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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BRANCHBURG, NEW JERSEY
JUNE 25, 2020

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Fred Whittles, on June 25, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. This is our second session, as a part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. Thank you so much for meeting with me again today.

Fred Whittles: Thank you.

KR: We left off in our first session talking about your undergraduate years at Rutgers College. I would like to start off today by asking you, what activism did you participate in on campus?

FW: I wasn't directly involved on campus, not like a campus-sponsored activity, but in my junior and senior year, I got somehow involved--and I don't even remember how; I think it was because I was working at grocery stores--somehow involved in farm workers. There was something to do in the New Brunswick area that was involving them. I really don't remember much of the detail about that.

Then, I [was] always involved in anti-war protests, anti-Vietnam protests, and what have you. It never made sense to me and still doesn't. I think it's affected everything that's happened since then in terms of how we view ourselves as a country. When they did the shutdown at the end of my senior year, I was a little bit involved with logistics, helping people out, but, at that same time, I got to meet some people who were more or less some national leaders. [Editor's Note: The shutdown refers to the Rutgers College faculty voting on Tuesday, May 5, 1970 to suspend the semester by making classes and final exams optional and instituting pass/fail grades for the spring of 1970. This occurred in support of the National Strike at Rutgers and on campuses across the United States to protest the expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia.]

The person I remember specifically [laughter] being offended by was Jerry Rubin. I realized that everybody was full of shit. It was one of those things, to actually think about it really made me realize how they were really about themselves more than they were about anything else at that time. That's who they were; they couldn't help it. They couldn't help themselves. [Editor's Note: Jerry Rubin cofounded the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies. He was one of the Chicago Seven, who were charged with inciting riots during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. In February 1970, Rubin and four others were convicted, though the conviction was later overturned on appeal. Rubin and one of his attorneys, Leonard I. Weinglass, spoke at Rutgers on March 6, 1970 in the gym. According to *The New York Times*, the event was delayed due a bomb scare.]

KR: What was your contact with Jerry Rubin?

FW: Some kind of meeting on the campus while it was shut down. There were a couple other national figures that came to that meeting. I think the meeting was at either Kirkpatrick Chapel or by Kirkpatrick Chapel. I forget exactly if we were inside or out. Basically, we went with the idea, wouldn't it be cool to meet somebody famous while we were doing this? Just listening to him, in particular, I realized that he was not my kind of person, I guess is the best way to say that, but also seemed to be very not un-different than my issues with Donald Trump right now. It seemed to be so much about what he wanted credit for or what he was doing and how he was wonderful. It made no sense to me. There was a lot more on the line at that point, what was

going on and what could go on and how the country was reacting to that, and he wanted more sacrifice from everybody but him. That was my reaction to that crowd. But he was the particular incensing person. [laughter] It wasn't like an official thing. It was like you were out there, a good portion of the time, on the lawns in and around Old Queens, and somehow, I caught wind of this and went. I've had some weird experiences like that in my life, where I showed up at odd spots and, almost like that Woody Allen movie, saw some interesting and met some interesting people. [Editor's Note: Built in 1873, Kirkpatrick Chapel is located on the Old Queens Campus on the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick.]

KR: You said you were involved in some of the logistics. You were talking about the National Strike and the shutdown in May 1970. What do you remember?

FW: The only thing I really remember is being involved in that meeting. I don't really [remember], other than that school was closed. It was a weird time. I could spend a lot of time on it, thinking about it. I remember being very turned off to that one gentleman. Maybe that shut my brain down.

We were doing things like getting people water. Everyone was just sitting there on the lawns. We didn't march. We just sat; that I remember. If somebody tells you different, they're probably right. [laughter] But that was it. I remember being involved in very many group discussions about how it's going to be better and how we're going to make things better. It didn't work out. That was another weird thing in my life in that right about then, other things were going wrong in the economy and I had a job lined up that got cancelled while I was sitting out on somebody's lawn. That was about it. That's fifty years ago. That was it. I don't have a great deal of memory from it, other than maybe trying to help people bring food in or something like that. I forget exactly. It was like, "Hey, can you help?" You either can sit there and do nothing or help. I felt helping was better, and whatever running around I was doing made sense at the time.

Think about it, in those days, [it] wasn't like everybody had bottles of water. There wasn't that. It wasn't that kind of setup. Now, especially because I worked in grocery stores so much as a kid, I couldn't imagine what it would be like today because there's literally types of bottled water [laughter], and it just [did not] exist. If you wanted water, you had to have a bottle, you had to have containers, they'd have cups, all those things. As a matter of fact, I do remember that because the fraternity house was not that far away, and I knew we had a lot of red plastic cups for beer and I just took them. I think I took them, respectfully took them, but those types of things, it was right there. That was on South Union, right across from the campus, right there. I knew where that was. I forget what we did with the water, how we did that. But, anyway, that's what I was doing, how can we help people? [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: Students took over the Old Queens administration building.

FW: I don't know if we took over the building. I think we just took over the lawn, the lawns around the building. I don't remember us actually [taking over the building]. I believe in that time, the University was very much part [of the protest]. The school was shut down because of

the reaction to what was going on in Cambodia and then, shortly after that, the whole Kent State thing. I think the school was sympathetic to everybody that was there and going, "Holy shit, what's going on?" I don't think there was this situation of like having to take over the building. It was like, "Take whatever you want." I think there had previously been something like that at the school, but I don't really remember that clearly. There was no real resistance or overreaction from the administration, saying, "Oh, we've got to stop these kids before they go crazy." I think everybody was in shock, shocked, especially after Kent State. [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. (From Paul Clemens' *Rutgers Since 1945*; Kent State University Libraries, Campus Strike Papers: New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1970)]

When we lived in Harrington Park, our across-the-street neighbors were in Kent State and were students of Kent State at that time, and they talked about that, at length, about how their whole school just collapsed over that business. Then, you look back on that and see how things can get out of hand. You see it in a different light.

I do feel that, as a country, at the college/university level, that could've been anybody, and I think all the universities kind of took that same, "Wow, that could've happened here." I don't remember if the state did anything at all in terms of state police or anything like that. I don't remember any of that. It just seemed that the University said, "Yes, you're right. That kind of stinks." There were a lot of people speaking. I don't remember too many of the speakers. That was the thing that the separate meeting was about because they wanted to have more activity, more action, and I think pretty much at the University level, we said no. They wanted to create a reactionary situation for authority, and the authorities at that point were pretty much saying, "Go ahead, do whatever you want. We're heartbroken too." Maybe that's part of why I was not impressed and actually depressed and rejecting some of those things because that particular individual was telling us how to run our lives. But it was really for him, so he could take credit for being who he was. Then, later on, what did he turn out [to be]? He just was a drug dealer and scammed people, as an accountant. I don't know if that was him or Abbie Hoffman. Like I said, I didn't have any respect for him after that and I've never had it since. [Editor's Note: Abbie Hoffman (1936-1989) cofounded the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies, along with Jerry Rubin and Paul Krassner. Also a member of the Chicago Seven, Hoffman spent seven years living as a fugitive after being indicted on drug charges. He died in 1989 from a drug overdose, which was later ruled a suicide. After retiring from political activism during the

1970s, Jerry Rubin went on to become an investor and businessperson. He died in 1994, after being hit by a car in California.]

KR: When the National Strike was in full swing and all the protests were going on, on campus, the Rutgers College faculty basically voted to make final exams optional and to make classes pass/fail. What happened with your classes spring semester of your senior year? Did you have to work things out with professors?

FW: No. All my midterms were done. I just took my midterms and ran with it. No, I didn't spend a minute working on it. I'm going to say there might have been one class that I went to, to verify that, but the other people I was involved with more or less told us, "Don't worry about it. Take your midterm." Like I said, the whole University, in my mind, was more or less sympathetic or shocked by the whole business. I think shocked, I think, is still the term I would use about it because they just didn't want that nightmare on our campus.

KR: I wanted to go back a little bit and ask you about your involvement in the farm workers movement. What were the issues that were being talked about?

FW: That was labor union recognition. I was working there, there was a grocery store there called Great Eastern. I don't think it's there anymore, but before that, I worked in an A&P. In order to work at the A&P, you had to be in the union. I don't know which store I was working in at the time, but they just made us aware of that situation.

Hold on one second. I think our guy's here. [Editor's Note: Mr. Whittles is talking to someone.] Sorry for the interruption. We have our world's worst fear; we have a service guy coming into our house. He's fortunately masked and gloved.

Anyway, through those people, I went, and because I was in college at the time, I had a lot of free time, and I went on a couple of marches. We went to Trenton. We went to Trenton and in New Brunswick and we went somewhere else. I think it was somewhere down in South Jersey. It was just that we went on these things. They were there. We were marching. They were marching. Then, it gets back to things, I started to admire some of these people for who they were. If you understood and you probably do understand my upbringing because your upbringing is probably the same, I was like this totally wrapped-in-my-own-cushion white kid, and I had no idea what they were going through.

