RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE WHITE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Charlie White on June 19, 1998 in Perth Amboy New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and ...

Eve Snyder: Eve Snyder

KP: I guess I'd like to begin by asking about your parents, because you're a real Perth Amboy native. Not only were you born in Perth Amboy in 1918, but your father was born in Perth Amboy.

Charlie White: My father was born here. My mother was born in Jersey City but moved here and was a member of the first graduating class of Perth Amboy High School. She was one of seven sisters and she's the only one that went beyond eighth grade. They were all bright, witty women, but they were women. My mother had to make an absolute plea to my grandfather to be allowed to go to school. Her marks were good enough and he ventured to let her go to Trenton State, which we now call the College of New Jersey. She went there and she always joked about it and I said, "Mom, why did you go to college and none of my aunts did?" She said, "Because I was the ugly one and he figured I would never get a husband. So I better learn a profession to support myself." [laughter] And of course, she was a beautiful woman, you know, but that was always her way of explaining it. Her sisters always called her "The Scholar" and had a deep respect for her.

KP: And she taught in the school system?

CW: She taught in the school system and she told me things. My mother talked to me a lot because I was the youngest of five children and her mind was not totally used up in house cleaning and running the whole show. You know, she had five kids, and she loved cooking. But while she was cooking, I would be in the kitchen. She would talk to me and say things like, "Are you having a good time, Baby?" She would tell me things about the family, and I do have a good memory and I remember things. I know because my sisters would say, "Why do you know that and we don't?" and I would say, "Because Mom talked to me and she didn't talk to you!" And she did, and she told me things. When she went to school, they instituted a course in Psychology at Trenton State. One of the first, probably, at least certainly in a teachers' college, and do you know what the text book was? The two William James' volumes.

KP: Wow!

CW: Nothing like going to the source, right? It was not, you know, something new that just came out. She said her teacher was this brilliant woman, probably a Gertrude Stein type, who was a pupil of William James. It's that kind of piercing mind, but dare say, she had a man's mind. I can't say that can I? [laughing] You don't mind? Oh, I just wanted to say that. But she had kind of a direct mind, and my mother was fascinated by it.

KP: How long did your mother stay in the school system and how much did she make?

CW: She taught about ten years, from around 1895 to 1905. She made eighteen dollars a month when she got married, and my father made fifteen dollars. She made more than my father.

KP: Really?

CW: He worked for his own father. There was no public school when my father was born in Perth Amboy. My mother had gone to Jersey City public schools and then came here. By this time they had started the grammar school and high school. But my father went to, what he used to joke about Warner Institute. It was a school master school. They had it on Rector Street in the large federal kind of building. It only took boys, only boys, and it was a pay school, so not all the boys in the town could attend; it was the ones who could afford to. And I imagine he went there only for four years, and yet to me, my father was one of the smartest men I ever met.

KP: You said that he served as an apprentice?

CW: Yes, he went to study under Edison at Menlo Park.

KP: What year was he with Edison? Do you know?

CW: I would think like about '85. 1885.

KP: What did he ever say about Edison?

CW: Wouldn't talk about him.

KP: Really?

CW: He would not talk about it, and I'd ask my mother, "Why?" because I didn't know him. When my mother told me, she said, "You know your father studied with Thomas Edison, he was a friend." And when I asked my father, he said, "Oh, yes, we won't talk about that." And I said to Mom, "Why can't he talk about it?" and she said, "I think Edison used to hit them." He had a vicious temper. Not a nice man, personally. And my father was a very non-violent man, tremendously non-violent. We were never hit. There were five children: nasty, rough, arrogant, conceited. So you could imagine there was chaos at times, but we were never, not one of us was ever hit. Well, my father had a silence that could destroy you. I came home from the Army, and a couple of choice words slipped out, and he didn't talk to me for forty-eight hours. I was almost in tears and I said, "What did I do?" My sister, Mary, said, "Your language." I said, "Oh, I'm sorry." Just that silence, it wasn't that, you know, it hurt or anything. It's just, "I'm above this, and I don't like what you said and I did not hear it." And it destroyed me. I hate to keep thinking that people were better in those days. I don't think they were, but I'm trying to figure out, did they have more courage than we had? My mother and father put five of us through school. College. How? The sacrifice must've been tremendous. I know one thing. My mother used to, when she was home, play records on the Edison machine. My father forgave Edison enough to buy an Edison phonograph. Which was called, I believe, a gramophone in those days. And she loved show music. Which I still do, I collect it. And they apparently went to a lot of

shows when they were young and just married. And after we came along, there wasn't money for that. I can't remember them, in my boyhood, going to a New York show. It breaks my heart. I didn't realize they sacrificed that for us, you know, to go to school. But, I think that's where my sister, Ruth, and I got our yen to go into theater. Listening to old show tunes.

KP: What did your father do for a living?

CW: He was a designer. He designed marine fittings, as they were called in those days. Ocean liners, which you know were plentiful in those days, came here, quite large ships that came in. Things made for them had to be made specially. You couldn't call up the Home Depot and say, "I want three funnels," or something. And ... so my father would design them ... you know, on paper, and then they were made, carved in wood. And then that wood was soaked in wet sand. And then when that sand hardened, you had the shape of the fitting that was needed, and then they poured the molten metal into it. And then you had the fitting for the ship, or the machinery or something. Everything was made to order. And it was labor intensive, and there was no profit on it because you didn't make one and then make four thousand. You made one and you broke it up.

KP: Was your father in business for himself?

CW: No, my grandfather had the business. He came from Ireland. His name was Patrick White, and he started the machine shop and foundry. And I could never find out where the money came from. He educated them quite well. And one was going to be a doctor, Uncle John was going to be a doctor. I never knew much about my grandfather. My mother said he was a cranky, autocratic Irishman. She would tell me one story. He had six boys and ... she said his wife Mary, my grandmother, was a lovely, shy woman. She wanted some female presence around the house. They tried to adopt girls, you know, but had no luck. So she had all these boys that played. They had their own baseball team, you know. And they, they did crazy things. And the grandfather apparently wasn't that mean. But when his wife died, Uncle Jim's wife, one of the daughter-in-laws, came in and the living room had no curtains. So to help Grampa White, she went out and bought curtains and put them up. And he came home from work and said, "What is this?" And she said, "Oh, Father White, I thought you'd like some curtains, and I bought them and put them up." And he went over to them and physically tore them from the poles. He said, "I didn't have curtains when my wife was alive, and I won't have them now." [laughs] Oh, but he was good to them. He sent them to colleges and things. He went back to Ireland and wanted to marry a widow he met over there, and the brothers were horrified. And they sent two of the boys over and they dragged him home without the wife. They did terrible things in those days. That's why I hesitate to say how wonderful they all were. He was probably a young man when his wife died. You know, I mean, as we would say now, he went over and found somebody he loved. But no, they went over and physically got him back, so I think maybe that might account for some of the crankiness, don't you think so? He couldn't marry a second time. What was wrong? His wife was dead. No, no, no. But they had to. The family … my sister, Ruth, used so many of the relatives for characterizations on stage. And I'm trying to explain sometimes why they behaved like they did. They were ... a different breed of people.

KP: How long did your father work in ship design?

CW: Oh, until the late thirties. Then he had a second stroke. And his eyes … he had cataracts. He was a volunteer fireman and we had a very big fire about 1918 at the dry-docks and he was hit by falling bricks. They think then, maybe it didn't have anything to do with it, but the cataracts started growing. And then, it was a big thing in those days, cataracts. You were blind. You had the operation. And then they grew back, and the second operation was in New Brunswick, and it was like that [snaps his fingers]. Then after all these years he had his eyesight. Amazing, you know. I've had cataracts. My cataract operation took an hour and a half. I mean from when I left the house till when I came back. I think twenty-five minutes in the operating room. And the operation, I think, took a minute and a half. Amazing.

KP: Now it's become very routine whereas before it was a major thing.

CW: Major thing. You went to the ... Manhattan Eye & Ear, which was the only hospital on the east coast that did this operation to remove cataracts. And the King of Siam was there. He was having the same operation, but he had the entire floor over the room where my father was. And he was allowed to bring, I think, something like eight of his wives. They all had on brown mink coats, and they all were little. And they all ran with those little oriental steps that you see in the *King and I*. You know those little steps, and they would wander all over the place. And sometimes you'd bump and say, "Oh," and they'd run back. I can't believe it. Amazing, but it was the only place. And later on, Dr. Clare in New Brunswick, learned the technique and my father's second operation was in New Brunswick at Saint Peter's.

KP: You mentioned that your father was a volunteer fireman, and that's one of the things that makes Perth Amboy very distinctive, the long tradition of the volunteer fire department.

CW: Yes. My father never understood why I was not a volunteer, which was because I was always away, and I wouldn't be here to answer calls and everything. But it was assumed that you would become part of that. And ... amazing what people did then, in those days. Now my father had five children, and he was probably in his fifties. He shouldn't have been running around, you know, putting hoses on burning chimneys and things, but that was expected. And ... when Pearl Harbor happened, there was an empty Naval Reserve building, the armory. And ... the rector of the Episcopalian church up here, Saint Peter's, called my sister, Mary, who had done all kinds of local civic work. You had to. You were expected to. Everybody did something. And he said to her, "There are about thirty young men over there." They were taken right out of church and everything on Pearl Harbor day. It was Sunday morning, and it was about eleven o'clock. And they were just dragged right from their homes and Sunday dinners, and they were brought down there by car and dumped there. Now what they could do, I don't know. They had no guns, no uniforms, no nothing. And he said, "They're over there and they have nothing to eat and no blankets or anything." So, my sister, Mary, called her circuit of women friends and they got the food and it was ... amazing. By five o'clock in the afternoon, they had blankets and cots. Now the Red Cross had been doing some things. We, of course, had warnings that the war was going to happen. We were preparing for it in some way. But this was the war. This was it. We were bombed at Pearl Harbor. And ... the first thing we were told was that we, you know, had to

put black sheets on the windows because we were facing the bay. But those women came over and they had blankets and sheets and food for the people. They all just went in their kitchens and cooked and brought it over ... I don't know when we stopped doing that. Don't you think we have, Kurt?

KP: I guess it depends on the town.

CW: Is it the East that doesn't do it now?

KP: I'm not sure, actually.

CW: You must remember when we knew every single person living on the street. Even now I don't know these people. There're two men and we say, "Hello," but, you know, before it was Grace Hines and her son, Joe. They lived there. So you yelled, "Grace, you got any bananas?" You know, "Can you make a pie for the soldiers?" It was that kind of thing, they wouldn't know it … You lived and worked in Perth Amboy, but you don't anymore. I'm willing to bet you that sixty percent of the Perth Amboy High School graduating class will leave Perth Amboy.

KP: So your memories of Perth Amboy, you mentioned before we started the interview, are in many ways as a mini city, a very cosmopolitan city.

CW: Yes, yes. You could buy a ticket to a Broadway show here in Perth Amboy. We had ticket agencies …We had printers. You could have books printed. We had song printers. You could have your songs printed in Perth Amboy. And we had a lot of musicians. You could hire bands and things. You could hire entertainment. We had a lot of vaudevillians that lived here. And of course, there were women who taught piano, people who taught voice. And we had people, who came from the Metropolitan Opera twice a week, who coached the advanced people. My sister, Genevieve, studied with Nino Ruisi, who sang. And he would come to the house and he would come from New York, by train. I had a timetable from 1904, and it was ten minutes quicker from New York to Perth Amboy in 1904 than it is today.

KP: Really?

CW: Yup, yup. And of course, trains left on the dot in those days. They were efficient. Now, a trainman was a very highly respected occupation. Wonderful. But the town was not. When the Depression hit, this was a major industrial city. It's had so many layers, I always think it's like Troy. You know, there's Perth Amboy I and Perth Amboy II and Perth Amboy III and up until about … [loud airplane overhead] Thank you, Port Authority, for redirecting air traffic. This was one of the first artist colonies in America. The ... McKays. Steel McKays and his son, Percy, lived here. Percy was born here in Perth Amboy. Harry Tierney who wrote *Irene*, lived here and his family were all musicians. Ruth Saint Dennis used to spend her summers here. [William] Dunlap, who wrote *The First Plays*, had told people in New York how charming Perth Amboy was, when it was a village on the bluff overlooking the bay and all. And a lot of people knew it as a summer home. And, oh, … and a lot of MGM (musicals?). They lived here. There were a lot of theater people. It was an artist colony. L.C. [Louis Comfort] Tiffany came down

here to study art at Eagleswood and Carl Wiggins, also studied art here. That got lost when the industry came in. Industry came in because of this magnificent port. You had water on two sides, and you had a bay. And you had access to New York Harbor, and you had access to the world. It was ideal, and the industries are all built on the edge, on the waterfront. They brought their tankers right in, they brought their barges right in. And that was so successful that we lost the beauty of the artist colony.

ES: Was the artist colony a remnant of the Eagleswood that was here in Bay Union?

CW: Yes, yes, here in Bay Union. It was friendly, too. Marcus Spring, who started Eagleswood Colony, lived until about 1875. And he was active in the town. He stayed, but his wife kind of lost her interest after the Civil War. But he stayed around here. But by then, the ... industry, and of course, you were getting the immigration then. The Irish came in, and the Danish and the Scottish came in. Now those influences are almost gone now. There are very little of them. But it's my … I read somewhere and I can't back it up … we have arguments about this. Thomas Mundy Peterson was the first black man to vote after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. He was encouraged to do it and escorted to the voting place by ... Marcus Spring who founded ... Eagleswood. He was a transcendentalist, a pupil of Emerson, and kind of a mystical Protestant. But the other member was Patrick Convery, who was a Roman Catholic. It was kind of interesting because, and nobody wants to admit this, I think because Thomas Mundy Peterson would've been lynched … New Jersey did not vote for Lincoln. New Jersey's record on slavery is not totally beautiful. And ... when Mrs. Spring, Rebecca Spring, Marcus' wife, went down to Harper's Ferry and got John Brown, she couldn't directly bring him into Perth Amboy, because there were mobs waiting for the bodies. So she had to stay; they kept the bodies in Rahway, and then about two o'clock at night, they brought them into Perth Amboy and buried them. So, it wasn't all waving flags and, "Oh, yes, we're honoring everyone." So it's my point that Marcus Spring and Patrick Convery probably said…Patrick Convery probably said, "If I'm with him, the Irish won't bother me." Because the Irish were not particularly, you know. The riots in New York City were sponsored by the Irish who resented the freed Negroes for taking their jobs … low paying jobs. And you can't say these things because you know history and tradition has glossed over them.

KP: Turning to your growing up, when you grew up Perth Amboy, it was also like a city. It had a lot of ethnic communities.

CW: Yes, yes, it did.

KP: And I take it a strong Irish community.

CW: Oh, yes, yes.

KP: Could you maybe talk about the Irish community that you remember, when you were young, in your twenties and thirties?

CW: I grew up as a Roman Catholic. Of course, I went to what we call, "the Irish church," which was Saint Mary's.

KP: What were the other churches?

