

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN ZURIER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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William Buie: This begins an interview with William Buie and Steven Zurier for the Livingston Oral History Project. We are in Columbia, Maryland and the date is April 12, 2016. Steven, thank you for having me.

Steven Zurier: Nice to be here.

WB: To begin with, can you tell me when and where you were born.

SZ: In Passaic, New Jersey, September 8, 1955, Passaic General Hospital.

WB: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

SZ: My father was Leo Zurier and he was born in Passaic in 1928. He actually got a scholarship to Rutgers at the age of sixteen. He graduated high school a year early. He was very bright, but he just wasn't ready for college work. ... The story I got was that he was a little immature and lost his scholarship, and then went back to live with my grandparents and went to Newark College of Engineering. I guess the fall of 1945 was when he started college, and then graduated in 1951. Then, he worked for Westinghouse for about a year or two, and then, after that, worked for A&J Friedman Supply Company in Passaic, New Jersey. They were a pipe, valves, and fittings distributor and years ago, when Passaic and Paterson had an industrial economy, they would supply the mills with industrial supplies. There are still people who are in that business in New Jersey, but for the most part it consolidated. In 1985, A&J was liquidated. He had worked at A&J for twenty-five years, and then worked for a place called A&M Supply Company in Rahway. I mean, he loved the pipe, valves, and fittings business. It was something my grandfather did. It was something that actually our whole family did. One of my uncles started a distributorship in Los Angeles. Another one started one in San Francisco and they did very well. There was always talk in our family of starting our own supply house, but we never did. My grandfather wasn't a risk taker. My father wasn't a risk taker. I wasn't really interested. I was a hippy and wasn't really interested in the business and wanted to be a reporter or teach history or something like that so, on our side of the family, it never really materialized. He was just a really good guy. I mean, he was very well liked. He was president of the Temple Beth Shalom in Clifton, New Jersey and president of the Masonic lodge in Passaic. He was also a pretty strong sports fan. He loved the New York Giants from the '50s. He loved the Willie Mays teams and got me into National League baseball. [Editor's Note: Willie Mays played for the New York and San Francisco Giants from 1951 to 1972, taking a two year break to serve in the Army

in the 1950s. He finished his career with the Mets in 1972 and 1973. The Mets were created in 1962.] When the Mets came to town, we became Mets fans. Some of that might have been a rivalry with my grandfather who was a Yankees fan. Kids have to get under their parents' skin so grandpa was a Yankees fan and my dad was a Giants fan. Then, like a lot of New York area people, when they moved out to San Francisco, when I was younger we would follow the Giants, but when the Mets got good we followed the Mets. So, anyway, sports was really big with him. He played basketball in high school. He was a really diehard New York Giants football fan and loved the Knicks. He wasn't really keen on hockey and with music he sang in the choir at our synagogue and loved Frank Sinatra and loved like the big band music and just the old standards, the [Great] American Song Book. [Editor's Note: Mr. Zurier is not referring to a book. The Great American Song Book is the canon of popular twentieth-century American songs and jazz standards.] He was okay with going to the theatre to see a play or musical. He wasn't overly cultured in that I think my mom dragged him to an opera once and he fell asleep. [laughter] So, the higher arts were not for him. So, that's my dad, and then, just to fast forward, he retired in 1994 and my mom and dad moved down to Boynton Beach, Florida and he just had a lot of health problems. He died at seventy-five. He ultimately succumbed to lung cancer. First, he had colon cancer and then he had lung cancer. Then, he had dementia. He just declined and by the time he was seventy-five he was gone, so it was sad, but at least he got a chance to retire in Florida. Then, my mom was born in Boston--so she grew up in Dorchester in the '30s, during the Depression, and that side of the family, they were Russian immigrants. My grandfather worked eighteen hours a day in a tailor shop and my grandmother worked in the garment center in Boston, worked in a factory. They were different. I mean, my aunt, my grandmother's sister, was a labor organizer. So on that side of the family they were staunch Democrats, labor people, and somewhat religious, but not very religious, more culturally religious as opposed to my dad's side where they were religious and some of them were very conservative politically. My father was mostly apolitical. To give you an example, he voted for Nixon in 1960, but in 1964 he voted for Johnson. By the late '60s he was liberal. He voted Democrat in '68 and '72 and '76; 1980, not so much. So, anyway, I guess he's kind of like that independent voter that they talk about--sometimes he voted Democrat, sometimes he voted Republican, but he was mostly a Northeastern moderate. My mom is a staunch Democrat, like all the way. She couldn't bear to vote for the Republicans. But anyway, a little bit more about my mom, she never went to

college, but she read a lot and got herself educated and was a homemaker for the first years of my life, and then worked. I have a sister Joanne. Joanne was born in 1959 and when Joanne and I got old enough she went back to work. She worked for a travel agent, and then she worked at the United States Printing Inc. for many years as a bookkeeper. She worked as a bookkeeper and the family needed the money to help us through college and pay expenses. I was fortunate in that my parents paid for college. I handled my expenses with summer jobs and paid for my apartment senior year. I guess the progression from the 1940s and '50s were that a family could live on one income and women always worked, but I think it became more prevalent for women by the mid- to late-1960s for women to work. If women weren't working full-time, they were juggling a couple of different jobs to help the family out. So, that's what my mom did. She's an interesting person. I mean, she's eighty-five now and she only watches public TV for news, she won't watch Fox News. Once in a while she'll watch CNN. But she's always reading the papers and always sending me articles. Then, with music, she loved Frank Sinatra too. My parents, their famous story is, like I think in 1980 when Sinatra had a big concert at Carnegie Hall, they waited in line for about ten hours for tickets, which was something that a sixteen-year-old would do. [laughter] So, that's how dedicated they were to Frank. So, anything about my sister you want to know? Or just my parents at this point? Anything you want to follow with my dad or my mom?

WB: A couple questions, one, do you know how your parents met?

SZ: Yes, they met at a Borscht Belt hotel. You know what the Borscht Belt is? It's the hotels in the Catskills in the 1940s and '50s. Jews from New York City would go to the hotels in the summer for recreation. Then, I guess, in the winter there'd be like singles events and things like that, just meet up. I guess today we call them meetups. It was like that era's version of a meetup. I guess more like a singles weekend, that kind of thing. So, they met there. [laughter] I have some funny stories. They met there and after a while my father proposed marriage and my grandmother, being kind of like a peasant woman from Russia, was convinced that my father was going to sell my mother into white slavery, just ridiculous stuff. "We didn't know who he was," she would say. We didn't know his family. All they knew was their little neighborhood in Dorchester, in Boston. They all worked twelve hours a day. My grandfather worked eighteen hours a day, so the idea of their daughter marrying someone from New Jersey, it just seemed like

so far off. But it worked out. They got married. We lived in New Jersey and my mom's side of the family was up in Boston, but I think, growing up, every four to six weeks we would drive up. They very rarely came to visit us, but we would always go up and visit them. The other side of it is that my grandmother and grandfather's side of the family were from Providence, Rhode Island, so we would always take trips to New England and go to Providence, go to Boston. So, that was always a lot of fun.

WB: Can we get your parents' names? I am not sure if we.

SZ: Yes, Leo Zurier. Leo, and then Eleanor and her maiden name is Beden, B-E-D-E-N. Leo was born September 28, 1928 and Eleanor was born September 6, 1931. Eleanor was born in Boston. Leo was born in Passaic, New Jersey.

WB: You said your mother's grandmother was from Russia?

SZ: Yes.

WB: Was your mother bilingual or multilingual?

SZ: Not my mother, no, not really. She spoke a little Yiddish. She knew Yiddish phrases, but not really. I mean, that generation, they Americanized. I mean, there were always arguments between my grandmother and mom because she didn't like that my mother listened to Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett and all the popular music of the time. My grandmother and her sister thought they were all gangsters.

WB: What about your father? Did your father speak Yiddish?

SZ: My father did not speak Yiddish. On my father's side, they came from Lithuania in the 1880s [as a result of *pogroms*, anti-Semitic purges]. No, they spoke English. My grandfather would speak a smattering of Yiddish. I never knew my grandfather on my mom's side. He died in 1952 and I was born in 1955. So, my grandmother and my aunt lived together. These are my childhood memories of my grandmother and my aunt living together up in Boston and they read the Jewish press. They read the *Jewish Daily Forward* and spoke Yiddish to each other.

