

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED WHITTLES

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Fred Whittles, on June 23, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. This is a part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. Thank you so much, Mr. Whittles, for joining me today.

Fred Whittles: Thank you.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

FW: I was born in Jersey City at Margaret Hague Hospital, April 17, 1948.

KR: Where did you grow up?

FW: My parents originally were from Harrison, New Jersey, and we moved from Harrison in 1956 to New Monmouth, New Jersey, Middletown, New Jersey, whatever you want to call it. That's where I grew up, although I'd like to say I have not grown up yet. [Editor's Note: New Monmouth is a community within Middletown Township, New Jersey.]

KR: For the record, what were your parents' names?

FW: My mother's name was Betty, or Elizabeth, and my father's name was Frederick.

KR: What do you know about your parents' upbringings?

FW: I don't know what you mean by that.

KR: What do you know about their growing up? What do you know about your grandparents?

FW: Oh, okay. Well, my father's family mostly was from East Newark, New Jersey. They did move quite a bit, I think, to do with jobs. The story that I should say to you about my father's family is my grandfather came to this country with a group of people from England who were going to work for the Coats and Clark Company. At that time, Coats and Clark wanted to start a business in the States. This is before World War I. Anyways, so, they brought a portion of their workforce from England--I'm thinking it's Manchester, England--and brought them to move to Kearny, New Jersey to work for the Coats and Clark factory there. [Editor's Note: Coats and Clark was a weaving and textiles company that was founded in Scotland in the 1700s.]

My grandfather was kind of a mechanic, what they call a boiler room engineer, if you were to start a steam engine, those types of things, and he was also a fireman in Kearny, New Jersey. Then, he made the terrible mistake of falling in love with an Irish girl from Harrison, New Jersey, and, because he married a Catholic, was thrown out of his job and his family. It wasn't that he was someone of sainthood because he was also kind of a roustabout guy. As an operating engineer, this, again, is family legend--I'm not sure if this really happened--but he used to, for a short time, my dad lived on the Jersey Shore, and he told us his father did rum running in the '20s, as somehow working on the ship. It's probably true, but I don't think there's a whole lot of evidence of that. [laughter]

Then, somehow, they ended up back in East Newark. I don't know when. I guess my father went to Harrison High School, and that's where he met my mom. My mother was from Harrison, and she was in Harrison High School too. It's funny you're asking these questions, because I just gave myself a project in the family archives to find better pictures of my father because I have great pictures of my mother. My father passed away young. I actually had a chance to go through a lot of the old paperwork, which gives you some idea of how much time you have when you're retired.

Anyway, my grandfather, my father's father, left the family sometime in the middle '30s, and my father was, I think, fifteen at the time. He had to support the family, so he dropped out of high school and worked at a company not too far from there called Miller Packing. At Miller Packing, at fifteen years old, he was a slaughterer. They handled the sheep. I always think of my father this way, as being fifteen years old, and as the lambs went to slaughter, his job at fifteen was to grab them with his fingers, by the nostrils, lift their head up, slit their throats, and then, as they still scrambled by, hook them so that they would be lifted up and drain out the blood, so that they could go the rest of the way to the butchers. That's how he supported his mother and three brothers until World War II. The cool thing that happened about that is, in those days, in that area where he worked, the people who handled all the sheep were French and the people who handled all the butchering were Germans, and he was a pretty sharp character. Even though he was going to get his GED [graduation equivalency degree] at the same time, he learned both French and German, which when World War II came about, helped him out quite a bit.

As for my mom, my mom was a Harrison girl, one of seven children. My grandfather came from Ireland sometime around the turn of the century. He was escaping English oppression and had some family issues, and they felt that they needed to get him out of Ireland before the English came to take him away because he was a growing boy in that area and [he] came here. He worked for the Erie Lackawanna Railroad. He died young. They had seven children. My mom had four brothers and two sisters, and I think he died when my mom was thirteen or fourteen. My grandmother was a schoolteacher. My grandmother's family actually came over in the 1840s and had established themselves in Harrison. So, I do know a lot.

Then, my folks got married in 1945. My father, who was one of the first people overseas, at the end of World War II, this point system allowed him to come home, so he knew he was coming home in April. He actually landed in New York sometime I think about April 1st or 2nd. He and my mother got married April 15, 1945, which was the day after Franklin Roosevelt died, which put a little damper on the party, but it didn't bother them that much. That's it. What else do you need to know? I could go on forever about this. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) served as the U.S. president from 1933 to 1945. He died early in his fourth term, on April 12, 1945, from a cerebral hemorrhage.]

KR: Where did your father serve during World War II?

FW: He was one of the first people to land in North Africa in 1942, and, again, because he could speak French and German, was involved in North Africa and pretty much spent most of his time in North Africa in the Mediterranean while he was in the service there. [Editor's Note: On

November 8, 1942, Allied forces invaded Axis-occupied North Africa in Operation Torch. North Africa was liberated from Axis occupation in May of 1943.]

KR: He was in the Navy.

FW: He was in the Navy. Then, when he came home, he went to Rutgers for a short time. I don't exactly know all the details on this, but he was also in the Navy Reserve and, shortly before Korea, I was two, he was called back in, for whatever good or bad reason. That's the weird thing that we were talking about this week, my family, my wife and I, was my earliest memories of my father were he was in a Navy uniform. I think of that because that's who he was. He was this guy who came and went in uniform. [laughter] He left, I think he was gone for eighteen months or more overseas, so I think he came back in sometime late '52. He actually left, we have Christmas pictures of him just before he left in 1950, him in uniform and him leaving that next day after Christmas to go overseas. Then, he came back and did what all dads did, made a whole bunch more kids and worked hard. [Editor's Note: On June 25, 1950, a North Korean surprise attack on South Korea started a three-year armed conflict that pitted the forces of the United Nations, led by the United States, against the Communist forces of North Korea and China. The conflict ended in July 1953 in an uneasy truce that left Korea divided at the 38th Parallel.]

KR: Did your father talk much about his military service?

FW: He didn't talk too much. We learned a lot about his military service when he was a little bit older, because he had some phenomenal pictures of Casablanca and Northern Africa. He had been on the scene for a bunch of things where he got to take pictures of de Gaulle and other famous people that had visited that area. His major joke though was--this is probably going to sound racist, but it is--my mother was the first white girl he saw in three years and he decided they should get married right away. My mother's joke was, "I waited for him at the dock in a white dress." [laughter] [Editor's Note: On November 8, 1942, Allied forces landed in areas near Casablanca, Morocco, then a French colony, as part of Operation Torch. Morocco was defended by the Vichy French, allied with Germany. Charles de Gaulle was a French general who led the Free French Forces during World War II, when France was occupied by Germany. He served as the president of France from 1959 to 1969.]

One of the things we've been blessed with, in a weird way, since my mom passed away, I have all my mother's archives, and my father wrote God-knows-how-many letters to her and eventually to us while he was away in Korea. His letters are spectacular, not only because I think of this guy who was literally a high school dropout, working as a butcher, and he wrote in this beautiful, unbelievable longhand, beautiful writing, but his combinations of words as he described things that he saw there. He only wrote to my mother about cool stuff, like a mosque or some sultan's palace or how big the ship was and all these different things. His writing humbles you, when you think of his basic humble background. I always thought he was a pretty sharp character, but I never realized how eloquent he was, I think, especially at writing. Of course, as his son, I don't think eloquence was his strong point, [laughter] as he kind of had to manage his end of raising five kids, putting food on the table, and all the different things he was involved with, as he went on. He was very direct in his direction.

KR: That is amazing that you still have your father's letters, and that your mother saved them.

FW: She was super romantic. I mean, they were a very romantic couple. They loved to dance. As a kid growing up, we always had music in the house, and they would sing. They had their differences, of course. They were pretty hard partiers as well, so it was all part of their thing.

KR: My grandmother saved my grandfather's World War II letters, which I now have.

FW: Wow.

KR: Yes.

FW: Did he write in that special, unbelievable [way]? Where they learned this way to write, not just the words, just the scripture, the way it was written, in the script. I mean, I never could do that. My father is right-handed and I'm left-handed, so maybe I had that against me, but just incredible, incredible handwriting.

KR: How did your parents actually meet?

