

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP ZIPSER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Mr. Philip Zipser on May 10, 2024, in Monroe Township, New Jersey. This is Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much, Mr. Zipser, for sitting down with me and having me in your apartment. I appreciate it.

Philip Zipser: Phil.

SI: Phil, absolutely. To begin, we like to know a little bit about where the people we interview come from and their families. Do you know anything about your family background?

PZ: A little. My father came to America when he was nineteen. His parents sent him to America to avoid conscription into the Austria-Hungarian Army. He came from a small town, or not so small town, in Hungary called (Signet?). We have a Hungarian man here who knows (Signet?). I remember the name because I was brought up for a very wonderful few years in Sea Gate in Brooklyn, the very tip of Coney Island. My father said he went "from (Signet?) to Sea Gate," which was one of his few jokes.

My mother's family was very unique. My grandfather was a *melamed*, a learned man. He was not a rabbi; he was a teacher. He lived and worked in a barter economy. He would give lessons and people would supply him with food, clothing, whatever he needed.

When his oldest two daughters were married and out of the house, he sent his third youngest daughter to America to live in a doctor's house and be a member of the doctor's family, but mainly to be a maid. She got no money for this, but he got the money.

When he got enough money, he sent his only son to America, who was allowed to sleep in the same bedroom as his sister. They put up a curtain dividing it. When the two of them had sent enough money home, Papa, Mama and the remaining three daughters, including my mother, who was the next youngest, [came] to America.

He did not like America. They lived here, married off all their children and left America and went to Palestine. They left America some time just before the First World War and got to Palestine later that year, much later. It took them around nine months to get there. He set up a school there. Rumor has it--my grandmother, we know, died shortly after they got there--supposedly, possibly, he remarried and had more children. I don't know. I do have pictures of their gravesites.

SI: Was that family also from Austria-Hungary?

PZ: Yes.

SI: Do you know the name of the town they came from?

PZ: No.

SI: Okay.

PZ: I don't know where my mother lived. I think it may have been someplace fairly close to Vienna, but I'm not sure.

SI: Do you know anything about your parents' lives before they met?

PZ: My Aunt Fanny, who was the one who came as an indentured servant and who lived long enough to see one of her children run for Congress, told a lot of stories about how they came shortly after the Triangle Shirt factory fire. She went to work, and then, she realized she hadn't given them instructions on how to use the stove. She was sure they were going to burn the building down and she rushed back home. [laughter] I don't know much about them.

[Editor's Note: On March 25, 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in Manhattan caught fire, leaving 146 dead and dozens injured, primarily young, female garment workers.]

Very recently (as a matter of fact, at my 103rd birthday party), one of my great, great nieces showed up with a picture that I had never seen and that I think was my parents' wedding picture. I have it in my phone and it's amazing. My mother was in her forties when I was born. I'm the youngest of the four children. Seeing those pictures of her as a young woman was so meaningful to me. It was amazing to me, because I think I resemble her a great deal, which I never realized until I saw a picture of her as a young person.

SI: She worked in factories, do you think?

PZ: I really know nothing about what she did before she married. I presume they may have done work at the apartment. I think, at that time, frequently, people had what they called piecework, where they would be doing part of a garment. I heard stories about that, but I know very little. My mother always worked.

My father, after they were married, my father dabbled in real estate. He apparently, during the First World War, was very successful. He had a country store. My next to oldest brother, who was eleven years older than I, was an asthmatic kid. The doctors told them, if they wanted to see him live to maturity, they had to get out of New York, that the air was so bad in New York.

He gave them the option of moving to Colorado or the Catskills. He took the Catskills. When I was one year old, the family moved to Catskill and they lived there for about four years. My mother became terribly depressed--I think she was subject to depression--and they came back to New York. My brother lived to be ninety-five.

SI: Okay.

PZ: So, it was a good move for them.

SI: Your father's country store was in the Catskills.

PZ: No, the country store was in Maspeth, New York, which is the first exit now on the Midtown Tunnel, but, at that time, it was very far away from the family.

SI: What are some of your earliest memories about the place you grew up?

PZ: The earliest thing I remember was living in Sea Gate. We moved there when I was in second grade, so, I was probably six. I loved it there. We lived on the last street on the bay. Our backyard touched to the sand, where the rocks were there. They had built jetties of rocks and there were many hermit crabs.

It was a wonderful place for a kid. When the large steamers started coming, the three-stackers, we would get tidal waves that we would try to ride. We would ride around a quarter of a mile on the waves. It was a wonderful, wonderful place.

SI: What were you riding on the waves?

PZ: The waves.

SI: Oh, just body surfing.

PZ: Body surfing, yes. We were probably the poorest family in the 'Gate. I had a horrible experience of being present when my father pleaded poverty and tried to get me *bar mitzvah*-ed without having to pay for it. They really made him grovel, and I was so ashamed of him. It took me years to get over that. I had that experience with my father and I had another one.

Jump ahead--when I was a freshman at Brooklyn College, I was riding my bike. A truck came by and the fender hit me off the bike. I was lying on the street, immobilized. I heard two of the guys say, one asked the other, "Where's his father? He was here a minute ago," and he said, "Oh, he's out measuring the skid marks. He wants to make a case."

Those two things poisoned my relationship with my father. I was angry with him over that. I sort of got over it at the point when he was diagnosed with lung cancer.

SI: How did the family survive in these circumstances? Did he work somewhere else? Did he start another store?