[Editor's Note: The *Jewish Daily Forward* was a Yiddish newspaper that began in 1897. It is now an English weekly news magazine.] It's funny because lately, the last few years, I've been playing the Yiddish music. You see I'm a musician. I play the bass and the guitar, and I've been

learning some of the Klezmer music over the last five, six, seven years, really, over the last ten years. I wonder if subliminally I heard that music growing up, but I don't remember really hearing Klezmer music at my grandparents. I have distinct memories of them reading the Yiddish papers, of seeing Yiddish papers in newsstands around that neighborhood in Boston, and them conversing in Yiddish, and reading the papers. That's basically what I remember. My mom, still to this day, still uses Yiddish phrases. I still do, somewhat; but I'm another generation removed from that culture. Actually, people from our generation rediscovered Yiddish culture and Klezmer music. It was Hankus Netsky from the New England Conservatory in Boston. He put together a band and it became a big deal over the last twenty-five or thirty years, but it kind of pains me. I mean, when it comes to music, the Jews don't know their own music. Don't take this the wrong way, but blacks don't know their own music either. I mean, the people say, from my generation or our parents' generation, they grew up listening to Coltrane and Monk and Charlie Parker and Mingus, and all the great players, but the kids today don't know that stuff and they know hip-hop and they know R&B and music like that, but they don't always know what came before it. Except the kids who play music. [Editor's Note: John Coltrane was a saxophonist who lived from 1926 to 1967. Thelonious Monk was a jazz pianist who lived from 1917 to 1982. Charlie Parker was a saxophonist who lived from 1920 to 1955. Charles Mingus was a bass player who lived from 1922 to 1979.] They play in the school bands and they get exposed to it the more traditional jazz. I will say that what they call "smooth" jazz is popular with African Americans.

WB: Was there any effort in your household to try to make sure that you were aware of Jewish music, Jewish literature, or the Jewish press that you talked about?

SZ: Oh, yes, we were very religious growing up. My grandfather was the president of an Orthodox synagogue, the Ahavas Israel, in Passaic, New Jersey, which I think is now defunct. I grew up Orthodox for my first twelve years, and then, when I was about twelve years old, my mom rebelled. This was the middle of the '60s, so keep that in mind. My mom really did not want to go to the Orthodox synagogue anymore and the Orthodox synagogue was where my grandmother and grandfather on my dad's side would go. [Editor's Note: Ahavas Israel, located on Van Houten Avenue in Passaic, New Jersey, is still operational as of May 9, 2017.]

WB: Did she say why?

SZ: Well, the service was in Hebrew. There was no English. She felt like there were just a bunch of old men, just reciting gibberish, and the rabbi was very conservative and there was so much happening in the world in the 1960s that my mother didn't relate to what was happening there. It was a big deal at the time. We broke away from the Orthodox synagogue and went to the Reform synagogue. ... In 1967 we went to the reform synagogue. The whole family became very active there. My father became president of the synagogue. My mother was very involved; sat on some of the boards. My sister and I would go to services every Friday night, Saturday morning, and Hebrew School a couple days a week. We were involved in some of the youth groups there. So, yes, religion was an important part. When I was about eleven or twelve years, during the summer, I would take the cantor's place and chant the service on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. The choir director at synagogue begged my father to have my voice trained. My father just didn't do it. I don't know if it was the money or if he just didn't like the idea of his son taking voice lessons. It just didn't sit well with him. I never really figured out why, but I never got voice lessons. They would let me take the guitar. I studied the guitar, but the voice lessons they didn't go for. I begged them to buy a piano so I could do that and study voice, but it just didn't happen. I took guitar lessons when I was eleven, twelve, thirteen and learned a little bit. I didn't really come back to music until I was eighteen or nineteen. I studied music more, not even as a minor, just took a couple of music courses in college and got into it after college. I studied with Mark Elf, who's a really great bebop guitarist in New York, and Harry Leahey--his heyday was being in the Phil Woods Six. I took classes with Vishnu Wood, who was in Randy Weston's band, and just got into it. I mean, it's just something that came to me. We haven't really talked about Livingston, but a lot of it was the experience at Livingston. I always liked jazz. I guess for me, jazz was like listening to Count Basie. I grew up listening to Frank Sinatra and those bands and all the bands with Nelson Riddle and Count Basie and Frank Sinatra, those albums. But it wasn't until I got to Livingston that Larry Ridley would give talks on jazz and just opened us up to a whole universe of music that I didn't really know that much about. I wasn't good enough to be in stage band in high school, but I remember really liking stage band in high school and they played some Coltrane tunes and things like that. Livingston was just such a great environment in those days. It's really kind of sad that by 1980, for all intents and purposes, except for keeping the name, they pretty much phased out what the college was.

WB: Well, before we go too much into Livingston.

SZ: Okay.

WB: Let's try and catch up on your childhood.

SZ: Okay, the only reason why I tied in Livingston was because the interest in jazz, I always had an interest in jazz, actually acting on it happened during Livingston. So, we'll go back to childhood. Redirect me.

WB: Well, tell me a little bit about growing up in Passaic and also your earliest memories from elementary school and junior high.

SZ: Well, I grew up in Clifton. I was born in Passaic. I grew up in Clifton. Clifton was all white and Passaic was more of a city and more diverse. The Jewish community existed more as a Passaic-Clifton community. I was, I guess, a happy kid. In elementary school and junior high and so forth, I got decent grades. I always liked history and English and I did okay in math and science, but never really loved math and science. I was able to get the B and sometimes the A, that kind of thing, but for the most part I just enjoyed sports. I had friends. I played on teams. I played little league baseball and later on I played rec basketball and I played on the high school baseball team in my freshman year and junior year. Senior year, I decided not to play, in those years my life revolved around sports and playing ball with friends and things like that. Then, it revolved around Hebrew School, the synagogue and we'd go to the YMHA [Young Men's Hebrew Association] in Passaic a lot. There'd be Saturday night dances. We'd do that. It was just kind of suburbia. Later on, when we got older, it was nice being close to the city. I think because my mom grew up in Boston, she was okay with me taking the bus to go to Yankee Stadium or go to Shea Stadium or go see a ball game. In those days (late 1960s) it was four dollars to go see the Knicks play. We'd sit in the upper deck, in the nosebleed seats and see games. I wasn't really much with the ladies in high school. My last couple years, I started hanging out more with the opposite sex and had friends. Was never depressed; I was a reasonably happy kid.

WB: Where did you go to high school?

SZ: Clifton High School.

WB: What year did you graduate?

SZ: '73, 1973. I was talking about this with my wife. I never was really that much engaged. I just wasn't engaged. I went through my life. I did what I was supposed to do. I got decent grades, not great grades. I wasn't involved in a lot of extracurricular activities in high school. I wasn't overly motivated. I played sports with my friends. Later on, I got into music. I mean, it was the height of the rock era, so I was into that, but I wasn't engaged in high school like the way I was at college and I don't know what it was. I think sometimes people need to be away from home and solve problems on their own. For example, my older son, he's out in California now and it's been the best thing for him, being out at grad school in California. So, I don't know. Ask me anything specific you want to know about either my middle school years or high school years.

WB: Well, it sounds like, would you say you were content during those years?

SZ: Yes, I was okay.

WB: But you also grew up during middle school and especially in high school, there's a lot going on locally and also globally.

SZ: Yes.

WB: Music, politics, international politics.

SZ: Yes, Vietnam.

WB: How aware were you of what was going on around you during your young and later teenage years?

SZ: I was aware. I remember waking up the morning Robert Kennedy was shot and running to tell my parents that Bobby Kennedy had been shot. [Editor's Note: On June 6, 1968, Sirhan Sirhan shot and killed Senator Robert Kennedy.] I remember John Kennedy being shot in 1963 and going to a special service to pray for John Kennedy, to pray for his soul. [Editor's Note: On November 22, 1963, Lee Harvey Oswald shot and killed President John Kennedy.] In 1968, when Dr. King was shot I sang at a special service. [Editor's Note: On April 4, 1968, James Earl Ray shot and killed Dr. Martin Luther King.] So, I would say my social conscience, I was very aware of it. Very aware of it through the synagogue even though my parents weren't activists. They really weren't. Like I said, my father was apolitical. My grandfather was kind of

conservative. He wasn't an Archie Bunker, but he was conservative. [Editor's Note: Archie Bunker is a fictional character from the 1970s television series, *All in the Family*. One of his personality traits is that he is a conservative.] I remember working for the McGovern Campaign in '72. [Editor's Note: George McGovern ran as the Democratic candidate in the 1972 presidential election. He was a former US representative and then a senator representing South Dakota for over a decade.] My mom worked a little bit for McGovern and we went to see McGovern speak. We went to see Teddy Kennedy speak, things like that, yes, we were aware. [Editor's Note: Edward "Ted" Kennedy was the younger brother of John and Robert Kennedy. He served as a Senator from Massachusetts from 1962 to 2009. He died in 2009.] We were aware of what was going on. My goal in life was really to get out of Clifton and by the time I was in high school, I just felt like the racism of Clifton was too much for me and that's really what appealed to me to go to Livingston where there'd be a diverse student body and we'd be able to make some kind of progress. You didn't go to school at Rutgers? You work at Rutgers?

WB: Graduate school.

SZ: You went to graduate school. Well, back when I grew up, except for Teaneck and Engelwood, North Jersey was very segregated.

SZ: People tell me that Clifton is much more diverse today. There's a lot more Latino. There's a lot more African American in Clifton, but back when I went to school, you had Paterson, Passaic, Newark and Clifton. Clifton was kind of a big horseshoe, and Passaic was in the middle and it was basically, it was a great divide and it just wasn't right. There was a lot of racism. There was Anti-Semitism. It wasn't always comfortable being Jewish in Clifton. There were only five thousand of us in a population of 100,000.