There was a big thing about recognize the union because they need to get paid, but if you were a farm worker, and it's probably still [true] today in a lot of the country, they were represented not by unions but by these guys who were brokers. The brokers would confiscate their pay, and there was all sorts crazy amount of hours they worked and if they didn't hit quotas. All those things to me were shocking, and I had no idea, literally, I had no idea that people had to work like that. If you were working for a broker, he provided your housing. Those people, even though they were picking food, could not get the food they were picking. They had to buy the foods from the broker. It was everything you thought that was gone from coal mining towns and all that stuff, [which] probably, about that time, was uncovering that, that people were working in the coal mines and working for the company store. That song "Sixteen Tons," you were then

trapped. You were working, [living] in company housing, and you went to the company store. That's really what those guys were going through, and it was shocking to me that that was happening. [Editor's Note: In the song "Sixteen Tons," by Tennessee Ernie Ford, the chorus goes, "You load sixteen tons, what do you get? Another day older and deeper in debt. Saint Peter don't you call me 'cause I can't go. I owe my soul to the company store."]

I had the time to go. I probably didn't go to class so I could go, but, I think I told you yesterday, I was not exactly a serious student. I had no idea what was going on in the world, and I wanted to get out and see some of it. There might have been something to be involved with, at that time, and I don't really remember, it might've been something through my dad and the Democrats at that time. Or it's something that came from being involved in, whatever it was, the grocery clerks, whatever that union was, and there was a gentleman that just got us interested and worked at the store level, who was maybe the shop foreman or something like that.

There's a story that I should tell you. When I was between high school and college, I worked in the A&P by my house. Of course, I don't think many people have that opportunity anymore. Then, that summer, because I was eighteen, I was allowed to work in the deli and then cut meat. Then, I became involved, because there was a guy who got sick, with the butchers.

I was always comfortable, growing up at the shore, cleaning fish and cutting chickens. The guy liked my work attitude, and he offered to put me in what was the A&P butchers apprentice program. There was a big debate in my family because my parents didn't finish college. That would be a good job, a union butcher. That's a great job. That program was an eighteen-month [program]. You would be deferred from being drafted, like an apprentice program, so it would be a junior-college type of thing. The guy tells me, "After that, then you might have to go in the service. Who knows what's going to happen eighteen months from now?" Then, he also held up his hand. I noticed he was missing digits on his hand from all the years of being a butcher. By that time, I already had had a couple bad cuts, and he said, "After all, you could always just lose a digit and you'll never have to go in the service." [laughter] That made me the best college student as a freshman. [laughter] I went, "No thank you, I'm going to keep my fingers in one place."

But it was a great experience, as a kid, when I was working with those guys who were butchers, to be really a kid working with older men. They were old, you know, men in their forties probably, world's greatest generation, about their attitude about work and how they get things done and do things right and all that. It was something I kept with me my whole life. If you're going to do it, do it right. Don't cut any corners, all these little things that people who I've respected over time have always seemed to have that same consistency about how to go about things. That's stuck with me forever.

KR: You said that when you working with the farm workers movement, you went to Trenton and somewhere else in South Jersey. César Chávez actually spoke in Atlantic City in 1969. He spoke at the AFL-CIO convention down there. [Editor's Note: César Chávez (1927-1993) was a labor organizer who brought attention to the plight of migrant farm workers in the United States. Along with Dolores Huerta, Chávez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), now the United Farm Workers of America (UFW).]

FW: Yes, I don't remember. Atlantic City I would've remembered. We went someplace. Again, going back to my limited vision of the world, Kate, I never went anywhere. I mean, I went to New Brunswick. For me to go to Philadelphia to go to a football game or a basketball game at Rutgers was an adventure that was beyond my imagination. I never went out of town. I don't think we went to Atlantic City. That would've stuck in my head. No, we went somewhere down in South Jersey, and to me, going to South Jersey, we might as well have gone to Mars. I should have had a space suit. I don't remember exactly where we met. I did go to Trenton. The grade school and high school, we went to D.C. We went to New York. My parents had five kids. You went to Asbury Park. This was big. Now, I think about that. I mentioned yesterday how far away it seemed from just Harrison to New Monmouth. That was hundreds of miles or hours, and it wasn't really.

One of the nice things that's happened to me in my lifetime is we haven't traveled a whole lot, but we have traveled a little bit. I traveled in my job and you really get a sense of the bigness of the country, which, if you're always in New Jersey and you're just captured in Jersey, which has everything a man could want [laughter], you don't realize how big the country is. It used to be that *New Yorker* poster, where it had a picture of New York and all the buildings in New York, a little strip of dirt called New Jersey, and then the West Coast and everything in between. That was my vision. [laughter] Even years ago, we lived in Albany, New York. The people in Albany hated New York City. New York City was, "Oh, my God, that's where all the problems are. If we didn't have New York, we would have a much better state." How do you justify that? Even going up there, it was like, "That's 150 miles away from my mother, wow." I've grown up since then.

KR: In our first session, you mentioned that you also got involved with what we would now call gun control. What did you do?

FW: That was involved in going to Trenton. It was a class I was taking. I can't remember the name of the class. I don't know if it was a poli sci class or not. The professor was hot on it, and I had no knowledge of it. I was never exposed to any guns in my house. My parents didn't have any guns. I had an uncle who was a hunter; I had one uncle of many uncles that was a hunter. Other than that, nobody ever thought about having guns in their home or any of that stuff. Then, part of that class was we did the research about how many people are injured indirectly. I'm sure the numbers are unbelievable now. They were unbelievable then. One of the statistics I remember from that, 1968-'69, [was] that there were more weapons in Detroit than there were in Vietnam, the city of Detroit. I just remember that comparison, why would so many people have that many guns?

So, [my involvement was] part of that class, but I also went to a couple of meetings. Since that time, I got back involved with Ceasefire Pennsylvania, which was kind of fun, before we moved down here. I don't remember too many other details on that. We went to a hearing, I think, in the State Senate, where they were talking about legislation, and whoever it was, the gentleman that was our professor, was somehow involved in that movement. New Jersey did the right thing in those days; they passed some laws. They made it more difficult to own a weapon, but you can walk over the street in Pennsylvania and buy whatever you want. But it was a statement, and I

think it involved long guns and those types of things. They wanted to make it more difficult for them to be purchased, and they did. New Jersey did a good thing at that time. Unfortunately, other places didn't.

I'm in South Carolina now. This is I think an open carry state, where people just walk around with guns all the time and we don't know any better. It is crazy to me. It's just like one of those other things, like being involved in Ceasefire, I sent them money and went to a couple of meetings. One of our neighbors was involved in that--I wish I could remember her name--who also ran for Congress down in Pennsylvania. Things have to change. Hopefully, it will change in your lifetime. It won't change in mine. All this bologna we hear about the police, some of that's absolutely real, of course, but I believe, also, if you're a police officer, you have to think that everybody else has some kind of more powerful weapon than you do.

I have a brother-in-law who was the chief of police in Little Silver, and he's retired. At the same time, there was a policeman in Little Silver--and it's a friendly town, everybody knows everybody--he stops a guy and tells them, "You really shouldn't be driving. Why don't you just stay here and pull the car over, sleep for a while, and I'll come back and get you later," and the guy stabbed him. That's thirty-five years ago. I know my brother-in-law was like, first of all, it was him going, "What are you doing?" He didn't understand it at all, and that was the basis of that. A good friend of mine has a son-in-law that's a cop in New York City, it's tough, just a tough, tough job, and they have to anticipate that every idiot has a gun and everybody does, except me. Maybe I'm the idiot. I feel very strongly that that's part and parcel of the problem, an unsolvable problem, because of the nature of the craziness of people.

When we lived in Pennsylvania, there was a State Assemblyperson, now in the House of Representatives in Congress, Madeleine Dean, and Madeleine proposed a gun restriction law in the Pennsylvania Assembly that said that people who are abusers and people who had beat up their wives or beat up their spouses in some form, anybody who had that kind of problem or problem with children or sexual predators, so these were like sexual predators and family abusers, should not have the opportunity to own a weapon. You would say, "That makes sense. We're not going to have these people get guns. We already know they physically abused people and they're not safe around children and other people. So, yes, we shouldn't let them have guns." No, her life was threatened, and they couldn't get that law passed in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, you could literally go and equip an Army on your credit card at Cabela's, and no one would question it. As long as you're legal, there is no limitation. I don't think it's ever going to change there because of the nature of the general population but someday. You work on it. I'm done with that stuff. I really am. [Editor's Note: Madeleine Dean served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives from 2012 to 2018. In 2018, Dean was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Pennsylvania's 4th District.]

