try to coordinate the efforts of the various boards of pharmacy. It was not easy in the beginning, because everyone enjoyed their autonomy.

As we moved on through time, we realized that there was certainly a need for coordination. People became more mobile and they started to move from one area to another. It was causing difficulty on both ends for the pharmacist and from the places where he wanted to settle and work who couldn't hire him until he became licensed in that state. So, a Blue Ribbon Committee was established. I happened to have served on that committee, representing the New Jersey Board. What we developed was a pharmacy exam and the concept was one exam that all would take throughout the country on a given day. It would be the same exam and they would become licensed and that would be accredited to their record. Then, if someone wanted to move from one state to another, they still had to meet requirements of law, take the law exam, which is really not that difficult, but they were credited with the part of the exam that required this particular knowledge to become a licensed professional.

Only a few states went along in the beginning, and then, over a period of about maybe six or seven years, virtually all of them did. Then, finally, only Florida and California chose not to and they didn't want to because they didn't want anybody that was moving to Florida for the sunlight to then interfere with the practitioners that were already there and start to compete for the positions in the stores. Then, later on, when there became a shortage of pharmacists, both Florida and California joined the NABP program, so that you could reciprocate into those states.

SI: How often would you have to go to these meetings and what would you do in the actual meetings?

DW: The national meetings were only held usually quarterly, but we communicated. Mostly, it was by letter or notice. During that period of time that we were developing this program, it was

not unusual to have a communication every couple of weeks, and then, we met more often during that period of time, too, usually in different parts of the country.

SI: Was there a particular aspect of that work that you were either tasked to do or that you volunteered to work on? Did you work on developing the test or working with other states to get them involved?

DW: We developed a regular PR program and I think the thing that really brought the other states along was the success of those who had accomplished it. Fortunately, for instance, the surrounding states to New Jersey--Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, even as far as Maryland--all went along right in the beginning, so that in New Jersey, most of the people that left, that went to other states, would end up in one of those states. The ones that were still being settled, if you will, they developed a shortage and their problem just didn't go away. So, they recognized the need to do it as well, but the best PR was the success that those who went into the program achieved.

SI: Did the continuing education requirements evolve out of that?

DW: Right. The other part of how that developed was that that brought everybody together, so that when you wanted to go to other issues, you could. We found out that things were moving so fast that the pharmacists who didn't choose to were getting left behind as far as knowledge was concerned. It was determined that, in order to relicense in New Jersey, it was every two years, you had to have a certain amount of continuing education credits to get the license. We promoted that in New Jersey as one of the first states that did that as well, so that the pharmacist was brought up-to-date. It helped in other ways as well, because what it did do was bring them up-to-date as far as the clinical aspect was concerned, the various treatments and the various things that were starting to happen to make the pharmacist a full member of the health team.

SI: You mentioned giving injections as one example of something that pharmacists learned.

DW: Yes. We have what is called a collaborative practice now. That's an area where the patient, let's say who is a diabetic, is being treated by the doctor. An arrangement can be made between the doctor and the pharmacist who's certified. He has to be certified in the area of concern, which is diabetes in this case, work out a system where the patient will see the pharmacist, say, once a month. If it's a person with diabetes, he'd be checking the levels, he'd be making sure the diet was appropriate, anything he saw, and report all this to the physician. He's working with the physician and the pharmacist receives a payment for that--not from the patient, it's from the plan or the program. These days, almost everybody has some kind of a prescription plan. Preventive medication is really what it is.

SI: You were also on the Judicial Board of the Pharmaceutical Association.

DW: That's the American Pharmaceutical Association. As a matter-of-fact, there were five members on that, only five members. It's like a Supreme Court, if you want to call it that. I was appointed by Bill Apple. He was the CEO of the American Pharmaceutical Association, a very, very respected person. It would handle complaints of one pharmacist against maybe a chain or

against a company. We would hear the complaint, and then, we would determine, quote, a "penalty," if there was one, or we'd determine that it wasn't an appropriate charge. I was proud to be on that committee. We did a lot of good things, resolving things without them becoming public and that was the idea. We got into lawsuits, sometimes, and, sometimes, it cost the Association money, but I think what we did was good and it was appropriate.

Generally speaking, most of the things that had to be resolved, the executive officer could resolve himself with communicating to the members of the committee, so that everything was done. There was one serious situation where a company was directed to do something and they refused to do it. There was a lawsuit and the Association was fined some money because of it. They felt that the operation of this chain store had been hindered to a degree by what they were asking them to accomplish. It was a nice way to resolve problems. At the state level, it's one thing, but, when you get to the national level, you're dealing with larger problems and greater distances. To have this Judicial Board helped.

SI: Do you recall any cases that you worked on while you were on the Board?

DW: Actually, it was funny. We actually worked one problem out between two chains who wouldn't talk to each other. We talked to each one and resolved it with their never even getting together. I thought it was fantastic. It had to do with something that was going to be an upheaval in an area and it was going to cause a problem for a lot of pharmacies in the area. It was an action that one of them wanted to take and the other one, who was correct, didn't want it to happen. It was not a legal matter, but it was a matter that was going to kick the system and it was going to hurt the patient.

You find bad apples in every barrel, not many in pharmacy. I have found out that all the pharmaceutical associations--I could speak nationally and in New Jersey--that if you work in the public interest, you're going to be successful. If you're working against the public interest, you're not only not going to be successful, but it's going to hurt you.

SI: What kind of charges would the independents levy against the chains?

DW: We had a code of ethics. For instance, you couldn't advertise prescription prices. The reason for that was that we wanted people to pick the pharmacy. If it's going to be a chain, fine, if it's going to be an independent, that's their choice, but we didn't want people running around from pharmacy to pharmacy, because, then, nobody really had their records in those times. Nobody did. That was even before the computer. To a degree, it was a financial consideration, because the pharmacy was losing some customers, but the customer was losing the protection of knowing that anything that they were taking was being covered by the pharmacist that was handling it by using their profile record card. Even today, people should use one pharmacy, because there's nobody that's going to go to a record card and check how many times they took this in every pharmacy around. If they're asked to, they can get it from the pharmacy, but it isn't going to happen. So, it's for the protection of the patient. That was one of the main things with the advertising. They would advertise and somebody would go there. Perhaps they'd get a prescription filled there, and then, maybe they'd come back to their regular pharmacy. Then, another store would be advertising something else and they'd go there. Of course, that was then.

Today, there is no such thing as restriction on advertising. That's long gone. We're talking about a different era. I'm not sure this is a better era than the old one was, in that regard, because I still think that people should pick a pharmacy and they should stick with that pharmacy if they're going to get full protection, especially today. I always kid people when I say, "When I started in pharmacy, the biggest mistake I could make was give somebody too great a laxative, too much senna." Today, if I give them a wrong dose of a pill, we can be going to, God forbid, a funeral parlor. So, it is a serious thing that we're involved with. The responsibility is great and the pharmacists today are up to it, because of the education they're getting. They really are. As far as pharmacognosy and pharmacology, pharmacists get two years of pharmacology. Even physicians get maybe one year and they're familiar with the drugs that they use. You have to be familiar with all the drugs if you're going to be involved in dispensing prescriptions for many various conditions--could be a hundred different doctors. We're finding out what it is to go to more than one doctor. We were very fortunate, for years and years and years, we had our regular checkup, but that was it, but some people haven't been that fortunate. They can go to a doctor for high blood pressure and a specialist for diabetes and somebody's got the gout--you could name it. You can go to the medicine cabinets of some people's home and you look in there and they're taking nine and ten medications at one time, many times appropriately, sometimes not, however. That "sometimes" is usually because they're going to more than one doctor. If they go to a specialist, we always tell them, "Tell your primary pharmacy everything you're taking and tell any doctor. Carry a card." Now, they're coming up with an identification card. I don't know if they're ready yet, but they're going to have them, where everybody will carry this card and they could put it into a slot in the pharmacy where they go and they know exactly what the pharmacy record is. That's a wonderful thing. I don't know how far it's advanced. I know it's in the works and I know it's being used, but I don't know to what degree.

SI: I want to ask about the *ShopRite v. The New Jersey Board of Pharmacy* case, which you said involved the right of the Board to govern the ethics of pharmacists.

DW: Yes. When it came to the ethical standards of the profession, there were some objections by a couple of the chains at that time. Don't forget, this is a long time ago. We're talking about probably in the early '70s for sure. When it came to the ethical standards, they didn't like to be what they called "burdened with unnecessary rules and regulations" concerning how they practiced. Everything that was in that was reasonable and it was put in there to raise the standards of the profession. Part of it was--it wasn't political, but it was just neighbor to neighbor--you don't say, "My pharmacists have licenses," or, "We deliver and there's no charge," things like this, which demean the profession to a degree and indicated that other people didn't do that, those kind of things. There were any number of rules and regulations that were in there and they just decided to take it to task. I happened to have been involved at the Board of Pharmacy level still. The objection was something that we felt was frivolous, but, by the same token, they didn't feel that way about it at all. Their feeling was their strength was being taken away to run their operation, that they couldn't do it and that what they were doing wasn't hurting the operation. It was, it was--I could read you the list. There was a list of ethical standards and there wasn't anything in there that you would say is wrong, I'm sure.

JW: Did this have to do with advertising?

DW: It had to do with advertising. The feeling was that someone should choose their pharmacy, whoever it was--if it was a chain or independent, the Board of Pharmacy had no problem with that--but the idea of using loss leaders in the prescription department, it ruined the concept of a person having one doctor, one pharmacy and one source for all their medication, so that they really could be controlled. If somebody's advertising a particular drug that someone is taking this month to get that person into their pharmacy, now, there's another source for medication, so, less control. Then, the next month, some other pharmacy, they're running a sale on Lipitor or whatever it might be. I just advertised that because it's become generic now--it's okay. It was not in the patient's interest to be running around from store to store. They were loss leaders that were being used, so that the Board said that they couldn't do that any longer. They couldn't promote in such a way. They could say that they had a prescription department, that they had this list of services they perform, no problem with that, but anything to reduce the strength of the services being provided to the patient, the Board felt was wrong. Of course, the judge determined that the Board was correct.

JW: You won the ruling. The judge ruled in your favor.

DW: That was the first ruling where pharmacy was involved where pharmacy was virtually declared a profession. It was accepted, but it was never written anywhere, but the way this came down, pharmacy was finally accepted, legally, as a profession. That was what was very important about this litigation.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about the trial itself and your testimony?

DW: It was quite a long and drawn out trial. Because of the position that I held, I kind of represented the practitioner in the trial. I have to say, it was a very interesting time in my life. I'm not going to say I enjoyed that--I enjoyed the results. I found out that you have to have a lot of patience and you have to listen. You can't jump at any answers when you're involved in something like this. I tried to handle myself in the best interest of why I was there and I was gratified at the results that we obtained. We had a lot of other professionals, professors, that were there. We had even some pharmaceutical companies represented. We had a good cadre of people who were witnesses on our behalf. Their presentations were oriented more, if you really sliced it up, toward business results and ours was patient results.

SI: It seems as though, today, the rules have changed quite a bit, where I do see advertising by pharmacies.