WB: How did you become aware that there was this amount of racism in Clifton?

SZ: First, I'll talk about anti-Semitism. There was a time, I think in '71 or '72, the Jewish Y wanted to move to a neighborhood in Clifton and it was the Athenia neighborhood and Athenia was not a Jewish neighborhood and they fought the proposed building tooth and nail. I mean, it was really a bad time. They eventually located the Y there and they opened it up to everyone. Everyone used the facilities. They used the pool. They used the basketball courts.

WB: Without incident?

SZ: No, there were no major incidents. I think there were some protests initially, but, eventually, everyone just got along. But there were big fights and there were nasty letters in the paper, in the *Passaic Herald News*.

WB: Yes, I wanted to ask how you became aware of it. You know what took place.

SZ: I read the paper, plus it was a hot topic of conversation at the time.

WB: Okay.

SZ: The *Herald News*, which was the daily newspaper, endorsed Nixon in '68 as the law and order candidate and I'm pretty sure, yes, I'm pretty sure they endorsed Nixon in '72 as well.

WB: Well, the ways in which you became aware of the racism in and around Clifton?

SZ: How was I aware?

WB: So, reading articles in the newspaper. Was it talked about in the synagogue? Did your parents talk about it? Did you talk about it with your peers?

SZ: It was just obvious. In a high school of 3,600 kids there was one black person. So, how much more obvious can it be? I mean, there were no black kids in my graduating class, and in the class of '74 there was one black kid, and he was a star running back, so they saw to it that they would get him to live in town because they wanted him for the football team. It was just a weird place, Will. I mean, we were ten miles from Times Square, New York City, but in some ways it was like the middle of Texas. The town was all about their football team. The town is about their football team and their marching bands.

WB: Sure, I will just pause the tape for a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WB: Okay. You were saying?

SZ: Well, the town was about their football team and the marching band, and I didn't do either, so I didn't really feel like I belonged that much. No, you can't have this. [Editor's Note: Mr. Zurier is speaking to his dog, Russ.]

WB: Were there any places that?

SZ: It wasn't like the South where, it was so blatant. God forbid, we didn't have "colored" bathrooms for the "colored" and that kind of thing, but that's the way it was. I mean, it was just bad. It was just bad. It was wrong. Once I learned about Livingston College and what they were trying to do there, it just appealed to me as a place to go to school.

WB: Sure. How did you learn about Livingston?

SZ: Well, first I learned about it because I applied to Rutgers College and I didn't get in and they said there was a spot for me at Livingston and I didn't even know what Livingston was. I mean, at first, I thought Livingston was just an all-black college and I wasn't keen on that. But then a friend's brother, Barry Kornbluh, insisted that I come down and see Livingston for what it really was. Livingston had bad press. There were stories about graduating functional illiterates, all this sort of thing. I don't feel the university ever really gave it much of a chance to succeed. Anyway, I came down and I spent the better part of a weekend talking to some of the professors, talking to some of the students and just meeting the people and finding out what this grand experiment in education was all about. I liked that there weren't going to be distribution requirements, that I could pretty much chart my own course. I was pretty motivated to study politics and English and I really got into journalism later, once I got there. But when I first got to Livingston I thought I wanted to be either a history teacher or maybe a history professor-- American history or European history. I got into American University. I got into Rutgers-Newark. I had this option to go to Livingston. I did not want to stay in Clifton and go to Rutgers Newark and live in my parents' house. I had to figure out a way to get out; to get out of my parents' house at that point and Livingston was the option for me. I mean, it just made sense. The more I learned about it, the more I liked the idea that there'd be a culturally diverse student body that you could take courses in African history. It just was appealing. I mean, my friend Rick Rancitelli, used to say you either had to be really into the dialectic or like super into Mao or into the Grateful Dead or something, or a mix of all of that. It was just kind of an iconoclastic place. WB: So, what year did you enroll?

SZ: In 1973.

WB: Okay. So, 1973, you are going to be a freshman.

SZ: The fall of 1973.

WB: You are living in New Brunswick.

SZ: Well, I lived in, well on the Livingston campus in Piscataway in the dorms, in Quad 1.

WB: So, talk to me about your first year.

SZ: The first year was more like an extension of high school. There were a lot of kids who came down to Livingston and spent a year or two there and never graduated. So, I wound up hanging around with some of the people I knew from Clifton, but then met people as I went along and met people in classes. The first year was just a party. I wasn't really engaged until my sophomore year when I started writing for the newspaper and spent time with a better group of students, a better group of kids, and just got focused on becoming a reporter.

WB: Was that your first time living away from home?

SZ: That was my first time living away from home. But the one thing that was really cool was there was a real effort in those years for blacks and whites to talk things out.

WB: You mean on the campus?

SZ: Yes, at nights or on weekends there'd be rap sessions and everyone would air stuff out about like why are the white kids just kind of hanging together? Why do the black kids stay together and there'd be conversations about, "Well, black folks really don't want to be with white folks and white folks don't want to be with black folks," and this sort of thing. ... I think the fact that we did it and that we broke those barriers and we had them in a fully integrated school with integrated faculty was just a really profound thing to do. I think, you take it for granted today. Particularly here in Columbia, Maryland. Columbia was founded in the 1960s and Columbia welcomes people from all walks of life and all religious backgrounds and all racial backgrounds. There are no restrictive covenants and they build housing for moderate and low-income people. So, anyway, I'm talking about Columbia. Its forty years ago. It's hard to remember. For me it was just really a great place. At that point in my life, my sister had anorexia nervosa and she was hospitalized a number of times and it was really traumatic for the whole family. At Livingston I had a really good group of friends, I got into journalism and everything that I wanted to do was there. People were motivated to talk politics and we all read the paper and followed the news and the professors were motivated. I mean, they recruited a young faculty. In poli sci you had

Wilson Carey McWilliams whose dad was Carey McWilliams, the editor of *The Nation* and Gerald Pomper, who was an expert on political polling and so forth. You had intellectuals like Dennis Bathory and Gordon Schochet, who were experts in political philosophy. In the history department you had John Gillis who was an eminent historian. Writing had Mark Crawford, who's a really respected journalist. Jerry Aumtente was a young guy then and he built that journalism program and was just really dynamic. I mean, I really loved the place. The music kind of permeated the whole tenant of just living there. There were just cool things that would happen. One night, Larry Ridley brought Teddy Wilson to play. I don't know if you know Teddy Wilson, the piano player; he played with Benny Goodman. Teddy Wilson did a trio with Billy Cobham on drums and Larry Ridley on bass. So it's this really cool piano trio. It was free. You'd never see it again because Teddy is long gone. You wouldn't get Billy Cobham, who was really big in the '70s, to do that necessarily, but they did it at Livingston and things like that would just be commonplace. Ted Dunbar, who was a great guitar player, would hold clinics outside on a nice day like today in the spring. There'd be students throwing Frisbees, and reading, just studying. The jazz band, one of the ensembles would be playing. It launched the career of Steve Nelson who's like this really great vibist and composer. Steve would always be playing there and George Naha, the guitar player. I just have fond memories of it. I think what really helped me was just getting involved in the newspaper. I mean, there are things that I would change. I have to say, I didn't make that many black friends. I was one of the few white kids who played basketball in the gym and wasn't afraid of the gym. A lot of the white kids were. I'm just talking about this in really terse ways. But, maybe there were like five or six of us who'd be in the gym all the time back in those days. But I still think it was a good thing to do. I still think it was a good thing to try Livingston because it led to other universities opening up higher education to minorities and women, universities opening up faculty positions for women and minorities. Without that, without those early experiments, we wouldn't have Barack Obama. You wouldn't have had a country ready to vote for Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton this time around, if Hillary wins the nomination. I think in our small way we had an impact. I often feel remorseful that by 1980 the university ended Livingston College as we knew it and integrated it into the broader university. Livingston was a product of the times. I think in a large respect they needed to do something. The riots of the '60s happened and they wanted to bring minorities into the university. Then, there was just this tremendous demand for higher education. So, it killed a

lot of birds with one stone in the sense that they were able to bring minorities in, bring minority faculty in, bring students like me who might not have been academically competitive for Rutgers College, but could do university level work. So, it worked out through the 1970s.

WB: Let me ask you a question, do you think that Rutgers College should have simply incorporated more non-white students and faculty into the college proper instead of setting up this separate institution of Livingston?