FW: I'm not quite sure. Well, they're from the same small town. Harrison's a tiny town. East Newark is a tiny town. East Newark is a vest pocket of a tiny town, Harrison. I'm not quite sure. I know that my father was not in high school. He was working. How they got connected, I'm not quite sure. I mean, you think about the size of that town, it's a square mile, and East Newark is a square half mile, or something like that, butting up there against Newark, and then that was a pretty industrial town. You had all those plants right there. You had all the mills in East Newark, and then you had the manufacturing plants in Harrison and all through. I mean, it's not there anymore. Everybody knew everybody. My mother's family was a pretty big family, and my father was the oldest in his family. My mother was not the oldest in her family, so he might have met her through one of her brothers. I'm not quite sure. But they loved being in Harrison, and they loved that whole [area]. As kids, [they would go to] West Hudson Park, that was their vision of life, and you'd go to Avon to the beach. It made them happy. That's actually how we ended up moving to the Jersey Shore, because they always wanted to be down at the shore. So, that's how we got down there.

KR: I am curious, what did your mother do during World War II?

FW: Well, she graduated high school in 1939-'40. She worked for the town, some kind of clerical position. She was what they called a commercial high school student, so she came out with basic secretarial skills, accounting. My mother was always super sharp with numbers and in her working career was mostly an accountant as a worker. So, I don't know what she actually did for the town. Again, I'm sure she got the job through the kindness of neighbors, because her father had passed away. All of her brothers but one were in the service, so [it was] people taking care of people then.

KR: Did your parents tell you stories about the Great Depression years and what it was like for them?

FW: Because my mother's father was always on the railroad until he died, he was pretty well off, but my mother told stories about how her father always wanted a side income. He had seven kids. So, he would do things like run a fruit truck or a vegetable truck. I don't know if he did that at a farmer-market type of thing or whatever. [When] my father's father [left], he was fifteen. He was working. Other than the fact that times were tough, I'm sure they were affected by it the way most people were. Even if you're working, you're not working well. I honestly don't know. I never really had that kind of conversation with my dad. I think the trauma for my mother was being thirteen or fourteen and losing her dad. He had a heart attack in their house, and, at that time, six of the seven kids were still home, so it was a big uproar. I'm sure that affected her dramatically over the years. I mean, she was either in seventh or eighth grade.

KR: One more question about your father's military service, do you know what his job was in the Navy?

FW: Well, he was initially a radioman, but he also, because he could interpret, one of the jobs he did when he first landed was, as an enlisted person, prisoners of war who were enlisted could only be interviewed by an enlisted person. I don't know if that's the rules of war or the rules of the United States or whatever. So, he did a lot of interviewing of French and German soldiers that were captured in North Africa right away. Then, after that kind of settled down, he was involved in logistics and was on a ship that went up and down the Mediterranean. I don't know if they were delivering supplies or whatever.

Then, in Korea, part of his Naval Reserve training was as a navigator, and he was a chief petty officer. He was a navigator, and once they got to Japan, they went back and forth from Japan to Korea for supplies and stuff like that. I know the name of the ship, the *Tappahannock*, because it was a big part of the family get-togethers. His buddies, after that, several times, would get together once or twice a year and celebrate not getting killed. [Editor's Note: The USS *Tappahannock* (AO-43) was a Kennebec-class oiler in the U.S. Navy that was in service from 1942 to 1970.]

KR: Are there any other parts of your family history that you would like to share?

FW: I don't even know what you mean by that.

KR: Are there any interesting stories, that I did not ask you questions to hit upon, that you would like to share?

FW: Well, my parents were very involved politically in Middletown. My father was involved in the Knights of Columbus. He was all about the Knights of Columbus. He was a state district deputy. He was a Grand Knight a couple of times in different things. Other than them working for a living, keeping us all out of trouble. Not that we met anybody famous or hung out with anybody that became famous, sometime I think it was in 1960, we actually had a Kennedy at our house for what the women called in those days a *kaffeeklatsch*, for the girls to get together. I don't know which one it was and I couldn't tell you, but it was a big deal for my mom. I was

twelve, so what the heck do I know? I was probably kept out of the house for two days because I was not safe around furniture or children.

KR: What are the names of your siblings? What years were they born?

FW: My older sister Beth was born in '46, March of '46, then me, then Korea. My mom lost a baby, I don't know if that was before or after me. I think it was after me. Then, my sister Mary was born in '54, and my sister Susan was born in October of '55. My brother was born in February of '57, right after we moved to the Jersey Shore. My mother said, I think she was pregnant for forty-one months. For forty-one months, she was either pregnant or nursing. To me, all I remember is when my sister Susan was born, and we were living in Harrison at that time. I was upset because, apparently, they promised me a boy, and then somehow, they fulfilled their promise by delivering my brother Jim, who was nine years younger. Yes, they had a bunch.

KR: What are your memories of living in Harrison in your very early childhood?

FW: Well, we always laughed--this is super memory--my sister and I talk about this quite a bit, especially as we had kids growing up. In Harrison, when I was in kindergarten, I went to Holy Cross School. We lived on Davis Avenue and we would walk to school. She was in second grade, I was in kindergarten, and it was not uncommon for us to walk to school. We would walk down city streets. There's certain memories we have. We'd walk past the bowling alley, and the bowling alley was open twenty-four hours a day, I think, in those days. We walked past an old building that was at one time a brewery but no longer had been open. As a matter of fact, that's now the site of the now Harrison High School. It seemed like, when you were five, it seemed like you were walking for days. If I go to Harrison, which I don't do that often, we would always look at that and think about, "Would we have allowed our own children to do that?"

If you had a quarter, which would be a pretty unusual amount of money, there was a store called Paulsky's at the corner of Davis Avenue and Harrison Avenue, which you could go in and Mr. Paulsky would make sure you would only get certain things because he knew your mom and he knew your mom's mom. It was a pretty unique little town in that way. That's what I remember about Harrison. I can tell you that my first grade teacher was Mrs. Noe. My second grade teacher was Mrs. Crossing. The reason I remember them is they were also our neighbors. So, Mrs. Noe lived two houses down; Mrs. Crossing lived six houses down. It's a little town. Going from there to New Monmouth and then taking a bus to school was like, "What an adventure, oh, my God." Then, later on, that was only a mile, but at that time, it seemed like, "Oh, how the heck did we survive?"

KR: What were your family get-togethers like when you were still living in Harrison? I am talking about with your extended family.

FW: Oh, this is funny. Well, we lived in an apartment upstairs in my grandmother's house. That's my earliest memory of any place I ever lived. We had lived somewhere else before that, but I don't remember that. That was kind of a tradition in my mother's family that someone lived upstairs. I don't know if it was the starter apartment for everybody or whatever.

Family gatherings at my grandmother's house involved many cousins. I have thirty-two cousins on my mother's side. It involved all the kids. Oddly enough, we're somewhat still close when we see each other, even though, at this point, we've buried all our parents. We try to get together, especially online, once or twice a year. We have a place at the shore; my cousins have a place down there. So, we'll get together. I just, last year, lost my Aunt Jean, who was my mother's older sister. She turned a hundred in April and then passed away in the beginning of June. That was kind of the end of the line for my mother's brothers and sisters.

As cousins, there's generational sets of cousins. There's the early cousins, like myself and my sister and some of the others, who were all born before the Korean War, and then there were a whole bunch born after, based on service time. [laughter] So, they were the younger bunch. But [we are] still in touch and happy to see each other when we get to see each other, which may be once in a blue moon. But we're trying to avoid any more funerals; we're just going to weddings and baptisms.

The earliest memory of that was my grandmother's dining room table, for myself and my other boy cousins of the same age, was our train, and we would go under the table and play. All the parents would be running around by us, when they were doing the food. Then, all the brothers and brothers-in-laws would be in the living room watching baseball. That was it. I don't know if they watched anything else than baseball, on a TV the size of this screen we're talking on. [laughter] They all smoked, and they all drank a lot. I mean, we didn't have any consciousness of it as kids. That was the norm. Many, many years later, we were at a party at my mother's-- this was way after my father passed away because my daughter was born and I guess was maybe two or three--there was so much smoke in my mother's house, because I never smoked, my wife didn't smoke, and we just didn't expose our daughter to it, we literally had her stay on the porch [laughter] of my mother's house. My aunts and uncles, there's a great picture in my mother's archives of two of her brothers and two of my aunts sitting there on the couch. The cocktail glasses are in front of them. The ashtray is filled, and there actually is a haze of smoke in the picture. That's who they were; I mean, that's them, God bless them. We survived.