DW: Oh, that has all changed and it's a long time ago. Now, don't forget, we're talking 1970s. I would say, by the '90s, that had all eroded, as far as that kind of control. First of all, the boards didn't pursue it anymore and, secondly, it's a whole new world of communications. Everything has just changed and the truth of the matter is that I'm not sure it's in the best interest of the patient, either. What happened is, if you can't whip them, join them. So, a lot of independents, they were doing the same thing and they've all been doing it. Is it in the best interest of the patient? I don't really think it is, and today especially, because we have third-party prescriptions and a great number of people are involved in third-party prescriptions. In other words, they don't pay but a co-pay, or whatever it is. They pay the same co-pay no matter where they get the

prescription, unless it's by mail-order and let's not go there. Right now, it isn't that much an issue as it was before, because of the fact that the patient isn't solely paying for the whole cost of the medication. Now, would it be a problem for the prescription card companies? I haven't really heard them do much complaining, so, I think they're okay with it.

SI: Were insurance programs and prescription plans coming in when you were still in the business?

DW: Yes, they were coming. They have become a lot more sophisticated now.

SI: When you were working in your own pharmacy and these plans started to come in, how did it affect the business, both from the standpoint of any changes you needed to make and, also, did it change your customer base?

DW: Our business was based upon service and we never changed, but we did change to this extent--we didn't change how we handled our prescription service, we didn't, certainly, change in any way our relationship with our patients, we didn't give better or less service than we did before, but what we did do, and what other pharmacies did, we decided we had to niche. We had to get something else in the pharmacy. We were losing some prescriptions. We were losing some to mail-order, we were losing some to chain pharmacies. So, we decided that we wanted to enter surgical supplies. Other stores niched, not the same way, but you laugh at some pharmacies, "Look at the jewelry there." You know what? if that pharmacy having jewelry gives them enough capital so that they can operate their prescription department appropriately and give the same service as before, what's wrong with that? Not only that, now, we find that all stores do everything. You going into a store ...

JW: They have food now.

DW: If there's a space that can be used to promote some profit, something'll be there. I feel that, in a way, it helped the independent pharmacy to reach out more, maybe went into specialty vitamins or things like that. There are other areas where pharmacists have gone. There are pharmacies in the area that put in items that you would normally find in a grocery store, but the grocery store put in over-the-counter drug items, so, why don't we get even, you know what I'm saying?

SI: When the plans started becoming more prevalent, did that become burdensome in terms of any paperwork you had to do or anything like that?

DW: No, I wouldn't say it did, because, in a way, a lot of the paperwork we had was being neutralized by the innovation of the computer.

JW: But, the payments that you got, how slow it was in coming, reimbursed from the plans.

DW: Oh, yes.

JW: They were slow.

DW: Oh, this young lady remembers much better than I do, because she's much younger than I am. All these prescription plans, they didn't all pay on time, and then, some of them would take advantage. They'd reject your prescription and send it back. After a while, you got used to what was going on. They were trying to float their money. You'd turn around and send it back without correcting it and you'd get paid the second time around. That's not the regular norm, but that happened many times. There was a lot more delay in your cash flow and some fellows really got in trouble, because the more they did, the more trouble they got in waiting. That's when independent pharmacists finally went to banks and got credit lines and things like that.

SI: Did you have a similar problem with Medicare or Medicaid?

DW: The payment for Medicaid is less than others. It's a state-run program, to a degree, administered by one of the other companies, but it was no more difficult than any other ones, except for the fact that the reimbursement was less. We initiated a prescription program in New Jersey and I kind of was involved in that. We convinced New Jersey to support it for senior citizens, the PAAD Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged and Disabled program, and that program actually saves money for the senior citizens. It also helped independent pharmacy, because no one was cutting that. The government would let them go on, so that any senior citizen on PAAD was a blessing for independent pharmacy. That kept the independent pharmacy from losing business which it might've lost under normal circumstances, because of someone undercutting or what-have-you.

SI: What was your involvement in getting that passed? Did you lobby in Trenton?

DW: I was involved in helping to develop it, with a lot of other people, the New Jersey Pharmacists Association. It was in the public interest. The seniors were having problems meeting their obligations. Medicare does not generally pay for prescriptions. New Jersey was one of the first states that had a program for senior citizens.

SI: What kind of relationship did the state organization have with Rutgers and other pharmacy schools in the area?

DW: Of course, Rutgers was our primary, but, don't forget, we have a lot of people from South Jersey. So, we also had a relationship with Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Temple University, and a relationship, to a degree, with St. John's University, and then, Brooklyn College of Pharmacy. The close relationship was always with Rutgers and Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Temple.

When I was teaching at Rutgers, one of the things I used to do as a member of the faculty was, I would go to the schools in New York, St. John's and Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, and I would speak to the New Jersey students, to help them prepare for the New Jersey exams. In those days, the exams were not nationwide. They were given by the Board of Pharmacy. It was ludicrous to my mind, in retrospect. You got twenty questions in math and, if you got five wrong, you flunked the exam for the Board. So, I went to those schools to prepare them the best that I could.

We felt that that was a service that we could do for the New Jersey students who weren't able to get into Rutgers. Most of them wanted to get in, there just wasn't enough room.

SI: Would you work on programs together?

DW: Worked on programs together, students would come to the convention. We'd have a student section, we'd have programs for the students, we would find externship sites, help the schools with placement. When they got into externships, now, it's a whole different ballgame, because the externships are part of their six-year program and they go into various disciplines of pharmacy. They go into community, they go into hospital, they go into industry, they might go into home health care. That's part of the curriculum. We were working very closely with Rutgers and I might've helped out a little bit.

SI: When you were the President in the 1960s, all over the country, in different businesses and communities, there was a move to get people who had not traditionally worked in professions into the professions, like African-Americans, women, getting more groups involved. Was the Society advocating for getting more minority members and women involved?

DW: We had officers that were of all races and we didn't seem to have that problem in pharmacy that they had in other disciplines. I don't remember any programs, but we had officers in all of our county groups that were minorities. There was only a small number of minorities in the school, and I guess that goes right back to the education system. There weren't enough of them applying, but, certainly, there was no discrimination against them. We didn't have a large number of other races in the school. No, we really didn't.

SI: Were there efforts to get more students from different groups into the school eventually?

DW: There were efforts. For instance, we had a pharmacy owner by the name of Matt Waters, a black pharmacist. He was just a terrific person and he used to encourage young black people to go to pharmacy school. It was done that way, by individuals. It wasn't done on an organized basis, it really wasn't, but there was no discrimination.

SI: During your career in pharmacy, were there any politicians in New Jersey who were particularly helpful, that you worked closely with to get things done?

DW: When I was very active in the Pharmaceutical Association, we had legislative committees and we would work with the State Legislature. We would attend their meetings and we introduced some legislation. Since I was involved at the county level on the Board of Freeholders, I knew all the state officials, because whenever there was an election, everybody was together, everyone knew everybody else. Of course, at that point, our particular party was in control in the State Legislature, and so, there were many occasions when we would ask for a meeting with them and each individual in each district. We would meet with our Assembly people and our Senator. I met with Barbara Buono many times. I think I mentioned to you, she started in Metuchen, New Jersey. We met with Assemblyman Barnes and Diegnan and we would react to legislation that they were proposing which would affect the profession and we would meet and present our case. They would have hearings on particular bills in committees

and we would go down and that was not uncommon. A few times a year, when I was involved, I'd be down there.

SI: Did you find that the legislators, for the most part, were receptive to what you were trying to get done?

DW: I never ran into anybody that wasn't very nice and certainly willing to listen. They didn't always agree with you, but no one ever just sloughed us off. It's according to how you go about it, though. If first you hit somebody with a stick, and then, you say, "I want to talk," that's not the way to do it. You talk first and, if it doesn't work, then, hit them with the stick.

SI: Were there any other issues that you tried to tackle during your time as president of the State Association?

DW: One of the problems that we had is that there were some competitive pharmacy organizations all vying for the same people. The truth of the matter was that some of the other groups didn't have the same organization that we had and what we needed was for all the pharmacists to be together. It wasn't that we wanted to assimilate their organization, but we wanted to work closely together with it. In some instances, the leadership felt that they were being threatened, so, they stayed away. There were other problems, personal, subjective things. So, we were working very hard to try and work together with all the other organizations and I think we were successful. We also worked very hard to encourage people to stay up-to-date. We started a lot of the continuing education programs and I think we were successful with that, too. We worked with other pharmaceutical organizations in the area--coexistence is what you would call it--because, up in the New York area, they're vying for some of our people and, down in the Philadelphia area, they were vying for some of our people. So, we tried to encourage everybody to join the State Association, rather than get involved in out-of-state organizations, but, like in the Philadelphia area, it was a tough deal. They had some people there, a lot of them, that were from New Jersey on the faculty. Membership was always a very important thing. We had various boards and we started programs, like the Pharmacy Institute. We set up a pharmacy right next to the building in Trenton and we would invite students from the schools to this facility and show them what pharmacy had been like and what pharmacy was about. It was right across the street from the State House. So, we were encouraging young people. We set up "respect for drug" programs. We would go to elementary schools and we would call it "respect for drugs," household items that are around the house. "You don't drink sodium bicarbonate. You don't drink Windex," respect for anything that's in the house. We decided and found out that it was smart going to the lower grades, because they're impressionable. We used to go into the high school and those kids knew more than we did--about the wrong things. So, we recognized that the place to start was at the lower grades and we did that. We had a Past President's Fellowship, where those who were President have an organization and they meet, usually at the convention. They'd still serve on some of the committees. Pharmacy, generally, historically, has almost been like a family thing. I don't mean in just the pharmacy, I mean among pharmacists as well. You go someplace, "Oh, you were a pharmacist? Wow," and they have a big discussion. I still run into that. I run into pharmacies now and I can't wait, because, chances are, it's going to be someone that I taught. Somehow, they remember the old guy, once in a while. I'm very happy to be a pharmacist and I'm very lucky.

JW: We were out to dinner and three young people came over; I say young, they were middle-age.

DW: They graduated in 1978.

JW: They said, "Mr. Wernik, so good to see you. We were your students at Rutgers."

DW: "Uncle Don," they say.

JW: It made him feel pretty good, I think.

DW: It made me feel so good. I hadn't seen them in thirty years, since 1978 it was, 1978. They were at a party, a retirement party, for the head of a hospital and they came over. How they recognized me; she claims I look the same, no way.

JW: They say, "You haven't changed, Mr. Wernik."

DW: It makes you kind of feel good when something like that does happen. You feel, hey, maybe you did make some kind of an impact on someone, not just that they remembered you, but, hopefully, they remembered some of the things that I was espousing at that time.

SI: I would like to discuss your teaching at Rutgers a little bit more. You said that you taught for a few years in the early 1950s, and then, went back in 1972 when the school moved to the Busch Campus in Piscataway.