SZ: No, I think it was good that they opened Livingston. If you integrated it with Rutgers you wouldn't have had the Urban Studies Department. You wouldn't have had journalism. Computers were a new thing back then. The first Computer Science Department at Rutgers University was at Livingston. It's hard to believe now because computers run so much of our lives. I mean, we have cell phones and Macs and PCs, and we can't function in our work lives without computers, but back then it was new. So, I think it was a really great laboratory for the university. You wouldn't have had the jazz department. The talent that they had. They had Larry Ridley chairing the department on bass. They had Kenny Barron teaching piano and James Spaulding on reeds and flute and things, and Ted Dunbar on guitar, Michael Carvin on drums. That was important. I know I'm music centered, but for that alone it was worth creating Livingston. Frankly, bringing it to today, the jazz departments, by and large at the universities, are not African American anymore. This really bothers me. My son went to Towson [University] and there are no black faculty members in the jazz department. There's just something wrong with that. Billy Taylor, the pianist who died a few years ago, used to say he would go to all the programs and there'd be no young African Americans coming up going into the jazz field, or very few. There's Warren Wolf and Ben Williams and they're from around here. Warren's from Baltimore, Ben's from D.C. There are a bunch of them. I could be wrong, but I would argue that it was good to set up Livingston because Livingston had a special mission as an innovative school. Until Livingston, there was no such thing as urban studies. There was no such thing really as a journalism department. Journalism was really a part of the English department at most universities back then. There was no such thing as a computer science department at many schools. So, I think it was a terrific opportunity for the university to try new things. I think the black students had a lot of problems integrating themselves. I think my sophomore year ... I wrote a story. There was a Malcolm X house on campus and the white

students didn't like the fact that there was a Malcolm X house because the way students were, liberal do-gooders, "Why do they need a Malcolm X house?" A lot of us felt we came here to integrate. We came here because we believe in integration, because we believe that a black person should have a chance for an education, that a woman should have a chance for an education. That there should be this kind of diversity, at a university, and lo and behold there's the Malcolm X house. I went to interview them and it was just kind of eye opening. It was their first time away from home and their first time away from their community and their first time in the white world. I mean, I saw it in a different light. I wrote it forty years ago. But I think it was important for us to do that and I went through life having that experience. Students will never have that experience again because they pretty much shut it down and they integrated Livingston to the rest of the university. I just don't know the statistics off hand, but I'm sure minority enrollments aren't increasing at universities nationally right now. So, I think it was really important for them to do that at the time as a transition for the black students and for the minority professors, and then as an experimental hub for the university to try new things. I guess they took the things that they liked and kept them. They still have the jazz department. They still have a jazz department or jazz program at Rutgers. It's a very renowned program. The journalism program is strong, I mean, that succeeded. Urban Studies, communications, urban communications, all that succeeded. So, it wasn't a total loss. I mean, I think it was a worthwhile thing for them to do, and then, to a certain extent, times change. We all moved on. You can't dwell and live in the past. But like I just said a few minutes ago, it created a climate so that a Barack Obama and a Hillary Clinton could run for the presidency. We all went out into the world and worked in corporations and worked in businesses or whatever we did with our lives and we brought our sensibility to our jobs. We brought that sensibility to our communities.

WB: Well, let's talk about the origins of your career.

SZ: Could I just, I just have to stop for a second.

WB: Sure, we will pause for a minute.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WB: Yes, so you're a journalist and you mentioned starting to work for the paper at Livingston during your sophomore year.

SZ: Yes.

WB: Can you tell me how that started?

SZ: My friend, Frank Carvill liked the way I wrote and he said, "You know, you write really good papers. You ought to consider doing more with writing." Frank introduced me to Paul Mulshine, who was editor of the Livingston *Medium* at the time. Paul is now a conservative columnist for the *Star-Ledger*. I don't always agree with him, but I respect his hard work and years in the business. Anyway, Frank introduced me to Paul and I started writing for the paper and I just kept going from there.

WB: What kind of stuff were you writing?

SZ: I wrote mostly politics. Livingston was a really intensely political place, so I would write about the various demonstrations and academic freedom debates in the faculty chamber. So, it was mostly those kinds of issues. I also wrote about the rock bands that I liked back then. Well, you know, it's funny. It's Livingston back then, so I wrote about our experiences at parties and things like that. Actually, it got to a point where the students who were more serious about journalism, who wanted to make *The Medium* a serious newspaper, sat Paul and I down and said, "Livingston has an image problem and we really need to make it more of a mainstream newspaper."

WB: This was a kind of editorial meeting?

SZ: Yes, it was an intervention.

WB: Okay.

SZ: [laughter] It was definitely an intervention. I think after that, there was so much going on. At the time we had Emmanuel Mesthene, Dean Mesthene, who had a background at the RAND Corporation. He had a very distinguished academic background, but he also worked for the RAND Corporation and there were all these rumors flying around about him being sent there by DoD [U.S. Department of Defence] to stop Livingston. It was just really kind of crazy in retrospect, but anyway. It was pretty clear by '75 or '76, that the university had sights to close Livingston down.

WB: In '75, that would have been your junior year?

SZ: '75 was my sophomore year.

WB: '75, sophomore year, okay.

SZ: So, there were all these various demonstrations and that's what we covered. That's really what we covered. Actually, that spring we wrote a big editorial asking Dean Mesthene to resign and he finally did resign. There was a lot of pressure for him to resign. They put in Dean Jenkins, who was one of the original faculty members. He was a biology professor. He had credibility with the conservatives. And mind you, a conservative by Livingston standards in those days was like a Hillary Clinton moderate if you could believe that. Anyway, yes, those are the issues we wrote about.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SZ: So, what was I talking about?

WB: You were talking partially about covering some of the demonstrations.

SZ: Oh, we covered the demonstrations, and then we wrote the editorial. We collectively wrote the editorial asking the dean to resign. The dean did resign because he wasn't really suited for Livingston. He was a really bright guy. He was also a conductor. He conducted the Rutgers Symphony, but as where Livingston was about jazz, he was about conducting the symphony. So, it was a personality conflict. It just wasn't a fit. He had a degree, a Ph.D. in philosophy and, well, he had this classical training in classical philosophies and was a musician and a classical conductor of classical orchestras. Livingston was about jazz and improvisation and conflict and people dealing head on with each other and it was just not a fit. Then, Dean Jenkins was there for many years, I guess, after that. He kind of shepherded the transition process for Livingston to become integrated with the university. The handwriting was on the wall. I think by '76 or '77, Douglass College recognized the journalism program. It was pretty obvious that that was going to happen and by 1980 they just formally integrated Livingston with the rest of the university. [Editor's Note: In 1982, under President Edward Bloustein, the Rutgers faculty was merged from the separate colleges to form the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. So, all the separate departments were merged into single departments. Students remained as students of the separate colleges until the colleges were merged in 2007 to form the School of Arts and Sciences.]

WB: I am curious. You are covering some of the protests. What was the tone of the student body and the faculty during that time? Were people sad, angry? Did they feel betrayed?

SZ: People were angry and people were angry because there was concerns that the EOF, which I guess in Jersey is the Economic Opportunity Fund, the EOF was going to be cut. I can't remember this, but the protest itself was about forced meal plans. The pretext was about forced meal plans. So, instead of being able to eat in your dorm and use the refrigerator and the stove in the dorm and save money on food, the university insisted that you have a minimum meal plan. Well, this was seen as a violation of human rights. [laughter] It was insane but I do understand that many students were hard-pressed for money, none of us were rich. But there was much more under the surface, it was really kind of insane when you think about it, but it really was used as a pretext to talk about this underlying sense that minority enrollment would roll back and that the Livingston experiment would roll back. Livingston would be integrated to the university, would lose its identity. What we knew as the college was no longer going to remain within the university and I think that's really what the protests, that's what the anger was about. The no forced meal plans was just an excuse to get people riled up. That was 1975. At that point, Vietnam was over. The student protest movement pretty much ended when the Vietnam War ended in January of 1973. I think what really propelled student demonstrations in the '60s was the opposition to the war. It pulled a lot of people together. There were a lot of issues overlapping that. So, by 1975, the '60s were over. Livingston was, seen as an anachronism. I guess they felt they had their fun with their little experiment. The black students, some of them were doing very well, others were really struggling. So, they killed it. I can't say that I'm up on all of the statistics. I think it'd be really interesting to see what happened to everybody. Maybe that could be part of what you ultimately do with this project. What happened to Richie Sachs, who was the big student leader? I haven't heard a word about him. I don't even know if he's alive. I'm going to be sixty-one this year. We're at a point now where we'll all be alive for another ten or twenty years or so. In twenty years, I'll be eighty-one. I might be here. I might not be here. I don't know. What happened to at least some of the key people who were important and what did they do with their lives? I mean, for me, I feel like Livingston was an important part. I play music. I play jazz and I raised my kids in Columbia because I wanted them to have a community that was diverse. I didn't want them to grow up not knowing black kids and not knowing Indian kids or Chinese kids or whatever. I just wanted them to be

comfortable with people from all walks of life because that's the world we live in today. My older son's going to be a musician. My younger son's a basketball coach. You deal with all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of situations. You have to be able to deal with people. You have to be able to understand where they might be coming from or how they might be similar or how they might be different. Sometimes I just get really depressed about it and feel like the 1970s led to the 1980 election of Reagan. The country became very conservative. We had twelve years of Reagan and Bush, and then we had Bill Clinton who was a Democrat, but a very conservative Democrat. Then we had Bush, and then we had Obama. So, by in large, the country has just got very conservative compared to what it was in the 1960s and '70s. You can't dwell on the past. At a certain point I just decided I had to get on with my life. I mean, I had various bouts with depression in my twenties; I just couldn't connect with the world. I just couldn't connect with just being a work-a-day person, just working a job and paying my bills and just being an adult. Eventually, it happened. By the time I was thirty, I had a decent job and I was living up in Boston. That's where I met my wife. She was from Baltimore. She had a totally different background. She grew up in Baltimore city going to city schools.