When we got together as a family, it was usually a big event, because it would be hard to have a small event. Even in the early days, there were locally ten kids between 1946 and 1950, and then the next group would be another bunch. I remember, my cousins, a good many of them were born between 1950 and 1962. Every family get-together was massive. We've done that two or three times, where all the cousins and the aunts and uncles got together for various birthdays. We didn't do that for my aunt's hundredth birthday, but we did it for my mother's eightieth birthday. One uncle turned eighty-five, and they had a big blowout. Then, literally, we had to rent a tent. Now, we have all those kids, plus their kids, plus kids, boyfriends, girlfriends, hangers-on-ers. It gets to be a good time. Is that something that happens in your family?

KR: Yes. When you were talking about the cousins born around 1946 to 1948, my dad was born in '46, so he called that age group the big kids. Then, the kids born between '52 and '60 were the little kids.

FW: Absolutely, that was the second generation. [laughter] Well, it was because all those guys went through the same thing, so many of them did, or, before they could get married, were



sucked into Korea. My father's side of the family, he had three brothers in all. One brother did move away pretty far, but the others, everybody lived in North Jersey, within fifteen miles from each other. Every get-together was a crowd just by bringing the kids. My Uncle Joe's family had seven, eight. We had five. My Uncle Frank had four. If everybody shows up with their kids, it's thirty people. [laughter] Then, if Uncle Jim came up from Maryland with his bunch of seven, that was huge. It was a great experience, in that in my last job, I spent quite a bit of time in Maryland and I got to meet one or two of my cousins that I had not seen ever, I can't remember. That's one of the things they remember. Every time they ever came to New Jersey, how they just mixed into the hoard, crazy. [laughter]

KR: What was it like when your family moved to New Monmouth?

FW: That was 1956. When we moved there, I don't think the Parkway was quite done, and that was a solid forty-five miles away. The things that we talk about that are funny and amazing to this day is the telephone was a party line and everything was long distance, so we were told to write letters to our grandparents. They couldn't talk to us on the phone because that was too expensive. Then, going up north to a family event was always spectacular. We had one of these cars, my dad loved a big wide car, and somehow four of us could fit in the back seat and the baby would be in the front. We'd go up north for one of these family events, every holiday, every Christening, every birthday, communion, whatever it was. Because there were so many kids, there was always something. The big thing my sister and I talk about quite a bit is when we first moved down there, the party line on the phone and the fact that we were so far away. For my grandmother to visit, that was like, "Oh, my God, how is Grandma going to get down here?" My dad worked in North Jersey. He took the train to work every day, and that was like, "Oh, my gosh, he went on a train every day." It was so far beyond our thinking, but we adjusted. [Editor's Note: The Garden State Parkway was constructed between 1947 and 1957.]

We were a mile from the bay and two miles from the ocean or three miles from the ocean. Middletown was growing. It was tiny then. Now, it's monstrous. It was lovely. I think I was very fortunate to grow up where I grew up, blessed by my parents, where I was always in a Catholic school, which kind of kept your community very close. Everybody knew everybody and then you saw everybody Sunday, you saw all your teams, everything was about St. Mary's, the school and the church and the teams. Then, I literally went from St. Mary's grade school to Mater Dei High School. It was kind of like you were always at the parish level. Are you my therapist, Kate? [laughter]

KR: [laughter] You said your dad worked in northern New Jersey. Where was he working when you were growing up?

FW: I couldn't remember that.

KR: Okay.

FW: He had some tough times. He had been working, somehow lost a job, and then he started working down in the Red Bank area and was working there, but his track record, in some of those positions, was rough. Certainly, it informed me to make sure I kept my head down and

kept a good job. He was involved politically, so he got involved in selling insurance and selling other things and dabbled in a little bit of real estate. The job that I remember him having the most when I was in high school and early college, he sold Muzak, you know, piped-in music, and he sold that all over the state of New Jersey. It fit his personality because where he sold it, it was mostly restaurants, bars and hotels, which lent itself for him to have a good day every day.

Then, later on, after I was in college, he somehow was involved in a construction company. He was working there and then through political connections became involved as the director of the Middletown Sewer Authority. Of things that I think my father was involved in, when we first moved to New Monmouth, Middletown Township didn't have [sewers]. Everything was septic tanks. There were no sewers, and there was tremendous problems from overdevelopment, drainage and what have you. That's how he got involved in the town to change things. One of the things he wanted and we eventually got--and I can remember that being a big deal--we got sewers and got out of septic tanks, and that made life immensely better for the town in terms of its value. In a weird way, he ended up being some kind of managing director or whatever of the sewer authority. That's what he was doing when he passed away.

A funny story about my brother when he was five years old--my father was working, he had an office in the house and he was selling insurance. He was in kindergarten, and the teacher asked, "What does your father do for a living?" My brother said, "Well, he sits around the house all day and then goes out all night." [laughter] So, the poor woman was like, "Oh, my God," and of course confronted my mother and my mother straightened her out. Everybody has their own concept of how people [work].

He worked hard and my mom also. I think my mom started working when I was in grade school full time, maybe when I was in eighth grade. She worked originally for Sears, and then she worked for a company called Ralph Friedland & Brothers, which is a manufacturer of blinds and shades in Keyport, New Jersey. She went to work there as an accountant and became kind of the treasurer of the company over time because she just had been there forever and ever. Friedland Brothers took care of my mother in a nice way. She made a good living, and when they sold the company, they took care of her in another way. She actually retired and sold her house and moved away, so she wouldn't be tempted to drive back to the office. She didn't want to work anymore. I think she was seventy-four or something when she retired, and it made it harder and harder for herself to work. That's why she ended up where she ended up in Toms River.

KR: What was your neighborhood like in New Monmouth? Who were your neighbors, in terms of religion, nationality and race?

FW: Everything there--and I'm sure that's true to this day--everything there was developments. Our parents bought a home in Locust Woods. Above us was Sylvia Woods; above them was Maple Woods. We were on a little cul-de-sac, Louise Place. On our street, most of the kids were my sister's age or my brother's age. They were mostly younger than my [age group] on my little cul-de-sac, and everybody [was] Irish but the Dorinos. They were the Italian exception, and everybody was Catholic.

Now, behind us, there were mostly guys my age. The next street over, in the little cul-de-sacs, as they kind of run up like fingers off the main drag, there were a million boys my age and a million girls my sister's age, and you were a part of that community. I mean, that was it. You didn't have to go too far. I can remember the oldest guy in our area was Jerry Murphy, who was maybe two years older than me or three years older. He's older than my sister, so he might've been three years older than me. Then, after that, I think everybody was within twelve months, from top to bottom, of guys I hung out with. We were all part of the big kid's group. [laughter]

Initially, we would play ball in the backyards. There weren't any parks down there at that time. Everything was set up in our backyard. Behind our house were the Livingstons. The Livingston's house and our house, the property line was home plate. Literally, everything was designed after that. Basketball nets, the Livingstons put up a basketball net. That was the first basketball net that I ever saw. Yes, I mean, it was a pretty homogenous community.

One of our neighbors in the development, just by happenstance, his brother was in the service with my father. Whenever his brother came down, they all ended up at our house or vice versa. Except for those guys that have passed away, I'm not so much in touch with them but on Facebook in touch with many. There's a bunch that have passed away.

You went to St. Mary's. I don't know if you've had this experience, Kate. When you would go to Catholic school in the '50s, you had to make sure you locked up your desk on Monday nights because the public came in and you knew the public-school kids were going to rob your desk. [laughter] That was part of that, and so all the kids that were in public school that weren't Catholic, we just assumed they were robbers. That whole separating out of people, it was, again, a very important part of what we learned, but it was how we were raised. We all played on the same teams. We all had the same bike. I can remember when we went from single-speed bikes to three-speed bikes. I think I was twelve.