DW: I became a faculty member up in Newark for a couple of years. When I graduated, one of the things I had intended as a possibility was to go on teaching, which I ended up doing in '72, but, in '50--for about four years, wasn't it, Joyce? We were married already, of course, and I was teaching, not full-time, but I was teaching two afternoons a week, as I could recall it. Then, when my father became more seriously ill, I recognized that it just wasn't going to happen. So, I made a deal with Dean Bowers. He was then there at the school. After I started teaching, he came. Dr. Rowe left just about the year we graduated and Dean Bowers came in. The deal I made with him was, "If we move the school down to Busch Campus, I'm going back." In 1972, when we moved, he called me. I went back again, teaching two courses, one in community pharmacy practice, which is so different than today, and one in surgical supply and another one, which you won't believe, communications skills. I never had those. I just think I enjoyed the teaching, I enjoyed the school and the faculty there. They're good people, except that everything changes. Don't forget, by the time I graduated from Pharmacy School, independent pharmacy was the thing. The chains were just starting out and independent pharmacy was what it was really all about. You opened your store at eight or nine, you closed it at ten or ten-thirty. If you had meetings, that's when you went to the meeting. I'd come home at one, two in the morning. Joyce was always there, waiting and smiling, and she put up with a lot. Then, as time went on, the chains came in and things changed there. It was chains versus independent. Now, it's pharmacy versus the pharmacy card companies, Medco, Caremark and things like that, because we're all in the same boat, really. When they put the screws to us, it's not just the independents,

it's the chains just as well. So, we've kind of been able to work together more in the interest of the patient. It's always in the interest of the patient or you're going to lose. That's what I think we've been doing. The Association has been doing that. The Board of Pharmacy has always been that way. They work in the interest of the people. I was on the Board of Pharmacy for a number of years, and then, the intern and externship was kind of my baby. So, they appointed me the liaison between the Board and the extern/intern program. I did that for about twenty-some years. I can't get rid of jobs, it seems. I can pick them up easy, but I have a hell of a time getting rid of them and I don't mind that. I've enjoyed every minute. People have been very kind to me, but I thank them for letting me do it, because I really enjoyed being involved. My father always said it the best. He said, "If when you leave this place to wherever you're headed, if you've left something that's worthwhile, then, the trip was worthwhile," and I've always kind of felt that way.

SI: Had there been any discussion in the 1950s about the school moving to the New Brunswick Campus?

DW: Oh, Mason Gross was the President and you'll notice I was on the Rutgers Advisory Committee. He almost used to run the other way when he would see me. He was very nice, by the way, a wonderful man, just wonderful. He said, "Don Wernik, I know, 'When are you going to move the Pharmacy School to Busch Campus?'" Ultimately, it started. Forgetting that I was going to teach, we wanted it on the Busch Campus. I can give you an example. This guy, believe it or not, was All-State in football when I was in high school and I went into the service. When I was in high school, Rutgers had a program in the phys. ed. program. They would send one of their kids out, phys. ed.s, to all the schools in the county to help the coaches of the various teams. They needed help, because our football coach was a physics teacher and he didn't even know what a football looked like for sure, but he got 150 dollars to do it. He was a wonderful person--he was a chaperone. When they started with this program, we had somebody down that was in education and in phys. ed. and they were very helpful. When I got out of the service, this guy was then an assistant on the Rutgers University Football Team and he remembered me. He tried to convince me to go out for the football team, but I was going to school up in Newark and Pharmacy School in Newark was like a nine-to-five. It was like a business job. He convinced me to try and I did it probably for a week. I'd hop in the car, I would drive down there. Nobody used lights in those days; it was all daytime stuff. By the time I got myself dressed, the practice was over. I never got in a scrimmage or anything in a week and I realized, and I told him, "Hey, look, I tried." I really wanted to do it, but I couldn't do it. So, now, fast-forward, my son went to Rutgers College of Pharmacy, which was now at Busch Campus. Now, it was a five-year program. He played tennis and he was number one singles player on the Rutgers varsity for two years and got four letters for tennis. Now, he never could've done that if he was still up in Newark. Would I have made the team? I don't know, but I know damn well I would've tried out for it, if I was down there on Busch Campus. So, Mason Gross would come to our meetings, the Advisory Council. He would come and the first thing he'd say, "Nothing new, Don, nothing new." I said, "I'm tired of hearing that. I want to hear something else," not just me, there were a half a dozen of us. We were all over his case. Finally, he took a piece of property that was supposed to be the Medical School's property and made it the Pharmacy School. Now, it's the Pharmacy School and they added on the Cancer Research program to the front of that building. So, it's Pharmacy and Cancer and, now, they're enlarging the pharmacy building. They've got

250 kids--kids, adults, men and women--in the pharmacy program. We started in the early '50s and, every time Mason Gross came around, he would remember, but he was a wonderful person and he gave us a piece of property that he shouldn't have given us. He took a lot of heat from the people in the Medical School, because they wanted to expand into the property area that was vacant, where we built the Pharmacy School, but that's how we got down there.

SI: When you got back into Rutgers in 1972, what were you doing at that point? I know you were involved in the externship program. Did that start then?

DW: I had externs in our pharmacy. It wasn't a required thing. I just had them come in to see what it was about.

SI: You ran the internship program for a very long time. Can you tell me a little bit about that, how it grew and perhaps changed during your time there?

DW: I was at the College of Pharmacy for almost thirty years. Since Rutgers had been moved to the Busch Campus, it was only ten or twelve minutes for me to get there from the pharmacy in Metuchen. I would teach a fifty-minute lecture and I'd be gone maybe two hours from the pharmacy. We found out that the student still had to go for a year after graduation to get licensed and it just didn't seem practical anymore. It was okay when they had a two-year program or even a three, but, now, you had four and going to five, and then, another year? It just didn't sound reasonable. So, we developed a program at the College of Pharmacy and presented it to the Board of Pharmacy. They accepted it and the first program gave six months' credit to the students toward their licensure. Instead of having to go for a year after graduation to do their what you would call internship, because they were out of school already now, they would only have to do six months. Then, as we progressed further, they received enough credits, as the program moved on, to where they didn't have to at all. Now, with the new Pharm.D. program, they're exposed to every area of pharmacy, almost, for a period of four weeks, through one whole semester. It's a six-year program now. When they graduate from the College of Pharmacy, they then actually have all their needed credits toward licensure. They just have to take the law exam and things such as that.

SI: Were you there when the Pharm.D. program was initiated?

DW: I was at the school while it was being developed, right. It's worked out very well. The injection information that you see now in storefronts, "Come in and get your flu shot, no wait," and there are some others, triple vaccines for your youngsters and pneumonia there, but there are other ones that are being provided, again, the pharmacist that does it has to be certified. The doctor has to be notified and all and the record has to be kept as to the date, etc. A lot of people never get to the doctor. It's hard to believe that, but it's so, especially seniors, a lot of seniors, and a lot of people in the poorer areas, their children never get any vaccine of any kind. So, this is filling a great need and I think it's a definite success. There's no question in my mind.

The pharmacy schools near New Jersey, because there were some New Jersey students that went to St. John's, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, those students had a slight disadvantage. In New Jersey, we moved first into these programs, so that the ones that had gone to other places still had to get

their credits by putting the time in the stores, maybe after graduation. Before long, it became in everyone's interest to adopt our method, because it was in our interest as well. We had New Jersey people that wanted to go other places, and so, it became in the best interest for everyone if they just coordinated their programs. When it got to Pharm.D., anyone that's got a Pharm.D. is eligible for licensure in any state, because the Pharm.D.'s are accredited by the New Jersey State Board of Pharmacy.

SI: You joined the faculty in 1972. On your resume, it says you focused on community pharmacy practice.

DW: Then, I was teaching. I was there two afternoons and I was teaching community pharmacy practice, and then, surgical supplies also, and then, as I said, I had a course in communication skills. What I would do in the community pharmacy one was, I would discuss various aspects of pharmacy and I would bring in people from industry. For instance, I brought my daughter in, who was then a sales rep, to let them get a feeling for what pharmacy was about and the responsibility of a pharmacist. I think I could find my syllabus if you wanted it. I would teach the various responsibilities. I wasn't teaching compounding and things like that, but the ethical responsibilities, the practical responsibilities. Some of my over-the-counter items, I would go in and I would take, let's say surgical supplies, and I'd throw them on the table. Then, I'd pick them up and I'd describe what they do. When we were in Portugal, they used hot water bags for heating. They'd put them under their covers at night for their feet. They had covers and they had a black-and-red Rutgers-colored cover. So, I bought one and I put it over a hot water bottle and I came into class with it on my head. That went over really big. I always felt that you can talk about something, but, if you show them something, it's more meaningful than just discussing it alone. So, I always tried to have something to show them relating to what we were talking about. In some cases, it was accounting, how you keep your accounting records. Patient profile was certainly one of them, because then it was in its infancy. In the beginning, it was just getting started.

JW: Also, he always encouraged them to become involved in their communities. He always felt that was very important.

DW: Yes, involved in the Association and things like that, too. I always felt that that was important.

Service to the People of Metuchen

Beginning in the 1950s, Donald's involvement in community affairs blossomed into a career in local government. From 1956 to 1962, he served as a member of Metuchen's Board of Health. He became a leader in the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce, serving as President of the Chamber from 1959 to 1960. He later served on the Borough Council from 1963 to 1969. From 1969 to 1979, he served as Mayor of Metuchen for three terms.

SI: You returned from the war in the mid-1940s, attended school at Rutgers, and then, joined the family pharmacy. At what point in all of that did you start thinking about doing something for your community or getting into politics? What led you into that?

DW: Actually, I had a very good example in my father. Before he became ill, he was a member of the Board of Education. He actually was on the Board of Health. He was involved in many local activities, including the Chamber of Commerce. When I joined in the pharmacy, after I graduated from the College of Pharmacy, he started his decline physically and he had to step out of things. He didn't ever tell me, "You ought to do this," but he implied, by just how he had acted himself, that he felt Werniks should stay involved in the community. I think I've been kind of outgoing and I like to be involved in things anyhow. I was one of those foolish people that even enjoyed high school and had a great time in elementary school--what can I tell you? He suggested that I join the Chamber of Commerce as his representative. I was active for a while and I became the President of the Chamber of Commerce. We were having a political action program, where we were going to actually have someone from the state come down, and it was about an eight or nine-week course, to tell us what it's like to be involved politically, what the requirements are, what the goals might be and how it could help the community and the Chamber. What happened, though, was that when we were supposed to have our first session, the person who was coming down from the state took ill, couldn't come. Naturally, I raised my hand as being the only one that would be willing to do it, as I could see it. So, I volunteered to conduct the program. I was really about one program ahead of everyone. It excited my interest in politics a little bit, and so, I actually taught myself that politics was a good thing, that it was good for the community, that it was important that people be involved. I think that really was what started me off, as far as actually being involved politically. As far as being involved generally, I think I've always been involved and I've always enjoyed it.

SI: In this course that you wound up running at the last minute, what kind of things were you teaching?

DW: Community involvement was one of them: be involved in the community; be aware of what's going on; the steps of getting involved; how you join a political organization; the concept that somebody who tells you that they're Independent is really a second-class citizen, because that person doesn't have anything to do with who the candidates are going to be. They can only choose between two people. If you want to be involved, you have to get involved in a party of your choice and help make the decisions that are basically going to result in the activities that the community will be involved in.

SI: Was this course held for the entire Chamber or were you just speaking to a select group?