PZ: My father opened a grocery store in Coney Island, on Mermaid Avenue, and we were all involved in that. I remember, Sunday morning, our routine was to take all the credit slips and we ran around the dining room table, stapling them together into packs, so that we could send them a bill and get paid.

SI: How old were you when you started working at the store?

PZ: I started working in the store when I was eleven. My brother, Herman, the one who had been so sick, for my birthday, gave me a bike.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Here we go. We were talking about the store and how you worked there.

PZ: Okay. My brother gave me a bicycle, but the bicycle had a big [basket]. It was a delivery bicycle. He, at that point, was finishing law school. I took over the morning delivery of milk and bread rolls before going to school. At about the same time, I took over the store at six o'clock, when my parents went home, and I ran the store until nine, when we closed. [laughter]

That was fun, though. The minute my parents went out the door, my friends came in the door. There was an occasional customer who might come in, but we played cards there. We had a lot of sacks of food--lima beans were a dime, walnuts were another thing. At the end of the evening, we never settled up with money, but we put the fruit back in the bag, the lima beans and the other dried things. We weren't very sanitary then.

SI: That was during the Depression.

PZ: This was later than the Depression. This was when I was eleven, '32.

SI: Okay.

PZ: It was the time of the WPA and the CCC.

[Editor's Note: The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (or, after 1939, the Works Project Administration) (WPA) were agencies within President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The CCC employed young unemployed males in outdoor conservation projects from 1933 to 1942. The WPA employed millions on public works projects like buildings and roads, as well as in specialized areas, such as the arts, from 1935 to 1943.]

SI: Could you see those programs in action in your area?

PZ: I saw it after the fact. I went to Brooklyn College, which was built by the WPA. People don't know it, but the plans they used were Jefferson's plans for the University of Virginia.

SI: I didn't know that.

PZ: And it was beautiful at that time. If you go look at it now, there are so many buildings in-between, you can't see how beautiful it was when it was just five buildings.

Jumping ahead, I started college in, I guess it was '34. My first impression--the campus was right next to Flatbush Avenue, which is a big, busy thoroughfare--the Trotskyites [followers of Communist leader Leon Trotsky] were on one corner, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade people were signing up people to go fight in the Spanish Civil War on the other corner. It was a wonderful experience. [laughter]

[Editor's Note: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was a group of American volunteers that fought against Francisco Franco's Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).]

My parents moved from Sea Gate. My father went bankrupt. They let me travel by subway to graduate with my class in Coney Island. In grade school, my name was "Zip," "Zippy." When I went to high school, I was the only one from my class who went to New Utrecht High School. So, I knew no one in the high school and I decided to be Phil.

When I got to Brooklyn College, people would come up to me, "Hey, Zip." So, I knew they were people I knew from [grammar school], [laughter] but I sort of erased them completely. It was a very funny experience.

SI: Where did your family move to?

PZ: Bensonhurst. At that point, my two brothers were both out of the house.

SI: It sounds like they were both much older than you.

PZ: Eleven and thirteen years older than me. I was really brought up by my sister, who was four years older than me. They tell me I used to call her "Little Mama." She was most influential to me; the others didn't exist.

In my family, also, my father's sister sent her son to America, to keep him out of the Army. He lived with us until he got married from our house. They made a little apartment in the garret. Do they use the word "garret" now?

SI: No.

PZ: Attic, but we called it a garret. They made it a little three-room apartment for the newlyweds, when he brought a flapper into the family. [laughter]

SI: Was he more your age or your brother's age?

PZ: No, he was a little older than my oldest brother. The two of them hated each other, right from the first day he arrived. I much preferred him to my brothers. He was much nicer to me. [laughter] I really loved the guy.

SI: Tell me a little bit about going to school, before you went to Brooklyn College. What did you like about school? Do any memories about school stand out?

PZ: The swimming pool, we had a swimming pool and I loved that. I swam; no one ever taught me to swim. We just learned, but I loved the fact that I was going to a pool. That was very exciting to me.

By this time, I had a group of friends and we formed a club. We were the Cellar Club. The object was to get girls to come down to our Cellar Club to dance, but we were shortly thrown out of our Cellar Club. Then, one of the guys who lived in a very old house got the okay to use a big garret. We changed our name from the Royals to the Garret-Cellar Club, which was fun.

SI: Were your friends from a mix of backgrounds or were they all Jewish?

PZ: They were all Jewish. It was a very predominantly Jewish neighborhood. I met the kids through Hebrew school.

SI: Okay, I was going to ask if you went to Hebrew school.

PZ: Yes. I started Hebrew school when I was about four or five. What I learned more than anything else in Hebrew school, there was one girl there who liked to experiment with sex. I think I learned more sex from her--I don't remember my parents ever saying a word to me about it. [laughter]

Skip ahead--when I was in sixth grade, it was Washington's [Bicentennial, in 1932]. Our school put on a play. We won the prize for being the best play. We performed in Macy's window. It was a big thing. I pretty much missed English class in school for a four- or five-month period.

During that period, I had one of my first really frightening experiences. My role in the play was as a friend of George Washington's when he was a kid. We had broomsticks, which were our rifles. In horsing around, I hit one of the girls in the groin with my stick. They told me that if she had a baby, it would be my fault. [laughter] So, how old was I then? probably ten, I guess. I couldn't see myself as a father and I was really worried about that one. [laughter]

SI: You would go every day and perform this play.

PZ: Yes.

SI: It ran for quite a while, it sounds like.

PZ: Yes. I blame my poor spelling on that. [laughter]

SI: Was religion an important part of your life growing up?

PZ: It was to my father, not to me.

SI: Okay.