Now, I live in South Carolina. There's a very, very interesting thing here now with the mask. My wife and I and most of our friends here, we don't go outside without a mask on. We don't go to a store without a mask on. I don't wear a mask in the car, it doesn't make sense, but I put the mask on and go into the grocery store. There are people who defiantly don't want to do that, and they're nutty about it. There's 120,000 people dead because people are so selfish, maybe not the first eighty thousand, but certainly the next forty thousand. All you have to do is park yourselves

for a little bit, but that gets into other things. Again, Kate, you're going to let me go into philosophy. I can go all day because that gets into things, like why don't we have national health insurance and all that other stuff? If anything exposed the fallacy of our country's medical system is this whole business of this pandemic because everybody can get it. People I know that have just gotten the test and don't have insurance have gotten a bill for the test of twelve hundred dollars. What? I thought the tests were all free. It's crazy.

I blame me and all people I grew up with and all the people I've aged out with, that we didn't do a better job fifty years ago, forty-five years ago, forty years ago, saying, "This has got to stop," because we've allowed it to go on. I think about things like, in 1995, the NRA [National Rifle Association] wanted to have proper identification for gun owners and they wanted to have all the clarifications that people talk about today. That was part of their vision. Not anymore. What happened? Whoa, it's just crazy. I don't know, and I blame me. I blame everybody that's my age because we allowed it to happen. Anyway, enough philosophy for the day. I'm drinking water now, Kate, but the vodka is not too far away. [laughter]

KR: To go back to your Rutgers years, when you started in 1966 at Rutgers, the Vietnam War was going on, and then the war continued to escalate in 1967, 1968 and 1969. What do you remember about the buildup the antiwar movement on campus?

FW: It just always was there. I think more and more people participated over time. For me, personally, one of the guys I went to high school [with, his] brother, who was maybe three years older than us, he was killed in Vietnam. That was shocking. Then, one of the guys I actually went to Rutgers with dropped out freshman year, Tom Blevins, and Tom and I had been to football camps together. He went to Middletown High School and was a good friend because we had gone to football camps together as kids. Either his dad or mom drove or my mom or dad drove when we were littler, and then we went together. He decided college wasn't for him. It was funny, because I was on a break too, to just say that, at the same time. He dropped out of Rutgers. I think he dropped out sometime in the middle of second semester freshman year and told me he was going to go into the Marines, and he was all pumped up about it. Well, the next year, he was dead. [Editor's Note: Thomas Lee Blevins, Jr. was killed on May 31, 1969 in Quang Nam, Vietnam. Blevins served in the Marine Corps.]

What affected me was they had a funeral for him that I had attended. I just remember, right before he went into the service, his parents got him a motorcycle, and I went on a motorcycle ride. It was the first time I was ever on a motorcycle, and I got to drive his motorcycle and, "Gosh, Tom, this is cool." His parents got him that bike with the idea, "This is going to be yours when you come home." In a twisted, weird way, they had that stupid motorcycle outside the funeral parlor, like he's home now. I went, "Oh, man, that stinks." He was wounded, he got medals, he got everything you'd want out of it except living. I was already not a fan, and then I became less and less of a fan from that. It was too close to home. It seemed to me that it didn't make--well, it never made any sense, and as a student, I had the opportunity to read up on that stuff before the Pentagon Papers. [Editor's Note: In March 1971, Daniel Ellsberg leaked parts of a top-secret Defense Department study about the Vietnam War to *The New York Times* and later to *The Washington Post* and other newspapers. These documents are known as the Pentagon Papers.]

I mean, people were like, "Oh, the Pentagon Papers came out. Oh, my goodness, look at this." That was a bunch of shit. It was always available for you to find out. It made no sense why we were there. We literally had stopped the popular interest of the people from being involved with North Vietnam, but fifteen years earlier we literally helped Ho Chi Minh get his feet on the ground. He was our friend. What happened? What happened were things like Korea and such like that, that caused those other problems. In 1955-'56, the Vietnamese people decided they wanted their own government, and we told them no. The United States told them no. We should've just left them alone, but we didn't. God knows how many hundreds of thousands of people died from that, beyond the fact of how many people were affected beyond that, here in our country and that country. [Editor's Note: Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) was a Vietnamese revolutionary who led the Viet Minh in the fight for independence against Japanese occupation during World War II and French colonial rule of Indochina. After French defeat in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva Accords divided Vietnam at the 17th Parallel, pending elections. In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem, backed by the United States, declared himself the president of South Vietnam, and elections to determine the reunification of South and North Vietnam never occurred. The U.S. continued to support Diem in the south against Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Viet Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North. About eight hundred US military personnel were stationed in Vietnam by the Eisenhower Administration during 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 President Lyndon B. Johnson to wage war in Vietnam. 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. American forces withdrew in 1973. On April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese forces took over Saigon, marking victory in the war and reunification of Vietnam.]

We still have problems like that. Think about it this way. You said your daughter's in the sixth grade, so she's twelve, and for her entire lifetime, we have been fighting in Afghanistan and in Iraq, or Iran, in Syria. My wife's cousins' children, one who is a Navy SEAL has spent most of his last five years in places that we have no value to be in, otherwise he could be a SEAL and run around and shoot up people. Certainly, they shouldn't have blown up the World Trade Center, but who won that war? Nobody. I always think Osama bin Laden really won because we've spent trillions of dollars and we don't have national healthcare and our roads are shitty.

Our infrastructure's terrible. My across-the-street neighbor right here in South Carolina, he's still working. He's one of the few people in our area that still works, and in South Carolina, what he does is he rehabilitates the bridges. In South Carolina, there's 7,200 bridges, and 6,400 of them are under repair, just to keep things from falling down. Wow, that's just one little state. So, again, I'm off on a philosophy class here, Kathryn. If you'd like, I could go on some more.

You asked me how did you get involved; I mean, for me, I was a kid. In those days, I was just kind of goofing around, and I might've thought of it as a good way to meet girls. I don't even remember that. But as an adult, I didn't get involved that much until we moved--a little bit in New Jersey with school board stuff, when we were in Harrington Park. When we got to

Pennsylvania, I had the right job at the right time to be involved locally in the Democratic Party stuff. After that, what do you do when you're writing checks and hoping people are nice. You're saving me a fortune on the psychiatry. [laughter]

KR: You told me that Lloyd Gardner was your professor for a foreign policy class. What sticks out in your mind about having Lloyd Gardner as a professor?

FW: [laughter] Well, that was one of the classes that you could take [with women]. Actually, that was on the Rutgers campus, but because of the nature of Douglass, it was a separate school at that time, that was a course that was not available [at Douglass], and there were girls from Douglass that took that class. So, anyway, even before I took the class, everyone said, "This guy's a really hard grader." Those people who were super achievers, trying to stay on Dean's List and what have you, wouldn't take that class because it would be very difficult for you to get better than a "B" in the class. Well, considering I was never better than a "B" guy anyway and I was just interested in the course, I took the course, and it was very, very difficult, very detailed. I forget, I think we had three papers and a final.

The striking thing that I remember more than anything else is that there was a young lady next to me, and when we got our first grades back, it was the first time in her life she got a "C". She collapsed. I mean, I don't think about it in a sexist way. It was just one of the things that shook me. I was so happy I got a "C". I was like, "Whoa, baby, yes, I didn't get thrown out of the class." [laughter] I was so in shock about it that I was just aglow with my success, and this person started to sob next to me. That class wasn't in a big lecture hall. I would say there were maybe thirty kids in the class, and so it wasn't like, "Oh, I hope to sit next to her," or anything like that. It was just like she happened to be sitting there. That's where people sat. She was sobbing, and I went, "Oh, what's the matter?" She was like, "I got a 'C'." "Me too, me too!" [laughter] She said, "It's the first 'C' I ever got in my life." I went, "There's more to the world." I said something like, "Welcome to the club." To me, if you knew what you were getting into when you took that class and that was your biggest concern, don't take that class. He was not a cuddly, warmhearted guy. Probably that's why I remember him more than others. I'm sorry that I couldn't remember his name [in the first interview session]. I kept thinking Gordon. Actually, I think I came out of there with a "B". Don't hold my feet to the fire on that one, but I was pretty impressed with me to survive that. I'll just never forget that.

You're talking a short amount of time, that you've got other classes, all this other stuff going on in your life, and this guy wants three papers, a midterm and a final. "Whoa, I'm not going to be able to smoke any weed this week. What's going on?" There were other classes, and if you've gone through the university system, I'm sure still to this day, you manage your time and you manage your classes based on what you want to get out of them. I have a really wonderful niece who is at Virginia Tech studying computer engineering, and when she has to take a history class or an English class, she seeks that class to be the least problematic. I respect her for that because she's got chem classes. It was like when my daughter went through, and she was a biology/chem major in college. You have to take those requirements; you might as well do requirements that are either going to be fun for you or easy for you because why kill yourself because you're killing yourself in other stuff.