WB: What's your wife's name?

SZ: Stephanie, Stephanie Gurwitz, and she was born in 1957. I would be interested in, as you talk to other people from that time, what impact did Livingston have on their lives? Did it change them in terms of how they respond to the people on their jobs? Did it get them more involved? Were they more inclined to be involved in the community in any great way? Or did they, by and large, people stay in New Jersey and live in segregated suburban enclaves--at least, the white students?

WB: Yes, I mean that is part of some of the information that researchers, historians will be able to glean hopefully from some of these interviews. To focus it back on you, let's talk about your later years at Livingston. So, when did you graduate Livingston?

SZ: In 1977. So, I entered in fall of '73, graduated in spring of '77. So, in those days it was expected. You would go to school and complete it in four years. There was none of this five, six, seven years or whatever.

WB: And you were a history major?

SZ: I was a history major. I was a history major and I kind of minored in journalism. I only took three or four journalism courses. My journalism training was really learning, being on a student newspaper. Oh, you're not recording? [Editor's Note: Mr. Zurier's telephone rings.]

WB: Oh, I will pause it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WB: Okay. You were saying.

SZ: My journalism was being on the student newspaper and then just working for papers. Jaki Kalansky, who was editor of *The Medium* a year before I was, she got a job at a local weekly, one of the *Princeton Packet* papers, south of New Brunswick. After college I started writing for her and I started writing for some of the different papers there.

WB: Right away?

SZ: Pretty much, actually. After I graduated, I had an apartment. I had a lease for a couple of months, so I lived in New Brunswick. I wrote for newspapers. I wrote for the *Princeton Packet* papers and I worked Manpower jobs at night. So, I would make twenty-five dollars a story and then work minimum wage in manpower like, either unloading trucks or working in factories or whatever work they had that day. It would vary. Sometimes it'd be working in factories. Sometimes it'd be as an aid to a carpenter, so I enjoyed that. The building jobs I liked because you were outside working on a house, that kind of thing, as opposed in a dingy factory or unloading trucks at a warehouse. Some of those jobs were horrible. It'd be like ninety-nine degrees and you'd be unloading trucks and you'd be gasping for air by the end of the day, so it was enough to give me the impetus now, "I'm going to be a reporter. I'm going to work in an office. I'm not going to unload trucks in ninety-nine-degree heat forever." [laughter]

WB: So, tell me about some of the other jobs you had right away. I think you were telling me about one of them before?

SZ: So, yes, so I worked for a lot of different papers. Let's see, I worked for the *Courier News*.

WB: When did you start there?

SZ: In the fall of '77.

WB: Okay.

SZ: So, I worked for the *Courier News* and I was a clerk there. I did the stock pages and answered the phones, and then if they needed people do police checks and stuff like that. I just did whatever needed to be done. It was just an entry-level job.

WB: Police checks, what is that?

SZ: We would call the police departments in the local area and just see if there any accidents. I mean, of course, what you really wanted to know is there any real crime. Were there any robberies, whatever, just anything that the police would have to report on, on a police blotter. Anything big like a fire or a murder or something like that, could be picked up on a police scanner. But they would usually have reporters. One of your jobs as an intro reporter would be to just call up the police departments on your beat and just find out if there was anything to report. Usually, you do it at ten o'clock at night before the paper went to bed, nine or ten o'clock at night. So, I worked there for a while, and then I worked at the *Paterson News* mostly for the experience. It was like a hundred fifty dollars a week, working forty-five, fifty hours a week. I wasn't even considered full-time. I didn't get benefits, but they paid me a hundred fifty dollars a week in freelancer's fees and I just did whatever needed to be done. I wrote features. I wrote news. They were shorthanded so they were just happy to have me.

WB: Were you still living in New Brunswick at that time?

SZ: When I first graduated I lived in New Brunswick for two months. Then, I was working at the *Courier News*. Half the time I would live with my parents up in Clifton. The other half I would just crash. I still had friends in New Brunswick, living in New Brunswick or living in the dorms, so I would just stay at their places and that worked okay for a while. Then, finally, I stopped that and I worked for the *Paterson News* most of 1978. Then I left. Then, by the end of 1978, the *Paterson News* made it clear to me that they weren't going to hire me full-time, so I said, "Okay fine." I had saved up some money because I was living at home. I went out to California, looked for jobs out there, spent a couple months just living and seeing the sites. I had a cousin out in the bay area so I stayed there. But I couldn't find a job so I came back and I worked for publishers. I worked for book publishers for about four or five years. So, I worked for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich as a production editor.

WB: What year was this?

SZ: From 1979 to 1981.

WB: Okay.

SZ: So I did that for a couple years. Then, for about two years, I sold printing because I learned the graphic arts. When I was at Livingston, one of the things that I learned was the production side of putting a newspaper together. In those days we did paste ups and we worked with exacto knives and it's now ancient history. There was even hot metal in those days. It was like the end of hot metal.

WB: What is hot metal?

SZ: Hot metal is like where they would actually set type, a line of type in metal. When you get home tonight look up hot metal. Hot metal in newspapers. It was when typesetting was actually a trade. The newspapers would employ typesetters, people who would set literally lines of types and they, it was called hot metal because it literally was metal and they would work on what they would call a lino type machine and they would set the lines of type in metal. It's amazing that we put a newspaper together this way, but we would take the copy. They bring it to the typesetters. The typesetters would type it up and etch it in the hot metal. Then it'd go on plates. I don't need to explain the whole printing process, but literally, in those days, newspapers would reek. You know what solder smells like? Like if something is soldered? Yes. The newspaper would smell like that. It would be a constant soldering iron going off. There'd be like this stench at the newspaper and it was from the hot metal. So anyway, where was I?

WB: It was from '79 to '81.

SZ: Oh, yes, so, I learned the graphic arts. The reason why I was hired at the publisher, at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, was not so much for my reporting. They liked the fact that I was a reporter. They liked that I was a writer, but I sold them on the idea that I knew how to put a newspaper together. I knew layouts, pasteups, and graphic arts. I knew hot metal. I knew all that stuff or at least I had a basic idea of it. I knew that the graphic arts is a whole other discipline, a whole other field. I'm not an artist and it became clear to me after four or five years that if I was going to do something in publishing, it was going to be on the editorial side; it was

going to be as a writer or an editor. So, I learned enough about graphic arts, the business side of the graphic arts, to sell myself to a typesetter and printer in Spring Valley, New York. I worked there a couple of years and it was a sales job, but as a salesperson you were as much of a layout artist and production person as you were a salesperson. So your job would be to sell a job to a company a printing job, and then shepherd it through the printing plant. So, anyway, that job didn't work out. Then I was just at a low point, and then I just decided to go back into writing. So, I worked for a paper called *Suburban Trends* in Butler, NJ. It was a twice-weekly paper and I worked there for nine, ten, months. Then worked at the *Herald News* for a couple years in Passaic. I sold myself to the *Herald News*. Then things weren't going great. I mean, when I was at the *Herald News*, I was making 245 dollars a week.

WB: What year was this?

SZ: This is in 1985, 1986. One option, once you had a few years writing experience, was to work in the business press, in the business trade press. So, that's what I did. I took a job with Fairchild Publications and that was another disaster. I mean, I had a lot of disasters in those days.

WB: Why was it a disaster?

SZ: It wasn't really. It just didn't work out because it was writing about supermarkets and I would have to go to supermarkets and write about their deli counters. I remember interviewing a guy and they wanted me to get "underneath" what the deli is about and all this stuff. I kept asking the guy, "Well, what is it about the merchandising?" He says, "It's a deli. It's got..." [laughter] It's the funniest thing. I'll never forget him for as long as I live, "It's a deli. You've got your meats over here. You got your cheeses over here. You got your coleslaw. You got your potato salad. What more can I tell you about it? It's a deli. It's a supermarket deli." [laughter] So I left that job. I remember there was one woman, they had her writing about shopping carts and she wanted to be a playwright. [laughter]

WB: So, there are a lot of people like that?

SZ: There were a lot of people who wanted to be reporters or wanted to be writers or whatever and they were writing about shopping carts and deli counters. There were some jobs at that paper I think that were good because supermarkets as a business, as a kind of like public

company, how their stock does and all that sort of stuff. That's kind of interesting, and then, there was all the technology. In those days, scanners were first being introduced and that sort of thing. So I think there were a couple beats where the reporters were actually pretty content and had good jobs, but then there were just people kind of on the peripheries, so it wasn't worth hanging around.

WB: Is that kind of the life of a writer to some extent?