CW: We had a big Polish church. Saint Stephen's was a very active Hungarian church, but there was also a very active Hungarian Protestant element. Now my father's friends, who were Danish, of course were, I suppose, Lutheran. And I can remember a Lutheran pastor, who was a wonderful man, named Reverend Schlotter. The Episcopalian pastor was a very aristocratic man named Northy Jones, who had money and taste and was a scholar. The Catholic pastor, when I was boy, was also a scholar. Monsignor Cantwell spoke four languages, including Latin. And he had studied in Rome … brilliant man. So that ... in no way was the Catholic church then a minority, except that the political power was still pretty much middle-class, Protestant, white. And it was only then that the Irish began to realize they could capture. I think Ed Patton was our first ... Irish Catholic mayor.

KP: Really?

CW: And he was a graduate of Rutgers, you know. And ... it was the early thirties. Yeah, but they were friendly. My father's best friend was Mayor Billy Wilson who was a Protestant. They were lifelong friends. Just the one day, on Election Day, was when they separated. But they were close friends always. And my father was great friends with Morgan Larson who was a ... Lutheran, I suppose a Danish Lutheran. There was no hostility and there wasn't bigotry. But I think the Irish came from a background of hardship and hunger and intolerance. And they were inclined, no matter what their position was, to be in favor of the common man. The Danish didn't have that experience. They came from a settled country and the Scottish did, also. The Scottish were not as downtrodden as the Irish were. So that the Irish became Democrats out of, I think, sentiment more than conviction.

KP: Do you remember when the Klan tried to march on Armistice Day, in the twenties?

CW: It wasn't in the Armistice Day Parade that they tried to march. The Armistice Day was the excuse for it. And they said that they would march on Smith Street. Now this was an outcome of the Red Scare after World War I. And ... as far as I can tell, the germ of it came from the Jewish community. They instituted a ... club that they called, I think, Knights of Justice or Knights of Equality. And they contacted the Knights of Columbus. Now the Jewish idea, I'm sure, was probably just to say, "Look, you can't do this, this is illegal to do." Of course, the Knights of Columbus' idea was a little more physical and a little more violent, and they met them. They had absolute physical fights. My father went up ... because he thought it was unjust that they would have a meeting in which they would denounce Catholicism, Jews, and Blacks, and they would be driven out of town. The Irish were too well established by then, and they met and they had physical fights. Somehow they knew that the police would not interfere. Nobody knows how, because the chief of police was a Danish immigrant, Chief Thomason. He was famous for clearing out crowds, but a wonderful man, but heavy … still has his accent. We had a police woman who was Danish, Jensina. Wonderful. It sounds like they were, it was divisive,

and it wasn't. Jensina was a wonderful woman. She could scare the you-know-what out of the kids, but she also would never hit them or anything. But she was about six feet tall. And Jensina was almost like one of those cartoons of the big housekeeping lady. She was big and she wandered around. And she could just say, "You, get in school right now," and they ran. And there's one little [story]. It was not until recently that they put women on the force again, but we had a woman on the force and she was great. It's funny. It's a funny town, Kurt ... it's a funny town. Its never cliché. It's not a pretty little village like … have you ever been to Williamstown?

KP: No, I don't think so.

CW: Where Williams College is? Have you been there?

ES: No.

CW: You swear somebody painted it. The leaves are all perfect on the trees. The grass is perfect, the perfect house. The library is exactly what you want a New England college library to be. But to me, there's something unreal about it. It's absolutely gorgeous.

KP: I've been told by some people I've interviewed about Perth Amboy that it was a very rough and tumbly town.

CW: Yes, yeah, yeah. Now, we had the bootleggers here. The crates of scotch were nailed into wooden boxes. And they had the straw. And they were dumped over by the ocean liners right in the bay. And then the boats went out in there and picked them up, out of the water, and they brought them here. And they went to a place on Route 9 around Sayreville; it's still there under the name of Jillies. It wasn't Jillies in those days, but that was the distribution for Central Jersey. It was like a well run business. The liners from Southampton wired the people, "We will be heading around Ambrose Light around such-and-such a time on Wednesday." And they would be out there within an hour. And they were prominent people, they were. But the Coast Guard still had to fire at them, and they could still go to jail. And it was illegal. I think Prohibition was a terrible mistake, I really do. It brought in, from what my mother and father tell me, crime. They had no knowledge of underground crime. And their friends weren't into crime. Now, suddenly, people they know were buying boats to run out and sell liquor. The son of a prominent man, who got thrown out of high school for failing his Latin test, found out he could go into rum running. But the element behind it all was the criminal element. And it brought it into everyday life. So I think it was a mistake. The same way drugs have done now. And I don't know what the solution to that is. We won't get into that, I know, because that's another four days. [laughs]

KP: What did you or your parents think about Smith?

CW: They loved him. He was a great idol. He was a most unusual man and, they couldn't change him … Not until the DuPonts got ahold of him and then changed him. Up until then, he was wonderful man. And ... you know he used to hate talking on the radio. No matter what they said to him, he called it the "rahdio." "And I want to talk to you on the rahdio," and he wouldn't let loose his Lower Eastside accent. He got through, in New York, some of the most incredible

social legislation. Unbelievable. And I read about ... the trips that Wagner, Senator Wagner, Al Smith, and Eleanor Roosevelt used to take. [Mr. White greets people on the street.] Hello. The Perth Amboy kids. Adorable, aren't they?

KP: Since we're on, you were mentioning about the trip with Roosevelt.

CW: He could not go and she was determined. It was a fight between the mother and the mother-in-law. But the mother wanted him to end everything. She wanted her little boy, Franklin, back even though he had five kids or something. And ... Eleanor was not going to have that. She was a remarkable woman. Remarkable. Do you know anything about Eleanor Roosevelt?

ES: Not too much.

CW: She's remarkable. I had the honor of meeting her twice. Did you know that Franklin Roosevelt had a brother? James. I think he was retarded. He's buried at Hyde Park. Normally it always tells you that Franklin Roosevelt was an only child. He was not, but he was the only one that lived. James, I think, was a mental case or something. But there was a grave up there at Hyde Park.

KP: You mention you had the honor of meeting Eleanor Roosevelt twice.

CW: The second time was when I went to a neighborhood playhouse and she came to talk to us. And I was one of the older students because I had been in the Army. And the head of the school said, "Would you see that Mrs. Roosevelt gets a taxi?" So I was talking to her for quite a while and then ... we went down and we just hailed a cab. She wouldn't let me call one, and we just hailed one. And I said to the driver, "This is Mrs. Roosevelt," and I gave him ten dollars and I said, "She's not to pay for it. Please take her to her home and see that she gets in well." Oh, she had entertained me in her home in Hyde Park, her home which was the little cottage that she built.

KP: That was the first time or the second time?

CW: The first time. And it was at Hyde Park. We played all the shows. Week after week we did a new show. And of course, being the character actor, I got the comics and the funny guys and the good parts. So she kind of took a shine to me, and she had a barbecue at her home. We went there and we talked, talked, talked, and at one point I said to her, "Mrs. Roosevelt, do you miss your big house?" She replied, "Oh, Charles, that was never my house, that was my mother-in-law's." And I went, "Oh." The little cottage was her house.

KP: This was after 1945.

CW: Yeah, yup. But now my father had owned a business. My father never had a driver's license because he didn't think a gentleman should drive a car. You called up, in the old days,

and you got a carriage, a livery man. So his idea of the same thing was that you called up and got a taxi. Now we went from Perth Amboy to Lake Hopatcong and my father went by taxi.

KP: So you used to go to Lake Hopatcong as a resort?

CW: Yeah.

KP: Every summer?

CW: Every summer.

KP: I grew up in the Lake Hopatcong area.

CW: You did? Oh, do you remember when there was a Nolan's Point?

KP: I've heard of Nolan's Point. I lived on the other side. It sounds like you lived to the Hopatcong side.

CW: We did, and my father adored it and my mother loved it. The thinking was that my mother was to have a summer's vacation from the children and running the house with the five kids, but we always brought up three or four cousins, so instead of having five kids she had eight. And she had to do more cooking than ever before. But she said she loved it, you know. We stayed in the hotel one summer when my mother said, "Let's not take a house." The girls were growing up and they didn't want to go away for the whole summer. They wanted to stay, they had boyfriends and all. They wanted to stay in Perth Amboy. So we, my mother and I, went up and we took rooms in the hotel.

KP: Which hotel, do you remember?

CW: Nolan's Point. And the band leader was Daly that had the Meadowbrook. Frank Daly, Frank Daly's Meadowbrook.

KP: Okay.

CW: And I played *Finnian's Rainbow*. I played *Finnian* at the Meadowbrook when it became a theater, and he wasn't there then. I like to talk to him about the old days because it was great, beautiful place, beautiful.

KP: Did your parents go anywhere else or did you go anywhere else before the war on vacation?

CW: Yes, we went to ... Milford. Shortly after, I would think about 1924. We went to a woman's house in Milford … a farm. We went with my Aunt Gertie, my mother's sister, Gertrude, and her grandchild, who was my age. And it was a house in Milford filled with antiques and an outdoor toilet. And we bathed in the creek and one day. Excuse me. Sorry.

KP: No, that's okay, that's okay.

[tape paused]

CW: But weren't those kids adorable? Have you been to the Perth Amboy schools?

ES: No.

CW: They ask me to come and talk quite often and ... it's a revelation. You know, people expect that they're going into blackboard jungle. You say to some kids, "Can you tell me where Miss So-and-So, the speech teacher is?" "Yes, sir, she's over there. Can I show you? I'll walk you to it." And you think, "Have they been prepared for me?" You say, "No, they didn't know I was coming." And these kids, they weren't taught to say all those things. They're adorable. And I love them because they either want to be kissed or they want you to sign an autograph and they come up to you. So where are we?

KP: Well, we were just finished talking about being in Mrs. Roosevelt's home which is quite an honor.

CW: Yeah, yeah. She's an amazing woman.

KP: And, since we were sort of on politics a little bit before, in the '20s and '30s, one very famous Perth Amboy family was the Wilentz family.

CW: Yes, they were our lawyers. We knew them well. And he was remarkable ... the Lindbergh kidnapping was so, the trial was so unusual. And lawyers now laugh at it and say it would not be allowed today. Now Mr. Wilentz, David, was a criminal lawyer. And he was the prosecutor, and the prosecutor was a man who had defended criminals. So they reversed roles and did things. And the judge must have been off somewhere in the mountains, because he made no objections and never stopped anybody. Wilentz said things that nowadays he would have been barred for saying. The newsreels are fascinating. They allowed cameras into it, and it's on newsreels. But as lawyers say, it was a laugh. It was hysterical, it was terrible. But I talked to Ed Patton about ten years ago and I said to him, "I think [he] was innocent." And he got violent. "No he wasn't! You don't know. You don't know all the evidence, people don't know, he was guilty." It's still a very vital subject. It's a vital subject at Rutgers even. Yeah. Now my sister, Ruth, had a German teacher, my sister, Ruth, graduated from Douglass. She had the German teacher who was proven to be a Nazi spy.

KP: She remembered Bergel and Professor Hauptman.

CW: Hauptman. And Hauptman used to say, "What are you Ruth?" And she said, "I'm a Roman Catholic." "I don't like Roman Catholics." He gave her a rough time, but she worked and he gave her good grades and all. She had a rough time. He was a rough man, but there was some leeway then with teachers. They had a lot of … there was not that control that there is now, and students did not object, you know. A teacher could say anything to a student then. Now you

can barely say, "You're not doing good work," without being arrested, you know. It's totally turned around. And of course, I came from a Catholic school where they could hit you.

KP: So you went through parochial school?

CW: I went through parochial school.

KP: Both high school and elementary school?

CW: No, I went two years to high school, and then we lost our house in the Depression and we moved to Woodbridge. Why we thought Woodbridge would be a financial saving, I don't know. By then my two older sisters, Mary and Genevieve, were teaching school. They graduated from Trenton State. [says hello to passerby] They graduated from Trenton where my mother had gone, and of course, that was a two year course, and they got a certificate to teach. And about, I would think about 1927 or '28, Columbia started what they called an extension work, where teachers could continue and get their Bachelor's degree by going Saturdays and nighttimes. And they were young and they immediately took advantage of it. The first year they went to Columbia. Then Columbia, which had a close affiliation with Rutgers in those days, I don't know whether it was because of the Kings and the Queens College thing or not. When I went to Rutgers, the logic prize was administered by Columbia University. Do they still do that?

KP: I don't know. I don't think so. But I don't know for sure.

CW: Yeah, it was amazing. It was, you know, a very close affiliation with them. So Dewey and his Colonia crowd came down to Brunswick and they instituted their series, and Mary and Genevieve went there, and I think they were among the first extension graduates. And I had a cousin, Gene Mullen, who graduated in '31, who was saying, "They're getting a degree and I don't think they should. I'm here at Rutgers in the daytime and they're getting a degree by just coming Saturdays and nights." And he put up this stink about it. But they worked very hard. And they got their Bachelor's degree ... that's how I got my education credits because I was in humanities. I had no time to get into the School of Education. I didn't want to go to the School of Education because I couldn't take the courses I wanted. So I took them on Saturdays with grown-ups. And of course, it was wonderful with teachers, professionals. It was wonderful because in creative education, when they say, "Oh, now let's see what would happen if we got our class to make pictures of the world." Well, I had no class. So, the teachers would do double projects and give me one. But it was very interesting. The first faculty of education came from all over. We had a teacher from Skidmore, and most of them were Columbia graduates with Dewey. John Dewey, philosophy. Now did you take your education?

KP: I got my Bachelor's at Drew and my masters and Ph.D. at Rutgers.

CW: Yeah.

KP: I've been at Rutgers quite a bit.

CW: Yeah. Did you take any education courses?

ES: No.

CW: Are you, you're not going teach?

ES: Maybe, but I'm not sure yet.

CW: See, I don't think ... you really don't have to take those courses anymore, do you?

KP: No, no, you don't.

CW: See we had to take Methods, Testing, Child Psychology, all of those things.

KP: Now did you want to be a teacher?

CW: No, I really never did.

KP: This was something you'd fall back on?

CW: My mother and father said to both Ruth and me, "We don't care what you are, but you must have a profession." And of course in the Depression you said, "I'm gonna be an actor." That was like saying, "I'm gonna be a bum." And my mother and father said, "You have to take something." So I took Humanities. Ruth took ... Languages. She was able to take Dramatics because they had a teacher named Jane Inge, who was a wonderful teacher. Rutgers had no Dramatics, none at all. So I didn't take mine until after I came out of the Army.

ES: What made you want to major in Classics?

CW: Because I failed my first six months of math, freshman math. And I went to ... the Dean.

KP: Which Dean? Dean Metzger?

CW: Metzger. And I said, "I'm never gonna finish college and I have to ..."

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KP: So he switched you to Humanities.