But just one of those things about that class. That's really what I remember about that class. I mean, the class was hard. He was not a compromising person. There were some history teachers there, professors there, that you could glide right through. So, that's probably why I remember. I've told that story five hundred times. Working in the forklift industry for years, there was a friend of mine that I worked with, he said, "You know why we're in forklifts? We're all 'C' students. We all have to keep working." [laughter]

KR: How was McCormick as a professor? [Editor's Note: Richard P. McCormick served as a professor of history, University Historian and administrator at Rutgers in a career that spanned 1945 to 1982. He chaired the History Department from 1966 to 1969 and served as the dean of Rutgers College from 1974 to 1977. He is the father of Rutgers University President Emeritus Richard L. McCormick.]

FW: I couldn't remember. I just remember he was one of the first guys we had in an intro history course, that he was there. I couldn't tell you, other than me sitting there with my eyes wide open going, "Holy smokes, this is hard." That was one of those classes that had the big lecture hall where he would lecture, tell you what the work was, and then you had to go into the small groups with the assistants. He was pretty far removed from actually [teaching]. I mean, I'm sure he was brilliant. You've got me. I was never inspired by too many of the professors. I just remember that one thing about Gardner, and McCormick being probably the first guy I had. That, and the Chinese guy, I think about that. I had the guy for Chinese two years, I don't even know his name. He's probably there. He's tenured now. He's retired. [laughter] I hope he has his English down.

KR: Do you remember anything about the Black student protest movement?

FW: No. There was one fellow--I don't remember his name, and it's weird because I should--who, he and I were in Chinese together for a time, and he was involved, but I was disconnected from it. When Martin Luther King was shot, there were some disturbances in New Brunswick. I lived on Easton Avenue. We could go to the roof of that apartment building and you could see the stuff running around and all that, but I was not connected to it at all. I probably, at that time in my life, thought, "Well, that's their problem." I always had a great deal of respect for Martin Luther King and spent some time as an adult reading up about him a lot, and certainly he sacrificed his whole life for others. I respect that. He didn't have to do what he had to do; he just did it. I just saw a thing this morning, where he gives a lot of praise within those early ‘60s things, but there were a lot of women who don't really get noticed, which is just part of the male dominated part of the society. They get lost in the sauce. I was actually shocked when I saw some of that stuff today. But, no, I really don't. [Editor's Note: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.]

I mean, every kid that's from New Jersey, everybody knew about riots. It was all in your face a little bit, but [I had] little or no understanding, like at least they had houses. I mean, I had no concept of it. When we were talking about those farm workers, I was blown away by what they had to do in their lives to work. I just wasn't connected to Black people. I really wasn't. It wasn't like our family sat around and said, "Oh, they're lazy," or anything like that. My mother had a lot of problems with Black people because she was from Harrison, and Newark was right

across the river. She was a nice Irish girl, and she just couldn't understand. That was it. She had fears. My dad never had any fears about that stuff, and those fears were not passed through our family. That's who they were. [Editor's Note: 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.]

KR: Do you remember any speakers on campus or going to any concerts?

FW: I went to a bunch of concerts. The ones I remember, we had the Beach Boys, Nina Simone, those are two that I remember. Most of my senior year, they had jazz concerts at Kirkpatrick Chapel, and I saw Dizzy Gillespie, Pat Metheny, oh, I can't think of this guy's name. That was more of interest to me. I mean, I went to every concert I could possibly go to. To tell you who I ever saw, I mean, the list of people we've seen is pretty endless, but I wasn't like a ticket saver or one of those people. I'm trying to think. Again, I just remember the Beach Boys, for whatever reason, I guess I was a big fan, and Nina Simone, because I didn't know anything about her and she was unbelievable. I think there were concerts, like three or four every year, that you could go to that were pretty inexpensive. If I had the money, I went. Down at the shore, we were close to Asbury Park, so I'd see some shows at Asbury Park every year. I can tell you that I saw Ten Years After, Rolling Stones, Dave Clark Five, everybody that seemed to be famous for me at the moment. I saw The Who, but it all blends into--there's no memorable thing, except maybe Nina Simone being the most unusual person that we saw.

KR: How about speakers on campus?

FW: I don't remember.

KR: You talked about the Douglass students in your Rutgers College class. Did you ever go to Douglass or Livingston to take classes?

FW: I don't think Livingston existed when I was there. My freshman year, I think I told you, I was at [University Heights] Campus in Davidson dorm. I think what they had there was, in those days, [what] they called Camp Kilmer, and maybe my geology class was up there, for whatever reason. I didn't take any classes at Douglass. Like every other hound dog, we went chasing after Douglass people. I was not involved that much. Livingston College, maybe it started when I was there; I don't know. You probably know, if you're the historian. [Editor's Note: In 1964, Rutgers acquired 540 acres of the former Army embarkation base Camp Kilmer in Piscataway and built Livingston College, which opened in 1969 as the first coeducational undergraduate college at Rutgers-New Brunswick. The University Heights Campus was renamed Busch Campus in 1971, after Charles Busch donated ten million dollars to the University.]

KR: Yes.

FW: I don't remember it to actually be a campus so much that I would think it was a campus. The Busch Campus was the engineering campus. I don't remember Livingston actually being anything.

KR: Your senior year was Livingston College's first year.

FW: I wouldn't have known that.

KR: What was graduation like?

FW: A blur. I think I told you yesterday, my then girlfriend met my parents for the first time, and we all ate dinner. That was it. My sisters liked my girlfriend too; that was it. It was a blur, well, especially that whole stretch of year with the shutdown and what have you and then not being in school and half being in and half being out.

I had this job lined up, and then sometime early in May, the person that hired me--and I can't even remember the name of the company, it was a brokerage firm in Manhattan--the guy called, "We're just not going to start any interns or any people this year. We're going to wait for another year. Please contact me next January, and we'll see if we can hook up with you." So, I was feeling pretty confident up until that day, and then, all of a sudden, that kind of collapsed.

I was still working at the Great Eastern in the deli and the fish store. I was pretty determined to say to myself, "I don't want to work as a deli and fish guy" [laughter] and was kind of feeling a little trapped. My apartment was paid for until the end of June. I had my stuff, and I moved home and went to look for a job. I had no concept about what that was because even the job that I had been offered was kind of a casual thing, go meet this guy, get dressed up, get a haircut.

That's a funny story in itself, Kate. When I met my girlfriend, later to be my wife, I had pretty long hair and sort of sideburns and then figured out, right after the draft lottery, I said, "Well, I got this big number, I should really get serious," because I had just assumed I was going to get drafted, "I had better get serious and get cleaned up." So, I went and got what I call the interview cut at a barber shop [laughter] and bought a couple of white shirts and got my dress clothes cleaned and then, through a friend, was told, I think it was his uncle, "Go see this guy. If you're going to get serious about looking for work, you might as well go see him." [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.]

I went into New York to see him and meet him. It was pretty nice, and it was downtown. If you were from New Brunswick going to Downtown [Manhattan], it was take a train, take the subway, and you were there. That was pretty cool. For a lack of sophisticated traveler like I am, I was pretty impressed that I did all that in one day. This gentleman showed me the ropes, told me what we were going to do, and I said, "Well, that's great." He actually said at that time, "If you want to just drop out of school and come to work right now, you're welcome to. You don't need a degree here. You'll be doing this and you'll get a better education here than you'll get at a university." I said, "Well, I've got six or eight weeks to go, I'm not going to drop out now," and he said, "Well, fine." I think we picked a start day of May 15th, and on May 10th, I found out I didn't have a job. So, it was kind of like a kick in the teeth. I worked at Great Eastern. I had

already told them I would stop working at the end of June after I graduated because I was going to go home and that was it. I mean, all of a sudden, I was out on my ass. I really went, "Holy smokes." [laughter]

I think I interviewed for about five or six different companies, and I got a job. That was that. I don't even think that job is on my thing here. My first job out of college, I worked for a company called Branch Motor Express in New York, and that was a nice job. It was a job. It wasn't anything other than get a job. I mean, my parents looked at me like, "You're not working yet?" [laughter] That stretch of time, that was a blur. The most important thing I was trying to do was get my life together and get some type of employment.

I think that I told you yesterday, when we were talking about getting my degree, I had, from student teaching, no interest in trying to be a teacher. I just didn't like it. I didn't like the situation. I didn't like the kids. Those kids were, one other thing, they were only a little bit younger than I was, so it was kind of like, "Oh, that's going to be terrible." To make a long story short, I just knew I didn't want to do that. So, I was very fortunate to get the job I did. It really lent itself for me, a few years later, I went from Branch Motor Express to Penn Yan and from Penn Yan through my life, so dumb stuff.

KR: Before we get more into your career, and I will ask you to trace your career, I just have a few more Rutgers questions. Compare Rutgers in 1966 to Rutgers in 1970.

FW: Other than I was older, sober on the way in, drunk on the way out, I really couldn't tell you. I don't remember. That's it. I really don't have a specific [answer]. Was there something that happened that I forgot?

KR: Some of your classmates have contrasted dress in 1966 to 1970, the breakdown of the formality in the way people dressed.