DW: Actually, there were ten people. It was open to all. We could've had up to fifteen, as I recall, but we had ten people who expressed an interest as a result of that. Then, I think the other thing that's important is, they not only implied but indicated that we have to be involved, because, if we're not involved, then, what we're doing is saying that we weren't interested in what's going on in our community. Certainly, I felt that I was interested and the people that were in that group all felt that way. Four or five of them did go on to be involved, not necessarily running for office, but getting involved. One of them was with me for many years. We became close friends.

SI: Would you say that most of the people who were interested at that time were of your age, the generation that came out of World War II?

DW: I would say yes, that they were. Their interest was not only in politics, but in the community. That's what brought them to the meeting, actually.

SI: At that time, what kind of issues was the Chamber of Commerce dealing with?

DW: Boy, if I had asked you to give me a question that I'd like to have, that would've been it. It happens that the Chamber of Commerce has all the normal responsibilities of being responsible to its members, being involved in community affairs, putting the best face forward of the community for people who live in the community, but, in this instance, at that time, we were in the process of looking for senior citizens' housing in the community. The reason we felt that a senior citizen facility was necessary was that we had a lot of people in Metuchen who wanted to stay in the town, but we didn't have any large number of facilities that they could utilize. At that time, we only had one or two. Now, there are some more multiple dwellings that are available, even in the town, but there weren't at that time. The reason everything was being held back was, we had a three-story limit on the height that you could have on any building in town. If you're going to do anything that was actually going to be effective, you had to have four or five stories. So, the Chamber started to campaign for a change in the zoning laws in the community. Both political parties actually objected. They wanted to keep the community the way it was. They felt that a great part of it, how we were able to be successful, was in keeping the density stable. They put it on the ballot, because we were actively pursuing them to do something. We were able to help encourage them to put on the ballot whether or not we should have a five-story exception just for senior citizens' housing in our community. It was a campaign. It was coincidental with our learning how to become politically involved. We had just finished that course. They explained to us how you win a campaign and what you do and how you operate. We used that and we actually were able to convince enough people in the community that it was for the good of everyone. In spite of the objection of both parties, we were able to prevail and the change in the zoning became effective because of the Chamber of Commerce and, maybe, because of that course. I'm not sure we would have even thought about handling it the way we did if it hadn't been for the course we had just finished less than a year before. So, actually, then, something really funny happened. It was a small town at that time, even it's smaller now than it was when I was Mayor, because, when I was Mayor, in this house, there were six people. Now, there are two. So, there are no empty houses, but the population has actually dropped a little bit. When the election was over, the active people in both parties weren't too encouraged by what we

had done, because they felt it was wrong. They felt what was being done was just the prelude to the fact that there would be any number of tremendously large buildings. It proved not to be the case. The unit that was constructed was 122 units. It's on Lincoln Avenue. It looks as well today in Metuchen as it did then. There were 122, either families, in some cases, individuals, who moved into those. It was set up so that anyone in the community who actually wanted to stay in town could. Because of the size of our town, there weren't quite that many in the beginning. It turned out that every resident in town who wanted to move into that facility was able to do so. In fact, some of them who were able to, really, at the last minute, decided they didn't want to leave their homes. They weren't ready yet, but, when they were, we still made it pretty good. There were waiting lists and we had to follow the federal guidelines and things like that for who could go in. We were able to run it ourselves, which is one of the reasons that we were, I think, as a group, effective, as far as the interest of the community was concerned. A lot of the organizations, a lot of communities, weren't able to handle something like this, so, they worked through some unions and other groups, who were helpful. They set up programs for things like this. The only thing is that the control was taken away from the community in many cases. In our case, it turned out that it worked out really very well. I think the people living in it are very happy. As a matter-of-fact, my wife's mother, my mother-in-law, who became my mother, that's how much I loved the lady, moved, finally moved, into one of the units. My father-in-law had passed away and she was an independent soul. She wanted it and she even lived there. She was the cheerleader of that place, by the way, I could tell you that. What happened to me, you're relating to about the politics of it, after the election was over and everything started to settle down, I got a call from the chairman of the party in Metuchen. They said they'd like to come over and speak to me. I figured they're coming over to read me the riot act, "Hey, butt out. You're the Chamber of Commerce, you're not the borough government. Leave us to make these decisions," but that wasn't the case at all. We all knew each other in Metuchen and Metuchen still is kind of that way. We had politics from September to November elections and we called it "the silly season." When that was over, you couldn't tell the Democrats and Republicans. They came to this house, right here, and they were sitting in this room. I was ready, I was all ready, I had my vest on, in case they were going to shoot and other things, but it turned out that they asked me if I would run for Borough Council. We were sort of in shock. After we came to, we told them that we would like to think about it, of course, which was the sensible thing to do. We have done everything one hundred percent together. It might be that we don't always agree in the beginning, but we always come to a consensus. Our kids have never seen us argue, they've never heard a foul word in this house and they're still waiting for the day that we have a fight. They're never going to see it, because it ain't going to happen. Then, we decided and I did run for Council the very next year. That was in 1963, I remember that, because that was '62, the election, when I was still Chairman of the Chamber. I dropped out of the chairmanship; I stayed as a member when I became involved politically. It was kind of a possible conflict of interest.

SI: Before we go into running for office, were there any other major issues that you dealt with as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce?

DW: Every chamber has one particular problem and that is, when you have a meeting, everyone comes to the meeting that can and everyone agrees with the solutions that are reached. Then, they go back to their own business. In those days, you see, the Chamber was just the retail

businesses. Today, a chamber, it's more diverse--there are attorneys, there are accountants, there are all kinds of people, which is healthy for the Chamber. Of course, in a town like Metuchen, if you just did the business people, you'd have kind of a small organization. So, it grew. At that time, it was just the independents. The one thing that was kind of difficult to do was to get those who were involved in the Chamber to get the word out, and then, get support for all the things we'd agreed to. We'd say, "We're going to have Metuchen Day," and then, we'd go to the *Metuchen Recorder*, which was the only paper in town in that day. I loved that *Recorder*, what can I tell you? Their solicitor would go around to the businesses and out of maybe twenty-five or so, ten would take out ads and the other ones wouldn't. So, we had that kind of a problem. I think the Chamber was something that was very vital at that time, because there weren't many other organizations. Now, there's so many organizations, you have to pick and choose, but it wasn't so. So, it made those who were involved become very close. We helped each other in many different ways, but nothing was that complicated. We had various projects. We won an award from the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce for one of our projects. Oh, I think it was the senior citizen one. I'm pretty sure that that was what it was.

JW: Then, you had the parades. You had a Memorial Day parade and a Christmas/holiday parade.

DW: Yes, the Chamber supported that, and initiated most of it.

JW: They organized it.

DW: Right.

SI: It is interesting that, in this campaign to get the senior citizens' housing built, the established powers in both parties did not want it.

DW: Excuse me, let's be clear. They didn't want the height change.

SI: The height.

DW: It wasn't that they didn't want the senior citizens--they did--but they were balancing their other interests. They felt it could be done on a different level. The other thing about Metuchen is, it's only a mile, about a mile square. So, there was not a lot of land that you had available where you could spread something out. You just didn't have it in this town. The political parties and those who opposed it didn't oppose the senior citizens having a place to live and stay in town. They wanted it as much as anybody did, but they just felt that, balancing things out, once you start, you put a chink in the armor, next thing you know, you've got three other buildings five stories high. Before you know it, things are out of control as far as what they felt was in the best interest of the community. It's also a tax question, too, the other side of the coin. By keeping the quality of the areas and the community at a certain level, you're going to have less commercial business and you're going to pay a higher tax. Metuchen's taxes have been a little higher, although everybody else seems to have caught up now. I'm talking about then. That's when Pepsi-Cola was a nickel, if you'll recall.

SI: It was not a nickel when I was growing up. Could you describe to me what the political scene was like when you first got into politics? Was it a pretty evenly split town? Was it more Democratic or Republican?

DW: You're wonderful at leading me to where I want to go, right. Your question, first of all, the community was generally Republican, I guess until the war. When the young people came back, you started getting more of a mix. When I ran for Council, if it wasn't for the support that I had from Republican people, I couldn't have been elected. Fortunately for me, I guess I didn't impress them as being someone that they didn't want in office, and maybe I hit the right year, whatever it was, but it worked out. Then, as time went on, it became much more evenly balanced. As far as what was Metuchen like politically, there were still philosophies, basically, conservative and liberal, if you want to use those terms. "What was Metuchen like?" When I was running for Mayor the second time, I ran against a very nice guy--and we were all friends, okay, but now it was "the silly season." So, he came into the meeting and he said, "Donnie," always first name, "Don, why is it that all you appoint to all the boards and commissions is Democrats? We have some good Republicans in this community and you don't give them a chance." I said to him, "Wow. I don't really know." I said to him, "I've got to tell you this--I can't tell you the breakdown of our committees. We just appoint people based upon how they fulfill their responsibility." Oh, he gave me a big smile. So, I asked the borough attorney, and I took a heck of a chance, I said, "Marty," Marty Spritzer, who was our borough attorney, "what I'd like you to do is, I'd like you to do an assessment." We had 158 people in those days that were volunteering or appointed to various committees in the town. "Let's see what the breakdown is." I was holding my breath. At the next meeting, he was to make a report and he did. The report was that of the 158, only 114 were known. The rest were Independents. We didn't know really what they were. Of the 114, seventy-seven were Republicans. I was okay until I got to the next Democratic meeting and they said, "What the hell are you doing? You're appointing only Republicans?" I said, "Whoa. We haven't reported a lot of these committees. People have been on them for eight or nine years. They're doing a great job. I don't care what party they're in, as long as they're doing it and want to continue." They didn't throw me out of office as a result of that, the Democrats, but everyone realized that's what Metuchen is. When we built the senior citizen's housing, the fellow that I chose to be a chairman of the committee was a Republican. He had been a CEO in the area around here, in some large pharmaceutical company. Who would have been better? rather than hire or bring in one of the organizations that would do it for you, but it would cost you. That's the way it was in town. So, the answer to your question, not in short, but in long, is that we were able to maintain the kind of a community I think you would like to live in for many years. Things change and they change everywhere, but I still feel that Metuchen has the same quality of leadership that we've had and we've still maintained. Look, there's more partisanship everywhere now. If I were in the federal government, I would probably be very upset, based upon what I've been seeing. I'm not going to get into the politics of it, but to have a federal government that is dysfunctional, we deserve more in this country--end of story.

SI: When you were serving on the Board of Health in Metuchen in the early 1960s, you were involved in the effort to fluoridate the water.

DW: Yes, that's true.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

DW: It became an issue in those days. We're talking now about the early '60s. Fluoridation is something that would help the young children, especially, prevent cavities, and it was proven that it was effective. I brought it to the attention of the Board of Health, and then, we brought it to the attention of the Council. Actually, in Metuchen, it was a hard sell. It was put to a vote and the people voted for it, but I don't think it was through the ballot. I think they came to meetings and they supported the concept. We initiated it, but we had the same water system as Edison and Woodbridge. They couldn't get it by their councils at that time. So, even though we passed it, we couldn't do it, because, at that point, we would be fluoridating Edison's water and Woodbridge's water. People kind of laughed at me, as I was the person who was promoting it and, yet, I was the one who was going to be losing some business if we got it, because we were selling prescriptions with fluoride tablets in it for the youngsters' teeth.