CW: And he said, "And then, if you take Latin and Greek, you don't have to take math, college math." And I knew I could at least memorize. I had, you know, four years of Latin, so I took Latin and Greek under Professor Clayton Hall. He was the one teacher of Classics in those days. He was a remarkable man, a graduate of Johns Hopkins, and kind of a snob, you know. He told you, "You should buy your clothes at Brooks Brothers," and he talked about the Cotillion in

Baltimore. But it was the Depression, and it was a world we didn't know about, and it was wonderful. He was one of the great teachers, and I didn't mind a little bit of snobbery. I went to a Catholic school, but he kept referring to it as a private school, "Now, Charles, you've been to a private school all your life." And it made me feel like, Whoa, I'm one of the Vanderbilts!" [laughter] That was kind of innocent snobbery, but he was also very brilliant. But he didn't get along too well with the other faculty members. We had a mixture of old-type professors, very keen, and then the younger ones who were doing it for the money, Depression things. But there were several that really changed me. The history professor was Edward McNall Burns, a mind that you wouldn't believe and an integrity that was unbelievable. You couldn't wait to go to his lectures. And then there were the others that you knew were just faking it, you knew it. [laughter] And you can do it, you got to learn that, you know, you could do it. But it was wonderful for me because otherwise I'd been at Catholic schools, and this was an education. Rough, but a good one. But I was very small. I was five feet, two inches, and I didn't reach my height until sophomore year. By then, I got into a kind of a lonesome pattern. I was five feet, two inches, you couldn't play any sports. I was the only one in ROTC without a uniform, they didn't come that small. So I marched in civilian clothes. And the next year, when I came back, they brought out the little suit, and I was now like five feet, eleven inches. "What the hell happened to you?" You know, "God, they made the suit for you and now you can't wear it." [laughing] But it was a different school.

KP: Was it a very small school?

CW: Very small. I was called in once by the Dean for missing one of the President's Teas. My presence was missed. The people who did not go were noted and we were called in. I don't think they have Presidents' Teas anymore, do they?

KP: No ... No....

CW: And we had to wear a beanie. Do they still wear a beanie at freshman year?

KP: No ... No.

CW: And there were certain walks you couldn't use. It's kind of fun.

KP: And there was real competition between the classes, particularly the sophomores and freshman?

CW: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

CW: 1938, the year we graduated, was a very close group, and they have stuck around a lot. They had, you know, Dick McCormick, Dean. There were a lot of them, and I get notes from them when they see me on television. Amazing. I think maybe because it was the last depression year, I don't count '39 because by then the war in Europe had happened. '38 was the last year when we thought, "Maybe it'll be no war. Maybe we'll have a life." And then I came out, and I went to work for part of the WPA, Department of Labor. I was not on the WPA, but

we were associated from the WA. We interviewed professions, skills, and trades people to find out what they did, what they needed for their profession. And because, I guess, the government knew they were gonna need people. I guess now as a young person, even a college person, I wasn't sure we were going to go to war. Pearl Harbor was a terrible shock.

KP: It was a shock, even that late?

CW: Yeah, yeah. And I think while we did that, we weren't doing those things just to give us salaries. We did that to get a list of people that went into trades we needed for the war effort, ship builders and things. Our little history group, that contacted you, has found out that there was a shipyard during the war. Well, I worked in there for a couple of months when I was finally judged 1-A. I gave up my job. They didn't take me for eight months and I had no money. And when I went to get a job, they'd say, "Oh, you're 1-A. I know we don't want to take you, you're gonna be leaving us." Well, I wasn't. Week after week, you know, and there was no money to even buy beer, or go out with the guys, or go to a movie that was fifteen cents. So some friends of mine told me about the shipyard that was desperate for people. And I went out there and they said, "Well, sure, we can use you no matter how long you'll be here. We'll put you in the tool room." And there I am, with my degree from Rutgers in Latin and Greek, ready to quote Cicero to the tradesmen. And, you know, they played every kind of joke on me, but I had fun. "Give me a left-handed wrench." "Hey, White, give me a bucket of steam," … all the corny, cliché jokes. And we worked around the clock. But that shipyard must've been … it was so quickly done, that somebody in Washington or Trenton was preparing. I'd like to know how much preparation Roosevelt did for the war. I guess, a lot.

KP: Were you at all worried about the peacetime, in 1940, draft?

CW: No, I was rejected that because of my eyes.

KP: So it was only when they lowered, quote unquote, "Lowered the standards."

CW: Yeah, yeah.

KP: That you were …

CW: See, I tried to join the Navy the day after Pearl Harbor, and they wouldn't take me because, you know, it was practically a joke about, you know, "Tell me the letters on the chart on the wall," you know, "What wall?" Never mind the chart, or the letters, but what wall? And the man who I went to my examination for the Navy was a classmate of mine from Rutgers. Now why he was in the Navy I don't know, because we had no Navy Reserves. It was all Army Reserves. But somehow, somehow, between '38 and '41, he had gotten into the Navy and I said, "Can't you please get me into the Navy?" I thought that was more fun. He said, "Charlie, with your eyes, I don't think you'll even be drafted." I said, "I'm 1-A, I know I'm gonna be drafted." "Maybe they'll throw you out." But they didn't. And I'm trying to think of who he was. And I have one very slightly off-color story about a classmate during World War II. Can I tell it?

KP: Oh, yes, please do.

CW: I will not mention names. But during World War II, if you had a small boat and if you donated it for use to the Coast Guard, you got an ensign's position in the Coast Guard. You and your boat came in together, and they took your boat for use during the war, and then you got it [back]. And this classmate of mine, who was always a snob, came to Perth Amboy, from, I think he lived in Somerset or New Brunswick, and, of course, he had this boat and he was the captain of it. You know, not literal captain, but the commander of his boat because he owned it and, of course, he had a crew of common sailors. So they used to go out and everything and they went out in December. And it only had one head, one toilet, and of course the sailors had to go, and they used it. Well, he was faced with the proposition of having to use the enlisted men's john, and he decided he wouldn't do that. So he put his backside off the side of the boat to relieve himself, and it was December, and he was hospitalized for six days with windburns on his derriere! The sailors all told me. I was hysterical. Oh, God, I couldn't believe that happened to Ralph. Yes, I could believe that happened to Ralph. He would risk derriere chap before he would go to the same john that the enlisted men used. Well, we had in 1936, Captain Croonquist, who was head of the ROTC Department. He was supposed to have been the Romeo of the faculty. He was an incredibly handsome man; he was kind of like John Wayne with silver. Now, he showed up Tuesday afternoons for drill. Now, we were in those awful uniforms and everything. And most of our officers were students, seniors and juniors. But he was a part of the regular Army. He showed up in riding boots, a uniform that had to come from London, a captain cavalry hat, a sword, now this is in '38, and white gloves. He was like a picture from a British magazine. Captain Croonquist.

KP: When you were …

CW: So …

KP: No, go ahead.

CW: No, so you know it was this mixture of looking back, he was obviously thinking of the barracks, peacetime Army. He was not thinking of tanks and blitzkriegs and bombs dropping on civilians. It was not his concept at all. But, you know, when I went into the Army, they told us that we could knock a Japanese plane down with our guns, our rifles. And we were told that the Japanese pilots were … "Don't worry about Japanese pilots, they all have bad eyesight and they can't see and they can't hit anything."

KP: When were you told that?

CW: We were told that now…

KP: This is …

CW: Pearl Harbor was '41.

KP: Yeah.

CW: December.

KP: Yeah.

CW: So, this must've been the following November, of '42.

KP: They were still saying that, even after Pearl Harbor and that all of that?

CW: Yup, yup. And we had one Chinese in our outfit, 80th Division, who walked Oriental style. You know, like they do in *The King and I*, with that little step, that little Oriental step. And he used to walk with us. He could not get the rhythm of the American. He didn't have our width, he was short. So finally, they made him the general's orderly, and it turned out he was a wonderful chef. So it all worked out well, but they didn't release him. But it was so funny to see him trying to catch up with us, because he walked one and a half steps to our one, and he was always on the verge of running. [Laughter] I don't think I met anyone from Rutgers when I was in the Army. I was in the 80th Division, 317th. Most of my classmates had gotten officer commissions. I didn't take the last two years of ROTC, I only took the first two.

KP: And you thought of taking the advanced?

CW: Oh, God, no. I couldn't wait to get out.

KP: Why couldn't you wait to get out? What were your thoughts?

CW: It was just so restrictive. You know, everything was cut and dry. There were these answers, and you had to just know them. There was no leeway, and I had begun my actor's kind of bohemian quality, and it didn't fit at all. Now, we never fired an actual gun the whole two years at Rutgers, but went into the Army and started firing rifles. I loved it, and I was a marksman. I hate to say that, but I loved it. Even now I would love to go shooting, but I don't and I won't.

KP: It sounds like you were a bit surprised at how much you loved shooting.

CW: Yeah, I loved the Army. No, I hated ROTC because that was kind of classroomy and stifling and everything. But the Army was comrades, and never being lonely, and drinking, and girls, and everything I had not had. We used to walk the streets of Lincoln, Nebraska tilting bottles like this. And, "Helloware, you boys," [slurred like drunk] and you were drunk. It was terrible, awful, and yet I loved it. It was the other side of life. Now, when I came out and I couldn't go teaching, I was working in a bookstore up in Brentano's and that was exciting for the people I met. But I thought, "There's something more exciting." And I got off the bus one day, on my way to work, and I went to the Neighborhood Playhouse, which is a famous school in New York. And I said, "I want to be an actor and I'm twenty." I think I was twenty-two or twenty-

three. And I said, "I know I'm old," I said, "well, Gregory Peck was twenty-six when he entered." And they took me.

KP: Did you use the GI Bill for that?

CW: Yes, yeah. They paid all tuition, all costs, and then we got fifty-five dollars a month for spending money. And do you know that I bummed around New York and had dates, and went to dinner, went to shows, drank, on that fifty-five?

KP: Fifty-five dollars?

CW: Yup, 'cause my family didn't charge me. You know, I was living at home but I was commuting.

KP: That's actually a lot of money to just bum around

CW: Yeah, yeah. Well, when I got my first TV jobs I made $275. I started to buy a house, I went to Europe, I went out. Two hundred seventy-five. In about 1948 or 1949 that was a lot of money. You were still paying a nickel for a cup of coffee. You were still getting a meal at the Automat for fifty cents. Now before the war, I had gone to hear Glenn Miller at the Café Rouge Hotel in Pennsylvania. My meal cost me a dollar fifty, no cover charge, and nothing for Glenn Miller and his band. So if you had five dollars, you could have a date and there was no fear of running out of money. And then about, I guess it was around 1951 or '52 that things began to [change]. You were still buying cars for under a thousand dollars then. Now, I'm trying think of when it, you know, then it started, and once it started it never stopped. Amazing. The lowest priced ticket for a Broadway show was fifty-five cents, and you could buy a ticket for forty cents at a place called Gray's Drug Store if the tickets weren't selling. You could buy a ticket for a Broadway show for forty cents.

KP: And now even the discount tickets are …

CW: Yeah.

KP: Harsh.

CW: Sure.

KP: It's a lot of money.

CW: And if you were a student actor, you could sometimes say to the box office, "We're studying acting, can we come in?" "Yeah, sit in the back rows." They don't do any of that anymore. If you were Elizabeth Taylor and asked for a free ticket they'd turn you down.

KP: Backing up a little bit, did you act growing up in Perth Amboy?

CW: Amateur acting. My sister began getting some work before the war.

KP: How influential was your sister in your decision to become an actor?

CW: Total, total.

KP: Because she, in a sense, was the first one.

CW: Yes, yes, and she and I were close because it was kind of like Mary, Genevieve, and Richard were hotshots. They were good at everything. Then we're the two, Ruthie and then myself, who were the getaways of the kids. So I always said we went into theater just so that people would listen to us. Because, you know, my sister, Mary, was national vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. My brother, Richard, had a tenor voice that would melt your heart, and he was funny, and witty, and charming, and we weren't.

KP: What does your brother Richard do?

CW: He was an insurance salesman. He should've been the actor, he should have been the actor. He had it all. And Genevieve had a gorgeous voice and could talk a mile a minute. And we were the dummies, but we took it out in acting. You know, if nobody would listen to us, then we'll go on radio and TV. And I mean, people will have to listen to us. But it was strange, because we had that division. Maybe it wasn't as divided, but I always thought of them, Ruthie and I thought of them as, not against us, but getting all the glory. And my mother adored Richard. I know she loved me, I knew it, but it seemed, to me, like he could do nothing wrong. She adored him. And I was like my father. Ruth always said they never had any pictures of her so she was adopted. She was convinced. And I was convinced that nobody wanted me because I had like five different names: Buddy, Pete, Charlie, Pat. I had all these names and I would answer to anything anybody called me. We always thought they didn't really want us. So, Ruth went to Rutgers, Douglass, and they had this brilliant teacher there named Jane Inge. And Ruth studied with (Spinskaia?), who was the famous Russian actress, who was a member of the original Moscow Art Theater. She came over when they first came over and she stayed. And then Ruth began to get work. And Ruth's career was amazing to me. Amazing.

KP: What year did Ruth graduate from Douglass?

CW: 1935.

KP: Did she ever marry?

CW: Nope. Never married. Nope. There was a young man that used to come down. He was young and he used to come here and say, crying, "I've been in love with Ruth all my life, and she won't marry me." He was a grown man and he was kind of … [claps] God, but she knew what she wanted and that was it. She was gonna be an actress. She had a fantastic reputation in New York.

KP: Since we're on your sister, what were some of her highlights in her career?

CW: She did the world premiere of *Happy Days* for Beckett. She was chosen through that. She did two Emmy Award performances on TV. She did *A Little Moon of Alban* with Julie Harris, which she won an award for. And she did *The Club Bedroom* on PBS for which she won an award. Then she won an award in Chicago and she did work at the studio and all. And she's in *Hang 'Em High* with Clint Eastwood and *To Kill a Mockingbird* with Gregory Peck.

KP: What role did she have in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

CW: She played the old grandmother on the porch, the very old lady. And then she was the Mother Superior in *Nun Story* with Audrey Hepburn.

KP: She had, she had quite a …

CW: And she was in *Midnight Cowboy*. She played the grandmother in *Midnight Cowboy*, Sally Buck. Yeah. The thing we always say, you know, the one line he says … John Voigt. Such a nice man. He had that wonderful line in that movie, "My grandmother died and she never told me." Which was so wonderful, so typical. "My grandmother died and she never told me." [laughs] Isn't that a wonderful line?

KP: What made you go to Rutgers? Had you thought of any other schools?

CW: I applied for a scholarship to Princeton. And there was a Princeton graduate who was pushing me, the son of a famous doctor here in Perth Amboy. His name was Ted Henry. And my mother was crazy about Ted, and he was a friend of my brother's. He wanted me to go to Princeton. And surely, about my senior year in high school, Ted had a breakdown, total breakdown. And my mother said, "It was from studying, and the conditions of Princeton." I don't think so now. And she said, "I don't want you to go there. I don't want you to go there. I don't care where you go, but you're not gonna go, you're not gonna. No." Princeton then was a pretty tough school. They flunked what, fifty percent of the classes? Half the classes were flunked. That's what would happen when they would play us. You know, only the top half was taken for the second year. It was just arbitrarily. They usually had eight hundred applicants. They chose sixty for the first year. So to get into that first thing was rough. Then the second year, out of the sixty, they chose the top thirty. So you were pretty lucky if you got to the second year.