PZ: Yes, it was. My father was not super Orthodox, but he was Orthodox. He did not smoke and did not work on the Sabbath. Of course, my mother, who did not smoke, worked seven days a week. He only worked six.

SI: She would run the store on Saturdays.

PZ: Yes, yes.

SI: Would you wind up going to temple a lot?

PZ: Yes, and I enjoyed a lot of the social aspects.

SI: Okay. Did they have youth groups?

PZ: There was a group called--I'm not sure of the Hebrew name now. I can't think of it, but we did a lot of folk dancing. It was fun.

SI: Was it Young Maccabees?

PZ: No, no, it had a Hebrew name. It may have been Young Maccabees, but (Hashomer Hatzair?).

SI: Okay.

PZ: I'm not sure--(*Hashomer?*) would be some form of "fighters," (*Hatzair?*), "fighters for the land?"

SI: Okay. I know there were a lot of youth Zionist groups and youth Jewish culture groups at that time. It sounds like one of those.

PZ: Yes. Well, the Cellar Club was a substitute for all of that.

Then, we had a substitute group. There was a family in the neighborhood who were affluent. It was sort of a poor neighborhood. She had a daughter and she was disabled--the mother was disabled, she was in a wheelchair--but she had a finished basement. She sort of set up an ongoing party. We were welcome there any evening between six and nine o'clock. We spent a lot of time there. She used to have nice food out for us.

As a matter of fact, her daughter married one of my friends when he went into the Army in early '41 or '42. He was killed. He went overseas and was killed very early. She was widowed before she was twenty-two.

SI: When you were growing up, did you and your family keep track of what was happening overseas? Did you follow world news?

PZ: My mother heard infrequently from her two sisters, who never came to America, who were married and out of the house. My father's family was killed in a *pogrom* in Hungary. All the Jews were pushed up a mountain and they wouldn't let any food go up.

SI: Was that in that town, (Signet?)?

PZ: I don't know where.

SI: Okay.

PZ: Wherever there was a mountain.

SI: At home, would you discuss things like politics or what was happening with the WPA or the New Deal around your dinner table?

PZ: My father was a very intolerant man. He was very anti-black bigoted. My sister, on the contrary (the one who's four years older than I) was very influenced by her first history teacher in high school. My sister was a brilliant woman, by the way. She was a liberal because of him. My sister ended up the editor of her high school paper, she ended up editor of her college paper. She went to Hunter.

My father called it "The Year of Hell." My mother had surgery. She had her gallbladder removed. My sister had scoliosis, I think it's called. She's in the textbooks. She was in the hospital for over six months and they transplanted a bone from her leg into her back.

SI: Really? wow.

PZ: For the rest of my sister's life, once or twice a year, she'd have to go to the hospital because fragments of bone were working their way to the surface. With it all, my sister ended up bearing and rearing three wonderful children and running a very successful business.

SI: At least one of your older brothers went to college, too.

PZ: Both of them. Both of them became attorneys. They started off as business partners, until they were both married. Their wives hated each other, which was the end of the partnership. [laughter] It was the start of a very unhappy thing for my mother, who could not have her whole family together in the house.

SI: Your family clearly valued education. Do you remember them encouraging you to look toward college?

PZ: Yes. My father, when he had the means, both my brothers, one went to St. John's Law School and the other one went to NYU. I knew--my sister, who was my great advisor, among other things, told me--I had to work my ass off and get better grades, so that I could get into a free college.

So, I worked my ass off and I raised my [GPA] enough to be accepted at both Brooklyn and City College. I started and had a year, a year and a quarter, at Brooklyn College before my father had a heart attack. My oldest brother was married by this time and his father-in-law was the doctor who came into the grocery. He came out of checking my father and he said, "He's got to get into bed and he can't work anymore."

The family had a conference and they decided that I would take over the grocery. For the first time in my life, I asserted myself and I said, "In hell. No way will I ever run a grocery store or any retail establishment."

My sister was a newlywed at that point, living in a brand-new development called Parkchester in the Bronx. She had a one-bedroom apartment. Her husband, who I call a saint, allowed her to bring her father, mother and me into their home. They went from a one-bedroom apartment to a three-bedroom apartment. We lived together there until I went into the Army.

SI: Did you continue at Brooklyn College after that?

PZ: No, I had to give up. My saintly brother-in-law had an aunt who worked for Gerstenzang, which was a very well-known home [goods]--they made things for the bored housewives. One of the things they had was a room where women decorated baby sets, jars with the kid's name on it. The art department was cute, it was fun, and she was in charge there.

She got me a job because they had just brought in a brand-new thing called Q-Tips. So, I was in on the start of Q-tips. My job was to run the sterilizing machine. I would deliver the sterilized things to the belt where they were wrapped.

SI: This was all before you went into the Army.

PZ: Yes.

SI: Were you involved with a union there? Was it unionized?

PZ: No, no.

SI: How long did you work there?

PZ: I worked there and switched to City College at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street, Business School. I had to come up with something. So, I decided to be an accountant. I don't know why.

When we moved to Parkchester, I joined the Young Folks League of Parkchester, where I was one of the youngest ones in the group. I met a man who influenced my life so strongly and who became one of my closest friends. He was the President of the Young Folks League. He was an accountant and he was a pianist. He had all these gigs. He would play the piano and I would recite poetry. We were quite a duo.

SI: When did you get into poetry?

PZ: I don't know, someplace in high school.

SI: Did you write it or just read other pieces?