SI: Why was there resistance?

DW: "Fluoride is a poison." There were a lot of people that you didn't know their motivations sometimes, but they would scare the general public, "Fluoride is a poison." Sure it is, if you take a ton of it or if you take too much of it, but, when used properly, it was okay, but that was the cry. There were a lot of people who objected to it. Finally, we did get it passed and I was pleased that we did, because I think it was the right thing for sure. It was kind of a shame that the other communities didn't choose to go along.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your work with the Middlesex County Medical Society Foundation.

DW: The Foundation was created as a result of the "Polio Vaccine Sunday" that was held.

SI: I believe it was in 1964.

DW: Yes. "Polio Sunday" was a national thing and that was the reason that polio was eradicated, really, because all of these people were given the vaccine and they were given it for free. It was done all over the country. In Middlesex County, we established it. I was involved at that time at the local level and in the Pharmaceutical Association. We worked and set up programs all over the schools all over the county and physicians, pharmacists and nurses manned the stations. On a given Sunday, everyone was invited to come in and there was no charge. However, there was a little, like, a hat. If anyone wanted to make a contribution, they could. As a result of that, we raised about eighty or ninety thousand dollars. It was determined to make a foundation of it and the Foundation was established so that scholarships could be given to pharmacy, medical and nursing students. A board was established to work on that and I was a member of that group in the beginning. Generally, about ten scholarships are given. It averages out to about between a thousand and fifteen hundred dollars a year to ten recipients and the Board reviews the requests at their meetings, twice a year. Through the years, that's a lot of scholarships and, of course, the Foundation funds really grew through the years. It reminds you, every year, especially when you're on the committee, that a lot of good can be accomplished by people that are interested in the patients that we're serving. These nurses, physicians and

pharmacists received nothing for what they did and they didn't expect anything, but they made a very big contribution, because this happening throughout all the counties in New Jersey and all the states in the country, this was a mass proof of what can be accomplished when we want to try working together. We don't do that much these days anymore.

SI: Let us go back to the first time you ran for the Borough Council, in 1963, you said.

DW: Right, right.

SI: What do you remember about that campaign?

DW: I remember that I learned a lot about Metuchen, even though I thought I knew a lot. I'd grown up in town. I learned where every single street in town was. In those days, we covered every house. I learned that there were a lot of people that knew me that I didn't know. I learned that people, if you knock on their door--in those days, you could do it until nine, ten o'clock at night. Today, if you come here and it's dark, nobody's going to answer the door. They don't know whether you've got a gun or not. That's anti-gun. If it was a Republican--it took me a while to learn--they'd invite me in to chat, because they figured they're slowing me down in my campaign. So, I had to learn, after a while, "Hey, listen, say hello, smile, but get out of there, so that you can move on. Then, when you get to your own people, you don't need to stay too long." So, I learned how to campaign. That's one thing. I also learned that most people are very, very understanding and friendly, but they'll tell you how they feel and they are very happy to have been visited, at least that was then. That was in 1963 and it carried on in Metuchen throughout all the time. It wasn't just me; that's the way the town was. I also learned where every street was in town. I knew where most of them were, but that leads me to a very interesting story I know you'd love to have. One of the things we were involved with when I was first on the Council was the changing of street names, because we had a Walnut Place, a Walnut Street, a Walnut Avenue. If there was an emergency and they'd say, "Walnut," where's the police going to go, street, avenue? There was a lot of confusion and the feeling was, "Why don't we just rename streets?" If someone had a Walnut Avenue and that was the largest street, that would stay the same, but we'd let the people choose their own. There weren't that many streets, but it was a Walnut, a Maple--in Metuchen, when it started out, they were into trees, and we still were until these last storms. It killed a lot of our old hundred-year-old trees. There's nothing left of them in the middle anyhow. So, we came up with a solution. We even had a committee of residents. Only a few of the residents on streets that were being considered even were willing to serve. So, we tried to get some people who were well-respected and we did get a couple from each street, so that we could say that there was representation. We came up with a change of about ten street names, altogether. As you can imagine, everybody in those streets was upset. We volunteered, not only would we do all we could, but we would help them getting information out to all the people that they dealt with. We would prepare everything, like the phone company, people they had insurance with--anything that they had to change, we'd help them do it and we did--but that didn't matter. They were just not too happy about it. So, we had a final general meeting. Now, it turned out this was my first regular meeting, because they were on this before I even got on the Council. They worked through it and they worked quietly until it was all prepared. The police chief made a presentation. He said, "People have to understand that we're here to help and every minute is important. If we get a name like Maple, is it Maple Avenue, Maple Street? If we're

delayed ten minutes, it can be a life or death situation." The fire department man gets up and says the same thing. Don Wernik, who is the new member of the Council, gets up and he says, "It's the same thing with our delivery. If somebody needs some medication, we can't delay." So, the lady living on the street that I mentioned said, "You don't have to worry, Mr. Wernik, because your truck won't be on our street anymore." I was saying to myself, "Hey, did I make a mistake in running for Council?" No, I didn't feel that way, of course, but it was true that there were a few people that actually didn't deal with me ever again, as far as I know, but they were very few. I found out that, if you do what you feel is right, you'll come out ahead. Ultimately, the people who were really uptight became involved again and it was okay. The bottom line is that we did do it and the ultimate result was that there was a lot less confusion, even people delivering things. There were so many mis-delivered packages, because it was dropped at Maple Avenue, should have been Maple Street, Maple Place. A new councilman, sitting in on one of his first meetings, it was our first public meeting that we had, "Oh, wow, what am I getting myself into?" So, I came home and I spoke to my boss, Joyce, and she said, "Don't worry, it's going to work out." It worked out.

SI: How long were terms on the Council then?

DW: They were three years. So, I was actually on the Council two terms and it was six years.

SI: You were on the Council from 1963 to 1969.

DW: Right.

SI: That is obviously a period of great change in the 1960s. There were many social changes, particularly in terms of race relations, religious freedom, things like that.

DW: It started. The unrest really started at the end of the '60s, when I became Mayor--I didn't do it. In '69 and to '79, that was the period. You wonder how it came out to ten--the election for Mayor was for two years, but, after my first term, it changed to four years. So, I had one two-year term, and then, to four-year terms.

SI: In general, from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, what kind of changes were you seeing in the community and your constituency?

DW: From the '50s and '60s, a lot of younger people moved into town. We had, like, four thousand people when the war started, forty-five hundred, maybe five thousand, and the sons and daughters of the people who lived in New Brunswick and Perth Amboy and Plainfield wanted to be near, but they wanted to be in the county or they wanted to have some space. So, a lot of young couples moved into Metuchen and they were people from Perth Amboy and they were people from New Brunswick and they were people from Plainfield. So, we had a lot of young people and, in the beginning, these young people really had their hands full. They were just moving into homes, they were just married, they were starting to raise children and a lot of them, very frankly, didn't have a lot of money, and so, they didn't have a lot of time, either. A lot of them couldn't get involved, but there were some people, immediately--there's always a certain number of people who care enough to seem to be able to find the time. So, the activity in the

community grew and organizations grew in the community. The government was certainly well-organized. It was organized before I even ever came on the scene, but it became more so. We started looking toward the future, rather than what the situation is today. Up until the war, we had just come out of the recession, really. In the '30s, people were still just coming back economically, then, we had the war, and so, people were just in a situation where they were trying to make ends meet, if you will. A lot of them couldn't get involved, but, by the same token, they also became those people who, in the next five or ten years, became leaders in their organizations and in their community as well. We had a lot of young people who started to get involved, in the churches, in the organizations, and new organizations were formed and that was good for the community. At the Jewish Community Center, we had a men's club. We used to play softball every Sunday morning. If you look at my nose, you can see it was broken a number of times. I did it virtually in every sport. In those days, they didn't pad you up. I mean, reset it? They just patched you up and you went out and you played some more. We're playing softball against Highland Park, the men's club, and we didn't like Highland Park when we were in school, we certainly didn't like them any more when we got out of the service. Our catcher didn't show up and a fellow slides into home and I'm catching, because no one else volunteered. That was one of my problems. They always say, "Don't raise your hand." In this case, I had no choice, because, otherwise, we don't have a catcher. I got slammed. He comes into home, but I held that ball and he was out. We won the game. I came home so excited and I said to my wife, "Wow, we won the game." She said, "You what? Go look in the mirror," I think is the way she said it. My nose was here on the side of his face. Apparently, it just got knocked and I'm so used to getting banged around on it.

SI: You could not even feel it.

DW: I played football in high school, I told you, we didn't even have a mask, a nose guard. I needed one even when it was straight, but, when it got banged around a bit, I could use one. She said, "Go look in the mirror." I look in the mirror and it's like flat against the side of my face. Then, oh, we went to Dr. Mann, who was a neighbor. He was an eye-ear-and-nose man, thank God, and I knew him through the store. He went like this, "Click," and he clicked it right back into place. So, that was an example of the involvement that we had as young people. We had sports. In the whole community, the younger people wanted more activity, physical activities. So, you saw softball games, you saw American Legion teams grow, all these things became something that became almost a norm. Now, we're into the '50s and '60s. When we talked about the '60s, there was a lot of unrest in this country in the late 1960s, early '70s. That was the period when Martin Luther King was killed, Kennedy was killed, there was a rebellion of the young people, there was racial unrest--there was everything you can almost imagine. As a matter-of-fact, the result was that in the various communities, you heard about store windows being broken, you heard about riots. I formed a Mayor's Advisory Coalition. I just didn't know what else to do. We had a Civil Rights Commission, but that's six people. They couldn't do anything in a situation like this, because it was just too big for that. It couldn't wait for a monthly meeting. So, we started having meetings twice a week, and it was a voluntary thing. Anyone who wanted to join joined and we had over a hundred people, of all races, colors. We met two times a week, sometimes, and would discuss the issues and bottom-line. A lot of people would come into town ready to cause havoc and they'd be turned away, because we had an organization where we could get fifteen or twenty people just like that, if we needed them, because every night, you couldn't

be sure what was going to be happening for a while. Was it because of the Coalition? I think it helped. Nobody does anything alone. I received credit and blame for things, some good, some bad, but I can't take all the credit and I refuse to take all the blame. The truth of the matter is, in this case, the Coalition worked so well to the extent that there was not one pane of window broken in Metuchen in that whole period of time, when Plainfield went really down and New Brunswick was a mess, Perth Amboy the same. We have to attribute a lot of it to the fact that we had this Coalition and we had a Neighborhood Watch that we established also during that period of time. That didn't hurt, because it brought people into a program that we were interested in, which was protecting our community. For three or four years, that was almost the end of that period of time, we had a very active group. We had a drug hotline during that period and we had a lot of things that we established to try and cool things down and, also, bring some of the young people back who were on the edge. I think we were successful, to a large degree. Did we win every situation? I'm sure we didn't, but, again, it was the community. In certain communities, you probably couldn't do it. The fact that we're so small didn't hurt and the fact that everybody knew everybody else, to a degree, didn't hurt either. That's how we got through that period of time and I feel that was a successful experience. As a matter-of-fact, I went down to a memorial service for a member of our community who passed away. He was one of my peers and he was very active in the Coalition and we stayed friendly. Well, I went down there for me. I needed closure, too, because I've known this guy all these years. There were four or five people that were still from that group and they were in a corner talking about what we did and how it worked out. It kind of makes you feel that it had meaning and it carried over and this was from the early, middle '70s and, now, we're talking about 2013.