KP: And you made it to the second?

CW: I made it to the second year.

KP: It sounds like you felt very lucky to be there.

CW: Oh, I did, a brilliant teacher named Sanford Meisner. Sandy, we called him. He was one of the great minds that I ever met. Not a great actor, but a great teacher, and he liked me. But he

had a tongue that could curl you, you know. I came in once, and I don't know what I had on, whether it was a blue shirt and a red necktie, or green pants, or something, and he said to me in front of the whole class, "What do you read, Charlie, the Bulgarian edition of *Esquire*?" [laughs] Oh, what a brilliant man. He only died a year ago. He was in his nineties when he died. He was hit twice, once by a taxi, once by a truck. And when he was still teaching, in his nineties, his vocal cords had been removed for cancer. And he had an assistant who could understand his growls and burps and things and he taught that way. But the mind was still like this [snaps]. Amazing man. He was with the original Group Theater. But I had seen him act. And you know, he was not a great actor. Which was what we used to always say, "Teachers are not always the great performers," you know. What is it Shaw says?

ES: There were a couple of questions I wanted to ask you about Perth Amboy.

KP: Well, yeah.

CW: Yeah, please do.

ES: Okay. One was that I had heard about different ethnic sections of the town.

CW: Yes.

ES: Like Chickentown? And ...

CW: Dublin.

ES: Dublin, yeah.

CW: Yeah.

ES: And I was wondering what you could tell me about them.

CW: Pretty much that ... the immigrants clustered in areas, and then the people would normally call them what that was. The Irish went to the Hall Avenue section, which is now the Hispanic section. They went there because it was near the tracks and ... most of them never bought coal for their homes during the winter. They picked them up from the tracks where they fell off the coal (hots?) and everything. And the Danish went around ... Market Street and they built a church around there and they built an ethnic center ... which they called "Dana Hall." The Hungarians went around Johnstone Street, and they built beautiful church and a club room. They used to have, I don't think I'm pronouncing this correctly, a (Manacore and Damencore?), a men and women choir. And once a year they did a formal concert. Now, I don't mean like *God Bless America*. I mean starting with Handel and Bach, and maybe lightly winding up with Greig or Victor Herbert, a formal concert, and they would bring down a Metropolitan Opera star as the guest. And this was totally well attended, but it was not like, "Now … little Joey's gonna sing ... you know, something." You know, it was nothing like that. It was a formal concert. The Episcopalian church used to put on an operetta. The Italian church, Most Holy Rosary, put on an

opera. Now this is with local people. Maybe a star or a special piano teacher or something, but I mean the choirs and the people in town put it on. The synagogue used to put on a review which was directed by the man that directed the Lewis and Martin shows later on. So there was a tremendous amount of ethnic culture around, and we went to those things. You know, you heard a lot of good things. The first time I heard *The New Moon*, the (Simmon and Romberg?) operetta, was at Saint Peter's when they did it. Now where the voices come from, I don't know, that's my mystery. Where are the people that sang in those things so beautifully? They're not around anymore, Kurt. What's happened to us? Every church choir in Perth Amboy had at least two or three soloists that were of exquisite caliber. I mean exquisite. I don't mean competent. Saint Mary's had a woman named, Stella Christopher, who studied in New York. We had a mezzo-soprano who had an offer to go to the Metropolitan Opera chorus. She stayed in Perth Amboy. We had an Irish tenor that could have sung anywhere in the world. This is in a local church choir. Saint Peter's had, and still does, had an organist that's connected with one of the biggest talent agencies in New York. The Danish concert, their Bach and their Handel, was as good as any you would hear anywhere. They worked all year on that. The Italian church, I saw them do *Traviota*. Sometimes they would do something light like Gilbert & Sullivan. Light. We didn't have any distractions. We had no television. We didn't go to New York that much because we didn't have the money. And the church had filled a social vacuum which they don't now.

KP: But you did have radio.

CW: Radio was tremendously important. Tremendously important. You have to know what Roosevelt sounded like on radio. It was hypnotic. It was your mother telling you that nothing was going to happen to you. There's nobody under the bed and everything's gonna be all right. And you believed it and you had the courage to go on.

KP: My father very vividly remembers, as a child, listening to the music ...

CW: Yeah, yes. Absolutely. It was. You know, you believed there was somebody in the White House. There was a father of us all in the White House. It didn't matter that he was an aristocrat. He cared about us and he had his martini and his cigarette holder, but he cared about us. And he was vicious about ... capitalists and ... factory owners ... Barton.

KP: Ah, we have Barton, Fish and …

CW: Barton, (Dustin?) and Fish. And he ... had three republicans and they held up his reform of the Supreme Court. Barton, Dustin, and Fish?

KP: I ... I can't. I know Barton was one. I know Fish is the other. I can't, I'm not sure about the second one.

CW: And he started. And we would have a modern and he would give a beautiful speech and we would have this. We wouldn't have reform in the Supreme Court if it weren't for Barton, (Dustin?) and Fish. And he would do that and by the end of the speech everybody in the

audience was chanting it with him, "Barton, (Dustin?), and Fish." And those three guys who merely objected to one of his programs were maligned for the rest of their life. The audience said, "Oh, God, he's Barton, or he's Fish. Hamilton Fish was a prominent man and it ruined his career. I think his grandson now has recovered a little. We're talking now about what, 1936?

KP: No, well ... Fish bore that grudge for years.

CW: Can you blame him? The whole nation was, you know, "Barton, (Dustin?), and Fish."

KP: One thing about Rutgers, looking back at the old *Targums,* was that a strong part of your classmates were Republican.

CW: Terribly, yeah, yeah.

KP: In '32 and '36.

CW: The faculty was Republican. No, the administration was republican. And we were children of the Depression. My father lost everything. At one point we were out of food. Now my mother's sister and my uncles wanted to bring it. "Nope, we're fine, we're fine," but we were eating soup. Our mother was making biscuits with flour and water, no butter, and we're eating them. We were getting very close to starvation. And one night, I'm sure it was my Aunt Ruth and my Uncle Joe, put bags of food at midnight on our porch. No name or anything. They didn't tell us. The next morning they were there. They couldn't be returned, because nobody … so we had food. So we were hardly worrying about Herbert Hoover. "Herbert Hoover" were the two dirtiest words in my family's life. Herbert Hoover. My recollection of Herbert Hoover is that he dressed for dinner in the White House when the rest of us didn't have bread. And all he did was play Medicine Ball with Mark Sullivan. I remember a picture of Herbert Hoover playing Medicine Ball with Mark Sullivan. Now Mark Sullivan was a brilliant writer, but all I can remember is how I hated that name and that picture. He's there playing Medicine Ball, and my father is starving and we don't have enough food. It was vicious. And to go to Rutgers, I thought surely Rutgers would be liberal, and they weren't. Now ... I thought Burns was liberal and ... the music teacher was wonderful. And they knew that we were bringing peanut butter sandwiches five days a week to school and all ... I thought in 1938,at the end of the Depression, to bring a college teacher, a college educator, who was noted for his hatred, and let him speak for one hour against Roosevelt was inexcusable. Clothier was terribly anti-Roosevelt, but he was a gentleman.

KP: This was the famous address ... you were mentioning before we'd started about a president.

CW: Yup.

KP: And he basically gave an anti-Roosevelt rant.

CW: For an hour. For an hour. My father just …

ES: That was at graduation?

CW: Yeah, that was our graduation speaker.

KP: And that was 1938?

CW: 1938, yup. We had a classmate, I won't mention his name 'cause he's still alive. We had chapel in those days that you had to go to. You know, they'd check your name off at the door. You had to go to it. And for some reason, he was always the speaker at the chapel. And he always began by doing imitations of Eleanor Roosevelt. You know, "Franklin, this not war. I don't want war." And I used to hate that. And, of course, I think he's a very wealthy man now. I don't know, he's given millions to Rutgers so I shouldn't talk about him, but there was that feeling then. It was a lot of anti-Roosevelt feeling. New Deal feeling.

KP: What's striking is, even though Rutgers in many ways was benefiting from the New Deal, you have the stadium going up, and it was a WPA project, and several other buildings …

CW: They don't talk about how close Rutgers came to closing during the Depression, but it was very close. Until Roosevelt came in, Rutgers was like this ... You know, but there was some money given and there was aid from Roosevelt. Otherwise, Rutgers would have gone down the tubes. Yeah, but they didn't want to ... It was the same way about religion. Which seems impossible to think, but it was. There was a strong strain there. Because I took Latin and Greek, I had classes with some of the seminarians. They told one of the teachers, one day in class, about how they went over to the Catholic church, Saint Peter's, and they went to communion and they got it and they examined it. And I thought that was tasteless, and the professor was laughing and thinking it was so funny. And we kept it, we could. And I thought, I don't know, maybe I know it's my own religion, but even so, I don't think I would do that about any of the other religions, you know. It just seemed to be tasteless, you know. One story in my senior year was about a ... rapist and one of the girls in a fraternity. And the fraternity boys go out and they get him, and they bring him down to the ... basement of the fraternity house, and they start breaking his bones, and, eventually, they kill him. That caused quite a stir.

KP: We haven't heard about that one, actually.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

KP: That didn't make the *Targum*. When would you say that happened?

CW: This was the literary magazine, not the *Targum*. We had a literary magazine. I don't know what it was called, but that was the story in it and it was not censored.

KP: We haven't looked at the literary paper. So this was a story. Is this a true story?

CW: I don't know. I don't think so. I think it was made-up because I don't remember any rapes. I don't think so. I think it was just, you know, a kind of upper class vigilante.

KP: Oh.

CW: The class was very important then. But I can't remember. I can only remember a few wealthy kids, wealthy guys. You now, someone who owned a boat, and a couple others. But they were very, very minor.

KP: Now you commuted to Rutgers?

CW: I commuted. Ruth and I bought a car.

KP: Did you wish you could've lived on campus?

CW: Yes, yeah, yeah. I missed a lot by not living on campus.

KP: What about fraternities? Do you think you would've joined a fraternity if you could?

CW: Yeah, I think if I could've. See, I think the Army was my fraternity. See now, I had guys that belonged to my section of my company of my division, and we were close. I still am in touch with my Army buddies, and I'm still in touch with my Neighborhood Playhouse classmates. We call on the phone, but I don't have that with Rutgers. Probably my own fault, don't you think, Kurt? Because first of all, I was young, much too young for college. And I was conscious of being poor. Terribly conscious of it.

KP: Well, I think most of the people from Perth Amboy that I have interviewed didn't live at Rutgers. Bob Moss talked about his commuting and how difficult it was …

CW: I didn't even know ... (Seymour Saint Lifer?). You know, we were in the same year, same town. We weren't friends. Strange. I guess I hid in the library.

KP: Did you act at all?

CW: No, no.

KP: So you never took part in any of the performances?

CW: No. I can remember entering. I used to take summer work to get my education. And one of the ... other students in the education class was one of the leading actors. He had done one of the leads in one of the poetic dramas. And he came in and he had on sandals without socks and ... a silk shirt and no necktie and some kind of like purple pants. "Oh, God, if I could be an actor like that!" It was so un-Rutgersy, you know.

KP: One of the things that I often say to people about my impressions of the thirties and forties is that it was in many ways a "Poor Boys' Princeton." That people may only own one suit, but they sure enough wore that suit.

CW: My cousin, who was very close to me, wanted me to go to Rutgers. He persuaded my mother to make me go to Rutgers. He went from '26 to '31, and to him it was a Scott Fitzgerald life. He belonged to a fraternity, he had a Roadster. He used to take me when I was in high school to the games, and he'd take me down to Princeton. He loved to go to the Princeton game, the old stadium, and he would get me a drink afterwards, you know. And he hung around Princeton and he had total "rah rah" college life. Now when I went there in '34, that had disappeared.

KP: But ... you had experienced some of that … the coonskin coats.

CW: And my sisters, when they went to the extension, began to meet some of the Rutgers students, like the seniors, and they would come to the house. Now this is the late twenties, and that was raccoon coats, playing, sitting, standing around the piano and playing. And, "Oh, let's go out and get in the car and go into a diner or to a bar." Not to a bar 'cause there were no bars then. But that was still very Scott Fitzgerald college life, with the cars and the coats and the songs. And not a care in the world. And I went to Rutgers from '34 to '38, which was the worst of the Depression, because you had had ten years by then. Nobody had money. And then what do we get? We get the threat of the war. But I think we totally ignored the war.

KP: Well, it sounds like you had other things on your mind.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

KP: Did you work while you were going to school?

CW: Yes, Rutgers got me jobs.

KP: So what kind of jobs did you get?

CW: They got me … Every summer I used to work at the American Bankers' Institute.

KP: Oh, okay.

CW: And that was great money. Always get ninety dollars a week. Ninety dollars a week! WPA was paying people twelve dollars a week, and we were getting ninety! So we got enough for the year. And then Rutgers let me finance. I finished paying my tuition two days before I graduated. I had to pay it before then, but they were nice about it. And I was still paying it two days before graduation. But it was your own. There was no other place to get it but yourself. And you had to get it together, and you asked people if they were going to give you money for graduation if would they give to you early or something. You know, tacky things. But I had it, and I paid it.

KP: I'm curious because you mentioned chapel earlier. How did you feel about chapel?

CW: I thought it was a waste of time. A waste of time, you know. I had ten years of that in Catholic school. I didn't mind it, you know, it was good, but I didn't need those hymns and the reading of the Bible ... And then it meant you had to rush your lunch hour for that day. And we ate, the cafeteria was in Winants Hall, in the basement. And ... you always had a quarter for your meal, which was usually some form of pasta for a quarter. And ... there were times when Rutgers was dreary. From '34 to '38. And maybe all colleges were dreary. What do you think, Eve? Are they? Now see, Neighborhood Playhouse, because it had young actors and a wild teacher, it had a kind of wildness about it. And it was after the war. We were the first Veterans class. And we were not to be told that we had to do anything. And Mrs. Morgenthau, who was a Jewish philanthropist, ran the school.

KP: Was that Secretary of Treasury Morgenthau?

CW: Yup, yup. And most of the money came from the Chryslers family or the (Lewinson?) family, who gave (Lewinson?) Stadium. These were Jewish aristocrats with a tremendous amount of money and a deep sense of commitment and philanthropy. And they established the school, Neighborhood Playhouse, because one of the (Lewinson?) girls lisped, so rather than just hire a speech teacher for her that would only help her, they instituted a Neighborhood Center for Theater, where all kids could study free. That was the type of thing they did. And Mrs. Morgenthau came and sat with her hat on every day in her office, with her pearls, and she had lunch at "21" or somewhere. And I can remember her saying to me once, I was the oldest student in that year, "Oh, Charles, you're so talented. Oh, but they're so terrible. Oh, they're so terrible." Because, we weren't obedient, or we weren't nice. And a lot of them became wonderful actors.