PZ: I was very influenced by the WPA Theatre and by some of the attractions I was able to get to through my sister. She would be getting tickets to shows because she was editor of the paper and she would write reviews. I came across Gian Carlo Menotti. Do you remember the name?

SI: The name's familiar, yes.

PZ: And I loved his recitative and I loved talking in recitative. Sorry, how did I get to that one?

SI: We were just talking about different experiences and you said that there were attractions that your sister got you tickets for. What was the other one?

PZ: I remember *A Third of the Nation*, an English play, *Love on the Dole*, but the absolute best I recall the opera *Samson and Delilah*, which I thought was very dirty. We saw that one at Lewisohn Stadium [at City College of New York]--my first time there.

SI: That brought to mind a question--did you go to the '39-'40 World's Fair?

PZ: Yes. As a matter of fact, I have pictures of that someplace. Yes, I went there with one of my Brooklyn friends, who stayed my friend until he died.

SI: What did the Young People's [Folks] League do?

PZ: The Young People's League of Parkchester? It was a social thing. They introduced me to something that I thought was really the height of sophistication--date-nut bread baked in the can with cream cheese on it. [laughter]

SI: Tell me a little about your studies at Brooklyn College and CCNY. What were you originally studying, before accounting?

PZ: This fellow, Jay, when he heard that I was working in the Q-tip thing, he said, "We have an opening in my firm." He said, "I could get you a job there if you want." He flashed his paycheck to me. It was something like twelve dollars, which was a lot of money. I was making five dollars a week.

I took him up on it. I got the job, with the arrangement that I would be hired for seven dollars a week and I would have to give two dollars a week back. So, I worked for Jack (Rosenbloom?), and found out that the paycheck that was flashed to me was a biweekly paycheck. [laughter]

SI: When you say you had to give two dollars back, did you have to give it back to your friend?

PZ: No, to the firm.

SI: To the firm, okay.

PZ: The principal put on his tax return that he paid me seven dollars, took off a seven-dollar deduction and he pocketed his two dollars. So, that's the kind of accountant he was, [laughter] but we got even with him.

The office was on 42nd Street, right across from the park. We would get money to go by bus to--most of our accounts were in the women's dress trade, were in Northern Jersey towns, Union City, along that stretch. [laughter] I'm laughing--we used to walk from the office down to the

ferry, take the ferry across, climb up the Palisades, so that we only spent around twelve cents, I think it was. We would get twenty-five cents.

I loved being an accountant. I was seduced--when I told the guys in the office about it, they all wanted to get on that account--by one of the bookkeepers who was a married woman in her forties. I was twenty-one, twenty, twenty-one. That was my first, really, sexual encounter.

SI: Going back to Brooklyn College, you mentioned that it was very political. There were Trotskyites on one side of the street, and so on.

PZ: Yes.

SI: Did you get involved in anything political at college?

PZ: No, I didn't.

SI: Okay.

PZ: I did form the first men's potsy team.

SI: What's potsy?

PZ: It's a game, chalk on the sidewalk, this sort of triangle. You threw things. Then, you skipped through it to pick them up. There were songs we used to sing with it. I don't remember them.

SI: Were you working at the accounting firm when you went into the service?

PZ: Yes. As a matter of fact, when I went into the service, it was crazy. As a matter of fact, I'll show you. When you go into the Army, you fill out your background thing and my background thing had me down as an accountant. We're getting into the Army now. I got into the Army. I was supposed to go in and ended up in the hospital.

I skipped this part--when I was eleven, "The Year of Hell," my sister, six months in the hospital, my mother, gallbladder in the hospital, and I was in the hospital with--what is the surgery that every kid had?

SI: Tonsils?

PZ: No, the... [Mr. Zipser points to his lower abdomen.]

SI: Oh, an appendectomy.

PZ: Yes. I had an ulcerated appendix. I was so far gone by the time they got me to the hospital that all they did was cut me open and pour sulfa power in. They didn't have penicillin at that

point. Then, when I was supposed to go into the Army, the appendix acted up again. I had the surgery, which leads me to a whole other story.

SI: Please.

PZ: When I filled out my Army papers, they wanted any body markings that could be used to recognize my corpse if I was killed. I wrote down, "Double appendix scar." I sort of have a V-shaped scar because of the two surgeries.

While I was in the hospital, my friend, Jay, showed up as an officer. He told me, "The minute you get in there, tell them you're interested in going to OCS," Officer Candidate School. He said, "Otherwise, you don't know what kind of shit you'll get."

I found the shit the first day I got into basic training, because they said, "Today," it was at Fort Dix, "we're going to do something different. We're going to start KP [kitchen police] from the back of the alphabet." [laughter] So, I was sent on KP. I was picking out the few good tomatoes from bushels of lousy tomatoes. I got back to the garrison at the end of the day. They said, "Oh, you've been moved to another garrison."

So, I went to the other garrison and they said, "Today, we're going to do something different. We're going to start KP from the back." [laughter] At that point, I remembered what Jay said and I said, "I'm interested in going to OCS." So, they checked my score and I had a high enough score to be accepted.

SI: Do you remember what year and maybe what month you went into the service?

PZ: I think I went into the service around November. I was supposed to go in during the summer, but, because of the appendectomy, it was delayed.

SI: Was that November of 1943?

PZ: '42.

SI: '42, okay. Stepping back, what do you recall about the day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

PZ: A whole group of us were out flying kites under the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. When we got home, my parents were in tears about what had happened. They were worried that I would be going into the Army.