My parents, because they had a bunch of other kids, we were pretty free to do anything you wanted. I mean, I would leave in the morning and come back for dinner, in the summertime, this time of year, as long as I wasn't arrested, my parents had no idea what I did. If I missed a meal, my mother would ask me, "What did you do for lunch?" She wouldn't say, "Did you have lunch?" She just assumed that I had lunch somewhere. But we were twelve, thirteen, fourteen, there in those years, you were a free bird. I'd go to the bay, go for a swim, go to the ocean, hitchhike down to the ocean. We'd hitchhike down to the ocean, no fear. We had no fear; you'd just go, come back. We'd go down to Sea Bright. Now, we never had any money to pay for Sea Bright, but we would just climb over the seawall at Sea Bright and go for a swim. It wasn't like we thought anything about it. We were out on bikes. We just went on bikes until we got tired and turned around and went home. We'd go anywhere. It was a kind of neat way to grow up. I would never allow that with my daughter and my grandkids. [laughter]

KR: When you were at St. Mary's, what sports did you play and what activities did you participate in?

FW: Everybody had to play basketball and baseball. It wasn't an organized thing. There was Little League. In terms of being in the school, you were in your class, you did what you were

supposed to do. We had a lot of serious nuns. The school was huge. I mean, we had sixty-five kids in our third grade class. You would just go home and play. The school didn't have an organized thing. There was basketball for seventh and eighth graders, as a team that went around. I was never very good at that.

When I went to high school, I got involved in track and basketball. As a freshman, anybody could make a team. Then, sophomore year in high school, I started playing football and I was a big fat kid, so it worked. Mater Dei High School, that was their second year of existence when I was a freshman. It was, again, a very closed society of everybody you knew from grade school, plus some kids from Atlantic Highlands and Keansburg that didn't go to grade school with you, but all of a sudden, everybody's in the same school. I think there were 120 in my class and maybe 110 in some of the [classes]. If you wanted to be on a team, you got to be on any team you wanted. Then, in high school, I played basketball one year and then I actually did team management, the books for the games for basketball, and ran track all four years and played football three years.

I think about the size of the school I went to and the opportunities we had. People could be anything they wanted. My grandson's grade school, they only have twenty or so kids in a room. He's in the Charlotte school system, this is just one grade school that has six classes of twenty, twenty-five second graders. I think there's fourteen high schools in the Charlotte system. I don't know if kids would have the same opportunity that I did in such a small venue to be involved. Mater Dei High School, we had a really good track team and we had pretty decent basketball. When we started out in football, we were terrible, but we played. I got to play a lot, and that was a great opportunity to just be out and about.

KR: Outside of school, did you do any clubs, for example, Boy Scouts?

FW: No. I was a Cub Scout for a while. The two things I didn't do when I was in grade school were, I was in Cub Scouts for a while, I didn't like it. It didn't make any sense to me. Then, the other thing that you could be when you were in grade school was an altar boy, but you had to speak Latin or learn the Confiteor in Latin and I thought that was dumb. I looked at that and said, "What are we doing this for?" That, and the fact that you had to go to Mass at six o'clock in the morning and the other stuff. It was not for me. It never was; I couldn't imagine it. The only thing that I realized I got shortchanged on was if you were an altar boy in grade school for funerals, you got to go out of class and you usually got a tip and occasionally for weddings, I guess if guys went to weddings, but I don't think anybody was an altar boy or an altar girl in weddings.

KR: What professional sports teams did you follow when you were a kid?

FW: The Yankees, the Yankees. One of my neighbors was a New York Giant football player, Mr. (Reilly?). But in those days, if you played football, you only played [during the season], and he had a regular job. His kid was like a regular kid; he went to school with me. That was it. There wasn't that kind of sports emphasis there is today.

Everybody followed the Yankees. My father grew up as a Brooklyn Dodgers fan, but the Brooklyn Dodgers moved away. The Mets were an afterthought, so really Yankees fans. You had those teams, the Mantles, the Bauers, Yogi Berra, Elston Howard. Every kid knew everybody and had all the baseball cards. [Editor's Note: Mickey Mantle played centerfield for the New York Yankees from 1951 to 1968. Hank Bauer played for the Yankees from 1948 to 1959.]

I was never a really good baseball player. I played a little bit. I played Little League, and quite by accident, my team--I say this in a weird way--the team was pretty good and that helped your ability to play. Then, we got into some kind of regional competition, which we got eliminated from pretty quickly, but one of the things that shocked us was how big it was for other people. For us, it was like we were just playing ball. Then, all of a sudden, we're in some kind of regional tournament. Then, we went out of state, played somebody else, and everybody on that team looked like somebody's dad and they beat the hell out of us, so we were eliminated. I was on the team, and the team was good. So, I got to be on the team, but it was like Freddie play right field and hopefully you'll get hit with the ball. [laughter]

As a kid growing up, everybody followed the Yankees, and there just wasn't that kind of coverage for sports except for baseball. Baseball was on every day, and everybody had Channel 11 and Channel 9, whatever it was. I think the Yankees were always on Channel 11. My dad was not a big athlete, sports guy. He played soccer in high school before he dropped out. He always felt soccer was a game we should play, but there was no opportunity to play that. I imagine there might've been if I went to a public high school, but I don't even remember that, which is weird because later on, as a young dad, with my daughter, I got involved in soccer in a big way for our town and literally had a blast with it and went to school. I went to classes and studied and got--I don't want to say I got good at it--but the kids were good.

It's a whole different world now. Oh, my goodness, I think it's part of the bread and circuses of life. That's why I think it's so funny right now with COVID and the issues of racism getting everybody's attention because we're not distracted by teams. We're not hiding under a blanket of who got a hit, who's doing well. We're facing reality, fortunately. That's the end of the philosophy lesson for today. Do you get a lot of conversations like this from old guys like me?

KR: Yes. [laughter]

FW: [laughter] One of my frustrations is that I look back and I think of, wow, when we were in the '60s, the '70s and we were all cool and we were going to change things. I think we made it terrible, and I think then we did worse with our own children in some respects. Now, the net result is this mess that we're living in today. People want to say they're sorry for racism. I'm sorry for the mess we created. I know this all came out of Vietnam, protests, and all that other stuff, but it really just amazes me that we could have so many people who survived the so-called Summer of Love and then develop so many bad habits and so much anger. I see it every day. It's sad. I talk to my grandson and my granddaughter about this, and they just look at you like you're from Mars. Of course, they're eight, so that helps. We created such a selfish, nightmarish situation here, where people are so protective of themselves, it's sad, and we shouldn't be. Oops, I'm sorry, we went back to philosophy class. [Editor's Note: The Summer of Love refers to the

emergence of the hippie counterculture in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco and in other places across the United States in the summer of 1967.]

KR: What were political discussions like with your mother and father when you were growing up?

FW: Well, my parents were pretty much Kennedy Democrats. One of my memories of my father and I, we had our differences over Vietnam, we had our differences over a few things, but one thing we were really sure about was Bobby Kennedy should be elected. I think the New Jersey primary and the California primary, in those days, were at the same time, and my father was involved in terms of whether or not Kennedy would win New Jersey. Then, we were watching on television when he was shot. We were literally sitting in the basement, watching the TV in what was the TV room in the house, and that was tough. That was tough. I know it broke his heart, it broke my heart, because it was like all of a sudden ... [Editor's Note: Robert Kennedy sought the Democratic nomination for president in 1968. The New Jersey, California and South Dakota primary elections took place on June 4, 1968. Eugene McCarthy narrowly beat Kennedy in New Jersey, but Kennedy won South Dakota and California. After delivering his victory speech in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on June 5, Kennedy was shot three times by Sirhan Sirhan and died the next day. Vice President Hubert Humphrey went on to win the Democratic nomination but lost in the general election to Republican Richard Nixon.]

That's why I've said to myself, when I look at that stuff, whether it was Martin Luther King or Robert Kennedy or even George Wallace getting shot, I mean, all those guys should have told us all, in those days, we probably need to be more respectful of others and others' opinions, but we haven't done that. We also should take our heads out of asses and not be so wrapped in our own zone. It's tragic to me. I'm really involved in this right now in a lot of different ways. [laughter] I have been for quite a while, but I look back and think about what could we have done better. I feel that I should've been more involved twenty-five years ago than I am today. I feel like twenty-five years ago we should've been doing some things, and I wasn't. I was busy making a living and running around, doing dad stuff, that I should've been doing other things. I could go off on this; I can give you forty-five minutes on any subject that you'd like. I've been full of shit my whole life. This is how I've survived. I hope I'm not offending you with my language, Kate.