KP: Do any names stick out?

CW: Richard Boone, who did *Have Gun, Will Travel*. And Marian Seldeze, who became a star. And we had a lot of people. And we had a lot of famous people's children. Mischa Elman's daughter Nadia was there and ... the famous scenery designer's daughter was there. And we had a lot of people. Most of them dropped out after the first year. They thought it was finishing school, and it wasn't sandy. But Nadia was fun, and we went to (Elman's?) for a New Year's Eve party. It was the first time I ever saw … I thought it was just a turkey … And someone put a fork into the turkey, and, of course, it fell apart. It had been deboned. Totally deboned, and then put back together like a regular turkey, but I didn't know that. And I thought, "Oh, my God!" And ... Mischa Elman played, and other people played. Amazing night. So you made wonderful contacts. But they weren't as dedicated as we were.

KP: It sounds like Mrs. Morgenthau's comments, it makes a lot of sense, because you had all been in the Army. You had learned how to swear, and while this was an incredible opportunity, you were getting money. The government was paying for this. You were getting fifty-five bucks to go hit the town.

CW: And we used to take our characterizations out on Fifth Avenue. If we were playing blind people, we would come out of school and hit people on Fifth Avenue, and walk into them, or we were drunks, or anything. And then, of course, it would come back to the school, you know.

Once, Dick Boone was incredibly built, he was absolutely like Mr. Superman, and Fred (Sadan?), who was an itch, bothered him one time and like you see in the movies, he took Fred.

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

KP: You were just reminiscing about the community.

CW: He put him right through the door. In the first place, we were out of the Army, and theater to us was not something to fool around with. I think Mrs. Morgenthau, being a society lady, still thought that maybe we were correcting our lisps or learning to drink tea nicely. We weren't. We were about to do *The Wild Ones* with Brando, and *Streetcar Named Desire*, and things like that. We weren't about to learn how to make a martini like Noel Coward. So it was the first of that "macho" acting school. It was exciting. You didn't know when you did a scene whether you were going to get punched in the face or not! And you might well be punched in the face or you might be pushed down a flight of stairs. And theater was exciting in those days. Olivier was performing in America, Laurette Taylor was doing shows on Broadway. Oh, it was exciting. And it was still cheap. And that makes a difference. See, you can't do that in New York now. Students can't live that way in New York, its too expensive. We could. Did you get enough?

KP: Actually, I wanted to hear more about your GI Bill experiences. But going back to Rutgers, it sounds like you were a little disappointed, especially since you had seen a different world there before.

CW: Religion hung heavy over Rutgers in those days, Kurt. It still was the influence of the seminary and the religious founding. That was still strong at Rutgers.

KP: Well, people have said that Dean Metzger was a very stern Calvinist.

CW: He was. Now Holy Hill was there, they were in our classes. And we went to a chapel that was fundamental or mainstream Protestant. My idea of Protestantism was Saint Peter's Church, which was a beautiful church, and close to what I was as a Catholic. I didn't know about this theological strictness, which I found not at all pleasant. I was not at home there. Now I went down to Catholic University as a guest artist, and they put me up at the Dominican House of Studies. And I said to them, "I'll stay one night, then I'll go to the Howard Johnson's down the street. I won't stay over more than one night." I had such a great time, I stayed the six weeks. It was exciting and wonderful. Now, it's not like the Catholic Church in my church. Religious University Catholicism can make your hair rise. It must be worse than Notre Dame. These men are so far beyond Pope Pious II, that he, John Paul, doesn't know what's going on.

KP: Well, why didn't you say that?

CW: Some of the two thousand year old tenets of the Catholic church are questioned by these people. I've had Jesuit priests say to me, "I don't know whether there's a hell or not." Come on, that's why I'm good, because I don't know if there is one, and I don't want to burn. I don't know

whether there is one. Maybe hell is what you went through here in life. Maybe hell is when you didn't win the lottery. And they're way out, tremendously way out.

KP: It sounds like you were a bit surprised at it.

CW: There was one young brother who was not bright enough to be a Dominican, but he was a brother and he was a wonderful person. He took a shine to me because I'm an actor and he'd be waiting, when I came home from the performance, he'd be waiting to hear, "How did it go tonight?" And then I found out that they had liquor. Their order approved to have liquor, but they didn't have snacks. So I used to come in with snacks: peanuts, popcorn. And they all would come up and we'd have a drink at night at one o'clock, and I would tell them about the show, and I would go on. And he got carried away and one night, he got drunk and he fell and cut himself. We had to wake the medical priest to have him fixed and he was severely reprimanded. I went down to the abbot to explain to him and I said to him, "Father," I said, "X," Xavier was his name, "X is lonesome." And I said, "He's not going to run away and become an actor. He just wants someone to talk to. He's not a priest, and you're all so superior and he's so lonesome." And instead of getting upset, he looked at me and said, "Maybe we should have an examination of conscience." And I thought what a nice way of doing it. And he didn't leave the order. But the soccer coach did. He had got an offer. And he was a muscular priest. And he was one of those muscular Christian guys. But he got an offer and he left the priesthood. But they were exciting people. The only thing I objected to, and they changed it after, was that they had nuns come in and we had unbelievable meals, fillet mignon and all, and then there was an order of nuns called the Sisters of the Poor, who begged their food. Begged. And they used to come to the back door and say, "Do you have any food left over from your meal?" Now some of these nuns had Ph.Ds, but it was the fundamental basis of their order that they spend no money on themselves. They beg their food and they beg their clothing. Everything was given to the poor. And to have eaten a fillet mignon, and I mean it had the little wooden paddles that said "medium well-done," and a drink cocktail before dinner, this is hardly roughing it. And then to have these nuns come and say, "Do you have any food left over?" And the half of the fillet mignon that you didn't finish was given to them. And I found out that they later on changed that. They don't do that anymore, and the good life was over. But it was interesting. And they were brilliant people. And what I loved was that at ten o'clock at night, they went down, put on a robe over whatever they were wearing, pajamas or anything, and they had the ten o'clock service in the darkened chapel.

KP: What year were you at Catholic University, do you remember?

CW: It was about twenty years ago.

KP: So it was 1960s.

CW: Yeah, yeah, and it was fascinating because I had never had that much ... scholasticism. But it's fascinating, besides in the Army, I belonged, see. I realize now it was the same thing that happened to me in the Army. I had a group of people that cared about me. Now I came from a big family, but I guess that belonging … and I didn't have it at Woodbridge High School and I

didn't have it at Rutgers. I had it in the Army and I had it at Catholic U. And the abbot said to me, "You think about staying permanently." And I said, "You have everything here anybody could want but one thing." He said, "What's that, Charles?" I said, "The sound of a baby." It's a totally masculine thing there, you know. It's unreal and I said, "You need a baby to cry to know what life is." And he, "Well." But that's what I thought. But otherwise it was like the Army. In the Army you don't have a care in the world. If you spend all your money, you get fed, you have a place to stay, you have companions. There's no worries and the Dominicans were just like that. You don't worry about a thing. So you're broke, so you're gonna have fillet mignon and a martini. And you get some of the greatest brains in America to talk to about problems like how many angels there are and things. Fascinating, but not real. To me the Army wasn't real. The Army was not real to me. You know, what are a bunch a men doing with guns? Plus, you had a good time. So why question it? Eh?

KP: On the surface, even during the Depression years it seemed like Rutgers was probably pretty fun particularly with dances and social activities. Did you go to any of them?

CW: I went to the proms they had, I'm trying to think. It was our Junior Prom. We had some people from places like Newark and Jersey City. They felt the Depression very keenly, and one man in our class decided that he would go to the prom but he would make a protest. So he went in his ROTC uniform. That was a scandal. He was almost thrown out of school.

KP: And why was he protesting in an ROTC outfit?

CW: He thought the prom was ridiculous and lightweight and stupid but he didn't do it by, you know, just ignoring it. He would go in his military uniform. And, you know, well, you know girls, the way those girls dressed in those days could be a matter of concern. And then the dresses went down to the floor. We didn't wear red neckties, we wore black.

KP: So they were very high class affairs.

CW: Oh, yes, and great orchestras, great orchestras.

KP: My students actually are very envious of some of the life that we don't have.

CW: And we had them in the … what we called the "New Gym," the one on College Avenue. And they used to open the pool, and the pool was in view and it would be lit and decorated. So it was like an outdoor garden with a pool.

KP: Oh, very nice.

CW: Yeah, and the food was great, and there were wonderful orchestras. Usually a ... a big band ... I think they tried as best they could to have a Scott Fitzgerald kind of life, but the mood wasn't there, Kurt. The decades of my life have had a mental life and a mood. The Twenties, trust me, were giddy and fun. My mother and father were giddy and fun. The Thirties were somber. The Forties were so intense and normal and everybody just worked hard. And then the

Sixties were the breakout. There's a German word for the spirit of that time. Now I don't know what your age has, do you know? But to us it was clear. Peace treaties were signed in the Twenties. They would literally be on page twenty-two. Peace treaties. Important things. There was no international news on the front page. "(Dadda?) Browning Says He Wants to Marry Peaches." She was a fourteen year old girl and he was a judge about sixty-five. He was running around with a fourteen year old girl and people couldn't stop talking about him. And those were the headlines. "Judge Browning was going to marry Peaches." That was her nickname. That kind of thing was important. And tightrope walkers between banks.

KP: You also had flagpole sitters.

CW: Flagpole sitters. These were important things.

ES: What's a flagpole sitter?

CW: They sat on poles for days, sometimes for two months. And they hoisted up there to be fools, just to do it. And they had six day bicycle races. Well, if they don't know by six days who's gonna win … and people would go at two o'clock in the morning. And women and men would go in evening clothes and they would sit there and watch the bicycle riders and then leave and drink. You know, everybody brought their liquor with them. And ... dance marathons. They were sad because people were doing that for food. There is a lot to be said for the man who said, "They should only play the last two minutes of every basketball game." Right? Sometimes you feel that way?

KP: You had mentioned earlier that the pressure was very hard on your family.

CW: Terribly hard.

KP: When did your family lose their house? Would you remember the year?

CW: Yeah, in 1932.

KP: So was your billing to Rutgers very problematic?

CW: Unbelievable! How did they do it? Now Ruth was going to Douglass at the same time. Now Ruth went to work in Five and Tens and things. We always worked in the summertime. One time, we tried to run the refreshment stand at the beach. Anything you could. But how did they do it? And I don't remember them discussing money that much. They must've done it at night when we were all in bed. And then of course my father had a stroke, his first stroke. That's probably why he had it. You know now, there are things now I see that I didn't see then. Of course, you know, he didn't go to the hospital. He had the stroke in the house and stayed in the house. The doctor came to him. So when we paid the doctor, we gave him a loaf of bread or something and he was happy. He didn't have to; he didn't. A visit was two dollars if you had it, if you had it. If not, you still got the treatment. But I am so conscious of money now. I don't think they were, Kurt. You know, I'm conscious of my Ford Taurus … that I don't have a

Lincoln or something. Now I live down here because I have the view and I love it down here. But most of my friends think I'm living in slums.

KP: It looks pretty nice to me to be honest with you [laughter].

CW: I should be, to them, living in Metuchen. I should have a colonial house with a lawn. But I'm an actor.

KP: Yeah, Yeah.

CW: And I said, you know, that excuses it. See that's the excuse, because I could do that.

KP: I am currently living in Metuchen.

CW: It's a nice place. Edison is a place I don't like. I almost got arrested in Edison in the A & P because of the idiot running it. There was a blackout at eleven o'clock at night. I was in line next to be checked, and I think I had a loaf of bread. The lights started flickering, and this crazy night manager jumped on the counter and said, "Nobody move!" And I looked around and said, "I'm buying this loaf of bread. It's sixty-nine cents, here's a dollar." He said, "Don't you dare move." I said, "I'm not staying here. I have to get home. All I want is this loaf of bread. Its sixty-nine cents, it says so on the wrapper. Here's a dollar, I don't want any change." He said, "If you leave these premises I'll have you arrested." He called the cops. And I said to the cops, "Now this man is crazy. He's got everybody in there hysterical. Women are crying, people are hysterical. What about?" And they said, "Well, he said he thought they were going to have a blackout." I said, "Well, there's no blackout. The lights are on. Why is he in there screaming, 'Don't move. Nobody move.'" I said, "There are old women there that want to go home. Its eleven o'clock at night." And they were going to book me for a while. And I said, "Is So-n-So still the mayor?" And they said, "Yes, yes, do you know him?" "Yes." "Well, all right, Mr. White, don't do it again." This crazy guy. Don't move because the lights were flickering.

KP: What year was that?

CW: It was only about five years ago. The lights were flickering so he's jumping on the counter screaming at people. And you know, who shops at eleven o'clock at night except old people that forgot things or somebody that has to go somewhere the next day and needs lunch or something? Nobody was in there to hold up people. He was the only one hysterical. I said to the cop, "He's the one hysterical, up there screaming at people." I said, "We're all standing here in line waiting to check out." Life is funny. Life is really funny.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about Rutgers?

CW: [laughing] Now my sister, Ruth, had a totally different experience at Douglass. She loved Douglass.

KP: Even though she was a commuter?

CW: Yep. Oh, she stayed there one year. Yeah, she stayed there and she stayed there a couple of times, off and on ... I don't know. I think it was me, not Rutgers. I think I didn't blend in. I don't think they were hostile to me. I think I didn't made an effort to blend in. Thank God for the Army. Because I want to tell you, when I went to the Playhouse, I was the party boy and I loved it, and I learned to do that, and am now. The Army changed me from a bookworm to an extrovert.

KP: It sounds like growing up you were very shy.

CW: Yes, I was small, quiet and ... you know, in this family they're all such hotshots. Yeah, do you have brothers and sisters?

KP: I have one sister.

CW: Yeah, Eve?

ES: None.

CW: None. See, I was the youngest of five. And they were, I mean they were hotshots. Everybody adored them. "Oh, how's your sister?" No hello. It wasn't, "Hello, Charlie." It was, "Hello, how's your sister?" And they meant Mary and Gen. They didn't mean Ruthie.

KP: When you say your sister had a very different experience at Douglass, what did you mean?

CW: She had a lot of friends. And Jane Inge taught drama, and Ruth got good parts, and was good. So she began to have a reputation and she was well-liked. She was, you know, friendlier. And it was Jane Inge that sent her on to (Spinskaia?) and gave her a recommendation and all. I didn't have anybody that cared for me that much at Rutgers.

KP: How did you get your first job out of college. How did that come about? You mention you'd gotten jobs with the State Employment Service.

CW: Yeah, my uncle was a county politician.

KP: In Middlesex?

CW: In Middlesex, and he put my name up and pushed me a little and I got a job as an interviewer.

KP: And where did you work?

CW: All over Central Jersey.

KP: Were you based in Perth Amboy?

CW: Yes, the office was in Perth Amboy.