I felt very strongly about it. I went down and I decided--I don't know why--that I want to be in the Navy. I went down to the Navy and the Navy turned me down because of my eyesight. Then, I had the appendectomy and went into the Army.

[Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

It's funny, if you go over there--there's a sheet of paper. [Mr. Zipser's home health aide goes to retrieve the paper.]

I have so many stories and they sort of weave together.

SI: That's very good. That's what we like.

PZ: Okay.

[Mr. Zipser's home health aide returns.]

SI: Thank you. This is a flyer for a Jewish culture event for Memorial Day.

PZ: I got into the Army with a group from the Bronx. We shared the barracks with a group from rural Georgia, who had never seen a Jew. They couldn't believe I was a Jew, because I didn't have a tail and I didn't have horns. They weren't antisemitic; they were just brought up in a place without any Jews.

As one of them said when I asked him, "How come you have such a strange way of talking?" his answer was, "If you spent your life looking up a mule's ass, you'd talk the way that I do." [laughter] I loved that. I never forgot that one, but they weren't antisemitic. They were just brought up to believe that. They really took the towel off around my waist to make sure I wasn't hiding anything.

SI: Did the two groups get along or was there friction, the Jewish New Yorkers and the...

PZ: Georgia Christian garrison.

SI: Yes. Did they get together?

PZ: Yes. We were close. I really ended up liking some of those guys. It wasn't bad, because there were a number of Jews in the Bronx group. Half of them were probably Jewish.

SI: It was a mix of different New Yorkers.

PZ: Right, but I did have a horrible antisemitic experience later on, when I was overseas. You want me to go into it?

SI: Sure, we can jump around.

PZ: Okay. When I got overseas--after I finished Officer Candidate School, I spent a year getting specialized training. I went to Columbus, Ohio, where I took a course in Warehouse Management. I was in the Quartermaster Corps.

I came back to Fort Lee. I forgot to mention, basic training and Officer Candidate School were all at Fort Lee, Virginia. It was my first experience with the blacks having segregated

conditions, where I'd be walking down the street and this elderly man would jump off the sidewalk into the street. I couldn't get over that. It was really shocking to me.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about how basic training and OCS were at Fort Lee.

PZ: Okay.

SI: You mentioned seeing segregation for the first time.

PZ: Yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about OCS at Fort Lee.

PZ: I am always ashamed of myself when I tell this story--I enjoyed it. I had never been away from home. I had slept out of the house maybe three times or four times. I think I was in Manhattan once or twice.

The Army was all the Boy Scout camps that I never went to. I loved the marching and counting cadence. Other people were complaining like hell about everything. To me, it was a fun experience. I was happy in my role and delighted. I grew up. I really was a very immature kid.

SI: Was the training mostly in logistics and things like that?

PZ: The training in OCS? I don't remember much of it. [laughter]

SI: That's all right.

PZ: I really don't remember what it was, but, whatever it was, it was easy for me.

SI: After this long period, you got your commission as a second lieutenant.

PZ: Then, I went to Columbus, Ohio, for a few months. Then, I went to Omaha, Nebraska, for training as a trucking officer. When we checked in, they said, "You're leaving on a convoy delivering trucks to Sedalia, Kansas," to [what was] then called Sedalia Air Force Base, which is now [Whiteman] Air Force Base, I think.

I looked at the listing and they had me down as a driver. So, I trotted inside and I said, "Hey, you've got something wrong--you have me down as a driver. I don't drive." They said, "By the time you get to Kansas, you'll be driving." [laughter]

So, I started driving. I hear pounding in the back. There, we were assigned in groups. I finally managed to stop the thing. Everyone jumped out and went into the truck behind. I was left all alone in the truck. [laughter] I really didn't learn to be a very good driver on that trip.

When that had ended, I was sent to Brackettville, Texas, which is near Uvalde, where John Nance Gardner, who was Roosevelt's Vice President, kept an open house day and night for the military. That was priceless to me. It gave me a home away from home. I knew, anytime I was lonely or I wanted to be away from the Army, I could go there. They were wonderful people.

[Editor's Note: John Nance Gardner, III, served as Vice President of the United States from 1933 to 1941.]

SI: Did you ever see the Vice President?

PZ: Yes.

SI: Really? wow.

PZ: Yes, yes. He was very nice, a very nice man.

SI: Would he talk to the GIs?

PZ: Yes. That's why I felt so terrible about that shooting up there. It was such a peaceful [town], okay. I lost my train of thought again. [laughter]

[Editor's Note: On May 24, 2022, a gunman claimed the lives of nineteen children and two adults and left over a dozen people with injuries at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.]

SI: What were you doing in Texas at that point?

PZ: I was supposed to be training in running an office. The civilian who ran the office was totally deaf and had very strong hearing aids on. He came to me and he said, "Anytime you need me during the working day, come touch me. I turn off my hearing aids, so [that] I could concentrate on my work." I never forgot that one. I loved that.

We were very close to--can't think of the name of the city, but it's a major city in Mexico. We used to go there for food frequently.

SI: Was it Juarez? Was that the city?

[Editor's Note: Juarez is a significant distance from Brackettville, Texas. It is likely a city or town between Jimenez and Ciudad Acuna along the Mexico-US border.]

PZ: Probably. For the first time in my life, I went with a prostitute there. I'm telling this story because it showed up [later]. I got a leave home before going overseas. When I came back to the camp, there was a note at the gate to report to the hospital immediately.

I thought, "My God!" This was after I had been for the first time to a house of prostitution. I was sure, "I probably have a venereal disease." So, I sweat it out. I got there around midnight

and, eight o'clock in the morning, when the Doc comes, he says, "What's this crap about a double appendix scar?" [laughter] I heaved such a sigh of relief.