KR: No, not at all.

FW: You're from New Jersey.

KR: Yes.

FW: Right?

KR: My dad was in the Navy, so I am well versed.

FW: There's no shocking here. [laughter] What else do you need?

KR: What did Bobby Kennedy mean to you as a presidential candidate in 1968?

FW: Well, you remember all that; I do. Johnson backed out. He [Robert Kennedy] just was the guy. Knowing the history now, I don't know if he would've done anything differently. If you think about Johnson, what Johnson did, Johnson really was carrying on the so-called Eisenhower-Kennedy legacy with Vietnam. Nobody knew how to get out of it. We haven't learned that lesson. We have kids, who weren't born yet, right now in this service to this country in Afghanistan, so we haven't learned that lesson as a country. But I just felt he was an alternative to Johnson. I feel like he would've carried on some of the legacy that Johnson had in terms of the poverty stuff and all those things that may have made things better. When he couldn't run, I definitely lost interest. [Editor's Note: On March 31, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. After World War II, President Harry S. Truman's administration provided aid and military advisors to France to squash the Vietnamese fight for independence. Following French defeat and with the Cold War fueling anti-Communist policies in foreign relations, President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported President Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam with training and equipment against Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Vietminh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north. About eight hundred U.S. military personnel were stationed in Vietnam by the late 1950s. During the presidency of John F. Kennedy, American troops in Vietnam reached 16,700 by the end of 1963. In response to an alleged naval confrontation between American and North Vietnamese forces, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 10, 1964, which authorized Johnson to wage war in Vietnam. Under Johnson, the numbers of American troops in Vietnam increased from 80,000 in July 1965 to 385,000 in 1966 and to the peak of 543,400 in 1969.]

He [Robert Kennedy] was an inspiring person, not that Hubert Humphrey wasn't inspiring, but he wasn't inspiring. I'm not trying to take away anything from Humphrey's wonderful career and service to this country. I read about this stuff all the time now, so I'm kind of twisting how I thought about it then and how I think of it [now]. I do know from 1968, that was pretty devastating for me. It kind of bummed me out. It separated me out from my father in some ways. We kind of went in different directions in terms of he became a lot more hardened to protests and all that. Then, of course, all those riots were happening in '67 and '68. I mean, that was tough times, and we're back to it now. Hey, we caught up. We're back to it now. Hopefully, it gets resolved. [Editor's Note: Hubert Humphrey served as the vice president from 1965 to 1969 and as U.S. Senator from Minnesota from 1949 to 1964 and again from 1971 to 1978. In the summer of 1967, riots occurred in cities across the United States, including Newark and Plainfield, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan. Between 1965 and 1968, there were over 150 incidents of social unrest in the United States.]

Right after that, I would say I just shut off. I literally shut off for a while, and what woke me up years later was Watergate. I feel bad for Richard Nixon to this day because I know he was a great student of history and he would understand exactly what he did. He didn't wanted to get caught, and he got caught. But that was the beginning of this partisan/non-bipartisan vision of government, basically because he was going to win no matter what in '72. He wasn't going to lose. What was he trying to do? I mean, the Democrats couldn't find their way out of a paper bag, but he was so stupidly paranoid and worried about stuff that he didn't need to worry about. [Editor's Note: On August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon resigned from the presidency, amidst

revelations of his involvement in and coverup of the burglary of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters in the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972.]

In 1970, of course, we had the whole Kent State thing, but right after that, it died down. It just died down. You got a hold of Tom Mattia [Rutgers College Class of 1970]. I got a hold of Tom Mattia because I was thinking about, "Wow, it's fifty years in April from when we shut down the University." I had not been in touch with Tom in probably forty-two years, forty-three years. [Editor's Note: Following President Richard Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia, a nationwide student strike commenced in the beginning of May 1970. The strike began at Rutgers on Friday, May 1. On Monday, May 4, two thousand protesters gathered on the Old Queens Campus, and Rutgers President Mason Gross addressed the crowd, calling the protesters his guests. That day, two hundred students occupied the second and third floors of Old Queens, including Gross' office, resulting in a two-day sit-in of Old Queens. On May 4 in Ohio, National Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine. In solidarity with the National Strike, the Rutgers College faculty voted on Tuesday, May 5 to make classes and final exams optional and instituted pass/fail grades for the spring semester 1970. On May 5, massive demonstrations continued at Rutgers, and protests and counter-protests continued for several weeks at Rutgers and on campuses across the nation. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries. Thomas Mattia, a member of the Class of 1970, has also been interviewed by the Rutgers Oral History Archives as part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. (From Paul Clemens' *Rutgers Since 1945*; Kent State University Libraries, Campus Strike Papers: New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1970)]

It was a weird thing because I'm retired now for a couple years. All of a sudden, somebody told me that they saw my name on LinkedIn. I was on LinkedIn for a very short time, and I'm like, "Why would my name still be there? I'm retired."

So, I went on LinkedIn, I said, "Let me see if I can find Tom Mattia on LinkedIn," and there he was. That was so weird to me. So, I wrote him a note via LinkedIn, this was a couple months ago, celebrating fifty years of shutting the University down. We got reconnected, and that's how I got connected to you. I'm thankful for it. I'm thankful for that dumb thing that happened because Tom and I, he's been bounced around the country. He's doing his thing. He's got three kids. I think the last time I saw Tom was actually right after my daughter was born, the September or October after she was born. She was born in November. The following year, 1980, we had all gone to a football game and he was there and she was there, because I have his picture with the little princess at that time. That was it. That was forty years ago. I know I have not seen him or talked to him probably since. He went his way, I went mine, and that's the way it goes. I'm thankful that we got reconnected. We're having a lot of fun together. We'll actually see each other. He's in Texas and I'm here [in South Carolina], but I think he's going to be in New York in July. I'll be in North Jersey, so we'll get reconnected somehow. But I digress. [laughter]

KR: Well, that is wonderful that you reconnected with Tom.

FW: It is. Thank you.



KR: Still on the topic of politics, I want to go back a little bit to when John F. Kennedy became president in 1960. What do you remember about that?

FW: I was twelve, and what we remember about that is everybody was so happy because now a Catholic could become president. That was it. I mean, I had no thought in my head about anything else. The idea of going to the Moon and all this other stuff, I had no fears or anything like that. I was just a twelve-year-old kid having a good time. That was it. I think it opened up some minds in the country, but I'm sure there's people that still worry. I mean, think about how much trash has been piled on that guy's life since that time, and they'll be taking his statue down wherever it is. That was all I remember though, "Yay, a Catholic can be president." That would be really weird today because I wouldn't go to church if I couldn't get arrested. I go to church for funerals and weddings, and I don't know any of the songs anymore. [laughter] [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy set the goal of a lunar landing in a speech given on September 12, 1962 at Rice University in Texas. In the speech, Kennedy said, "We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept ..." On July 20, 1969, in the Apollo 11 mission, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the Moon, while Michael Collins flew the Command Module Columbia in lunar orbit.]

Well, that's the other thing, you asked about stuff I did in high school and in grade school, I was always in a choir. Whatever they needed, I was always somehow involved. We didn't have an organized musical program at Mater Dei. It was too small, but we had a choir and we had a choir in grade school. It kept me out of trouble.

KR: When you were at Mater Dei, what were your academic interests?

FW: Getting out. Well, we were on that track, everybody was tracked to go to college. Academically, there was no thought that you would go not to college. There was the thought you would go to college, and they wanted kids to succeed. There wasn't a wide [variety of courses]. I think about the wide variety of courses that my daughter could take when she was in high school, and God knows what it is today. I was in the top group. You took English I. I always would take French and Latin. Whatever they threw at me, I did, and I did very well. I was a good student. I was more of a history buff and I still am than I was a math buff, but I did well in everything. One thing I didn't get, I had a rough road in high school, they didn't have a very good science program. This one gentleman, who I am sure is not teaching anymore, was teaching chemistry, and we had chemistry as juniors and he was terrible. Then, I found out, after my junior year, I had enough credits that all I had to do was take the basic requirements as a senior, which I think was English, math, history, gym, so I had most of the day off.