SZ: It is. In retrospect I kicked around for ten years. I worked in the graphic arts. I worked for small newspapers. I worked as a clerk. Just looking back at it along the way I was always building experience. I was always gaining. I had clips. I had something to show for it. At least I was on a path at that point. I mean, it wasn't self-sustaining. It wasn't self-sustaining until 1987 when I got a job at Cahners Publishing on *Industrial Distribution Magazine*. [Editor's Note: *Industrial Distribution Magazine* was founded in 1911. It ceased publication and went online in 2010.] Because I knew about the graphic arts I called the editor of *Graphic Arts Monthly* and I said, "Do you have any jobs? I'd really like to write about the graphic arts. It's something I know about and I have reporting experience now, so could I do that?" He said, "No, I don't have a job at *Graphic Arts Monthly*." In those days Cahners bought what was called Technical Publishing, so they bought *Datamation*, the old *Datamation*, which was one of the first computer magazines. So they bought *Datamation* and then they also bought *Industrial Distribution* and he said, "There are jobs at *Datamation*. I don't know what you know about computers." I said, "Not much." He said, "There's also a job at *Industrial Distribution*." I said, "Oh, my father gets that magazine. That's what my father does." So, I called the HR [human resources] person in New York and I said, "I know what industrial distributors do." They said, "Come in. Come in tomorrow." It was funny because there'd be hundreds of people applying for writing jobs in New York and the fact that I even knew what it was--I had experience at that point and I knew what the industry was, so they called me and I interviewed there and got the job. I was also willing to relocate to Boston. That's when my life started to take form. I worked up in Boston for five years and that's where I met my wife Stephanie and we had our two boys and things pretty much took form, and then we moved down here. I still worked for Cahners. They bought *Government Computer News*. So that's one other aspect of my life that's I guess is important is that I worked in the computer trade press the last twenty-four years. Most of the

distributors we wrote about at *Industrial Distribution* were warehouse people and inventory management systems were important to them, and they were all computerized, so much of the business story I would write would be about how they would manage their computer systems. So, yes, by the late '80s, early '90s, I saw the writing on the wall where business was going and where business press was going and I just started writing about computers, volunteered to write about computers as much as possible. So, I got five or ten clips writing about computers. Sold myself to *Government Computer News*. Stephanie was thrilled because we could come back down here. We lived in Baltimore for a couple years, in the Park Heights section, and then bought the house here in '94 and have been here ever since.

WB: Let me follow up with a couple things. One, moving back and working in Boston, were your aunt and grandmother still around then?

SZ: My aunts (my mom's sisters) were around, yes. That was nice. Living and working in Boston was really great for me because my whole mom's side of the family was up there, so I really liked that. I really liked reconnecting and I would see them on holidays and things like that and different family events. So, it was hard to leave because I really enjoyed Boston. I really enjoyed our years in Boston. It was just very good times for us by and large. I mean I met Stephanie. The '80s were bad. The '80s were not great for me because I wouldn't want to go through my twenties again. I wouldn't want to start in the newspaper business and like you said, the life of a writer, I would not want to go through that again, ever, but I guess what doesn't kill you makes you stronger as they say. I got through it. I got through it and better times presented themselves. But anyway, the years in Boston were great. I moved up there in '87. I met Stephanie in '88. Ben, my older son, was born in '89 at Brigham and Women's. Solomon was born in '91 and then by '92 we were down in Baltimore living in Park Heights.

WB: When you got the job, because you said your father was getting, what was the name of the magazine?

SZ: *Industrial Distribution*.

WB: *Industrial Distribution*.

SZ: In fact, most of the magazines I worked for don't exist anymore. The *Paterson News* and the *Herald News* have been folded into the *Bergen Record*, I think. Or the *Herald News* kind of

exists like the *North Jersey News*. The *Paterson News* and the *Herald News* that we knew no longer exist. I think the *Princeton Packet Papers* exist in some form. *Industrial Distribution* doesn't exist. *Government Computer News* is a website. *CommWeek* is defunct. *Internet Week* is defunct. *Builder Magazine* still exists and that's about it. But most of the publications I worked for either were dissolved or become websites or just simply don't exist anymore.

WB: I mean, that's a sign of the times.

SZ: It's just the way it is.

WB: Yes.

SZ: It's just the way it is with print.

WB: But what I wanted to know was had you gleaned any actual knowledge from your father about the industry, that you could then bring out?

SZ: A little bit, but it was more like once I was in it, a nice byproduct of that job was that I got closer to my father. My father really liked the idea that I was on the magazine and we'd talk about the business a lot more. He always wanted me to be in the business. I think he always wanted to start a small company. His father never passed the business on to my father and my father wanted to pass the business on to me. I wasn't really interested in the business. I think at a certain point because my journalism career really wasn't taking off, if my father had a business that was worth going into, I might have done it. I might have done it, but it's just hard to know. There was never really a business to go into. I did interview at A&J Friedman I think in '82 or '83 and by that time I think it was pretty clear they weren't going to continue the business and they didn't want me there. They didn't want me there. I didn't really want to be there. The job didn't pay that well. Whatever they were going to pay me I could make working on a low-end publishing job, so I always felt that I was just better off doing that; at least I was headed down a path.

WB: Remind me again, what year did you start writing about computers?

SZ: My first job in the "computer press" was 1992, but I wrote about computers from 1987, 1988 on. I didn't have a job as the computer writer, but like I said, I volunteered to write about computers.

WB: Inventory.

SZ: Inventory control and warehousing, and manufacturing, you would invariably write about computers. If it was manufacturing, you would write about CNC [computer numerical control] machines. If it was warehousing, you would write about inventory control, software, and those kinds of systems. And then so much of what we did, again, in the early days, was we wrote about PCs. We wrote about the latest version of Windows. One of the first features that I was involved with at *Government Computer News* was Windows 3.1. It was when Windows 3.1 came out. Then, Windows 95. It just kept us busy through the '90s, just writing about those projects.

WB: Well, that's where ultimately I wanted to get to. How did you build your knowledge up to write effectively?

SZ: In those days it was such a new field that the vendors would spend time with you.

WB: Okay.

SZ: I would spend hours and hours at Cisco and Synoptics and all the old networking companies, Bay Networks. I'd go there for two hours and they'd just teach me the stuff.

WB: Okay.

SZ: They don't do that now because it's just so much more developed. It's more by press conference or press materials or they'll do a brief, fifteen minute or half hour briefing, but like I said, in those days they were so eager to teach us so we could write about this stuff that it was a great time to learn.

WB: What kind of issues were you covering?

SZ: It wasn't really issues. ... The one thing that was kind of cool was when the Clintons came in they had reinventing government, so we did a lot of stories about agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency opening up environmental information, like public information, those kinds of things. It was mostly just writing about the technology.

WB: About the actual products?

SZ: It was mostly product writing as opposed to issue writing. I got involved in writing more about issues on *Builder Magazine*. We would write about affordable housing and we won awards for writing. We dedicated a whole magazine to immigration in 2006. This is right at the time when President George W., President Bush, really had the right idea about immigration--setting up a guest worker program and those kinds of things, but the right wing was just so powerful. Any attempt to try to have some kind reasonable solution to immigration was seen as amnesty. So, that point of view won out and President Bush, because of Iraq, was so weak he just couldn't cut a deal and that was really the last time we got close. In 2006, 2007, we had a real climate to do something about immigration and at our magazine we did a really great piece on that and won an award for that. Then we wrote about the housing meltdown, so that was the most issue-oriented reporting I've done in a long time. I mean, most of the computer stuff I do is really product oriented.

WB: So, you mentioned early Windows. What were some of the other products that you covered?

SZ: Cisco routers, all the networking products, and then we would write about how agencies and later on, when I worked for *Internet Week*, how companies would transform themselves using the internet. It was a big deal in those days.

WB: For example?

SZ: Well, just a lot of it stemmed around purchasing systems like having web-based intranets and just having websites where people bought products online, those kinds of things.

WB: Okay. If you could talk to me about, as you're journalistic self, as you're covering all these issues, as new technology, the internet is changing everything, you as a private citizen, how did you feel being so up and close and personal with these things?

SZ: I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it. I liked being part of the tech press. I try to use the technology as much as I can. People in our family often say that the first time they experienced the internet was in this house, people who went on to do a lot more with technology than I ever did. I'd write about it, but one of Steph's cousins is an IT guy for NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], the national weather service. Her cousin's husband always says that it was in our house that he saw the internet for the first time. That was a big deal. Just the

idea that you could take a Grainger catalog, a catalog of products and put all those products on the internet and it could be sorted and indexed. It just was never done before. Everything prior to that, at manufacturing plants for example, or construction companies, you'd have these big paper catalogs of products. Now you go on the web, you go on the Grainger catalog, you go to "whatever.com" and you can buy anything.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WB: So, we left off, I think, when you moved here. And what year was that again and what company were you working for?

SZ: Alright, so when we bought the house in 1994.

WB: In '94.

SZ: At that time, I was still working for Cahners Publishing, C-A-H-N-E-R-S. I was working for Cahners Publishing and working for *Government Computer News*. So, I was with them until 1997. Then, in 1997 I worked for a company called CMP which is one of the big computer press companies in those days and worked for *Communications Week*, and then, within a few months they changed *Communications Week* to *Internet Week* to try to--I guess in those days they thought they needed an internet book, they needed an internet magazine to stay competitive with all the other publishers. I think what happened was that the internet became such an integral part of everybody's business, that there was really no longer a reason to have an internet magazine.