SI: You went from Texas overseas.

PZ: No, from Texas, I went back to Fort Lee. From Fort Lee, I went to Norfolk, Virginia, for embarkation. The night before we went overseas, for the first and the last time in my life, I got into a crap game. I got on the ship without a cent to my name and owing money to people. I was lucky as hell.

We were, I think, 175 of us on this Liberty ship. It was all officers. The largest group were these Southern Baptist ministers, who were great guys. They were all middle-aged men who had been former drunks, former no-good-niks, who became military men.

SI: Were they chaplains?

PZ: Chaplains, and they taught me every card game there is. They taught me chess. As a matter of fact, one of the pages that my daughter sent [of his wartime diary] was talking about the chess games I was in. They just stayed my friends. There's another story that leads [to that], that reminds me of it.

Anyway, I went overseas as a trucking officer. The Chicago truck drivers' union had volunteered *en masse* and they were all old enough to be my father. When I said something they didn't like, they picked me up and carried me and threw me out. They called me "Liet" ["loot"] [laughter] and I loved them.

We were running a school to teach drivers, local drivers, to drive the trucks. One of the things I do not have a copy of, but I wish I did was, we had a sheet of paper with what to pay if we killed a goat, a sheep, a child--and the girl children were cheaper than the chickens. In Iran, a girl, a daughter, you had to raise a dowry to get her married.

Anyway, I was with the trucking office for a fairly short period of time, long enough to tear the underneath of a truck off on a rock by not judging the rock's [size].

SI: Did you learn to drive there?

PZ: Well, I drove the truck, but I didn't do too well. I was pleased when I got notice that I was being transferred, that the post exchange needed an accountant.

SI: Tell me more about the trip over.

PZ: It was fun, it was fun. We had a lot of reading material. We put on weekly shows. At that time, they had no--what do they call those?--no containers. So, we'd have a box this high next to a box that high and they were all wood. What we did is, we would tear off pieces of wood that were loose and we made a bridge, so that we could walk around the perimeter of the ship. We had a circular thing.

We made a deal with the Navy people that we would do our own cooking. It was long, never too boring for me, because, if you wanted company, you went in and you helped whoever was doing the cooking then. We set up a roster. I learned all these great games.

SI: Were you in a stateroom with other officers?

PZ: No, the Liberty ship had no staterooms. I was fifth up in a canvas hammock. As matter of fact, when we were fishing the people out of the water, I had my pants on backwards. I woke up, tumbled out of bed. I know my knees hurt for days. I was up there and I found myself with my pants on backwards.

SI: You told me that before we started recording--tell me why you're fishing people out of the water.

PZ: Because their ship had hit a mine and went down.

SI: How often did that happen?

PZ: The answer would be (ten times?). The Mediterranean was full of floating mines. After that, we had to be careful as hell. You couldn't go [in] a straight line.

SI: You would zigzag.

PZ: We saw some [mines]; we all took turns. We had people all around the ship watching for mines, but the trip was intriguing. We went through the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, where the natives would come out [in] their native ships.

One guy tore [off] his, I think they call them (Bernese?), and he had flaming red hair. He yelled, "Me British bastard, me Scottish bastard." [laughter] We used to trade cigarettes. I got my first pair of local sandals that way.

SI: Where did you land, finally?

PZ: In Khorramshahr, Iran. Khorramshahr, Iran, I watched the local guys, most of whom were very small men--I wasn't a very tall man, I was five-seven-and-a-half. Backup--they had something around their shoulders in sort of a "U," "J"-shaped thing. They would put a refrigerator on that backpack and the guy would trudge off with that. It was amazing what they could carry on their backs. I was in Khorramshahr and we took a train up to Ahwaz. Ahwaz was the place where the camp was that I was first stationed at.

When we got on the train, I went to the john and I couldn't figure [it] out; it was pretty dark. So, I found someone with a flashlight, borrowed his flashlight, went back. There was a hole in the floor and a set of footprints, but the footprints were in the wrong direction. They weren't aiming at the hole. It was for defecation, plainly. The people, they all wore these dress-like items and they would stoop and defecate there.

SI: When you got to this camp, was that where the truck training assignment was?

PZ: Yes.

SI: You said you weren't there for very long.

PZ: No, I was there long enough to get friendly-- Khorramshahr was on sort of a "U"-shaped bay. We were on one side of the bay and the other side was Abadan. Abadan Oil Company was manned by Jews from Palestine. Shortly after we landed was Passover and they invited all the Jewish GIs over to Abadan Oil Company for the *seder*. I was one of them and I got friendly with [them]. I invited one of the guys back to our place.

A year, maybe, or maybe two years later, I got a rest-and-recuperation leave to Palestine [then a British mandate]. One of these fellows who I was friendly with gave me letters of introduction to three different people in Palestine when I went there the first time in--I think it was 1944.

It was interesting, because one of the letters was to a big shot in the *Histadrut* [General Organization of Workers]. I think it's the labor union. The other one was to the man who ran (I don't know if he owned it or ran it) the major department store in Tel Aviv. The third one was a woman he was very friendly with. He said, "You'll get a homecooked meal." I got the homecooked meal, which was delicious.

I knew there was going to be problems there because one man told me how Palestine would be developed as a union. It will be a liberal, shared community. The other guy said, "We have to be a capitalist country. We have to be able to afford to turn the desert into a garden."

SI: You got to see two different views.

PZ: Yes, yes.