KP: Would you go out and interview?

CW: We would go out … One of my coworkers had a car. He was given, I think, seven cents a mile. It was official and he had to jot down the number. And we would go to Jamestown, Trenton … Union, Colonia, all these places. And you went into factories. And you asked, "Did you go to school? How did you learn to use that lathe? Does it bother you? Do you have any physical pain?" And we'd try to get a reason. And I think it was for the war years, I really do.

KP: It sounds like you were in some way collecting basic statistical data.

CW: Yeah.

KP: And how long did you have this job?

CW: Oh, I had it about eighteen months.

KP: And then what happened?

CW: Then I got the 1-A and I quit it, stupid thing to do.

KP: Oh, you got your notice and thought you would go right in?

CW: I thought, "I'll be gone, and I'm gonna have two weeks to have fun." And the two weeks turned into, I think eight months. Then I had to go work in the shipyard.

KP: Oh, okay. And you were living at home at this time?

CW: Yeah, my mother had died. My father and the family were here.

KP: It sounds like you were helping your family out.

CW: Yes, yeah, yeah. My father had a second stroke and then we knew he would not go back to work and he stayed home. Yup. Now, I've had two minor strokes and they're putting me back in the main stream. What I'm thinking is that we resigned my father to a position of being an old man. I'm seventy-nine and I'm going to try to keep working as an actor, but we automatically assumed that my father would just stay home. It was hardly fair. We assumed that he would not ever date again or anything. My father was a handsome man and five children. You know, we just made him. I don't mean we were the only ones, but that was done in those days. A widow of forty-five, her life was, she was a widow. She wouldn't look at a man or anything else. Widows who married a second time were, well, you know, they were racey. It was amazing what they did to people. My Uncle John's wife died when he was twenty-five, and he was told by my grandfather that he was not to marry again. No, he didn't enter a monastery. He had girlfriends

and he kept mistresses. Can you blame him? He was a young man with money. And my grandfather said, "If you marry again, it is a dishonor to your first wife's memory." At twenty-five! He only knew her for one year. She died of tuberculosis. He met her, they fell in love. She was a beautiful girl and she died. He was supposed to run around the rest of his life mourning her.

KP: Did they have children?

CW: No. He used to go visit her relatives up in Scranton. She was beautiful. He was studying medicine at Columbia, and she was a librarian. They eloped, and it developed soon afterwards that she was tubercular, which in those days was deadly. But, I mean, he was twenty-five. It's ridiculous to say, you know, but I think we did it to my father. My father was only sixty-five when my mother died, yet we made him an old man.

KP: I know that you were recently on TV. Are you pleased that you still have an acting career?

CW: Yeah, yeah. I don't belong to the "senior citizen" group. I think they're wonderful, but I want to be around young people because they keep me young. And I want to be around people that do something else besides watching the *Simpsons* on TV. I think your mind is so important to keep yourself going. My father was a very active man, which is why I'm sorry that sometimes we treated him so. He used to go to the track and he ... had the television to watch ball games and things. So I know he didn't have an empty life. And he read. And he had the five children. And Ruth was getting a lot of prominence then. He took great delight in her career. But we assumed that he would not marry. I think it's an Irish thing, don't you? I do, I really do. I think it's an Irish thing. You're married the once. Whether they're alive or dead, you're married. And that's what it was, you know. And yet I have a cousin, a beautiful woman, Catherine, whose been married eight times. I think that's wonderful. Eight times. I ask, "How does Cathy look?" "Oh, she's always gorgeous." "Married?" "Nope, she's not married."

KP: The Irish had no great love for the British. How did you feel about Britain in '40 - '41? I mean, we were doing a lot to help the British.

CW: You know, yes. And of course, we weren't …Roosevelt said ... Roosevelt's telling us to help the British overrode. And now my father was also of that generation that said, "We are not Irish Americans. We're Americans." My father, when he had money, went to Bermuda and traveled ... never went to Ireland. And he used to say, "We are not Irish Americans, we're Americans." I never heard Irish music or anything. We went to Catholic schools, but we didn't go to Irish … My mother always said, "Well, you know, I think there's a little Protestant in there somewhere, but don't ever say anything to your father." And I think there was. My father was not Irish - Irish. And so, of course, we helped the British. But the Irish don't tell you that Ireland was neutral during the war, which is hardly to their glory. And they made money out of the war. Johnny Doughboy found a rose in Ireland, but that was the north of Ireland, that wasn't the south. The only time I heard bias from my father … My father really was not at all a bigoted man, except he had an APA. He'd say, "Be careful, he's an APA" I never knew what that was, but I think there was an organization called the Anti-Papal Association. They were violently anti-

Catholic. So, I suppose in a sense that was retaliation. Since they were gonna be prejudiced against him, he could be prejudiced against them. But, you know, my mother's friends were Jewish, my father's friends were Danish and we never heard it. I had one Catholic buddy in the Army that was very close, but it wasn't because we were Catholic. It was because John hated the Army so, that I had to protect him. From the day he was drafted it was, "They did this to me and the whole war is doing it to me." And he was hysterically funny because he was so sincere. He was living in San Francisco. His brother called me several years ago and told me he found out he had inoperable cancer and he put ... Donizetti's *Linda de Chamonix* on the stereo, his favorite opera. And he took a bread knife and ended it in his stomach. He had problems I think, but a wonderful person. And then there were others, you know, Episcopalians, Methodists. I think World War II did more to break down bias than anything else.

KP: We're sort of skirting around World War II.

CW: Yeah.

KP: I guess, let me ask you about World War II in Perth Amboy because Perth Amboy was hit hard by the Depression.

CW: Terribly, terribly. Factories closed and everything.

KP: My impression is that it really boomed in the war. The factories were going full tilt, and it was a very different town you were leaving when you went off to the Army.

CW: Yeah. And remember now, Perth Amboy is three square miles. There's no open space, so that when the guys came out and got these chances to build homes and buy homes they were not available in Perth Amboy. The homes were built and there was no room so the whole generation moved to Woodbridge.

KP: And Metuchen?

CW: Metuchen, Edison particularly. Edison used to come to Perth Amboy to high school. They didn't have a high school, and we were close to Edison. But it all moved there, and the big developer in Edison was a man from Perth Amboy, Barney Dwyer.

KP: Is that in Congressman Dwyer's family?

CW: Yeah. Barney. Barney was the developer. He made a fortune in real estate. But he was from Perth Amboy. But there was not that much. We have some lovely homes out on the highway. But it was too late and too little. And the whole generation moved out of Perth Amboy.

KP: It's striking that the people I've interviewed from Perth Amboy all did that. I know Bob Moss moved to Metuchen after the war.

CW: They lived up here on Water Street. Yup. See the Hispanic immigration came in, and unfortunately the factories had moved out. So they did not have the opportunity that the Irish and the Danish and those people had. They were just stuck in a town that didn't have any work for them. They keep saying to our history group, "You can't talk about a Perth Amboy. There are five." I know of five. The industrial Perth Amboy, the colonial, the artistic Perth Amboy, the Civil War Perth Amboy. There were individual soldiers that were wonderful, but it was not a state effort to support the Union. And we didn't vote for Lincoln, we voted for that stupid McClelland. We have a street named after McClelland. A fire company named after McClelland. There's no Lincoln Street. There's no Lincoln Fire Company. McClelland was our big hero. That little pip-squeak. [laughs]

KP: I guess one thing I should've asked applied both to the thirties and the Forties was unions and union activity. Do you have any remembrance of any strikes or particularly the CIO coming in?

CW: Yeah, yeah. Now, my father never, never even considered unionizing the factory, never. My father believed that somebody had a baby, he got extra money. They would've been arrested, making business the way they did then. My father used to always change names because, you know, some poor Polish guy would come in. He'd be working with my father, who would say, "All right, what's your name?" "Senicov Senuatitz" (nonsense). "Okay, you're Joe Smith." And they changed names arbitrarily because they couldn't bother spelling those. The Danish names weren't as bad. You know, "Hans Neilson." "All right, that's not hard." But when it got to be the Hungarian and the Polish ones, it was ... And they never kept records. But they'd go to my father or my grandfather and say, "I'm losing my house." "All right, we'll give you a couple of extra bucks this week." Or maybe it could be a hundred or two hundred, but it was all done paternalistically, never done legally. Of course, the factories that were here were violently anti-union. Guggenheim and those were even notorious, and I believe that there was one strike where several people were killed. Twelve people, wasn't there?

KP: I'm not sure.

CW: Something like that. So it was very difficult. Also, relatives of relatives of mine, what we call "Irish kissing cousins," went into the unions. They were Catholics, and they were about to be ostracized and removed from the church. And a pope named John Leo III came out with an instinctive little set that it was not illegal to belong to unions, that working would have a right. And to my grandfather that was important in those days. My grandfather had never been baptized, so he took the name John Leo from the Pope. And Arthur Quinn, who was a relative of ours, became one of the first vice presidents of AF of L because the church would not excommunicate him then. It was important and very rough. Then in the Thirties we had the kind of John Wayne cowboy kind of union guys. A lot of shooting and drink 'em ups and stuff like that, but they got a lot of union stuff over. And it, you know, it was rough. My father never objected when my sister became vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. He said that it was about time, and it should be. I thought my father would say to her, "You're no daughter of mine," but he didn't. He thought it was fine ...

KP: How long did your father live?

CW: He lived to be eighty-five. He stood up one day and said, "I don't feel well," and we lost him. But he never lost his, he never became an invalid. He never lost his brain. I thought my father must've wanted to die because he never wanted to be a nuisance. So I think he thought, "No, I don't want to be an invalid, so I'm gonna do it my way. I don't feel well." I wish he had lived about five more years. There was so much I wanted to tell him. But he lived long enough that he knew I loved him. And I loved him. I loved him tremendously, I really loved him, as I adored my mother. But after my mother's death, I began to look at my father differently. When I went to war, they marched us up Smith Street … This is my last story, I promise you. They marched us up Smith Street in civilian clothes and then we went to the train station, and we kissed our families goodbye. And we get on the train and we went down to Fort Dix and I went over and hugged my father, and I came back and I said to my sister, "I think Pop's sick, he's crying. I don't think he's well." And she says to me, "You damn fool. You're going off to war, that's why he's crying." I had no idea that my father would cry when I went off. I was totally surprised at that.

KP: It sounds like he didn't cry very often.

CW: No, no. He did one other strange thing. My brother and my Uncle John came to live with us after my uncle had his stroke, and he got worse and worse. And, he was finally dying ... and my father said, "Would you stay with Uncle John?" And he died literally in my arms. And we were not that friendly; that was the first time a person had ever died … even in the Army I didn't have anybody die in my arms. And he died in my arms. And I came down and I said, "Pop, Uncle John is dead." He said, "I'll go up." He went upstairs, stayed a minute and came down. And like something in a play, he went over to the fireplace and stood by the fireplace and he said, "I want to thank you children for taking care of my brother." I was gone. He was formal, absolute. He had to do it. "I want to thank you for taking care of my brother." [Claps] Well, the man has guts. I wish I were the man he was. There was a way of behavior that was kind of nice. I thought that was my father, thanking us for doing, you know. But that's it. I think I've absolutely worn you people to a frazzle.

KP: No, no. We have to ask you about the war. I guess you had the classic send-off that everyone reads about. You were marched out to the train station?

CW: Yep, and given little presents, little prayer books by the priests, and little sewing kits by the Red Cross, little address books by people and things.

KP: You'd been in the ROTC. What did you expect was going to happen?

CW: I was in a daze. It was like I wasn't there, like I was observing it. And one of the things I can remember is that this woman friend of mine was just married, and her husband was drafted. And she came over to me and she said, "Oh, Charlie, take care of my husband, please take care of him." Twenty-eight days later, he was a second lieutenant in the Military Police and I was in

basic training, still cutting potatoes. He was made a lieutenant in twenty-eight days for Military Police!

KP: Why him and not you, since you had a college degree?

CW: Yes, but with the Military Police, he had the height, the looks, and the glamour. And that's how they picked them. He had four weeks and he got a second lieutenant.

KP: You reported to Fort Dix. How long were you at Fort Dix?

CW: Six weeks. We lived in tents, and then from there we went on a train and went to (Talahoma?), Tennessee by way of Chicago.

KP: Now did you do any basic training in Fort Dix?

CW: No.

KP: That's a long time to be at Dix.

CW: No, we just fell out and, you know, mostly just … but we got up at 3:30 in the morning, and I can remember falling out with the moon, the Jersey moon still bright overhead, and thinking, "This is not get up time, this is go to bed time." And then about an hour later they would feed us, about five, and they would feed us again at ten, and then our last meal was three o'clock in the afternoon. Well, we were city boys. We were starving by eight o'clock. Fortunately there was a diner on Fort Dix, on the base. And that place was crowded with somebody getting a hamburger or something. And you'd ask your family to send you money or something so you'd go. And we lived in the tents, we lived in tent city. Then we went to Tennessee. And that's where we did our real basic.

KP: Where in Tennessee were you sent to?

CW: (Talahoma?). It was outside of Talahoma. Talahoma had about under 500 people, and an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* some years later said that 400 of those became millionaires. There were over 75,000 people in Camp Forest. Talahoma had 500 people. Those people could get a million dollars for a blade of grass. They used to rent rooms in their basements and put up sheets, and take one room in the basement and make six bedrooms out of it with just sheets between them for soldiers' wives. They would take a garage and they would turn it into a movie house and charge you five bucks to see a movie. They all made fortunes, and of course, they sold bootleg booze. Three dollars a pint. They all became wealthy, but, you know, 75,000 people next door to a village of 500 people … People built extensions, anything to get a room to make it into something. There was no such thing as a hotel. The only thing that was there permanently was the billiard hall. And of course, you had to reserve that like a week in advance. And the taxi companies just became millionaires. Three dollars to go to camp.

KP: Which is a lot.

CW: Yeah, oh, yes. Yeah, we were getting fifty dollars a month or something, and no expenses. And on your day off you didn't care what you spent. Amazing.

KP: It sounds like even though you had hated ROTC, you didn't mind the Army.

CW: No, I didn't mind it.

KP: Even basic training?

CW: No, I didn't mind the Army.

KP: Even your drill instructor?

CW: Yeah, yeah. He was a Southerner, and of course, everybody, all Northerners, were from New York City. And no matter what you said to him, he would just say, "You guys from New York City, now you don't know." And you'd say, "We're not from New York City, we're from New Jersey." "Well, that's New York City." Everything was New York City above there ... But the officer I had was an actor and he was a wit. He was delightful. His explanation of the Bill of Rights was hysterical. It was a routine. He was a brilliant performer. He died. He was killed in action. And then there was one officer I had that was from Ocean City, New Jersey. They were wonderful. Our captain was Captain Grant Hoover. We had great officers, great officers. They were not West Point. They were Reserves.

KP: You had mentioned before we had started the interview that you liked Tennessee.

CW: I loved it. I loved the people. They were lovely.

KP: Tennessee was very isolated then.

CW: Yeah, oh, yes.