FW: The only thing I can think of was when we were freshmen, you used to dress up to go to a game, and that didn't happen much after that, except on special unique occasions. Part of that was, I thought, something to do with the fraternity. I don't remember the University in any way. I mean, I was never one of those freshmen, they had freshmen beanies and all this other stuff, I had no tolerance for that, for some jerk coming up and telling me what I'm supposed to do, who was two years older than me and could grow his own mustache. It didn't [have] any value to me. But I guess it became less formalized; I don't remember. I honestly don't, though I went there because I didn't have to wear a jacket and tie every day because I could've gone to St. Peter's or Seton Hall or Holy Cross and had that requirement and I had no interest in it.

KR: How did you meet your wife?

FW: It's very romantic. I was working at this food store, and there was a girl who was in school with her. She went to Kean, which was then Newark State. I had worked with this girl for a couple months, and she said, "You know, I have a friend that I know would be a perfect girlfriend for you." I said, "I don't want to be involved with anybody." I think I had gone out seriously with a girlfriend from high school and we'd had our ups and downs and we were kind

of not together anymore. To make a long story short, I was like, "I just want to get out of college and get on with life." [laughter]

A weird thing that happened was, I'm going to be as discreet as possible, so she had a boyfriend, and she and her boyfriend had no place to go. She said, "If I can get a couple of girls to come to your apartment and meet a couple of your friends, could I, with my boyfriend, use your apartment for a discreet behavior?" Gosh, I'm so politically correct. I said, "Yes, we'll see what we can do, and how many girls, how many guys?" So, it ended up it was going to be two girls. I said, "Okay." I had a fraternity brother who said he would go along, and the two girls came in with her and her boyfriend. One was blonde and one was brunette. The deal I had with the other guy from my fraternity, he said, "If there was a blonde, I have the blonde. I'm with the blonde, because my God, blondes." I said, "Okay." That's how I met my wife. We're at this party and we're just having a party, it was kind of like beer, wine and marijuana conversation. It got to be a little weird, and I was a little uncomfortable. I wanted to get out and go for a walk, and this girl said, "Yes, I want to get out of here too." I just thought she was going to go home or whatever. [laughter] So, anyway, we went for a walk, and we were talking about different things. We found that we liked each other. I mean, it was weird. It was weird that we were basically from similar families, there was a bunch of things like that. We got back, and I told her, "I'll get your phone number from Linda," who was her girlfriend, "and I'll give you a call." She said, "Sure." She was sure that she was never going to get a call.

Then, shortly after that, they had the draft lottery, and we all, the guys, we all sat around and watched our numbers come in. I had her phone number. My number came in at 263. I thought, "Well, that's pretty good. I might want to get serious with somebody because now I know I'm not going to go into the service." I don't know what I was thinking at the time, but I wanted to celebrate and I called her up. Unfortunately, I did call her up, it was like, I'm going to say, twelve-thirty in the morning. Her parents were really impressed, but it was a good time to call because her brother also had restricted phone time that he could use. She had an older brother. We talked, and I said, "You know, let's try to get something in." She said, "Well, try to call me when you're, one, sober, and two, not at this time, but you have to call me at this hour because," it's another whole story in itself. "Okay." I called her back a couple days later, and we went out on a date.

The weird part about that was that time between the time she first met me, long haired, mustached, sideburns Fred, to the time I went to her house, I got my interview cut. I went to her house. I, of course, was mostly lost on the way there. I got to her house and she didn't recognize me, but she was pretty sure it sounded like me. The weird thing that happened was that her family was all there, not just her family being all there, her mother and father were there, her grandmother was there, her aunt and uncle were there, her cousin and her cousin's fiancé were there, her brother and her brother's fiancé were all there in the living room, waiting for me to come get her. It's led to many romantic afternoons. It just was I walked in the door and I remember, literally, we went through that kind of reception line greeting nightmare. [laughter] My now brother-in-law and my wife's cousin's husband, we're all still tight with, they were laughing their heads off because they realized what I was going through. After the date, I came back to her house, and her brother was still awake and now by himself. The first thing he said was, "Let's go out for a beer." [laughter] We left and we went out, we were in Cranford, and we

went out to some bar in Cranford and had a couple of beers. What a lovely family, just like mine. Then, it's gone on since then, not in a straight line, but it was pretty much a straight line after that. That's how we met. It's a beautiful story of hoping that someone else got laid. [laughter] [Fred Whittles' Note: Alice graduated in 1973 from Kean (Newark State) and also has her masters in Special Education from The College of St. Rose in Albany. She worked in Head Start in Albany and Bergen County, New Jersey as a teacher and Special Ed Coordinator. She also worked with multi-disabled special needs children in various programs in Upstate New York and Bergen County. She is the glue that holds our family together and a rock in my life. We have been together since 1970 and were married on October 8th, 1972. Right now, in 2020, she is helping with the grandkids, who are learning with remote Zoom learning.]

KR: You told me about your first couple of jobs. Take me through your career and the places that you worked and what you did.

FW: Well, when I came out of college, I went to work for a company called Branch Motor Express. They were in New York. I was more or less an intern in the marketing department, and basically the job was tracking trends in the business of--Branch Motor Express was what they called a north-south carrier at that time. They depended on the textile trade in and out of New York, and so they were always trying to balance things. Through that, I got a little experience in actually doing marketing development and [the cost of] how these businesses run. As a matter of fact, I kind of just learned about trucking. Being, weirdly, a student of history, it became fascinating once you really got to see how things [worked]. I had worked in this glass plant and warehouse, so I kind of knew truck drivers. But it was how to balance things out or how to go from point A to point B and how things are shipped, how that business developed, about things like, in those days, the ICC [Interstate Commerce Commission] and rate regulations, where you could go. It was very, very restricted. It's not restricted anymore. I was working there for a short time, and in those days I was living at home.

I was on a bowling team with my dad, and one of the other people in the league, it was part of the parish league, was a gentleman named Jack Doran. Jack worked for another company called Penn Yan Express, and he asked me, "What do you do over there?" I told him what I did. He goes, "We need a young kid to do all that kind of stuff where I work." I said, "Well, I'm a young kid. I could do that job." I was working in Manhattan, and working in Manhattan meant you had to get up at a stupid hour, catch a train. It was exciting at first, and then it got to be, "Oh, my God." Every Friday night, when I had a date, Kate, every Friday night coming back on the train, there was a problem. There's no cell phones. There's no telephones. It was like, just forget about it. Whenever you had a plan, you couldn't make a plan, and I was really not enamored with working in New York.

Branch's offices were at Fifth Avenue and 14th Street, right by Union Square Park. It was a great eye-opener just to be in New York every day, and it was a great eye-opener to see how a company ran. They had their central dispatch in that building where I was. We were on the seventh or eighth floor in this building. I was learning about business from the inside out.

To tell you a funny story about that, think about this from your own office experience today. Everything was typed and carbon copied. But if you wanted to have big distribution of a letter,

you had to go down to the copier center, where there was a cranky old man, and you had to have it signed off by three people to get seventy-five copies of something made. You would go there, and they had to be on Xerox paper, which had this weird leaf design on one side. You had to listen to this man abuse you while he made seventy-five copies. Seventy-five copies was like, "Oh, my goodness." It was just so crazy, but that was my experience of working in New York in that section. I made zero dollars. After commuting and dating, I don't think I made five dollars.

Then, I went to work for Penn Yan, and that was in North Jersey. The nice thing about Penn Yan was they paid me more money, and I got a company car. That was kind of handy, but I also got to work with some really great people and I learned the business inside out. I also got to put my two cents in after a couple of years. They did a lot of training of me, but it also gave me opportunity. I started as an inside guy. Then, we did two big market surveys, where I spent a couple weeks on the road on my own, developing directions for the company, under the direction of another guy, but he did none of the work. I did all the grunt work, and that grunt work paid off for me in a lot of ways. It kind of exposed me to the world. Again, I literally had not travelled anywhere to this point in my life.

I had some good mentors there. In a weird story, you asked me how I met my wife, so I'm working in this place and I'm talking to the man who was ultimately my boss. His name was Ed Richel, and he asked me, "So, are you going out with anybody?" "Yes, I've got a girlfriend." "Where's she live?" "Cranford." "I live in Cranford." "Oh, well, she's on South Union Avenue." "So am I." He was my brother-in-law's Little League coach, and he had a son my age who was in the service at that time. I said, "Oh." He knew my wife's family, and he just thought, "I have to take care of my neighborhood." He kind of took me under his wing, what was important, what wasn't important, how to look at things.

Then, after he told me what was important, I got to tell him what could work to expand our business. That was something where they gave me an opportunity to be in sales, but it was a special program because they were in Carlstadt and they were up and down but did no business in Carlstadt, Moonachie, Secaucus and all that. There wasn't as much there as there is today, but I said, "I can double your business or triple your business locally if you'll give me the opportunity to have people work here." They would have guys going all the way to New Brunswick, all over God's creation. We went from Carlstadt to Brooklyn every day, but we didn't go to Moonachie.