SI: What other impressions did you have of Palestine at that point?

PZ: At that point? I was in Ramallah and, for the first time, I ate one of the giant grapefruits. What do they call them?

SI: Are they *sabras*, like a prickly pear?

PZ: Yes.

SI: I think it may be a *sabra*.

PZ: Things were not bad at that time. I felt comfortable. I went into towns all over.

SI: Could you go to Jerusalem?

PZ: Yes. We took tour things in Jerusalem. It was beautiful. As a matter of fact, I have a painting of Jerusalem one of my friends, who was there years later, did.

SI: When you were first in Iran, what were your impressions of that country?

PZ: I couldn't get over the smell.

SI: Okay.

PZ: Their main fuel was dried dung. They would put it on the walls of the houses. When they fell off the house, it meant they were dry enough to burn. You knew when you were approaching a village by the smell.

What we did, in the Army (they [locals?] showed us how to do it), we built--what were they called?--desert air-conditioning. We got chicken wire. We took out the windows, put chicken wire in with excelsior, which was the packing thing then, with water dripping down through the excelsior. The wind blowing against that really did an amazing job.

One of the other things, while I was in the trucking, half the trucks did not have windshields, but the General had an all-(Jallosene?) house made from the [windshield material?]. When the third or fourth person was killed, because a pebble would hit the driver and we were going over mountains, he was called back to the States in disgrace.

SI: I know in other areas of North Africa (and elsewhere), the Army would have to deal with locals either robbing them or, in some cases, killing people. Was that a problem in Iran?

PZ: Yes. One of my biggest shocks of my life was when we finally closed the Persian Gulf Command. I'll get back to that later.

We were at sea, on the way home. They called seven names over the PA system. I went into the Captain's office and he said, "Pack your things. We're dropping you off at Suez, Egypt." I thought--I went on a drunk [bender]. I completely lost a week. I have no idea what the hell I did or didn't do there.

After that, I had the biggest ball of my life in Egypt, but what you were talking about, I was sitting in front of Shepherd's Hotel [in Cairo] in a car. I had the window open, my hand was up like this. Someone came and tried to rip my wristwatch off. I screamed like hell. The cops came. They said, "How lucky you are." He says, "Usually, they will chop off your hand to get the watch."

SI: That is lucky.

PZ: So, they did have that there, but another [story], when I was in Iran, we had thirteen posts going from the Persian Gulf up to the Russian border. Every place where we had a post, the Russians had a post and the English had a post. Most of the English posts were Indians. It was

fun and embarrassing, because we were able-bodied and all the Russian posts were rest-and-recuperation people. There wasn't an able-bodied guy there.

In Iran, if any enlisted men wanted to make a trip on their off time, they had to have an officer along to get a vehicle. If they asked me, I always said yes. On one of the trips, I went into a nearby town where a man had just imported his American wife.

He had been in school in America, married her in America. They were coming back. So, we were invited to the wedding, the whole village was. We went to the wedding and I met this woman and the man. Everything was fine.

Going back to the incident at Shepherd's Hotel, the same day I had that incident with the watch, on the Shepherd's Hotel veranda, I meet that woman again. I said, "What are you doing here?" It turned out he had three other wives. She did not know. He did not tell her that she was his fourth wife.

SI: She got out of there.

PZ: Yes. That was amazing. The funny thing was, they say that Shepherd's was "the crossroads of the world" and it turned out that it was for me.

SI: Yes. Going back to your duties in Iran, you went from the trucking outfit to a PX.

PZ: Yes.

SI: Tell me a little bit about that.

PZ: When I got there, the man in charge of the whole PX operation was a Major (Versonel?) from Philadelphia, whose hobby was collecting silk Persian rugs. You walked into his room, you had to step up like that. I never was quite sure if he bought them or was swapping things for them. After a short period, his assistant, who was Captain Roth--he [the Major] went back to the States, with all his silk rugs--Captain Roth became a major.

Captain Roth, when I first met him was the week after his wife, who he married a nurse there, she became pregnant and went home. So, I got there a week after she left, when he was awfully down in the dumps. We became best friends. We were really like brothers. We shared everything. I worked for him.

After I was there for a while, we got a second man. He and I, we're both first lieutenants at that point. When he [Roth] became the major, I became a captain. This fellow, who was my roommate, he was an emigree from Germany. He did say that all of his uncles and cousins (and maybe siblings) were Nazis.

He said that I got the captaincy not because I was better, but because I was a Jew. It tore the camp apart. There were the people who were "pro-Phil" and the "pro-Ike." It was the most uncomfortable experience of my Army career. It was a horror.

SI: Would people just not socialize with you because of this incident?

PZ: Yes, but we, throughout this, lived together. One of the trips I got was to Luxor, Egypt. That's quite a place. On the trip, I met a nurse and we became very good friends. Her name was Mary Jones from Metter, Georgia. You know what?--I'm in Egypt now--King Farouk needed surgery. He opts to go into the American hospital, an Army hospital.

[Editor's Note: King Farouk I (1920-1965) ruled Egypt and the Sudan from 1936 until he was dethroned in a military *coup d'état* in 1952 and went into exile in Italy.]

Mary Jones comes into the officers' club that night and she prances in. I said, "What's happened to you?" and she said, "I'm the only girl from Metter, Georgia, who ever had her ass pinched by a king!" King Farouk. So, that was my entrée to royalty. Anytime he had a party, he invited her and I was her escort.

SI: Wow.