There's a funny story for you, Kate. I'm going into my senior year in high school, and I realize I'm going to have to learn how to type. I go to this sister who was the guidance counselor, Sister Patricia--oh, man, I do have the brain connection still--Sister Patricia was the counselor and the basic person to tell you what you should do, what you shouldn't do. I probably talked to her four times in four years. I go there, and I say, "I want to take the typing course." She goes, "Why?" I

said, "Well, because I'm going to be in college next year. I don't really type very effectively and I want to be good at it." Just think about hearing this as a seventeen or eighteen-year-old, I was seventeen, she goes, "Listen, Fred, you'll always have women to type for you." I never had a woman type for me. In one job, my first job, there was kind of an executive secretary and she didn't type for me. I typed for her. She told me what to type, and I put it on a piece of paper. I laugh about this today. I am one of the best two-and-a-half finger typers that you'll ever see in the world. I lived and died with computers for thirty-five of my forty-five years--actually, no, from the second job I had. The second job I had, I was on a computer in some form and initially hunting and pecking and now pretty damn good, at my own pace. I always laugh every time I've told that story to people, and they think, "Wow, she was in the dark ages." Well, she was, but so was I. It was 1965, help me, but I never had anyone ever [type for me]. Even as a sales guy, if you needed to type a proposal, I was the guy. I probably put it all together and had somebody else type it on the official document, but other than that, nobody typed for me. Even as I was general manager of a company, nobody typed for me. I would type something up. I had a friend who would check it. She would say, "This is wrong, that's wrong." "Thanks." "Fix it." [laughter]

KR: What was your college application process like?

FW: I can't remember. Fill in the form. I don't think we had an essay. I had really good College Board scores. I didn't apply to a lot of schools. My parents couldn't swing much more than a state university. I was a pretty good football player in high school. I was being approached by the Coast Guard Academy and Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. I didn't want to go to Holy Cross because I had just spent four years in a high school that you had to wear a white shirt and a tie and a jacket every day. I thought if I had to do that for another four years, plus by this time, I was pretty much non-religious. At Holy Cross, as a freshman, you were required to go to Mass on Good Friday. That was required attendance, and they required attendance on certain Sundays and all the Catholic holidays. I thought, "This is crazy. Why am I going to high school again?" I didn't want to bother with that.

Then, the Coast Guard Academy, my dad was a Navy guy and he said, "Well, if you go to the Coast Guard Academy, why don't we try to get you into Annapolis?" [Editor's Note: The U.S. Naval Academy is located in Annapolis, Maryland.] He worked on that for a while, and when I didn't get in at the end of my senior year, I didn't want to worry about it. I got accepted to Rutgers, and I was pretty happy. As a requirement from the high school, everybody in our high school had to apply to Seton Hall. Everybody had to apply to another school called Belmont Abbey, and all boys did. I was accepted everywhere I applied. But I had the grades, I think back about it now, I was president of the Student Council, captain of the football team, a writer, I was involved in so many different things, plus I think I had a 1260 on my boards, something like that. Probably that didn't hurt. So, everything was lined up, fifth or sixth in my class, let's go. I think I was actually tenth in a class of 112. Not that I worried about those things, I didn't. That's what counted then; fill out the forms, and away you go. I remember my parents complaining, because I forget how many dollars you had to spend to apply to these different schools, and they thought that was crazy. "Why don't you just apply to one? Just apply to one. Get done with it that way." It cut deep into my father's beer money.

KR: Did you visit Rutgers before you went there in September of 1966?

FW: Yes, we went down. I don't want to say it was an official visit. Literally, my father said, "Let's go look at the school." Yes, we went there. I'm trying to think, we went to Seton Hall. I don't remember, I'm sure we went some other places, but basically Rutgers was probably, in terms of affordability for my family, that was the best bet. I think we went to Glassboro, whatever that is now, Rowan. [Editor's Note: Rowan University was founded in 1923 as Glassboro Normal School. In 1958, the institution became known as Glassboro State College. In 1992, it was renamed in honor of Henry Rowan, who gave the college 100 million dollars. In 1997, the college earned university status.]

KR: Yes.

FW: We went down to look around Glassboro, and again, the Glassboro coach wanted me to play ball. I thought I could walk on to Rutgers. That didn't make sense because I was five-ten, two hundred pounds, and the average guy on their team was much taller and much bigger and I thought, "Boy, that was crazy." So, I tell people I learned physics in that experience, by realizing that I was little and big men would knock you over. I probably could've been abused for a while at that, but fortunately I didn't. I just went into the clamshell of going to college.

KR: I am curious if you remember the summer reading that was assigned going into your freshman year at Rutgers College.

FW: No. Do you know what it was?

KR: Yes. Someone else I interviewed talked about how there were four books, and he remembered two of them, *Growing Up Absurd* by Goodman and *The Other America* by Harrington. [Editor's Note: *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* is a 1960 book by Paul Goodman. *The Other America* is a 1962 book by Michael Harrington.]

FW: I wouldn't have known that.

KR: Sure, I was just curious.

FW: Yes, even though in my whole life, I'm a reader. I read probably forty-five to fifty books a year. Even then, I loved to read and I loved the story of what I'm reading. I think that's why I was attracted to history because I liked to see it pieced together, but I wouldn't remember what those four books were. I probably devoured them in the first month after I got the list. That's who I am. I mean, how'd he remember that? [laughter]

KR: What were your first days and weeks like when you were a freshman at Rutgers College?

FW: It was a little bizarre. I lived at Davidson dorm, which is now on the Busch Campus, up by the Engineering School. All my classes were downtown [on College Avenue], so I became a bus guy. Also, the way Rutgers was set up then, our meals were all up there, so it made me feel like not part of the campus. I had a roommate that I had gone to high school with, which was good in

some ways. [Editor's Note: Mr. Whittles' answers a telephone call.] Can I help you? I'm in the middle of a conference call. I will definitely be there. See you later, bye. Lena Newman, another New Jersey refugee, right here in South Carolina. Where were we? [Editor's Note: Built in 1961, Davidson Hall is a residence hall located on the Busch Campus of Rutgers University.]

KR: You were talking about living in Davidson.

FW: Yes, so, we were in Davidson dorm, and that was far away and you weren't part of the campus. You felt a little isolated. The other problem was, as a freshman, I had all these eight o'clock classes. That was a mistake, and I definitely felt isolated there. The Davidson Dining Hall was also the dining hall for the football team, and this was so weird. I'm sure they separate them out totally now, but on my meal plan, I was like a human, and those guys, you would see the food that they would get that you weren't allowed to have. It was funny. You automatically felt like a second-class citizen. Secondly, you couldn't even eat the stuff that other people were eating in the same room. [laughter] It was weird. It was a weird transition. Part of the transition that was really tough was, as I said before, I was always in this very closed, parochial, comfort-zone shell, and all of a sudden, [I was out] in the world and that was shocking to me.

I had an aunt who was very concerned that I was going to go to Rutgers. This was when they had that controversy, there was a professor there named Genovese, who was somewhat controversial for no other reason than he said, "Gee, maybe we shouldn't worry about certain things." Anyway, she was sure I was going to come out as a Communist and if not, God knows, marry a non-Catholic. [Editor's Note: Eugene Genovese (1930-2012), a scholar of slavery and the American South, served as a history professor at Rutgers from 1963 to 1967. On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Scott Hall dedicated to discussing U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, Genovese declared, "Those of you who know me know that I am a Marxist and a Socialist. Therefore, unlike most of my distinguished colleagues here this morning, I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." Genovese is remembered for his "welcome" of Viet Cong victory, but he went on to criticize U.S. foreign policy by saying, "Our policy has been to support corrupt regimes because these regimes would allow their countries to be exploited and would stop the spread of socialism ... the threat from Cuba is its example and its ideology. It suggests that other countries too can be masters in their own house." Amidst the firestorm of controversy that ensued, Rutgers President Mason Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese and staunchly defended the principle of academic freedom. Genovese later resigned and moved to Canada, where he taught at Sir George Williams University.]