He gave me a territory, and it took off like a shot, partially because they were building businesses and buildings there faster than I could shake a stick at, and I was like the guy there. What we were selling made sense. Then, Penn Yan, through that, thought I was a sales genius and sent me to some sales training places for education and then gave me an opportunity to live in Albany and be on my own. We did real well up there. Then, they got more territory, and they thought, because I could develop territories, that I should go down into Philadelphia and work for them there.

Then, what was just typical, I guess, more today than it was then, the owner of the company decided to sell the company, and he hired a bunch of guys to take it over. We just fell out of fortune, out of favor with them. Fortunately, through a friend, I went to look for a job, while I

was still working, and then I got connected to Crown Lift Trucks, Crown Equipment, and through them got, because of my sales training experience and they needed sales trainers and sales managers, I got a job in New York, so I was back in Queens.

The deciding factor on that job was--I had two offers at the same time. My wife was pregnant, and Crown paid a little bit less money but covered you medically from the first day. McLean Trucking, which has since gone to their reward, you needed to work there six months before you were covered, and I couldn't see why they wouldn't cover me right away. Even though it was more money, I went to work for Crown in a total new industry, forklifts, so that we wouldn't have to spend six thousand dollars for my wife to have a baby.

[I was] working for those guys from 1979 through '97. We were an outsider in the business when I started there, but by the time I finished, in New York and New Jersey our market share was the best in the country. Our profits were there. I don't say personally, but the companies that I worked for put a couple people out of business because we were doing so well. So, it was going good.

I had an opportunity, the best way to say this, when I first was hired at Crown, they put you in these operating positions as what they call branch manager, with the temptation that eventually you'll get to own the business. Sometime around 1995, they changed their minds on that. So, you worked for the company and you were paid well, but a forklift dealership was not in your plans if you worked for them. I kind of [had] a falling out between myself and those people because, especially in New Jersey--when I originally started with them in New York, we had no money, we had no business, and we took that place from zero to ten million dollars a year and then went to Jersey, which was at two million dollars when I got there, and we took that from two to twenty-four million dollars. The profit we were making was crazy. Part of that deal was, when I first went, some of that would come your way as a way to buy in. Once that buy-in wasn't there anymore, I kind of lost my energy for operating a company. I was always at work by seven, and on many days, even when I'm at home, I was working after I got home, with the whole drive, "Hey, someday, it's going to be mine." When that wasn't going to happen, I opted, with them, to go to another position, and that probably wasn't politically correct at the time.

Then, right after that, I had a friend who was at Clark Material Handling, and Clark, big guys, they brought me in to be in the warehousing business because I was what they call a warehouse specialist. So, I had developed whole companies at that point and knew what people wanted in warehousing and did that for Clark for a while. Then, Clark was in financial trouble, and then I went to work for a Raymond dealership, which is another warehouse specialty company.

Since that time, it's like '97, I became a head of this kind of specialist of logistics and how to put a warehouse together and how to, not just matériel, handling the forklifts, but the racks, the shelving systems, integrating the systems, working with the software people to make things work from the get-go. It took off for me, especially the last ten years I worked. I can't complain too much about Crown. It paid for our house and our kid's college education and a few other things and I'm friendly with people there today, but getting out of there after a while was good for me too.

What was fun, for my whole career, was seeing how things changed. I worked for basically a specialty company, selling just electric forklifts in a world that sold mostly gas trucks. Then to now, what was twenty-five/seventy-five percent of the market is now seventy-five percent of the market [is electric] and twenty-five percent is gas trucks, and even that's going to get smaller and smaller. I got to work on some neat stuff.

Especially from how the world works, when I first went to work for Penn Yan, I was blown away by how much is shipped around. Certain accounts that we had, I was involved with a company called The Coca-Cola Company, that had a bottling plant in Paterson, and how many truckloads of soda came out of there every day. One of the other companies that we were involved with there was Mueller Macaroni out of Jersey City and how many truckloads of spaghetti and noodles came out of there every day. Then, when you get into actually warehousing and the distribution side of things and how things are picked and packed and placed and how it comes to your shelf and how it evolved over my career into Amazon, even that stuff, the last big project I worked on before I retired was involved with all robots.

The reason I love being in forklifts is I'm Irish curious. I got to stick my nose in everybody's business and did really well, and I am where I am today. The best thing I got out of my job though over time is that I probably hired, comfortably, three to four hundred people, over time, and of that, probably a hundred of those people are in touch with me on a regular basis, either out of respect or just can't believe I'm still alive, one of the two. I'm not quite sure. [laughter] It gives you friendships all over the country and different points of view all over the country really. Well, here, this silly pad that I'm writing on, if you can see that, that was a group of guys, we made up a plan, we made up a club of people that were in the warehouse fraternity and working on systems and all that. I don't even remember what that Delta Sigma means, but I think it means something to do with profit and innovation. It's gotten me involved with a lot of crazy stuff, and I got to work with people, literally, from California to Maine and Canada, and for three months with a whole bunch of guys from South America. I wasn't in South America but literally was their coach for three months as they expanded their business and turned things around for themselves. It's a crazy business.

With everything, think about it, look around your house, everything in your house, every piece of furniture, every piece of plastic, every window, every door somewhere was handled by a forklift. Some had a barcode, all that stuff. I got to watch and be a part of it and involved in it and enjoyed every minute of it. It was a fun business to be in. I had some opportunities to do other things, but I enjoyed that.

When I was working initially for Crown in New York, that was a crazy amount of time that you were away from home, but then when I got to work in New Jersey and lived in New Jersey, that was great because then I had a lot of free time where I wasn't driving back and forth. I wasn't trying to come home from Ronkonkoma at five o'clock in the afternoon. That gave me the opportunity to be involved in my town a little bit, get involved with the school board a little bit, get involved with coaching the kids. I got to be a soccer coach. I just got to be part of a town, and that got me connected back into other things. It was a fun ride. It's been a fun ride.

KR: Tell me about your daughter.

FW: Well, I don't have a daughter. I have a princess.

KR: Oh, I see. [laughter]

FW: She's a delight. She's a wonderful person. We only had the one kid, so she had a lot of focus on her, unfortunately for her. We have a running joke in our family, as we were trying to pack up to move, we found cases and cases of pictures, and almost all the pictures have her in it. So, we feel that she has the most documented life of a person. We can literally document outfits for birthdays.

She was always just a fun kid. When she was little, we lived a little bit in Tenafly, and we had some really great neighbors there with kids her age. That was good for her. Then, we moved to Harrington Park, I guess, when she was coming out of preschool or in preschool, and that created a lot of relationships for her that she's involved with to this day. Girls and guys she that was in preschool with, she's still in touch with. They all went to the same high school and grade school together. Growing up in Harrington Park for her was a dream come true. You couldn't get lost in that town because everybody knew who you were.

She was always a good student and a very active athlete. When she was little, I'm going to say little, maybe in the third or fourth grade, there was many opportunities for her. She was already playing softball or mini-ball or T-ball or whatever and she was involved with me in soccer, but they didn't have girls basketball. She wanted to be involved in basketball, so she became a cheerleader. She came to my wife, after about four weeks of being a cheerleader, and said, "You know, I like the outfit, but I want people to cheer for me." [laughter] Then, shortly after that, she got involved in all her school sports, and she was a pretty good grade school-high school athlete. She started four years of soccer for Old Tappan and track. One of the things I love about her and her friends is that they're all theater nerds, because my wife and I are theater nerds. She had a great group of kids to grow up with. Like I said, they're still in touch from grade school and preschool.

My sister lived in Princeton. I think [my daughter] was about ten or eight, whatever, and she said, "This is really nice," we were touring the Princeton campus, and, "This is really nice. What is this?" "It's college, so you have to go through grade school and high school as well." "This would be pretty nice. I'd like to go here." I got in full dad mode and went into this lecture about getting good grades and stuff, like an idiot, but she was pretty driven. She was driven as a kid to do well. I think that comes a lot from her mom and from me a little bit but a lot on her own. I mean, that's who she is. That's who her kids are, so the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. In the opportunities that she had to hang out with kids that were less driven or kids who weren't driven, she was in the driven group. I'm sure if you went through that yourself in high school, it's a little obvious to everyone who's either cool or not cool but working hard at it.

Anyway, as parents, we wanted her to go to some fancy New England college, and as a kid, because there were so many terrible cold winters in North Jersey where we lived, she wanted to go south and that's how she got to Wake Forest. Actually, my wife and I and she are all basketball fans, college basketball fans, so we were sure she would go to Duke. She had the

grades and all that to go there. We went down to tour Duke, and we really were not, I hope I'm not offending you if you went to Duke, we were not impressed with the setup. The one thing that we weren't impressed with, going back to my memories of being an isolated freshman, the freshman dorm at Duke is not really on campus. It's kind of off campus, and I said, "You know," I went through the whole thing, I said, "I went through that in college. That was not good." By that time, we were already depressed about it.