SI: How soon after you became Mayor did you start the Coalition?

DW: I think it was almost immediate, because we started working on it my last year of being on the Council, we were even working on it, but not the Coalition, it was just the issue was coming up. I'd say maybe the first or second year. Either late '69 or '70 is when I actually established the Coalition. I would say late '69. That's when it started to heat up in this area.

SI: This was precipitated by what had happened in Plainfield and elsewhere. Was there anything that happened specifically in Metuchen that added to that?

DW: No, this unrest just doesn't happen. It was going on for years and it wasn't just one group. What happened is, they all kind of coalesced at the same time. You had the young people that were uptight, you had the Vietnam War, you had the racial relations situation, you had women who weren't content. A lot of groups started to decide, "Hey, it's about time things got better." There were things already working to improve the situation, but they were working much too slow and people were not willing to really wait. Were some of the people unfair? I can't put it that way, I really can't. I think that it was time and all this unrest may have had some positive effect on the issues.

SI: You described how you dealt with escalating violence, drug abuse, that sort of thing. How would the Coalition deal with racial issues? How did they address that?

DW: Actually, we had any number of people from all the churches, including the black churches. We had three black churches in the community. We never addressed it one racial group or another. We would send committees to the various churches, sometimes, to address them. If there was a problem, we would invite some people down and we'd always have a mixture at all those meetings. It was never all-white, all-black, all-anything. We were very careful to make sure that people knew that this was Metuchen speaking, this wasn't a part of Metuchen, a segment of Metuchen, and I think it was very effective. I know that the black ministers were very helpful, as all of them were. Everybody was helpful, because nobody wanted to see these things happen. It just got out of control. It didn't start in Metuchen, it started years ago and it kept building up and boiling over, until I think, as I said, the perfect storm was-- Vietnam might've been the perfect storm, to get enough people involved. As far as racial situations, that was a problem for a long time and it was getting very slowly improved until Martin Luther King's time, and Kennedy had helped a lot, too. With women's rights, my wife said she couldn't understand that, because she had no problem with women's rights--she was the boss.

SI: At that time, were there any issues of bias against any group that had to be addressed? For example, at the time, real estate agents across New Jersey were forcing African-Americans into certain sections of town, helping to perpetuate a system where they could not buy in other areas.

DW: I think one thing that protected Metuchen was the size of the town. It's true that black people did gravitate to one part, but there were black people all over the community. So, it wasn't something like that. Yes, I think there's a bias, but I think a lot of us inherited a bias, which we didn't even know we had, if you follow me. In other words, a certain community was biased because they only knew their own religious affiliates. Anybody else wasn't quite up to it. This is something that they inherited. It could be any one of the racial groups or religious groups and there was one group versus another, yes, but, in Metuchen, it never got to the point where it was something that was out of control, certainly not in my time. Before that, I'm sure it didn't, because there was only one type of person in Metuchen for a long time, although there were, for instance, black people in Metuchen starting in 1900. (Webb's?) family, (Cobb's?) family, some of them went back that far. I had the pleasure of working very closely with one of the churches that was trying to expand when I was Mayor. It's just wonderful to see how loyal people who are active in their churches are and what they'll do for their church. They built something, that it was like, remember that movie, "Build the ballfield and they shall come," or something?

SI: *Field of Dreams*.

DW: They built the church when they didn't have ninety people, I don't think.

JW: That was Reverend Dale.

DW: Reverend Dale. Now, it's beautiful, and it's been expanded. He's dead, he's gone, but he was forward-looking. For me to tell you there was no bias in the people in Metuchen would either tell you that I don't understand or that I'm not telling the complete truth. There was and there still is and there always will be a certain amount, but, on a scale of one to ten, I think we got an eight or nine.

SI: It is interesting that the group met so often, twice a week.

DW: Sometimes; I'm not saying every time. There was no schedule. It wasn't on a schedule, although it was scheduled at least once a week for a while there. There was a time of need there where, every day, we were seeing something happening--not in Metuchen, but how far is it to New Brunswick, how far is it to Perth Amboy? Not far, I've got to tell you. Now, it's even worse for a different reason. It's a different situation and things are okay, but what's different now is, we're right on Route 1, we're right near Route 27, 287, the airport--we're right in the middle of everything. So, it isn't that you can say, "Nothing that's happening in Newark is going to bother me," not true. It's fifteen minutes on the highway to get down here. So, you're responsible for everything all the time. You can't really rest and say nothing's going to happen.

SI: Were there any protests or marches in Metuchen at that time?

DW: I can't remember any marches in Metuchen. Protests, what do you call a protest, if it's a bunch of some people walking around? We had that from time to time, but not in large numbers, some people just trying to make a point, okay.

SI: There were no sit-ins or takeovers of buildings.

DW: No. When you've got half the people that are active in town on the committee, you're not going to get too much of that, which was good.

SI: Going to the issue of new people moving into town and the population expanding, from the time you joined the Council up to your tenure as Mayor, how often did the issue of zoning and new housing come up? How did you deal with it?

DW: We had a zoning board and we had a planning board, we had all these boards. As the community grows, they become much more active and their responsibility is much greater. The truth of the matter is that, in our community, we were lucky, because our forefathers thought about zoning and planning. If they hadn't, we'd have been in really big trouble on the one hand, but, on the other hand, because of the way we developed, the downtown was a natural. The railroad, the reason that the railroad developed the way it did, the reason that Metuchen is really like it is, is the fact that, during World War II, Raritan Arsenal was a very, very busy place. There were a lot of things going on there and there were a lot of people coming from the city even going out to Raritan Arsenal. Metuchen was the closest place. So, they'd take the train to Metuchen, and then, they'd get transportation out to Raritan Arsenal. As a result, Metuchen had more stops than New Brunswick or even Rahway, and still has as many or more. That's why the station grew like it grew, because it was a very popular station, because of Raritan Arsenal.

SI: You were tying the growth of Raritan Arsenal with the zoning issues.

DW: It had to do with the zoning issue only to the point that a lot of the people that worked there permanently then started to live in town. As the town developed, we had to put limitations on areas for each lot. In certain areas, it was like a full acre, but you really had to keep it small.

Otherwise, you were limiting yourself to how many people you could even have in this town, because, if you ever drive in Metuchen, we have some parks and, thanks goodness, we were able to prepare for those parks. We did a good job, I think, as a community. So, we have four or five ball fields, parks, available for our young people and for the older people who want to still partake, tennis courts. I was accused, at one point, with the tennis courts, of having them built for my family. My son, as I think I mentioned to you, was number one singles on the Rutgers Tennis Team. My second son also was on the Rutgers Tennis Team. My daughters played college tennis. We, as a family, used to go out Sunday. So, we loved tennis. So, somebody came to one of the meetings when I was Mayor and they said, "Mayor, we know why you built those tennis courts. You build it for your family." This guy didn't know from tennis, but he was of the opposite party and he was just trying to zing it to me. I said, "That's all right, George, don't worry--I built it for my family, but anyone who wants to join us is welcome at any time." I think that was pretty good and that ended the discussion. If I had said, "What do you mean my family?" then, we could have got into a long debate. I learned that by agreeing, as long as it doesn't cost me anything, sometimes, it's the best thing to do, tongue-in-cheek, sometimes.

SI: What other issues stand out in your memory from your time on the Council, before you became Mayor? What were the major issues that the Council dealt with?

DW: I think most of my memory is afterward. We were still a growing community. We were busy. We started to plan long-term, which was important, which hadn't been done before. It was, "Let's make it until tomorrow. Let's make the tax base be okay. Let's keep the taxes down." That sounds good, but, sometimes, you've got to raise it a little bit to prevent a tremendous raise down the line, because of certain things that have to be done. So, that was always a concern and it always will be a concern. There's got to be a balance. You've got to have enough to run the community and you don't want to get more than you need. Then, of course, different people have different opinions as to what's enough for the community. Some people, and I guess I subscribe to that, think education is very vital and I have to say, in Metuchen, the school budget, except for a couple of times, almost always passed, because the people feel that way. The government of Metuchen has stayed out of the politics of being involved with the School Board. In many communities, that's not the case and, as a result, a lot of things happened that were political rather than in the best interest of the whole community. We'd go vote and there's the school budget, we have confidence in our School Board and we'd vote for the budget. A lot of people in Metuchen, even senior citizens, did that. You used to say, in some towns, everybody's a senior citizen, "I have mine--my kids are out of school now. What do I need the budget for schools for?" "Hey, who paid for you when your kids were there?" So, it's something that's going to be always with us, but I certainly believe that education is a tremendous investment that we need. Look, the other countries of the world, they seem to be getting ahead of us in education and where does that start? It starts in kindergarten. My grandchildren that live in Metuchen, they're eight years old and I'm watching what they're doing in math and things. I'm not sure I can keep up with them at this point and they're only in third grade. I see progress, anyhow, for sure, but we have to do it. We have to spend money on education and, also, we talk about the need for clean air and things like that. You say, "What can a community do?" Hey, we recycled in Metuchen. In fact, we started the first recycling in the area, when this old guy was Mayor. I didn't do it alone, the Council--no one does anything alone, I want you to know. I receive a lot of credit for those years and I'm grateful for it, but I was in the right place, had the right people

and a tremendous amount of support. That's how we got a number of things done. Nobody does it by themselves.

SI: How did the recycling program come about?

DW: I did it with the Boy Scouts. It was paper recycling. They picked up newspapers and we supported it. We used some borough trucks and things like that. We recycled newspapers. That was the first thing in this area that was done. Of course, recycling has become a major project for everybody now and thank goodness for that. Clean air is so important and it's just something that you have to start at the local level. You can't start it at the federal level. There's a million things you can do in a community as well and we've always tried to support whenever we can. We're a small town, but you know what? every little bit helps.

SI: You said that they started developing this long-term plan towards the end of your time on the Borough Council. What were some of the elements of that plan?

DW: It wasn't only in the long-term. It started, I would say, in the early '70s. It wasn't at the end of the era. People were thinking and talking about it. This is nothing that just came out of the blue, but, in order to plan long-term, you have to put aside a certain amount of monies for things. You have to. You can't just say, "Well, we're going to do this." "With what? Where are you going to get the money?" You have to seek support from the county, from the state, from the federal government. There are certain monies that are available and we had just the right people in place for grants and for things like that, who were forward-looking. The success of the community wasn't because of the Mayor alone. I think the Mayor helped by supporting the right people, by having the right committee chair people in place, by having the right administrators and higher department heads. This is what does it in a community and that's what did it in Metuchen. We had a perfect storm that way and I was the beneficiary of it, because a lot of things did happen during that time, but it happened because of all the support of everyone.

JW: Can I interject?

SI: Sure.