WB: Explain that.

SZ: Well, I think that the company I worked for had *Information Week* and we were basically writing about the same things. We were duplicating the same stories.

WB: Okay.

SZ: So, if we wrote a story about how GE was using the internet and transforming themselves using the internet and doing the purchasing systems, using web-based systems and all these kinds of things, *Information Week* had the story. We had the story. Maybe we got a little more technical in terms of how we would explain how their networks were constructed and architected as opposed to the business strategy, but it would be so subtle. At its heyday there were like fifty-five or sixty of us working at *Internet Week*. So, that's sixty people with sixty salaries with

benefits and all that stuff, and I think when it came time to make cuts, when the economy went sour after the .com crash they just folded *Internet Week*, so at that point I lost my job. It actually wasn't that bad because I had severance and for about a year I wrote for a bass magazine. I wrote for music magazines and that was a lot of fun.

WB: What magazines did you write for?

SZ: I wrote mostly for *Double Bass Magazine*. They were published by the company that publishes *The Strad* which is a magazine about violins and violin making. [Editor's Note: *Double Bassist Magazine* ceased publication in 2008. *The Strad* was founded in 1890 and continues publication today.]

WB: Okay.

SZ: *Double Bass* has since been folded too. I forgot about that. *Double Bass* was folded because I guess there's more of a market for violin than for double bass. I wrote a story about the history of bebop bass. When I started playing the upright I injured myself, so I wrote a story about hand exercises and taking care of your [body], like musicians thinking more of themselves as athletes and warming up and those kinds of things. There's a whole range of exercises you can do to warm yourself up before you play and before you practice, so I wrote about that. Mike Richmond, the bassist, I went to NYU and I talked to him and met with his students and they had a whole bass ensemble, like a bass orchestra of seven, eight, nine bassists. [Editor's Note: Mike Richmond is a Grammy award winning bassist. He began teaching at NYU in 1988.] He wrote an orchestration in all different parts of harmony for melody and harmony for the upright, so that was kind of cool, but it was bass geek stuff. What I tried to do, and I did somewhat successfully, was take some of the principles I had learned in writing about specialized publishing, writing about distribution or the computer industry, and brought that to music writing. It worked for a while, but then, just to give you a sense, I would make maybe ten cents a word. Today, I make about a dollar a word, maybe a dollar a quarter a word on a computer story, so if I write a thousand words I make a thousand dollars, just in round numbers. Well, in music writing, if I wrote a thousand words I'd be lucky to make two hundred dollars.

WB: Oh, wow.

SZ: The economics of it didn't make sense and I had this house to support and a family to support, so I went back to work for *Builder Magazine*, but that turned out to be good. *Builder Magazine* was actually pretty good. I wrote about technology and I also got more involved in all the other housing issues. I wrote about affordable housing and immigration and the housing bubble and all that stuff. Then, for the last eight or nine years, I've been in more specialized computer publishing again which is safer. It's just more steady work and it's become what I do.

WB: Can you talk to me about how the publishing industry has changed over the years that you've been involved in it?

SZ: I think the big thing is that and this might have been me because I didn't major in journalism, but I think the big thing is that when I came up you could be a print guy and maybe you'd get involved in broadcasting as a specialist doing a radio spot or something like that. I think the big difference now is that they expect you to be a multimedia journalist. That's a good thing actually. I think the way it's changed is that today you can't just do print. You just can't do television. You can't just do radio. You have to be able to do all of it. You have to be able to function in print. You have to be able to function in video. You have to be able to function in audio, do podcasts, all those kinds of things and be as versatile as possible, because you just never know what's going to happen--whether the project you're on is going to be moved aside, if the advertising is going to go down, you're going to lose your job. Job security is just not what it was at newspapers. I had a friend who worked for the *New York Times* for eleven years and just felt that he wasn't going anywhere with it and took a job with Bloomberg. He worked at the DC Bureau of the *New York Times* and, years ago, that would be a career job. You'd spend thirty, forty years doing that, but not as much. I think the big thing that has changed is that you have to be more versatile. You can't just be a writer or you just can't be a radio person or a T.V. person or whatever. You have to be able to do all of it and force yourself to do all of it. [I've spent] the last year, couple years, doing freelance work. I've written video scripts. I just try to do as many different kinds of things as I could get my hands on. I do white papers. I write case studies. I do straight-ahead news. I do slide shows where you do snippets of a story, a two hundred, three hundred word story and then you illustrate it. You'll let photos tell the story. So, I think that's how it's changed. Part of it is that the beginnings of that kind of education happened at Livingston really. Jerry Aumente was really big on that and that's something that I somewhat

regret. I'm glad I did what I did because I studied history and politics and political science and economics and I got an academic background. In those days you had to take fifty-two credits to be a journalism major and I thought that was too many. You take 120 credits to graduate, so fifty-two credits, that's almost half your curriculum is just your major. So, I just thought, "Well, I'll just take courses in journalism. I'll work on the paper and take my chances." I think that probably hurt me a little bit, at least in terms of getting that first job. I think the editors, when I first applied to newspapers, they didn't quite see the commitment. Keep in mind, when I got out of school in '77, it was the height of the Woodward and Bernstein craze, so journalism programs were popping up all over the country; everyone wanted to break the next Watergate story. So, yes, they probably looked at me like, if you're a history major, what do you want to work at a newspaper for? Whereas, years before that they wouldn't have asked that. They would say, "Oh, this is great." I thought that I'd be well received and they'd say, "Oh, wow, here's someone who actually knows something. Who actually knows something about politics as opposed to just knows, who, what, when, where, why and can regurgitate what they hear at a meeting," or whatever. [Editor's Note: Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein are investigative journalists who worked together to uncover much of the Watergate Scandal in 1972 which led President Richard Nixon to resign.]

WB: You can tell me that Woodward and Bernstein craze, or that flood of journalism majors in departments must have made the job market competitive.

SZ: Oh, it was super competitive. I remember going to the *Home News* in New Brunswick. *Home News* still exist?

WB: I do not know. [Yes as the Home News Tribune]

SZ: Okay. I used to go, I remember going to the *Home News* in New Brunswick in '77. Robert Rhodes was a nice guy to the extent that he would, as a courtesy, meet with some of us who he knew were serious about being reporters. Anyway, he met with me and he showed me his files of resumes. Keep in mind, the Woodward and Bernstein craze, newspapers were declining and there were also recessions. So we had the oil shock of '73. We had a recession in '73 and a recession in '77. Anyway, he showed me his 1973 pile, his 1974 pile, his 1975 pile, his 1976 pile, and he said, "You'll go in the spring of 1977 pile." So, he said, "I hate to break it to you like

that, but you're going to have to find something to do, and then, maybe just do freelancing and just try to get clips so you can sell yourself to a paper somewhere."

WB: These were piles for when he would be considering next?

SZ: Right, right.

WB: Wow.

SZ: Unless someone came along who knocked his socks off. I was good. I was definitely one of the better students and I was on the Livingston [college] paper. I have to say, my freshman year I just kind of partied and I didn't know what I was doing. By my sophomore year I was very focused. I knew I wanted to stay on the paper. I became editor by the time it was my junior year. In my senior year I did an internship at a foreign policy journal [*Worldview*] that Carey McWilliams set up for me. I was just pretty motivated and my expectations were pretty high. I didn't think I'd start up at the *New York Times*. I didn't even think I'd start off at the *Star Ledger* or the *Bergen Record* which were the big New Jersey papers. I'd thought I'd get a job somewhere at one of the smaller papers. I couldn't even do that. It was just really hard. There were just so many people who wanted to be reporters. It was hard. My mother wanted me to be an accountant, like a nice Jewish accountant, but it wasn't for me.

WB: You mentioned that you started off covering more products than issues. Did that transition to becoming more issue-oriented?

SZ: When I first started writing about industrial distribution they were more like business profiles. It was interesting. They were human interest stories because they were usually family businesses or businesses that somebody started on the seat of their pants or in their garage. So, it was a human interest business story. Then, you would tell the business story within that. Yes, coming to *Government Computer News* it was all very product focused, like I would do features. I would do the feature pages and one month it would be Windows 3.1. ... It was every other week, *Government Computer News*. We published twenty-six times a year. So, for one issue it would be like Windows, stories about Windows. Then it'd be about enterprise networks. Mind you I didn't know what an enterprise network was then, so I had to learn about networks. Then, it'd be about security products. I just kind of liked it. It was interesting enough. I saw the handwriting on the wall writing about industry. Industry was declining in this country and

computers were on the upswing, so I just realized I wasn't going to write for the *Atlantic Monthly*, I wasn't going to be writing about political campaigns or any of that stuff, and that at least writing for *Government Computer News* I could write about an (important?) industry around D.C. I've covered about every agency of government. We wrote about how the USGS [United States Geological Survey] would use computers to study earth science and we'd wrote about NASA. I wrote a story about the first e-mail communication on the space shuttle, brining e-mail communications to the space shuttle; those kinds of things. Al Gore reinventing government in '93, '94, '95. We'd write about how agencies would kind of attempt, anyway, to remake themselves using technology.