While we were on that tour, we went to Duke, NC, the University of North Carolina, William and Mary, and one other school, I think Martha Washington, on the way down. Right after that, we went to a wedding in North Carolina for my niece, who went to the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. So, we were at the wedding, and we're at the cocktail party. Someone tells us, tells my wife, "Well, if you don't want the big-school experience," because we were kind of blown away by the University of North Carolina, how disconnected we were. We go to the University of North Carolina, and we're supposed to go for our tour. We hit there right as classes are changing. Well, there's 28,000 kids on that campus, and, apparently, all 28,000 were all changing at the same moment. That was like, "Holy smokes." We were blown away by that. That was our complaint about it. This friend of my sister's, or it might have been a friend of my niece's family, her husband's family, said, "Try to go to Wake Forest and see if you like that because it's a little bit less crowded."

My wife [was] going to drive home from that wedding. I had to go to work, and I was going to fly out somewhere and then catch up to them later. They went to the Wake Forest campus, and that's in Winston-Salem. My wife liked it a lot, but she kept her mouth closed. My daughter got in the car and says, "We'll apply here." "Okay." That's the only place she applied for. She got the early in, which was nice. She wanted to be in sciences, and she was impressed with the science opportunity there to be in a smaller group of people. It worked out really well.

She went there and did pretty well in school. I mean, she came out with a bio-chem degree and all that stuff, but she wasn't sure [about graduate school]. One of her professors that she really liked, who has since passed away sadly, who was a big bio guy, she said, "I don't feel like going to grad school right away." He said, "Well, you know you shouldn't, because if you're going to be in the sciences, you should look and see if you can get a research job. See if you like it. Otherwise, you could always get any job with your appearance and personality. You'll be fine no matter what you do, but if you don't want to go for your doctorate, you're really not going to enjoy being in the sciences."

She came back to live with us for a little bit in Philadelphia but got a job in New York at Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Science in the Bronx. Through the auspices of my brother-in-law, [she] got an apartment on 29th Street or 22nd Street, I forget where in Manhattan, and did that for a year or so, I guess a year--I'm not even sure now--yes, a little bit more than a year. [She] decided that she wanted to go for it and then applied for the university there and then got accepted to Einstein in that program. The nice thing about that is that because she was accepted and had already got some time in there, her doctoral pursuit came with a stipend, so you actually got to live on the campus and she was there for a while. Then, she moved in with her husband-to-be. Yes, then, she got her doctorate. [Editor's Note: The Albert Einstein College of Medicine is a private medical school located in the Bronx, New York City.]

One of the neatest experiences we had was to see her do her defense. That was pretty cool. That was a pretty cool day. That was pretty much a fait accompli by then, but they had to go through the drama of it. So, we didn't know, but she knew. I remember more about her graduation from Wake and her graduation from that school for various good reasons than my own. At Wake, her graduation speaker was John McCain. That was 2002. I don't remember the speaker at her graduation, but it was probably the last few days that my mother had a level of consciousness. She was starting to fade away into dementia. Taking my mother and my mother-in-law, who, they both have since passed away, into Manhattan, they graduated at Lincoln Center, and they were two old girls who were just excited. It was pretty cool. [Editor's Note: John McCain (1936-2018), a naval aviator and prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1983 to 1987 and in the U.S. Senate from Arizona from 1987 to 2018. McCain sought the Republican nomination for president in 2000 and 2008, securing the nod in 2008 and losing in the general election to Barack Obama.]

That's my daughter in a nutshell. Here, she's black and white, but there she is. [Editor's Note: Fred Whittles shows a photograph of his daughter.] She's pretty accomplished in terms of her job, because, initially, she was thinking she'd go into science and met a person, literally at a graduation party, who said, "We need people with your expertise to be medical directors in advertising companies because you know. We get these customers that tell us it's a miracle drug and then we find out it's not good, and maybe you could help us." That was a very small advertising company, but they paid her a stupid amount of money. She went to work there, and then since, now she's done that for ten years, yes. Now, she's with--I can't think of the name of the company. I'll look it up.

KR: Fred, you can also add it to the transcript later.

FW: Anyway, she's doing quite well. Her husband is with Wells Fargo down here. That's how they come down here. She works from her home. She works internationally, so she's constantly [meeting] in the morning with Germany and England and in the evening with the States, sometimes with Australia. It depends on who she has to talk to. She does quite well. Her husband does quite well. They're lovely people. It's all their fault we're here in South Carolina because if they could've done this in Jersey, we'd still be up there. [laughter] Then, we wouldn't have the freedom to be--I tell people that we're tax refugees here in South Carolina. We already were in Pennsylvania. Because you have the benefit of living in lovely Somerset County, you know; you don't know any better. In New Jersey, you learn the word "only." "Our taxes are only 19,000 dollars," and you're happy. "Oh, that's good, 19,000. Oh, that's good, yes." Good for a laugh.

KR: You wrote on your pre-interview survey that in 1995, when Pope John Paul visited the Meadowlands, you were involved in that whole event. [Editor's Note: Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) served as the pope from 1978 to 2005. On October 5, 1995, he held a Papal Mass at Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands in East Rutherford, New Jersey.]

FW: Yes.

KR: How did you get involved in that?

FW: Well, it was a fun little adventure. [laughter] I was working for Crown at that time. Our offices were in Elmwood Park. The fellow who was running that production, it was a company out of New York called Michael Harms Productions, and he was responsible for the Meadowlands event. He reached out to a friend of mine, who was at a company called, it's changed names, it used to be Upright Scaffold, and the guy said, "No, I can't provide you the equipment." They needed some type of lifting device, and they said, "Call this guy Fred Whittles. Fred's a good guy. He'll take care of you." So, they gave me a call. My office said, "We think we can help you." They wanted to come to our offices in Elmwood Park.

They came to the offices, and it was an architect, Michael Harms Productions, the Vatican Secret Service and the U.S. Secret Service. So, we showed them what we could do. Basically, Crown, being an electric forklift company, one of the things we make, and you see them all the time in advertisements, [are] order selectors. When you see an Amazon commercial, you'll see the guy going up to pick boxes. So, we had a lot of order pickers, and that was part of our mystique. We knew how to get people to pick orders. We said we could set up the truck so that it would act like an elevator inside this altar. [Editor's Note: The Vatican and the pope are protected by the Swiss Guard and the Gendarmerie Corps of Vatican City.]

What happened was, initially, the pope was supposed to come a few years before but had fallen and broken his hip. In a preparation for that, the Diocese of Newark had built or maybe Michael Harms, I can't remember, built an altar in preparation for this and staged the altar for this Mass at the Meadowlands. So, now, he comes back in '95, and they were concerned because now the pope is still suffering from the broken hip. They went through his itinerary that day. If you want to be blown away by itineraries by old men, he had a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York at seven AM and then a meeting at the U.N. [United Nations] at nine, then he was at some other thing at eleven, some other event in the afternoon in New Jersey, being greeted by the governor, and then he went to something else, the whole thing. They said, "So, it's going to be five o'clock in the afternoon and he's going to be tired." Plus, the whole time he's riding around, everywhere he goes, he's in the popemobile waving at everybody. "So, we need to find a way to get him lifted up," because the initial idea was he would walk up these fifty-five steps to the top of the altar, platform, stage, whatever you want to call it, and, "We need something that you could provide." The coolest thing at that time was we showed and gave the technical drawings for a piece of equipment to the architect. While they were talking [about] how things could be done in my conference room, the architect drew it in, literally in pencil on a work pad, how it would fit, here's how it would fit.

We said, "All right, here's what we'll do. We'll set it up, so that it's on a platform. It'll be carpeted. It'll be set up for safety." They said, "We can't just have you have one truck. You have to have two." "Well, only one's going to fit in the gadget." He says, "Yes, but if there's a part that's needed, we'll be able take it off." So, they said, "We need you to provide two people, one to operate the machine and one to fix it if it's broken." I remember at that meeting, looking across, there's a friend of mine, the guy that worked for me there as a service manager, I said, "Well, I don't know who the service technician is, but I know who's going to be the operator. That's going to be me." What the heck? Why not? You're working your ass off. I wanted to get

the perk of it, and this Steve Willencheck, who was the service manager, he said, "Yes, I know the technician too." [laughter] It was him.

We had to be vetted. First, we had to set up this crazy gadget the way they wanted it. That was fine. That was nothing. But every person that was involved, whether it was the paperwork or touching the truck in any way or delivering the truck in any way, had to provide to the Secret Service Department all the information we had about that person. We vetted every person. Actually, they told us, there was one guy that worked for me, "Well, we would prefer if he doesn't work on it. That would be okay." [laughter] I don't know what was wrong with him, but we said, "No, don't worry about it. We're just going to have these guys." Then, we set it up. We got all these clearances.