JW: I think one of the reasons he was so successful was that he was a very hands-on person. When he was on the Council, he was in charge of public works and he would go out in the snow, with the snow removal people, ride the truck with them and check the town that way. So, he was into everything and he knew what was going on and people appreciated that he really cared.

SI: What do you remember about your campaign for Mayor? Did you run in 1969 or did you take office in 1969?

DW: I ran in 1968. '69 is my first year as Mayor, '69 to '79, yes.

SI: What stands out about that campaign?

DW: When I ran for Mayor? What stands out is that I felt I was very fortunate, because the people in the community were very supportive and that means irrespective of party affiliation. They encouraged me and they supported me and I've never had a moment's regret for running in any capacity for any office. My good fortune is having this young lady sitting here next to me, not only being my advisor, she is my savior. I'd come home some nights, I was spent--maybe more from pharmacy meetings than borough government meetings--but I always knew she was there and I knew that I had that support. It's awfully important to have a home that's comfortable. They thought for a long while that she was a widow, because she went to all the PTAs alone. Why, she had three PTAs to go to at one time, because we had four kids and they were in elementary, junior high and high school. She kept herself very busy. She was involved, president of the women's auxiliary of the temple, she was president of the women's auxiliary of the Pharmaceutical Association at the state level, she was involved in all the PTAs.

JW: This is about you, Dear, not me.

DW: It's about you and that makes it about me.

SI: What other issues from your time as the Mayor stand out in your memory? You dealt with these larger issues through the Coalition. What about the everyday work of running the town?

JW: The swimming pool, public swimming pool.

DW: Yes, even when I was still on the Council, we were working on this, and finished it when I was actually the Mayor, a municipal pool, which we still have and it's marvelous. There was objection and we lost two elections because of our desire to build that community swimming pool. Fortunately, I didn't run in any of those times, so, I might've lost, too. I don't know. Although I've never lost an election in Metuchen, I've lost one election in my life. That was when I was on the Board of Freeholders, but even then, I still won in Metuchen when I lost that election in the county. So, I still have never lost in Metuchen. We knew it was going to be something for the community that was going to be worthwhile. We had the area, we could finance it, we figured it out and it was a political hassle all the time. Finally, after six or seven years, we were able to build it. Of course, we knew what was going to happen, but there were those who were against the pool that actually asked their constituents to not even join after it was built. It's like poking yourself in the eye, because we had an obligation as a community to keep that thing going. If we didn't get enough people to join, it was going to come out of the coffers of the community and not of the people that already had paid to join. It was a tough issue.

SI: Why was it so difficult?

DW: I never could figure that out. I don't want to get into any politics in our discussion, but it became a political issue and I don't even think about it anymore. All I know is, it's there, I know it's served the community well. I know that, in recent years, they've allowed people from Edison to join, who live in a certain area around it. I know that it's renovated regularly. It looks as nice or nicer today than it did when it was built. We belonged for many years to it and that was our Sunday there, the whole family out there. It was just terrific, but, anyhow, you ask anybody, any time afterward, were they glad we had the pool? It never cost the Borough any money. I mean,

there's a certain appropriation you have to have for certain services, so, you're paying people, but it was never a drain on the community.

SI: How did the expansion of the road system and the highways around here affect your job?

DW: That's where we had a very good borough engineer, name was Mr. Buchanan. We would develop five-year plans and it would be plans for development above the ground and below the ground. Storm water was a problem and we still have the problem on Main Street. When it really rains hard, you can't get underneath that underpass. Did I tell you that story about the underpass? This was when I was a kid. There was a fellow named Judge Bowers who had a garage and he had a wrecker, a truck. I always said Judge Bowers, one of the ministers in town and my grandfather ran the community from the potbellied stove in the back of our pharmacy. When it would rain like all heck, if you ever go there now, you still can't see--it goes down like this on each side, so, you can't see how deep it is at each end here. You might say, "It doesn't look that bad," but, when you get down in there, you can have it over your car almost. They'd come up to the station and ask, "Can I get through there?" The Judge would say, "Sure, go right ahead." In those days, with the cars that they had, they weren't waterproof underneath, that was for sure. They'd go and they'd get about twenty-five feet into there, or maybe less, and you wouldn't have to worry about drowning, because they would float up before anything happened. Then, he'd get his wrecker out and he'd pull them out, and then, he charged them five bucks. So, he had told them to do it, and then, he went and pulled them out. As a matter-of-fact, five bucks in those days, that could be five hundred bucks today, I think, but that was Judge Bowers. He was quite a character.

SI: Did any of the larger road expansions, like the growth of Routes 1 and 287, affect the community?

DW: Perhaps traffic-wise. Route 27's a state road. Where we're involved is, we'd like to make some changes and we'd have to get permission from the state to do that. For instance, one thing that we wanted to do is, if you're coming into Metuchen via Route 27, there's a left turn at the light before you come down the hill that goes over a bridge. You make a right there, and then, you're on Middlesex Avenue. We wanted to fix that and we almost had it accomplished, because, then, the state ran out of money. They drew up the plan so that when you get to that spot, they'd put a bridge over the railroad and down to the right, so that Route 27 doesn't go down, make a left and a right again. It just bears over and goes down that way. That would've saved Metuchen a lot of traffic, too, because people that are passing through, they wouldn't be passing through the middle of town as heavily as they do. That "L" thing caused all kinds of problems. So, state roads, county roads--Woodbridge Avenue is a county road, not a local road, Grove Avenue is a county road, not a local road--the local roads were the ones that you're responsible for, and so, maintenance to the roads, maintenance of the sewer system. That's how we started, with the water under that thing. You can't do much with that Pennsylvania Railroad, because they have to take care of that and they're not too quick at doing things that are major. That would cost them a fortune, apparently. So, they've alleviated it. It isn't as bad as it was. It used to be that if you got three drops of water, you were in deep you-know-what. Today, it's not as bad as it was, but it still isn't what we would like to see it as. The police, at a certain level, close it off and that's the only smart thing to do. Storm sewers, we put a lot of those in during

that ten-year period of time, but a lot of them were there before we started, just increasing the volume. Some of them were just old, had to be replaced. So, that's an ongoing thing and we were doing that. We talked about the railroad. We ended up with a raised level railroad, like we have today, where you just walk onto the train. We worked with the federal government and we worked with the state government and the county government. Again, I appointed somebody from our community and a committee, so that we could control what was happening. It took us nine years to do it, but we got the elevated railroad. In 1979, it was finished. In fact, that and the senior citizens' housing was finished at the same time. We had a raised level platform station before New Brunswick, before Rahway, Elizabeth. Only Newark had it before we did. That was something which was really beneficial for our community.

SI: In general, what was your relationship like with the state and the federal government during your tenure as Mayor? How often would you have to deal with those entities?

DW: It was because of the financing. We had financing from the federal government. We had to deal with the railroad, but the railroad was easy to deal with, as long as you didn't ask them for any money, at that time, and then, the county, and then, actually, the community. So, it wasn't a lot of community money. Obviously, we couldn't give too much, but it was to the benefit of the railroad, for sure, and then, to the benefit of the federal government and the state government, because it trickles down. That does trickle down. Some political people think other things trickle down, but they don't.

SI: Were there other major projects that you had to work with the county, state and federal government on?

DW: We worked with the County on, for instance, recycling. We developed our own program, but they helped us with recycling. The County helped us with purchasing. We'd get some of our trucks and cars through their purchasing contracts. We'd get them a lot cheaper than if we were out and do it ourselves. Again, there's so much going on now that I'm not even aware of, but we were starting to do that then. So, there's even much more cooperation and the County makes money available for some of our arts programs and things like that and the state government does also.

SI: During your time as Mayor, what work would you do in terms of the economic development of the town? Did you work to attract new kinds of businesses to the community?

DW: We were always doing that. Right now, in fact, we had a planner down to look over the parking area down there near the station. It's a lot at New and Pearl Street. We are planning a building complex and it's passed all the zoning requirements. There are still some planning requirements they're working on, but it's a go. We have a national contractor who's been doing a lot of shopping centers, big, tremendous things. We will have a parking garage and there's going to be 250 condos. There's going to be some commercial and, on the ground floor, there's going to be some business. The reason they're building the garage is because this will be taking up the parking lot and we need that parking for the 250 people that are going to be living there. Also, we need it for people that are shopping and those who leave their cars there in the morning and

commute daily on the railroad to their jobs. So, there'll be enough parking there for all of that. It's going to be a four or five-level structure.

SI: You left office in 1979.

DW: Let me tell you one thing I want to tell you about; I just thought of it. We always used to start our meetings with a prayer, just like Congress does. Now, it's before the Supreme Court, "Can they do that?" It finally got there. We were there in the middle 1970s. We had a minister, a rabbi or a priest, a religious official, come down to help us start every meeting. The problem was that, sometimes, they'd be a little late. We decided that what we were going to do was change it from a prayer to a moment of silence. People could stand or they could sit; they could observe anything they wanted or nothing. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, you remember that name?

SI: Yes.

DW: She was "Miss Atheism" and they had cells all over the country. I think they still do. She heard about this and one of her local cells in Edison had a representative come to our next meeting, when they heard what we were planning to do. "You can't do that. We didn't even know you had a religious thing to start with. It must be stopped. It's a violation of separation of church and state," everything you can think of. It went on for three or four meetings. So, we decided we were going to do it and we announced that, at the next meeting, we were going to resolve the matter. A whole slew of their people came to the meeting. We had a short, little lady come to our session--her name was Butterfly McQueen. Does that name mean anything to you?

SI: Yes.

DW: She was the maid in *Gone with the Wind*. She came before me. She is an atheist, or was an atheist, because she passed away. She said to me, "Mr. Mayor, you know, you don't have to believe in God to go to heaven," and God sent me the answer immediately. I said, "Tell me, who do you think is in charge up there?" I thought that was the best line I ever had in my life. I didn't have time to think it up, it just came. They had some notable stars they would send out, but we went ahead with it. As far as I know, they're still active. [Flash--The Supreme Court has just ruled to uphold our action. Sorry, Madalyn.]

SI: How many times did you run for office?

DW: I ran for Mayor three times.

SI: Three.

DW: I ran for Council two times. I'll tell you something funny. I was campaigning one night in Metuchen. Metuchen and Edison intertwine and there's one development where half of it's in Metuchen and the other half is in Edison. I'm campaigning that night and, in those days, we used to stop at nine o'clock. I'm knocking on doors and I get to the end of the border of Metuchen and it's nine o'clock. So, coincidentally, it was time for me to stop anyhow. I'm about to stop and I see one of my opponents coming toward me. He says, "Hi, Don." I said, "What are you doing?"

He said, "What are *you* doing?" I said, "I'm campaigning." He says, "Me, too. I just came from this whole area." He had campaigned in Edison. He didn't realize it, and I didn't tell him. I understand, the next night, he went back to the same place. I thought that was kind of funny, but I was very nice about it. I said, "Good going."

All the things that I've done, I've enjoyed. I've considered it a *mitzvah*, a blessing, for me to be able to be involved. I don't look at it as having contributed and created, I look at it as receiving a lot of satisfaction from all the things, and I never did anything alone. We've got, thank God, the kind of a community that everybody pitched in. They would come in meetings and tell me, "Hey, we'd like to do..." but, then, if I formed a committee, which I would do almost always, they'd volunteer to serve on the committee. We did a lot of things in Metuchen mainly because of their willingness to participate.