The shocking thing for me was meeting people [from all over New Jersey]. Literally, other than my cousins that lived in other parts of New Jersey, I didn't know anybody from anywhere. It was kind of throwing me to the wolves in a little bit of a way, and I'm certain it affected me mentally. I'm sure it has, but I just wasn't quite sure what to make of it. I will tell you this, Kate, my admission to my daughter and to you and to my wife, was I was in college for four years and other than being in a fraternity and hanging out with a bunch of guys that drank too much and smoked too much pot, I really never connected to the University or the system. I think that hurt being in that situation; that kind of created this disconnect. I just never was connected to it. I was literally doing what I was told. You go to college, you get a degree. My dad, of course,

wanted me to become a lawyer or an Indian chief or whatever, but the goal--and I could understand it from the point of age now, of course--all the things that they were denied in their lives, they wanted for their children, but as a goofy kid, I was way immature, way not ready. If I had taken a gap year, I could've taken that gap year in Vietnam. What a bargain. [laughter] So, that didn't make sense, but it really was four years of me just trying to stay above the law. It started with that.

Foolishly, I went and pledged a fraternity in the second semester of my freshman year. That was a mistake, too. Oh, I loved the guys, it was great, but then, again, I'm at Davidson and all the activities are down on the main campus. Now, if you're hanging out at the fraternity, you're taking a bus home at eleven o'clock, and at eight o'clock in the morning, class. Sorry, we're not making it. It was the start of an interesting experience. [Editor's Note: Fred Whittles was a member of Alpha Chi Rho, Beta Phi chapter, known as the "Crows." The Alpha Chi Rho house was located at 11 Union Street.]

KR: Going to Rutgers, you were aware of the controversy with Eugene Genovese that happened the year before you got there.

FW: I wasn't aware of it as much as I didn't think it was a controversy. I think it was just one guy. Think about it. I mean, I don't know how large Rutgers was then. Think about how large it is now. Certainly, there were fifteen or seventeen thousand kids who go to school when I was there at least, at least ten thousand undergraduates, if not more. Other than being aware of it from the point of view of my relatives talking about it.

At the same time I was going to school, my cousin Tom went to the Newark College of Engineering, and my cousin Cathy, she went to UC Berkeley. That age group of us that were in that big kids group, it wasn't anticipated that you would do anything other than go to college. It was just you went to college. I didn't want to go to engineering school or be in the Coast Guard, so that was it. I didn't get in the Naval Academy. I was just there. I just ended up there. [Editor's Note: The New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) was known as the Newark College of Engineering from 1930 to 1975. UC Berkeley is the University of California, Berkeley.]

I have recommended, to other people, to not race to college. I felt, you know, when you're a kid, you think, "Oh, my God, I've got to get everything done," but now, with the wisdom of age, I also think just take your time. I never felt comfortable with school. I just did what I had to do to get done. The best thing that ever happened was in 1970 when the whole school shut down, because I was pretty much mentally done at that point. I was involved in a little bit--and I don't want to say in any grand scale of--even for the previous year or so, I was involved in some of the activities, the protest activities, the anti-war stuff, and showing up at the parades and whatever else needed to get done. I got involved a little bit my junior year into senior year with two things, farm workers and the gun stuff. New Jersey, at that time, was trying to pass a law, and I think I was taking a class that got me involved in understanding the silliness of the Second Amendment. I've been a gun discourager ever since. In terms of the actual classes and people to actually go to school with and attend, I was more involved in anything else than school. If they didn't accept your midterm grade for that last semester, I wouldn't have finished.

That was another weird thing. I got a job. I actually had interviewed for a job and had a job lined up. The guy that hired me wanted me to start. He said, "Just drop out of college. Don't worry about it. You don't need your college degree." This was like the start of March of 1970. I said, "Well, I'm here." This was before the stuff hit the fan. "I'm here. I've got six to eight weeks to go. I can knock this off, and then I'll come to work. My last class is May-whatever. I'll come to work the next day." Well, not only did that Cambodian thing happen but the economy took a real big tumble right there, and that job disappeared. The months I knew I had a job, as much of a bum as I was before that, then I really become a bum. Then, all of a sudden, this Cambodian thing, the Kent State business, all of that, that pretty much riled me up for a while. Yes, that was my second half of my senior year, really.

The other weird thing that happened, the draft lottery was at that time too. That was February of that year, and I got a very lucky number, 263, which kind of put me out and above the crowd in terms of the chances of being drafted, which made me feel like I'm home free now, in a way. [laughter] So, that was it, college in a nutshell. [Editor's Note: The first Vietnam draft lottery took place during the senior year of the Class of 1970. On December 1, 1969, the U.S. Selective Service held the draft lottery, which was broadcast live on television and radio. The lottery selected birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970 during the Vietnam War. April 17th, Fred Whittle's date of birth, was drawn at position 260.]

KR: What was pledging like?

FW: Stupid. [laughter] The Greek alphabet, know the brothers' names. There was some hazing, but none of that stuff bothered me. I was just a beast anyway. Other people would be worried about stuff. I was in it for the ride. I'm not a physically big person, I'm only five-ten but, in those days, physically very thick. I was working out quite a bit before, thinking I was going to play ball and all that stuff and then I realized I wasn't. You wouldn't want to fool with me, and, typically, sadly, in that whole fraternity business, they would pick on the weak sisters. They wouldn't pick on a big guy. They would find a weak link and beat him up, and it was stupid. I didn't have a lot of respect for it, but I was just happy to have a place to go that was not at the frigging campus two-and-a-half miles away and take a bus ride. That was my goal, to have a place to go.

I enjoyed being in a fraternity. I liked a couple of guys I lived with; Tom Mattia was one the first year. Sophomore year, I lived in an apartment on Easton Avenue, right at the corner of Hamilton and Easton, right about there. It's now not a building anymore; I think it's a restaurant. We had a great apartment there, where we could be on the roof. Then, the last two years I was in college, I lived on Louis Street, and I was just happy to be downtown, having a place to live. It was more important for me to be away and be on my own than it was being in school.

I always worked. Summers, I worked in a glass plant in Cliffwood Beach, and during the school year, sophomore year, I worked mostly like a day laborer. I did work a stretch at the hospital there, where I was doing a night shift orderly job, which was always interesting. Then, junior

and senior year, I worked in delis. I always had a job, I always had money, and occasionally went to college.

KR: What was your experience with Air Force ROTC?

FW: It was just dumb. Well, your attitudes change. I think we were required to take something. I don't remember. So, I signed up. Then, at the end of my freshman year, there was a rule change where it wasn't required. So, I thought I could not take it, but then I got in some trouble and I found out I had to finish that second year. I cut my hair, shined my shoes, and went and showed up. I was never a big fan. At that point, I pretty much didn't want to be in the Air Force or the Army. I didn't want to be anywhere. I wanted to be in college having a good time. If you were in ROTC, you had to have your hair cut and you had to shine your shoes, and you had to go drill. It was not for me.

KR: Did you follow sports at Rutgers?

FW: Well, when we were first there, that first year was the Jim Valvano and Bob Lloyd year, and basketball was big. Football was not that big. Football, John Bateman was the coach. They were probably not a good team. We didn't play big-time football in those days. We played teams like Lafayette, Lehigh, Holy Cross, Princeton. I think every year we were there we lost to Princeton, except for the hundredth anniversary football game. Especially being a part of the fraternity business, that was a big thing, to go football games and to go to basketball. [Editor's Note: Jim Valvano (1946-1993) was a Rutgers basketball player from 1964 to 1967. He went on to coach college basketball, winning the NCAA National Championship as coach of NC State in 1983. Robert "Bobby" Lloyd also played for Rutgers from 1964 to 1967, earning All-American honors in 1967. He then played in the National Basketball Association (NBA) from 1967 to 1969. Lloyd and Valvano led Rutgers to a third-place finish in the 1967 National Invitation Tournament (NIT). John Bateman served as the head coach of the Rutgers Football team from 1960 to 1972. The first-ever college football game was played on November 6, 1869 between Rutgers and Princeton. On September 27, 1969, the two teams faced off in the centennial game, and Rutgers won 29-0.]

We used to go to the gym; the College Avenue Gym was basketball. There were only about eight hundred, nine hundred seats there. I don't think there were many more than that. What's so crazy, sports was just not big time, and Rutgers was certainly not big time. That's one of the things I'm so proud of the University for finally getting themselves together and representing, I guess is the best way to say that, just the talent that comes out of New Jersey. There was no pride. I don't know how that happened. Why are there more Notre Dame fans in New Jersey than Rutgers fan? I think that's changed. I think that's changed, but the reason for that is people wanted to follow a winner. They wanted to follow somebody that was doing good.