KP: And this had been a very small town.

CW: Yeah.

KP: You had told us a wonderful story beforehand about marching one afternoon and stopping at a little country store.

CW: One thing in Tennessee would be that they really had country stores. And there'd be a store and we would get, you know, "Take ten. Break for ten." Or even, "Break for a half hour." We didn't leave our money in the barracks, we always brought our money with us. And 3,000 guys would rush into that country store and literally buy every single thing on the shelves, jars of jelly, pickles, anything. Some of us for the sake of buying. And that woman, or that man, would suddenly have sold out every single article in that country store. Pigs feet, anything. Anything at

all that you could buy. But, it was fun though, [laughing] and we used to hide candy bars in our gas masks. There used to be a joke question, "How many Clark bars does a gas mask hold?" "Twelve, sir." [laughing] Because, see, you had to have your gas mask out to have it empty so you could get food in there, which was totally wrong. You could be court-martialed for that. We never thought there was going to be a gas attack. And then we got the M-1 rifles in place of the old ones. At Rutgers we had the old rifles.

KP: The Springfield.

CW: Yeah, Springfields.

KP: Which you never shot?

CW: Nope.

KP: You just marched with them?

CW: Just marched with them. I don't think there was any ammunition anywhere except Captain Croonquist's sword. [laughing] Which he needed to defend himself from husbands!

KP: So he really was a ladies man?

CW: Yes, and he was stunning. He was a John Wayne type. Gray at the temples, six feet, three inches, shoulders. And, you know, the boots and the tight riding pants and the white gloves. He was the picture. He was cast by central casting, "Give me a West Point graduate." "We've got a perfect one for ya. This guy here is perfect." He was.

KP: Did he marry a former student?

CW: Yes, he had married a student and then he got accepted at Rutgers. It was considered kind of risqué … But he was a brilliant teacher.

KP: What was a typical day like for you in training? I mean, what sticks out in your memories about the Army? You mentioned you liked the camaraderie.

CW: Yeah, yeah. And I could march, so that it was never physically rough on me. And I could shoot, so those things were easy. I hated KP, but I never got it much. KP pretty much was failing. We had a lot of southern boys who would go AWOL. And ... when they came back, being gone two months or so, they would be given a month's KP. And the food wasn't too bad to me. I had worse. Rutgers cafeteria prepared me for the Army food. And ... as I said I had friendships. The only thing I missed was the privacy of showering and going to the bathroom and things like that.

KP: You're the first one to bring it up so directly, but that's always struck me about the Army. You look at an Army latrine and it's not a lot of privacy there. In fact, there's none.

CW: You didn't mind the showers, but it was sitting on the hopper that was so invasive. Ten guys in a row sitting there, you know. Now they don't have that anymore, I don't believe. But in Catholic school, we just had the urinals. We didn't have, as the public school does, private bathrooms. We had public urinals. But ... I guess, maybe I was more lonesome at Rutgers than I thought. And then the Army was, I always said it was my education. And I still have friends from the Army from fifty years ago that I still exchange cards with.

KP: You mention you'd become an extrovert because of the Army.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

KP: It sounds like you learned a lot by going on leave with people.

CW: Yeah, and I always said I was the official speller of the barracks because a guy would come over and say, "Hey, Charlie, how do you spell battalion? How do you spell maneuver?" And I used to write letters with them. We had illiterate boys from Tennessee and the South. I remember one boy who kept saying, "Would you write to my old lady?" And I'd write a letter. I said, "How old is your wife?" "Thirteen."

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

KP: Illiteracy in the South was common, in fact.

CW: I know. I think they let them sign X's sometimes. I don't think some of them could even sign names.

KP: Which must have left quite an impression on you because, although times had been tough in the North, most people went to school.

CW: Yeah. And ... only one time did I see a southern boy who didn't know about showers and soap. And they took him in the showers and they took the brushes and they cleaned him. They had to. It sounds awfully cruel, but he did not know about showers and soap.

KP: Really?

CW: No, he did not know. I think they could have done it a different way. Some of them may have enjoyed it, but, you know, they took the scrubbing brushes and they took the floor soap and they scrubbed him. Well, when you're that close to people it is an important thing, you know. You're only three feet away from the guy sleeping along side of you, and you all have to get out on the one side or you're gonna bump into each other. And there was some raucousness about it, and sometimes was kind of fun, a kind of earthiness. I think I got rid of my priggishness and my prissy little manners, you know.

KP: Well, you mention that you came home and you apparently inadvertently slipped, to the point where your father wouldn't speak to you.

CW: Just wouldn't speak to me. My father, if you held a blow torch to him, I don't think he would have used a mean or nasty word. He just did not do that. And some of the things I only learned in the Army. Even at Rutgers I didn't hear them all. But in the Army I learned some of them. Oh, there were times when you got so upset that ordinary words didn't do. You had to use them. Then I realized that I've always been ... interested in why we say "sergeant" and things like that. And I realize that the British Army was filled with poor Irish people, and they're the ones who said "sergeant or "sargeant." And the British lingo became Irish because of the men. The same way the American GI language became southern because it was mostly the southern boys out of the Depression who were in there in peace time. And they became the non-coms after Pearl Harbor because they had had two, or three, or five years of Army life. And they became the non-coms and they had thick southern accents. And it was only when they started getting the northern officers, the second lieutenants that … but the talk was southern, and you sort of adopted a southern accent, like I did when I worked in Dublin. I adopted a brogue because they could understand me better. So in the Army, you know, you used the Army language and the profanities and everything. It was a better way to understood that.

KP: I guess, although you have very fond memories of your Army service, I wouldn't be surprised, particularly as a private, if you didn't experience any "chicken shit."

CW: Yeah. I was transferred to personnel after a while and we had a southern officer who, I think we checked his records, a sixth grade education. And he was so terrified of regulations, I don't know how he ever got to be an officer. No education. He had been a streetcar conductor in real life. Somewhere he had gotten into the Army early and had gotten accepted and made an officer. Well, terrified of losing his position, all regulations had to be obeyed to the inch. And he was what we would call a real "chicken shit" officer. He couldn't ever change anything, it had to be that way because he was terrified. And in personnel we had access to the officers records, see. It was wonderful to go check on them.

KP: So you went through basic training and then what happened to you?

CW: Then we went on maneuvers.

KP: In Tennessee or elsewhere?

CW: We got transferred to Camp Phillips, Kansas. And that was interesting because I had never been to the Midwest that much before and that was real flat plains land. And then we wound up in California, and that's when I left the outfit. In California we were in the desert. We were living in the desert.

KP: So you got quite a tour of the country?

CW: Yeah

KP: You saw the South, you saw the Midwest, and you saw the West.

CW: Yeah, yeah ... I never think of the Army as being in New England. I don't know why it never strikes me that the war was up there. But it's just because I never knew anybody that was stationed in New England. They were, though, I know that. And they had airfields and everything. But I never think of it being up there.

KP: What do you remember about the Midwest and your maneuvers?

CW: The people were wonderful. Civilians. One thing that got me was that I had never known what plains were. And to stand outside your barracks and look for maybe twenty miles, and there's one tree. It's just like a painted picture. We had footlockers and you kept your most precious things down at the very bottom of the footlocker. And you might expect that there would be some desert sand on top but you would go all the way down and pick out your favorite pair of socks and you would unroll them and they'd be filled with sand. It got into the barracks, into your footlocker, into the bottom, into your socks. That was amazing to me. But the people were wonderful, and then they had a program to teach us Japanese called ASTP.

KP: Where was that?

CW: In the Army, in Camp Phillips, and I was accepted for that. We were sent to the University of Lincoln.

KP: So when were you in ASTP?

CW: '43.

KP: So you were sent to an ASTP unit after and that's when you separated from California.

CW: Yup, yup, then.

KP: Did you apply?

CW: No, I was picked for that.

KP: You were picked. You didn't have anything to do with that?

CW: Nope, picked. And we lived in student dormitories and had student food and we were right in the heart of Lincoln. It was marvelous. Naturally, it was too good to last, so they abandoned the program and we went back to our division.

KP: How long were you in your ASTP program?

CW: I think only about six months and then all of a sudden they dropped it. The original idea was that the war was going to take ten years and they needed people who spoke other languages for occupation. And then as the Allies began to press and Germany began collapsing, I guess they decided it wouldn't be that long so they just abandoned it and we went back to our division. And of course, the Captain says, "I don't want you. You've been gone six months, I don't know what to do with you." So they put me in headquarters.

KP: So the ASTP has broken up, and you're sent back to your division. Where were you sent?

CW: All the way back to California.

KP: Did you stay with your original division or were you sent to a new one?

CW: I was sent to my original and they had gone on six months, and they had no place for me. They didn't know what to do with me. And for awhile, somebody said to me, "Just don't do anything." And I said, "Well, no, I'll be, you know, AWOL or something. Somewhere along the line they will catch up with me." So they took me back and put me in personnel, and we went on maneuvers immediately. They were out of it. I was in the desert saying to my lieutenant, "You gotta do something with me." "Get lost," he kept yelling. "Get lost, we don't know what to do with you. Get lost." They were on maneuvers. They were living out of trucks and all. There was only a certain amount of food and equipment, and one more person was just a bloody nuisance. What do you do with them? I said, "Well, I speak a little French." So they put me in the French Department and ... he said, "That's a big help." So I stayed, and then we went on maneuvers, and we were on water maneuvers. I have a skin disease called psoriasis, which is common, and with the waterless diet and the dry food it was getting worse and worse and worse. And so finally one night, we went on nighttime maneuvers and the driver didn't worry because we were in a Jeep. We hit a hill and we went over into it and I cut my leg. And I couldn't walk and they couldn't come to me until morning. And by morning the infection had spread all over my body. So they took me to a field hospital and the psoriasis broke out from the infection also. They just used to take bolts of gauze and just wrap, no pajamas, just wrap me. And of course, I was in the field hospital and the food was better. And then after about thirty days, they came to me and I said, "Am I going back to my outfit?" They said, "Nope, you're going home." I said, "I don't want to go home." They said, "You're going home." I said, "There must be some use." "No, nope, no use to us." So I came out before the war was over.

KP: When did you come out?

CW: It must've been late '44.

KP: So the war was still going on?

CW: Yeah, yeah, my outfit was in. I went to Pasadena for a month and I got a scholarship to the Pasadena Playhouse. But Pasadena acted like there was no war and that still was California, you know, and I didn't like that. So I left and came home and there was still, I think, a good six months of the war before it was over.

KP: It must've felt strange to be, to be back.

CW: It was very strange because this was totally now occupied by sailors that had gone from National Guard, to Coast Guard, to US Navy, and they were over there. I had to wear my button all the time, you know, because people would say, "What's the matter with you? Why aren't you in the Army?"

KP: So you wore a "ruptured duck?"

CW: A ruptured duck, yes.

KP: So you wore that so people wouldn't hassle you?

CW: Yes, but the minute people found out that I was medically discharged, all kinds of jobs came to me. Rutgers got me a job with an advertising agency in Newark, which I probably would've been a millionaire now if I had taken.

KP: You didn't take it then?

CW: No, I didn't take it, and finally I took a job in Brentano's selling science books and classics and things, and met a lot of people. It was the end of the war and people were coming out and the Europeans were going home, and I met Thomas Mann, Sigrid Undset.

KP: Oh, wow.

CW: And wonderful people like Mike Brooks. It was a famous bookstore then, you know.

KP: I remember the Brentano's. I went to the old one before it closed down. Yeah.

CW: And it was while I was working at the Brentano's I got the idea that I wanted to be an actor. I was working in Brentano's when they dropped the atom bomb, and we were in the science section and it was an education. Yeah, everybody else was all excited the war was ending, but the scientists were saying, "This is a terrible thing, this is a terrible thing. This is a very bad day." Totally different atmosphere, you know. You realized it was. The rest of us were just thinking, "Well, everybody's coming home now, the war is over," but they realized the implications of it.

KP: It sounds like you were sort of surprised that the Army discharged you.

CW: Yeah, I liked it. I didn't want to go home, and it was before the war was over, it was not complete. I'm a completion person. And that was wrong. See, the war was not over and I shouldn't be around. And I floundered for a couple of months. I didn't know what to do. I was lost. And terribly lonesome, terribly lonesome. There was nobody my age around. They were

all in the Army and it was very hard. I didn't know what to do, and the family worried about me. I know they did.

KP: What about those you had gone to basic training with? What had happened to them? What happened to the original unit?

CW: They went oversees to the Third Army. I had an experience. People don't believe it when I tell it. I was in close contact with my buddies. And ... when I came back to California, one of them wrote and said they were going to go over to, he couldn't say where, but he said it'd be from an eastern port. And I heard from other sources that they were gonna be in what we now call Skelton, Camp Kilmer. And my sister, Ruth, had a car. They had come here and spent some leaves with me when I was in the Army and they knew Perth Amboy. And my family was crazy about them. And Ruth said, "Maybe they're at Kilmer." I said, "Kilmer has 75,000 soldiers. What would be the point? I wouldn't be allowed to talk to them." When you're embarking, you can't talk to anyone. You can't write out or get letters. Your troop movement cannot be told. She said, "Let's go out." And so I said, "All right, let's go out." So she had enough gas. We went out to Kilmer and she said, "Look for them." I said, "It's miles around." And she said, "Go over there and look for them. Maybe John's there." I said, "There's 75,000 soldiers." I went to the wall. Now honestly, I'm not insane. I said, "John?" and a voice said, "Is that you, Charlie?" I swear. 75,000 soldiers and I picked the spot where my buddy was. He came over to the fence and started to talk to me. We embraced and talked and everything, and at that time a Jeep came along. And an officer said to me, "You're a civilian." And I said, "No, I'm veteran and I've been medically discharged." And he said to me, "You know this fellow?" And I thought right away and I said, "No, I never saw him before." He smiled and he said, "Good, 'cause if you do, you and your sister are in the barracks till they leave." So we would've been held in seclusion till they left. I said to John, "Well, nice knowing you, soldier. And good luck and everything." And we left. I honestly met my buddy in a camp of 75,000 people.

KP: Which is great luck. I mean just the odds of that …

CW: Just unbelievable. We used to talk about it after the war. John used to say, "You knew I was there." I said, "John, we had no idea. My sister, Ruth, just insisted I call you." And just "John," not his last name or anything. "John."

KP: Why was your sister so sure?

CW: I don't know.

KP: Do you think someone had written to her?

CW: No, I just think she had an intuition. I believe in intuitions. My mother, when she took her entrance for Trenton State, she dreamt her entrance test. And she got up at like at four in the morning and she studied for three hours. And she had several of those questions, so she got in. My sister, Mary, had an intuition when my uncle died. She ... woke up and she went into my mother and father's bedroom and she said, "Uncle Jim has died." And my father said, "No,

Mary, go back to bed. Uncle Jim's in Newark. He went there on business to see something." And she said, "Uncle Jim is dead." No phone calls or anything. He had died in the Newark Penn Station that night. So I believe in intuition.

KP: You were talking about intuition.