Service to the People of Middlesex County

Following his successful tenure as Mayor of Metuchen, Donald found success on the county level, winning election to the Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders, on which he served from 1981 to 1990. Following his time on the Board, he was appointed to the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission in 1992 and served as Chair of the Commission in 1994. He also joined the Middlesex County College Board of Trustees in 1994.

SI: You left the Mayor's office in 1979. Did you run for Freeholder in the next election or not until 1981?

DW: There was a year in-between.

SI: Okay.

JW: He had to rest.

DW: I was nine years a member of the Board of Freeholders.

SI: How did that come about?

DW: I think what happened was that I've always believed that you stay in office, you do what you can, but, if there's no movement at the top, there's not going to be any movement anywhere else, either. There were a lot of good people available, like John Wiley, who was my successor. Joyce and I made the call together.

JW: I'd like to take the credit.

DW: I figured that it was time for there to be a change in the government. People were wonderful; they didn't want me to step down. Sometimes, in retrospect, maybe I should've stayed there. I'd still be there, because I loved it that much. My pharmacy was the headquarters and it was just so comfortable. Then, John Wiley became the Mayor and I always said I was going to still stay involved. There were people that thought that I would be a good candidate for the Middlesex County Board of Freeholders. Two years later, I was actually elected to the Board. First time I was a candidate, I was not successful. Metuchen's a small community and the Board of Freeholders would usually pick their representatives from the larger ones. I became a member of the Board of Freeholders in 1981. There were a lot of things that were different. The thing about being a mayor is, it's more tangible. You're right there, especially in Metuchen; you feel like everything is more real. When you're at the county level, you've got twenty-five towns you're working with, but, on the other hand, you have a lot of things, like the corrections facility that we did, the park preservation that we've done and the cultural arts improvement that we had, a lot of things at that level which you could never do at the local level. Did I enjoy being on the Board of Freeholders? Sure I did; I liked being involved and I always enjoyed that.

SI: Earlier, you described how you did not get picked because they chose people from the larger communities.

DW: Usually, yes.

SI: Was that just in terms of being selected to run or did you run and lose that election?

DW: No, I didn't; I wasn't picked to run. I didn't actually run. I think I've run for office nine times and I lost the last time. That was the year that the Democrats lost over the whole state, from the dog catchers up. I won't mention any names whatsoever, but, when you're running for Board of Freeholders, you've got to recognize that the head of the ticket, Governor level, is going to have a lot of effect. Where you have a lot of effect in the community that you live in, you don't have that kind of a clout in the other twenty-four communities in the county. Even in that election that I lost, I did win in Metuchen. I got high votes in that town.

SI: That was the Florio backlash.

JW: Yes.

DW: You said it, I didn't. That wasn't his fault, to a degree, but we're not going to get into that discussion. We always decided things together and we had decided that three terms was enough, à la before President Roosevelt. I wasn't going to run that time, but we could see what was happening and we weren't going to desert any ship. After all my involvement, we weren't going to walk away from something because it wasn't looking good. So, I did run and I'm not sorry at all. I didn't take it personally.

SI: How was running for Freeholder different? Obviously, you are out of your familiar territory, your community that you know so well. What is involved in a campaign on the county level?

DW: One thing that's different, don't forget, you're now running in twenty-five communities and we hit every one of those twenty-five communities. We would go out three and four times a week during the election period, from when September got started until the election itself. You'd travel and the local organizations would set up the program for you. Sometimes, we'd just go in and say hi and we'd leave and go another place and say hi, but we had been there, you know what I'm saying?

JW: A lot of dinners.

DW: I was campaigning in Sayreville and this fellow comes up to me. He says, "Do you remember me?" I never lied--I said, "I recognize you, but I really don't remember. Tell me, what's your name?" and he told me. He said, "I'll never forget you. I'll never forget the body block that you put on me when Metuchen played Sayreville. I can still feel it." That was in 1942 and this was in 1980-something--he really must've got hit pretty hard.

SI: You mentioned a few major issues that you dealt with once you were on the Board of Freeholders. What was the first major issue that you dealt with?

DW: I had corrections and we built the new corrections facility. We had a thousand prisoners at that time. The serious ones were in the state prison, of course. We built a new facility and we went for something new--direct supervision. Up until that time, most prisons were just jail cells. In this, they're like open dormitories, which are supervised by the corrections officers. This new facility was recognized by the state and they recommended it. We weren't the first in the country for sure, but we were the first in the state--there were six or seven that modeled their facilities after ours. That was the adult facility. Then, we also built a youth facility and a special school attached to it. It used to be that when there were young people that had problems, they were incarcerated for a period of time, sent back home--what was different, except that they were away for a short period of time? What we actually initiated was a situation, if there was psychological help that was needed or whatever help, they would get that. We had an alternate school there. They were getting schooling while they were incarcerated. We would now be able to rehabilitate to a degree and that proved very successful. It was a new building, it had a gym and it had facilities for, I think, twenty-four, and then, there were some that came in during the day. I used to call them "day guys" and they would go to maybe the alternate school, or we had all kinds of programs that were established. Up until that time, it was like an incarceration for young people who were incorrigible. So, I think it was a big step forward. It was something that I considered one of the most gratifying things that I was involved with. Even the new facility for the adults, with this set up the way we had it, the hands-on setup we had, we initiated programs for them, too, and even educational programs. For those that were going to be longer, but had proved to be trustworthy, we'd bring up some courses from Middlesex County College and things like that. So, we started kind of a rehabilitation, not just an incarceration.

SI: Was there any opposition to what you were trying to do with the corrections facilities or was it just a matter of getting the work done?

DW: There wasn't a lot of it. We had a Criminal Justice Planning Committee. I had that criminal justice group--in other words, the courts, the judges, the sheriff, the prosecutors, the police, the State Police, County Police, and those who worked at rehabilitation--all of them were on this committee, one or two. We were able to coordinate our thinking with this. It had been disbanded and we reorganized it, first or second year I was there. This committee was extremely helpful, because it was our public relations arm. The different areas didn't seem to be talking to each other. They were all doing a good job, best they could do, but it wasn't as good as they could do when they started to work together more. I think it turned out to be certainly in the best interest of not only the County, but, also, of the prisoners, who came out differently than they would have if they were just locked up and sent home afterward. Up until then, we were guilty of that, too.

SI: You were also involved in the economic revitalization of parts of the county, including New Brunswick's downtown area. How did that take place?

DW: When I was given the courts and criminal justice, they figured, with this wonderful wife that I have, "How about giving him something really pleasant to work with?" So, I was appointed to the Cultural and Heritage Commission. I was very happy that that did happen, because we accomplished certain things that were very gratifying.

The State Theater was in terrible disrepair and it was a blight on the community. The downtown center of New Brunswick was starting to develop and there were people bidding for that property. The Director of the Cultural and Heritage Commission, Anna Aschkenes, a terrific person, realized that if this went private, it was going to hurt the development in that area, especially not knowing what was going to be there and knowing what had been there before, which was less than satisfactory for developing a new cultural center. What happened was that I was able to find out that they wanted a certain amount of money for it. It was about two million dollars. We decided, she and I, to go to the Board of Freeholders. I was on the Board at that time, of course. I went to the Board and we agreed that we would get it--not to keep, but to have it to be able to be used. The feeling was that we would have a linchpin for that center if we kept that. The reason that was so was because those of us who are old enough remembered what the State Theater had been like. It was a beautiful theater. With the other theaters, there are two other theaters right there now, and then, the Mason Gross Cultural Center is up on the next corner, it was a natural that if that were to be put into good condition, it could be used for, perhaps, national arts. In other words, you could get big-time performers in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and that's the way it worked out. We bought it, and then, the Cultural and Heritage Committee was not involved directly in it, although they worked with everyone, but New Brunswick Tomorrow and the other people started developing this cultural center. Of course, the State Theater became the prime piece of that development. Now, we have that hotel across the way and I think it's a credit not only to New Brunswick but to the County and to the whole state. They have some restaurants there now that are very good--try one some time soon.

SI: Were you directly involved in the renovation of the theater?

DW: I became a member of the committee. I was on that committee the first few years, when they were starting to renovate. They kept me involved all the time that I was on the Board of Freeholders, which was three or four more years. They had wonderful people, who were giving of their time, because they believed. Rutgers University helped in that area as well. Did I do it by myself? No, I didn't. Was I helpful in encouraging the purchase? Yes, I was.

Anna Aschkenes, the Director of the Cultural and Heritage Committee, a very talented person, was recognized as the person who could help the state determine what the needs are of the various cultural and heritage commission members in our county. So, in other words, every year, Metuchen submits budgets or proposals for some funds from the county. The money is given to the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage and she determines how it's to be distributed, so that a lot of the things that are being done in the communities are being partially funded by the county. It's really developed culture and heritage in the true sense.

For instance, we refurbished the Cornelius Low House, which is a Georgian mansion. This Georgian mansion was built by a gentleman who was a very successful businessman. Cornelius Low was a merchant and Raritan Landing was a place where a lot of commerce took place, right here in New Brunswick or right at Raritan River. He built his home in 1741 and it was a Georgian mansion, beautiful, but, through the years, it deteriorated. We decided that we were going to rebuild it and the Board supported the Commission. It's a beautiful building now. There also is the Middlesex County Museum and all the programs are issued for free to the

residents of the county. It's just a great thing to visit every once in a while and we're proud of that. We refurbished it and it's just a beautiful looking building now.

SI: After you left office as a Freeholder, you joined the Board of the Middlesex County Community College.

DW: Right, I was appointed to the Middlesex County College Board of Trustees.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement there and what you tried to accomplish?

DW: I noticed that a lot of the students who came there-- it was not a residential institution, of course--they'd have one course in the morning, maybe another one later on in the day. In order to study, they'd be sitting around in their cars, they'd be sitting on the lawn. In the summer, it wasn't so bad, but, in the winter, it was kind of tough. They were sitting in the halls, but they had no place to really go. We discussed it on the Board and the Board agreed that we needed someplace where they could get instruction and support and they could be in some location and they wouldn't have to be sitting in a car or in a hallway. So, we built this structure adjacent to the library and it's called the Instruction and Resource Center. They have any number of meeting rooms. It has little corrals. They're little study areas. They're like little rooms almost, any number of those. We had computer rooms. We had it built long enough so that it could accommodate more than enough of the students of the school that would use it. The organizations used the small meeting room and having the library right next to it makes it even more convenient. I consider that one of the most gratifying experiences I had while I was on that board, to be able to go back now and see fifty or sixty students involved, either on a computer or just studying or having a meeting. It's something that I think the Board can be pleased about, because I think we accomplished something for the students which is vital. Now, everything that they need to handle while they're at the school, if they're not in class, is available to them. To me, that was awfully important. We've had some very fine leadership as far as the presidents of the college are concerned. There's been great support between the College and the Board of Freeholders. The Board of Freeholders and the College are independently supportive of each other, but the Board of Freeholders has let the College Board operate in an independent fashion and really been able to develop this college. It's something that we're all very proud of.