I mentioned that I worked at a glass plant in Cliffwood Beach. Joe Theismann worked in that glass plant. Just one summer though, then he became famous. [Editor's Note: A native of South River, New Jersey, Joe Theismann played quarterback for Notre Dame. In 1971, he led Notre Dame to a 10-1 record and a win in the Cotton Bowl over Texas. That year, in addition to being an All-American, he was in contention for the Heisman Trophy. After playing in the Canadian

Football League, he went on to a National Football League (NFL) career in which he played twelve seasons for the Washington football team (currently being renamed) and won Super Bowl XVII. His career ended when he was sacked and suffered a compound leg fracture during a Monday Night Football game against the New York Giants in 1985. In 2003, he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.]

KR: You knew him?

FW: No, other than the fact that I got to shake his hand once. He was just a guy. I mean, he wasn't important then. He was just another guy that worked at the factory. He became more important the next year.

KR: Was he in college then?

FW: I guess. I mean, I was in college when I worked there, so I guess he was. This was like a summer job. Some girl he was going out with worked at that place, because he lived in Old Bridge. Well, Cliffwood Beach is kind of like in the middle. He was there, the summer of my freshman year, he was there, and then left because he had to go to camp. But that's right about that time he became famous. I'm happy for him. I mean, I was happy for anybody. But it was one of those weird things that you [say], "Well, yes, I knew him," but I really didn't know him. I knew what he looked like in civilian clothes sweating over glass bottles. [laughter]

KR: You were a history major, correct?

FW: Yes. History-social studies. I'll show you. I have my diploma here, Bachelor of Arts, and I also have my teaching certificate from the Board of Education. I realized when I was doing student-teaching that I didn't like children and I knew that I was never going to do that, but I had to finish it because I didn't know how to do it any other way. So, I finished up. I student-taught at Franklin Township High School. For years, I thought, "Gee, this is the greatest thing in the world, getting to be a teacher," and then I just hated it. Face to face with kids in high school, I looked at it like, "What a terrible thing."

I initially had a job, and then that job faded away. Then, when I graduated, I went to look for a job, and I got a job in New York for a trucking company. For a kid down the shore to work in Manhattan was pretty cool, take the train in, take the train home, take the PATH train. My office was on Fifth Avenue and 14th Street. That's when I found out that I was smart because I learned a lot and knew a lot and figured things out. I only worked there for a short time, but that first year working there and my first year in the next job, where I worked for another trucking company called Penn Yan Express, set me on my life's career, because, weirdly enough, I could figure things out and people were happy to see me. I didn't realize we've been doing this two hours.

KR: How about a few more questions for today and then we will continue tomorrow?

FW: Okay.



KR: Is that okay?

FW: Fine.

KR: Okay, great. Which professors do you remember from your Rutgers years?

FW: I had a class with [Richard P.] McCormick, and I had a class with a professor, I think his last name was Gordon [Lloyd Gardner], foreign affairs, "U.S. Foreign Affairs." There was another course that I took, "American Economic History." I think McCormick taught "Intro to World History" or some stupid thing, but he was very impressive. Those are the ones I remember. I took a philosophy course, which was terrible. I took a geology course, that was a required science course, that I learned a lot about New Jersey and I got a kick out of. I don't remember any of the professors' names. That was it. The education stuff was all weirdly remote, which fit my personality at the time. Other than those three or four courses that I can actually remember, oh, I took two years of Chinese, which the only good thing about that was--you were required to take a language for two years--almost by the end of the second year, the professor, who was Chinese, learned how to speak English. When I first went into that class, it was an encouragement from the orientation, "Try something different." I guess that was another time when I visited. I think the orientation was before school actually started, and it was there. My father and I had this discussion, "You know maybe you should learn Chinese. That would be something different." I had taken French in high school. My father could speak German and French fluently, and he felt, "Chinese is maybe a language you should learn how to speak. It might be helpful later on in life." It wasn't.

The first week of Chinese language class, there were twenty-five or thirty people in the classroom, and the second week, there were nine. I was the only non-Asian. No, there was one African American guy, me, eight Asians, and that's who we went to school with the next two years. Most of the class all spoke Chinese and the eight or so Chinese speakers would talk amongst themselves in Chinese, and I could never understand what they were doing. But the professor was kind enough to just let me skate through. The one thing I do remember was Chinese poetry and literature the second year was just fabulous, but it was also, at that point, he had no idea what he was doing. I felt bad for him because he was stuck with me, and at that point, even the Asian guys were dropping out. I just didn't know any better. I had friends that went to summer school because they didn't do well in French or German the first year and they went to summer school. I couldn't imagine going to summer school; I had to work. So, I just toughed it out, four semesters of [Chinese], but got it done. Of all those classes that I could remember, really Chinese--isn't that sad--it was the worst one. What a waste of time. Actually, it was a terrible waste of time.

The best thing that happened, I had a Chinese to English dictionary. I was working in New York, and where I was working in New York after I graduated, right across the street was a Barnes & Noble bookstore. There was sign in the window that said, "We need to buy old school books." I brought my Chinese to English, English to Chinese dictionary in, and I sold it for thirty-two dollars. That was more than I paid for it at the University, so I felt that was the best part of learning Chinese.

KR: I think I will ask one more question for today, if that is okay.

FW: Go ahead.

KR: What did you think of Mason Gross? [Editor's Note: Mason Welch Gross (1911-1977) served as the president of Rutgers from 1959 to 1971.]

FW: Other than he was the president, I didn't think anything. I mean, I'm sure he was a lovely man. That was it. When you're in the soup of the university and who I was as a kid, I would just be totally unaware. One of the things I'm jealous about with my daughter was she went to Wake Forest and she was involved with the president of the university and all that. I mean, it was like normal for her to know whatever doctor, and it was like, "Oh, yes, I saw Dr. So-and-So." To me, I was just an anonymous kid in a school that I was just trying to hide my way through. What I thought about him, a lovely man. Was he on those [documents]? Wait a sec, let me just look on this book. Does he show up? He had to be there. Wow. He wasn't at Class Day. He must've been, right? [Editor's Note: Fred Whittles is referring to the program from Class Day on June 3, 1970, which culminated with Commencement at Rutgers Stadium at six PM.]

KR: I would assume that Mason Gross, as the president of Rutgers University, would have been there.

FW: Yes. They don't have him listed there, but I imagine he had to be there. That's really weird.

KR: Well, let's continue tomorrow.

FW: All right.

KR: We will finish talking about your Rutgers years, and then we will talk about the rest of your life, you career, your family and your political involvement.

FW: Well, there's a place in heaven for you, Kathryn, and I think I'll feel much better about myself as a person now. [laughter] I have the grandkids tomorrow. That's okay. We'll figure out what to do with them. Right after we're done though, I'm going in the pool with the kids.

KR: Do you want to change the time tomorrow, or do you want to do Thursday instead? That is okay with me.

FW: Can we do Thursday instead?

KR: Yes, sure. What is a good time for you on Thursday?

FW: Thursday is open all day.

KR: Okay, let's do one o'clock on Thursday.

FW: That's fine.

KR: Okay, perfect.

FW: Okay, that's great. That opens up the logistics for tomorrow.

KR: Sure.

FW: Yes, thank you so much, Kate. I really appreciate it. I'm sorry. I feel sorry for you. What a terrible life? How did you get in this?

KR: I love my job.

FW: Well, good, thank God, thank God. [laughter]

KR: Well, thank you.

FW: Now, I'm going to look up some of these names. I have all the guys that I graduated with in here, too.

KR: Okay, good. Does it say next to people's names if they wrote for the *Targum* or anything like that? [Editor's Note: *The Daily Targum* is the daily student newspaper of Rutgers University.]

FW: No, it just talks about what they got the degree in, and then there's the honors section, the awards receptions thing. No. A bunch of the stuff that they did. It's a nice book.

KR: Yes, well, thanks for finding that. That is great.

FW: Would you like me to make a copy of that and email it to you?

KR: That would be great. Thank you so much.

FW: Yes, I'll take care of that today.

KR: Great.

FW: Actually, I have to take care of something else right now. This was fun. So, one o'clock on Thursday.

KR: Sounds good. Thank you so much.

FW: Thank you. I am sorry that you have gone through this boring day.

KR: Have a great rest of the day.

FW: You too.

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

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