CW: Yeah, yeah. Do you believe in it?

KP: I'm not surprised by it. I don't have it but …

CW: Do you, Eve? Do you ever know things are going to happen?

ES: No, I ... never felt that way, no.

CW: Yeah, yeah. I also have a time thing.

KP: You've mentioned that.

CW: Yeah. Where ... sometimes I think, "This happened, but when? But when?" I can't think of when. But I know it happened, it doesn't surprise me. It used to frighten me but doesn't anymore. If I'm crazy, I'm crazy. I'm too old to change it [laughing].

KP: I'm curious of several things that you talked about. One of them was being in ASTP. You said you had a great time in Lincoln. It sounds like it was college without having to worry about tuition.

CW: It was, and the people … we were at a University. But to Lincoln, Nebraska, not near the east coast or the west coast, we were the war. And there we were living. We were the war. We represented the war to Lincoln, Nebraska, and they couldn't do enough for us. We never lacked for an invitation on a Saturday and Sunday.

KP: So you would have the classic, "Would you like to come?"

CW: Absolutely, and lovely people. And Lincoln then was quite an interesting, charming place. And ... she, the teacher. We had to speak only French, no matter what happened.

KP: You were learning not Japanese but French?

CW: French. I had had two years of high school French.

KP: Was anyone learning Japanese?

CW: Yes, they were.

KP: So originally you were pulled out to learn Japanese?

CW: Japanese. And why they abandoned it, I don't know. The motto was ... People that had children, someone in service, put a flag in their window with a star on it. It was called a service flag. We used to always say, "Tear down your service flag, Mother, your son is in ASTP" because it was nothing like the Army. Nothing, you know, a college full of girls around. It was nothing like the Army. And I liked Lincoln. It was a very interesting town. Even then it was very football-minded.

KP: I wonder if it was the town, too. I mean, you had been in training. You had been in the middle of nowhere, nothing interesting.

CW: Yeah ... Camp Phillips was in a place called ... Salina, Kansas. And it was a Kansas town. Dry, and …you know, not much. But Lincoln was quite sophisticated. It had movies and things and we were studying French. And the woman was, to me, a typical language teacher of a college. Nice, heavy-set, plump. And you know that she had learned French in college and she's been teaching it for forty years. And you know, "How do you do?" And things like that, you know. But she was good to us. She was not used to having thirty GIs in the classroom. And we had a bunch of foreign people who enlisted in the U.S. Army, and of course, they rattled it off. So she was getting instructions from them on her accent. So all we had to do was answer "oui" or "non" or "comment allez-vous" and get by. But it ended.

KP: Some people have told me how mad they were that ASTP ended. They felt that the Army promised them this.

CW: Yes. See, they yanked us out of our outfits. We lost contact. They put us in this, and then suddenly, they throw us back. Not into something where we're used to, but they throw us back. We didn't have the six months of the training that they had. You know, we were like recruits now, and these guys were not in combat but they were trained. So we were, you know, the sixth finger. We were the third thumb. Who needed us? And my captain actually said, "I don't want you. Go somewhere."

KP: Did you go back to your old unit?

CW: My old unit who didn't want me. What was I? It wasn't a case, like a corporation, where everybody gets knocked down a peg. I couldn't replace the man that replaced me.

KP: Yeah.

CW: He had six months of training I didn't have in infantry work. And they stuck me in personnel because they didn't know where else to put me. I wasn't our company clerk. I was just in personnel.

KP: So what would you do in a typical day when you were in personnel?

CW: They were starting then to get GIs for certain things … find out how many truck drivers we have in the outfit, things like that. And you'd pile through the records. "We got thirty-two truck drivers counting So-and-So, but he lost his license." You know, you had a record and you made these lists. The Army loved lists, you know. You remember the famous Mauldin cartoon ... the poster, the notices on the board of lists and things. And a GI goes to the very bottom one and it says "Valley Forge," signed by George Washington. Well, it was like that. They never took them down. Lists were there. I'm sure there are lists now from World War II.

KP: Oh, I've seen some of the lists and the records. Army orders were very ...

CW: And you know we took that stuff into combat or on maneuvers. You took the Xerox machines, the files, the typewriters. All that was taken. I don't know. How would you throw a typewriter at a German if he came over at you?

KP: One of the people from Rutgers drove in a truck and did paperwork.

CW: Yeah, that was important. You had to have those lists. Yeah. Its (Mennotte?) Opera where the girl goes crazy about the paperwork, and she has a wonderful aria about it and she throws the form. She's trying to come to America and she tries to fill form, after form, after form, and she goes batty at it. It's all wonderful.

KP: Did you ever join a veterans' organization?

CW: No, and I should. I should. I like them. The veterans I think are wonderful, and I think they've been shortchanged. I don't know. I joined the Knights of Columbus for a couple of years and then I quit. I'm not good at that. I don't go to Rutgers Alumni meetings and things.

KP: So you've never been to Old Guard?

CW: I should, but I don't.

KP: Eve has been to two Old Guards.

CW: Are they fun?

KP: My students love the Old Guard.

CW: Are they fun?

ES: Yeah, they're fun for us to see all the alumni.

CW: I'm sure the alumni just treat you like you're Miss America. You know, they see somebody young and it must make them feel good. Yeah. Now you're at Rutgers? You're not at Douglass?

ES: Douglass, no. Rutgers College.

KP: In fact, Eve is on the crew team.

CW: Are you?

ES: Yes.

CW: Great, that's wonderful. Now what is your major, Eve?

ES: History and English.

CW: And what will you do?

ES: I don't know yet. [laughter]

CW: You're gonna write.

ES: Maybe.

CW: Or go into publishing?

ES: No.

CW: No?

ES: No.

CW: It's a coming field. It's gonna be bigger than ever. Don't you think, Kurt? We've only tapped it.

ES: No.

KP: ... It's a very tough field.

ES: My mother works in publishing.

CW: She does?

ES: You don't make any money

CW: It's overcrowded?

ES: Yeah, it's just one of those fields where there's just not a lot of money to be made. They just, you can hire kids off of the street, out of college.

CW: There isn't a day that I don't get a card about a new magazine. "We'd like to give you one free gift." There's a couple here today, I think. Yeah look at these. *British Heritage*. Who is publishing these things? This one is *Architectural Digest*, well that's famous. But did anybody ever hear of *British Heritage*? "Free issue voucher, Mr. Charles White." And I get them day after day. I get all these new magazines.

KP: I'm curious because you performed in a play about sergeants, the Army, and barracks life. Unfortunately, it was on television a few months ago and I didn't watch it. I've never seen *No Time for Sergeants*. I've only seen a few clips of it, but I gather it's about barracks life.

CW: It's a funny show. It's a funny show.

KP: And it seems like a role that you love. It was a great play to be in because you could identify with that. That was your world.

CW: Oh, yeah, yeah. And I ... played the ... psychiatrist, who was, of course, crazy. Naturally. Our psychiatrist was finally committed. They found out he had a shoe fetish. He was stealing all the Army boots. This was our psychiatrist. People think, "Oh, well, they just made up a lot of stuff." Well, they did not make up a lot of stuff, but there was a lot of stuff. You know, your psychiatrist quite often was crazy. My buddies told me our general was "shacking up," as we used to say, with a German countess. That was treason. You couldn't mingle with the enemy. She had a castle Schloss. And he had a nice (Billet?). Of course, she had offered it to him. It was not supposed to have been, but we knew it was. It was such a mixture of Marx Brothers and Sir Galahad. When they wrote and told me that Tommy … Tommy was one of those young American soldiers that everybody loves, never says a mean thing or anything. He got killed. John wrote and told me that everybody in the company cried. So there was this mixture of horror and idealism and beauty. You know, when people like Gertrude Stein and these other people fell in love with the American GI, there had to be something. And you see the newsreels. And my God, they're like heroes, aren't they? They're beautiful. The American soldier was. He must've looked like something from Greece or somewhere. You know, compared to some of the other soldiers.

KP: I'm curious here. You experienced the training in the United States. Did the war itself change any of your buddies? Did they ever tell you they had experience, or even if they couldn't tell you, did just sense something was different?

CW: Yeah. It was my buddy, John. Well, I could use his last name. His name was Moran. He was from Connecticut. The coarseness did him in. He went to live in ... I told you how he died. Life defeated him. Not life, the Army. The grossness finally got to him. Now, I guess I was not in that long. Maybe I was not on the combat, but, see, I had such a narrow, priggish upbringing that it liberated me. But to a lot of people, it just destroyed them. It was gross. It was rotten and nasty. For sensitive people it must've been hell. And there was one company clerk who was particularly ugly. He really was. And every time he walked into the office all the other clerks yelled, "Take off your gas mask," which he didn't have on. [laughs] And it was, all right, it was

a funny joke once, but it was done every single time he walked in. It never stopped. So, yet I don't know a lot of people who broke under it and ... I guess your emotions were so close to the skin that if you wanted nurturing and help, it was there. So to you it was wonderful because you knew your buddy was as emotional as you were and as frightened as you were, and you could bare your soul to him and not have to be ashamed about it. But to some people who couldn't do that, they kept it in and they cracked.

KP: A lot of people talk about that comradeship that was there.

CW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KP: I've gotten the impression that it's very different from regular civilian life where you do have friends.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

KP: But there's intensity in the Army that you don't get.

CW: And it was not homosexual. Now, we were totally aware of that in the Army. And there was a lot of that, but this was totally different. I sometimes wonder if this wasn't what the Greeks had when it talked about his lover. I don't think it was physical. You were so close. You shared everything. And you had no secrets. No, we used to envy the gay guys because no matter where they went somebody always came, showed up in a Cadillac and took them to dinner. And we were there with our mess kits, "How did they know he's there? But he knows everybody in the East." You know, it was not that. There was a lot of that, don't get me wrong.

KP: I think a lot of guys I interview want to pretend there were no gays in the military in the Thirties and Forties.

CW: And of course, when we were supposed to go overseas the first time, one guy chickened and went up to the officer and said, "I'm gay." And we said to him afterwards and to the commanding officer, "You know he's not." "I don't care, I can't go, I can't go, I don't care." He just would declare himself homosexual and that was automatic, you know. He went home. Now that to most people was the worst thing he could do. And ... some of the wildest guys, some of the guys did things to their hats and you know, did things. They went to the war and were some of the best people. Survived it totally. So it didn't have to do with your sexual orientation, you know. All the gays that I came across in the Army were not sissies. A lot of them were awful damn heroes. And the worst thing was when the macho guys broke and you had to hold them. And that happened an awful lot of times. So nobody ever condemned anybody for breaking. You could've been the biggest guy in the world, but there were times when he broke and you had to put your arms around him. And you did. Even when things happened. It was very strange, very emotional. Very emotional. But I think ... I guess once in a lifetime's enough [laughs].

KP: One thing you experienced was Army medical care. How good was that? You mentioned the first night they couldn't evacuate you which apparently made your condition worse?

CW: They tried. There were some things that were kind of ridiculous. I had cut my leg very close to my scrotum, up here. Under Army regulations, the nurse could not handle that. She could not touch anything in that area. You could've had your penis cut off and she couldn't do a thing about it. It had to be a ward boy. So you had to get a ward boy who, you know, God, he took care of you. The doctors were pretty good. The dentists were terrible. The dentists were awful. So there's strange things that happen like that in this day and age. She couldn't touch my upper thigh.

KP: Do you think that was particularly the Army?

CW: Oh, yeah.

KP: When did you learn about the GI Bill? When did you know that this would be out there for you to take advantage of?

CW: I think it was that summer, wasn't it? Because I went to Neighborhood Playhouse. I had my audition in August. Now the war ended in July?

KP: Actually, August of '45. Yeah.

CW: Was it August? So apparently they must've put that through before the war was over.

KP: Yeah, it was put before.

CW: Because I immediately, you know …

KP: You knew you were going to take advantage of it?

CW: Yeah. There was no problem in getting it or anything.

KP: Had you thought about graduate school? Or was theater your determination?

CW: Theater was in my mind. You know, college life seemed a little dull after the Army, especially Rutgers, which was not exactly a bundle of laughs when I went there. It may be now, but it wasn't when I went there. Have I said too many mean things about Rutgers?

KP: No, no, no, trust me, we've heard really ...

CW: That's one thing about interviewing the older people. We have the distance now to be honest.

KP: Oh, some people have shielded Rutgers but … I guess one final point today is … you had acted in one play that sort of typified the Army. Is there any other play, or film, or account that

matches your experiences? Does any stick out that you either also acted in or that you saw that had really matched what you had gotten from World War II?

CW: In drama school, Dick Boone and I were very close friends, very close. And he was a tail-gunner, and I was an infantry man. And we were assigned Brutus and Anthony in *Julius Caesar*. We had already done a show once with Roman costumes and the togas. We were playing Roman soldiers with the short skirts and neither one of us had on underwear. And the note came from the director, "Both of you cross your legs." We were sitting there on stage and the audience … We decided no more short pants, and so we decided to do it as GIs. And it was one of the most exciting things I'd ever been connected with. The whole thing took on a wonderful reverence about the war and all. We got our Army stuff out, and we used it all. We had a tent and all. And a remarkable thing.

KP: That's very interesting. So in many ways, it sounds like the play had a great deal of relevance.

CW: Yeah, yeah. Then of course, by that time, when we came out after two years in drama school ... Tennessee Williams was writing, and William Inge and those plays that we could talk about and do. We knew those plays. We knew *On the Waterfront*. We weren't doing (Noel Coward?) lighting cigarettes and mixing martinis. As a matter-of-fact, a couple of years ago when I did the *Merry Widow* at the Place in the Park, they asked me if I would help the young actors because *Merry Widow* was an operetta from 1900. And they were still doing James Dean and it wasn't working. Like, "Hey, Sonja, hey, Sonja, come over here, baby," you know. Bill said to me, "Can you work with them?" So I worked with them and tried to give them style. And it was wonderful to kind of go back to something I hadn't done in a long time, where your comedy has to be totally artificial. You know, these people never existed in real life. It was an operetta. They lived in their own world and the young people were crazy about it. Yeah, but it was hard to teach them. You'd have to say, "No, no. Now, hey, come on, you're hitting a fly with a baseball bat. Now play this light." They wanted to joke. And they would come in and do things. And we tried to cut them down. I remember one attendant came in and he was going to make a thing out of his entrance, giving me a letter. And he came in and he stamped his heels [stamping his heels] about six times and handed me a letter. And I said, "This is a bit much." So the next time we did it, as he started to stamp, I put the letter under his heels and I picked it up and I said, "Ah, stamped envelope." [laughing] And he looked terribly shocked. I said, "It's a bit much, for an entrance, for a letter. You just bring it in and give it to me." Because young people want to, you know, make a hit out of the phone or something. "Hello!" You know, and I'm saying the older you get the less you act. The less you act and the better it is. But it is so hard to cut it to nothing. Let's go up and get a drink.

KP: Yeah, no, I think that's it.

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

Reviewed by Erin Gimbel 10/16/00
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 10/20/00

Reviewed by Charlie White 11/01