We had to go the day before to do everything, which was fine. It might have been two days before because they had to build this extension of the altar into it, and we set that up. Everything was fine. We tested it. We showed them how it would work. With that, we had the excitement of we decided to make plaques up, and somewhere in this house, there's a plaque that talks about that, for everybody that did the job.

Then, that day of that Mass, we had to be there at a certain stupid hour. I think we were there at nine-thirty or ten o'clock in the morning, and it was raining. It was raining, a horrible rainy day. There was a weird story there. New Jersey had been in a terrible, terrible drought, and this was the drought-breaker rainstorm. So, we're there in raincoats and all that. We got to be backstage at all these events. I didn't know this, but now I know. Wherever the pope goes, there is always a physician. There is always a full-time photographer. There is always an entourage of security beyond your imagination. I guess they're the Swiss Guards, but they're dressed normally and not with the crazy hats. Everything is duplicated. If you see the popemobile, there's another popemobile. Everything you see is duplicated, I guess, the president the same way.

We had to be there the whole day. We were there, and in a weird experience, my parish priest came in with all the priests, saw me there, knew who I was, and said, "Why are you here?" I showed him my super-duper clearance and said, "If you don't treat me nice, Father, I'll have them take you out." [laughter] He was a guy I just disliked.

Anyway, so, we got to be involved in this thing. It was raining. If you ever saw the amount of people and all these people were coming early, so there were people there at eleven o'clock, and as their buses would come in and they'd be put in their assigned seating area, they were in the rain. I was inside. I had a real nice coat and a nice hat and an umbrella, but they couldn't have umbrellas because that would be considered a weapon. There were people in wheelchairs wheeled out at two o'clock in the afternoon, and I mean, hey, it was raining. It was raining like you never saw. There they would sit, and they were praying, praying, praying, praying.

What was the ultimate experience for me was, they told us just before the pope got there, that he would absolutely use us as an elevator. They called it an elevator for them. We said, "Okay, that's great. We're ready." He comes in, and he drives around the whole loop of the stadium and then came in. He came to my curtain. I opened the curtain and said, "Really nice to meet you, Holy Father. Welcome to New Jersey." [laughter] I said something stupid. What else do you

say? He said to me, "How many people will fit on this thing?" I said, "Well, I think probably everybody in your group." He said, "Nope, just me and you the first time. As long as I'm up there safe, I'll be okay."

I put him on the lift, and it only took a minute for it to go. We actually had to slow it down, so it never felt like any kind of movement. I said, "Have you enjoyed the rest of your stay here? I guess it's been a pretty busy day." He says, "Well, this is the life I've chosen." I've used that line about ten million times since then. [laughter] We got up there, and right away, on the level of the altar was the pope's physician. He was already there and the Secret Service from the Vatican. Then, he had to wait there, and then I went down and got the rest of his entourage. It was like six guys. They were all there. They're going to go out onto the stage, and they look around and they go, "We need someone to hold the papal staff when he's not using it." They looked in the room and they've got a security guy, the doctor and me, and they go, "It's you." Here's this failed Catholic guy, in this tent, in the rain, they just give this to me, and it was a pretty cool experience. [laughter] I think if I dropped it, the Vatican security guy was going to shoot me. [laughter]

Then, the most overwhelming experience of all was the number, 75,000 people there. 75,000 people praying. Everybody pretty much knew the prayers, not like myself when I go to church now. The singing was wonderful. The speech by the pope was wonderful. Of course, brought into the emotion of the day, when it came time for communion, there were literally, I'm going to say, a hundred priests on the stage with me, but on the other side of the curtain, I kind of got emotionally involved. I said, "I'd like to get communion too." "No, not you, stay right here, don't move," that being the biggest disappointment in the day, thinking I need to get one from the pope. Then the whole thing ended, and he had other stuff to do. We brought him back down. We got him in the car. He gave me a hug and a thank you. I thought it was pretty cool.

Then, I got the title amongst my friends as the official forklift operator for the pope. The weirdest thing that happened after that, in that day, was as soon as the pope cleared the stadium, people rushed the altar like crazy people and were taking souvenirs off of it, including someone damaged the [laughter] forklift, trying to get some parts that we had built for that, which we didn't realize at the time. We kind of went out with the entourage to get out of the fray. By that time, it was pretty late. Both myself and my running partner were just saturated, tired, hungry, hungry like no tomorrow, and we said, "Well, we have to come back tomorrow anyway to take everything out of here. Let's not worry about it. It's safe here because we're at the Meadowlands and there's police everywhere." Well, there was nobody [protecting the equipment]. So, somebody stole something off the truck, I forget exactly what. It was just one of those weird things, you sit there and go, "Somebody wanted that?" But I remember, when we were leaving, there were people with all the plants that were on the altar and there were plants everywhere, there are all these people walking around carrying the plants and parts of the stage.

That was my coolest, most famous person I ever met, really, I mean, of things that, and I'm sure the story's changed hands a few times in terms of how crazy it is, but the weirdest thing was, that following weekend, we had to go to a friend's parents', I'm going to say, maybe it was somebody's anniversary. One of the neat things about living in Bergen County was most of the people that we lived in and around were mostly people originally from New York. We called

them Bronx refugees. They would come over, and people from the Bronx always talked [about], they didn't actually come from the Bronx, they came from a parish in the Bronx and so that's how they envisioned their lives. So, they were friends of ours, our daughters were in preschool together, and so there was all these first-generation Irish older ladies there, and my friend introduces me to them as, "This is Fred. He's the man who shook the pope's hand." [laughter] I think some of those girls, those that are still alive, I think they still are alive. It was fun. I actually got a writeup in Crown's newsletter about it, and it gave me one day of importance, fifteen seconds of fame.

KR: Well, that is an amazing experience.

FW: It absolutely was. I'm still close to the people that worked around it. I coincidentally ran into one of the guys that was involved in that in a different job and a different time and a totally odd spot, like, "Oh, my God, you're here and I'm here at the same moment." We managed to share the story with everybody he worked with. [laughter] He didn't quite meet the pope. He just delivered the truck. He was cleared from Secret Service. He got a different color--that was the weirdest thing--he got a different color badge than us. We got this one kind of badge. I still have it somewhere. He said, "Why do I get this color?" "Because you can only go this far," and that was what they were telling us about how secure they were. When we were there for the rehearsal, you could see how intense things were and how crazy people were. I mean, what are they going to do if somebody was going to kill that old man or somebody else there? [People] do crazy things, but that's the way things have to be done in those days, and now today, it's worse. But it was a thrill. I think you can hear from me, it is still a thrill.

KR: Well, I have reached the end of my questions. At this point, I am going to ask if there is anything that you would like to add.

FW: Yes, well, the only thing I would add is that I've just been very fortunate in my life. Things have either gone my way because of dumb luck or hard work, and sometimes it's not a bad thing to have a little combination of both. Even this has been lucky. I mean, literally, the whole connection, in fact, to you through Tom, I told you that whole story about reconnecting, which I have not seen him. Now, I'm really confused. We're hopefully on our way to New Jersey next week, except the governor wants us to be in quarantine for fourteen days. So, we have a home on Beach Haven and we want to get up there. Tom is supposed to be coming up to New York. We'll probably hook up somehow in the month of July if he gets to go. I don't know. Apparently, it's much worse in Texas than it is here, but South Carolina is not wining any prizes either for COVID. This was a cool experience. I feel cooler just from talking to you. Congratulations on a rising seventh grader and a rising third grader. It's exciting. [Editor's Note: 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.]

KR: Thank you so much. Well, I hope you have a good summer, and I hope you get to reconnect with Tom in the New Jersey-New York area. That would be really cool.

FW: Yes, I'm not going to Texas. There's too much disease down there.

KR: Yes, and summertime in Texas I heard is not the place to be.

FW: That's the other thing he was talking about. He said that's definitely why they want to get out of there. Well, listen, Kate, this was wonderful. If I run into another guy, I'll hook you up.

KR: Great.

FW: There is one nice thing here in this community where I am. There's three or four other Rutgers people here, but I know they're not the Class of '70. This is an ongoing thing forever, because when you showed me that Gardner thing, that was from years ago too. [Editor's Note: This refers to the oral history interview of Lloyd Gardner, History Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University, which is available on the website of the Rutgers Oral History Archives.]

KR: Right, exactly, yes. We interview people in New Jersey and Rutgers communities. This oral history project with the Class of 1970, this is one of our projects that we are working on now, but if you come across other Rutgers alumni who are interested in being interviewed, send them my way, email me. That would be great.

FW: Okay, I'll hook you up if I can.

KR: Great.

FW: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

KR: Thank you so much for doing this oral history interview series.

FW: Thank you. Take care now.

KR: Okay, have a great rest of the day.

FW: Have a great summer, enjoy those kids.

KR: Okay, thank you so much.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 7/28/2020
Reviewed by Kate Rizzi 8/31/2020
Reviewed by Fred Whittles 9/8/2020
Reviewed by Kate Rizzi 9/24/2020