WB: And you won a number of awards over the years, right?

SZ: Yes, I won a bunch of awards.

WB: Can you tell us about some of them?

SZ: Actually, I won my most awards at *Builder Magazine*.

WB: Okay.

SZ: The awards I won at *Government Computer News* were more like team awards for team coverage of, I think, one year we got best paper, that kind of thing. At *Builder Magazine*, like I said, we dedicated a whole magazine to immigration. So somebody wrote an overview and I wrote about job site relations. I can't even remember what I got to be honest with you, geez. I wrote about workers' comp and immigration. Somebody else wrote about the way immigrants would go to 7-11. She spent time going to 7-11s in her area and interviewing immigrants and just getting their stories. It was one of the first times that the immigrants were revealed as people in a trade magazine. I mean, they were just seen as things, just chattel really, so that was important. The pro-immigrant movement was really strong in those days, so they spent a lot of time with us. We interviewed them. It was just really well-received. We didn't win the Neal award, but we got a Neal Finalist Award which was good and the Neals are kind of like the Pulitzers of the business press. Then probably the best story that I wrote individually was I went out to Indianapolis and I wrote about a housing project that just kind of fell apart and talked to some of the homeowners who were losing their homes and what they were going through with the builders and the banks.

WB: What year was that?

SZ: That was in 2007.

WB: Oh, okay.

SZ: So, we were a finalist for that as well.

WB: Those are pretty timely pieces.

SZ: Yeah. After I came back from Indianapolis I decided I wanted to leave *Builder Magazine*. I was also at that point covering the House Financial Services Committee, so I was in on the meetings where Barney Frank would hold the hearings with Henry Paulson and Ben Bernanke and they would explain how the economy was melting down. It was pretty upsetting. You asked me before what it was like to be writing about that stuff and also to be experiencing it yourself. [Editor's Note: Barney Frank was a Congressman from 1981 to 2013. He was the Chair of the House Financial Services Committee from 2007 to 2011. Ben Bernanke was the Chairman of the Federal Reserve from 2006 to 2014. Henry Paulson was CEO of Goldman Sachs from 1999 to 2006, and then, Secretary of the Treasury from 2006 to 2009.]

WB: Yes, just a person.

SZ: A person. It was stressful. That time was really stressful and I think that's the single most traumatic experience. I mean, to me, the .com crash was bad. I lost my job, but the housing crisis I think was just much worse.

WB: Really?

SZ: The housing crisis was worse because this house we bought for \$195,000. It appreciated to \$505,000. After the housing bubble it went down to \$390,000. So, it lost about 110, 120,000 dollars worth of value and we got ourselves into debt and the house has been underwater for eight or nine years. That's why you see the "For Sale" sign. We're in the process of a short sale right now. [Mr.Zurier completed the short sale in October 2016.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

WB: You were just giving me final thoughts on Livingston.

SZ: I think for me, they were really good years. Some of the best of my life in terms of personal growth and being able to learn what I wanted to learn. At the time it's all I could've expected out of college. I really achieved a lot more than I ever thought I would. I thought I'd work on a local newspaper. I thought maybe if I worked for the *Star-Ledger* or *Bergen Record* and had worked my way up as an editor there or something like that, that would be a success. I never thought that I'd wind up working in the Washington area for years. Not that I scaled the heights of journalism, but I was, for the most part a journalist in D.C. for twenty-four, twenty-five years, so that was good. It all started at Livingston College and even though it's upsetting sometimes. ... I saw the university had their 250th Anniversary and they had the celebration. They had a symposium on race relations at the university in the 1960s, but it was only about Rutgers College. Then they said in the story that they'll deal with Livingston College--that they are only going to do the symposium on minorities at Rutgers College. I thought, "Geez, I mean, what about Livingston?" I mean the whole point of Livingston was to bring minorities into the university. Anyway, there are those I guess who can be embittered about what happened--that the college was integrating to the university, that it was just passing phase in many ways, but for those of us who lived it and who were there, from 1969 to 1980, it was an important place. It was important that it was tried. I don't want to over glorify it, but on the other hand I think it was an important thing that we did what we did. That for the first time, at least particularly in New Jersey, I mean I think in New York City there's a lot more cross fertilization between academics and interaction between the races and certainly in the New Jersey cities, but I think for the time it was an important experiment. It was an important thing for us to do. I sometimes feel like it would've been nice to just go to a normal college. [laughter] I sometimes feel like I wish I could just be like a normal person and not care about the world and just work a job and not get excited and not get upset, but that's not who I am. That's not who we were and I don't know if, it will be interesting for me to find out, for you to come back to me with, to an extent people were impacted by those years. Was it just something that they went through, and then they voted for Reagan in 1980, and voted for Republicans ever since. Just left that part of them behind or is there a piece of them, still that student at Livingston College? I don't know? For me, obviously, you had to reach a point where you function in the world. It couldn't always be like this great experiment unless you're going to become an academic, your life is not going to become an ongoing symposium. It's not. That's not how it is in journalism. I mean, there's a story,

something breaks. If you're at a newspaper if a fire happens or there's an explosion or an airplane crashed, or there's a murder, you got to go. You got to get the facts. You got to dig it up. You got to get the story and it's got to get done that day. So, there's not a lot of time for debate and discussion. But I'm glad. I'm satisfied with my education. I mean, I think it's a good place. Where the university is situated is a really nice part of New Jersey. I liked it there. I didn't go home much because my sister was sick and it was really a tense time in my family. I made a lot of good friends. There are some lifelong friends, people I've kept up with even though I'm down here in Maryland and they're in the New York area. Some people out in California, but overall I would just say I'm happy. I'm happy I had the chance to do that kind of education at that time because it really was the best of both worlds. You could be part of a large university. I took my Intro to Western Civilization history courses at Rutgers, but then as I got more and more involved with Livingston, I just wanted to take my courses there for the most part. I wanted to study with the political science professors. I wanted to study with the history professors there. I wanted to take the journalism courses with the people there ... the Rutgers students and the Douglass students were coming to us to take journalism courses, because the English departments didn't have journalism in those days. So, the catch word of today, it is what it is. It's not going to be 1969 or 1973 or 1977 forever and it's unfortunate that the country swung so far to the right that when we elect Democrats, the best we've done is a conservative like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama is kind of a moderate really in his heart of hearts. I mean, they try to portray him as a Muslim and all these kinds of crazy things, but he's really just a moderate constitutional law professor, but that gets lost in the translation. Generally, I had a very good experience there and I think for the first time in my life I felt engaged. I was involved in the college. I knew the professors. I sought the professors out. I knew the administrators. I knew what was going on at the college. I cared that the college would thrive and survive and that was important. It was important for me to be a part of that. I didn't do graduate school. I never really tested well. Part of it was I didn't test well and part of it was I just wasn't really focused. I had this notion. I think I was led a little bit astray by the poli sci people, to think that I could get into Harvard and some of the top schools for foreign service. I wasn't that kind of material. I just don't think that was in cards for me to do that. Then I applied to law school when my journalism wasn't panning out, but I didn't do that well on the law boards. Then I just decided what I really wanted to be was a reporter and a writer. So, that's what I should do. I

wanted to be a writer and I wanted to be a musician. So, that's what I was going to do and I made it work. I mean, the only thing I partially regret is maybe it might have been beneficial for me to do the degree in journalism, even to do those fifty-two credits, because I probably would have had an easier time getting a first job and it would have better prepared me for, like we talked about, the changes in journalism. Just sitting here talking about it, that whole idea of being comfortable in broadcast, being comfortable in radio, being comfortable in television, being comfortable in print, that all stemmed from Jerry Aumente and Dave Sachsman and those guys, and people around the country who developed journalism programs, but that idea never existed before that there'd be a place to do that at a college, at a university and develop those skills, because that's really what you need to be successful. There's, one of my wife's cousins' sons, he studied for broadcasting and he went into it thinking that he was just going to be a sports broadcaster. He wants to be a sports broadcaster, but his first jobs were covering news, writing news, and they kept telling him, "What we want today are multimedia journalists. We want people who could write for the web. We want people who can do podcasts for the web. We want people who can do their own filming, edit the videotape, write the copy, be on camera, all of it." Livingston was one of the first programs where people could develop all those skills. The fact that I didn't do that hurt me a little bit, but I learned on the job. I just learned on the job and at this point you see I'm here, I'm alive. I've managed this far so I haven't done that bad.

WB: Alright Steve, well thank you for allowing me to come and visit with you. I appreciate it.

SZ: Yes, it's an honor. I mean, in those days I was very engaged. I was the editor of the paper and I was really involved. It was one of the only times I was ever really involved at Rutgers University and it meant a lot to me, so I just appreciate that you'd come and that they'd think to interview me, that they would hear our perspectives from the people who were actually there.

WB: Well, Steve, thank you.

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