PZ: And he was a bastard. The table decorations were always rosebuds. He would break off a rosebud, dip it in red wine. If any officer had his back turned to Farouk, he would throw the bud against the guy's back. The uniform would be shot. You could never get that red wine out.

SI: Any other impressions of King Farouk?

PZ: Yes, he was a fun guy.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: How long were you in Egypt?

PZ: I got there just around the first of the year.

I want to close up Iran. We turned over the thirteen camps to the Iranian Army. We had an American grave[yard] for the guys. A lot of them were the truck drivers who were killed. I went up to do a final Graves Registration checkup.

The Tehran post was like a country club. It was all the red-brick buildings, beautiful shape, swimming pool. I remember hearing about Roosevelt's death when I was on top of a diving board. They made a big posting--but we were bastards. We took paperclips, the metal clips, opened the box and strewed them inside the safe, spun the combination dial, so that it was closed. Some bastard would pick it up, shake it (if they could) and hear something's in it.
[laughter]

We were back in Egypt.

SI: Yes. Actually, I have a couple more questions about Iran.

PZ: Go ahead.

SI: You mentioned that there would also be English and Russians nearby. Would you interact with them much?

PZ: Yes, we did. That's where I learned how to drink vodka. The Georgian kids all knew how to make vodka. They didn't call it vodka--they called it "rotgut." They made it out of the potato peelings, mainly. When I was in Ahwaz, it was very, very hot there. Our working day was six in the morning to one o'clock. Then, we'd go to the officers' club, drink until we passed out and go back the next morning.

SI: I understand that, back then, there was a lot of drinking involved in the Army.

PZ: Yes.

SI: I would imagine it was even more so when you can't do anything else, in that kind of environment.

PZ: Yes. The officers' clubs had a lot of drinking.

SI: You were in charge of this PX. Did you have other duties?

PZ: No, it was full-time.

SI: Okay.

PZ: I closed the Persian Gulf--I sold off all the items. I got a letter from the man who bought them, that, "The condoms are holey and the chocolate is moldy." What could I do for him? I was such a straight kid.

In Egypt, I was given the same job, closing the PX-es. By this time, I knew how to handle it. I apparently was one of the very few people who ended up bringing some money back from overseas post exchanges, which they were very appreciative of.

SI: Yes, I would imagine there would be a lot of opportunity for "self-enrichment."

PZ: In Egypt, my roommate was Don Frank from Texas, who was a very nice guy. We were sharing a suite in a *pension* [guest or boarding house]. He introduced me to a man he worked with who was the finance officer, Jerry Frank, who was Jewish and turned out to live two blocks away from Parkchester.

Jerry and I became very close friends, and we were friends until he died. When my youngest daughter was getting married, my friend Jerry was president of the temple. In the Jewish religion, the weekend before a wedding, they have sort of an introduction of the couple. It's like a betrothal, I guess. He said how much he enjoyed doing this one. He told the story of how we

met in Egypt and became friends. I felt very good about it, because I made a good impression on my Philadelphia new in-laws, who were great people.

SI: That's good. You were closing down the PX-es in Egypt. Who would usually buy the things you were selling? Were they local businesspeople?

PZ: Local people. A lot of it, we just dumped. I knew that you couldn't get that much for anything. I would rather dump it. We had a lot of fires, just burning it up. The one thing we did not burn up were the condoms, because we used them for decorations.

When I came back to the States, I was the senior officer on the ship, as a captain. We had a regular Army major in the Medical Corps who spent the entire trip looking for me and yelling at me. [laughter] When we came into the New York Harbor, we had condoms blowing all around the ship. I thought the ship looked beautiful; he didn't. [laughter]

SI: Were you in Egypt when the war ended?

PZ: When did the war end?

SI: May of 1945.

PZ: I was still in Iran then.

SI: Okay. That's when the Persian Command was shut down in Iran.

PZ: Yes. In Iran, I was in the PGC, Persian Gulf Command. In Africa, I was in AMET, Africa-Middle East Theater. I remember anti-American riots there while we were there.

SI: Tell me about that.

PZ: Yes, I remember we were told not to go out in the streets at that point.

SI: Can you explain why the riots started?

PZ: I don't remember.

SI: Okay. How long did that period of hostility last?

PZ: A few days. Anyway, at that time, I was in a *pension* in Egypt, but the Army decided to cut out the per diem. They moved us out to a camp, maybe two or three miles outside of Cairo. I still have the card--Heliopolis was where the post was.

There was a club there that went back to the days when the English were running it. It was a beautiful place. We used to go there a lot. That's where I learned to watch and enjoy horseracing. The guy always said, "You go to the paddocks and you bet on the horse that takes the last shit before the race." [laughter]

SI: That's a good tip. Did you ever become friendly with any British personnel?

PZ: Not really, no. I was friendly with some people who were stationed in India. I have some things inside here--no, they're at my daughter's house now--where we traded things. I would get them Iranian things that they wanted and they would bring me things that I ordered. We'd trade with cigarettes.

I don't remember--they were bringing us food. We frequently, when we were running the PX in Iran, would not be able to get food through. We would send out a hunting party and we would be serving gazelle burgers, boar burgers, using local meat.

SI: When did you wind up coming home?

PZ: When I left Egypt, we went from Egypt to Bremerhaven, Germany, where I carried my girlfriend's suitcase down on the dock and kissed her goodbye, with a thousand (it felt like a thousand) people applauding on the ship. [laughter] It's funny--skip ahead to around maybe ten years, I get a call. I was living on Long Island, near what was then Idlewild Airport [now JFK].

SI: Okay.

PZ: And I get a phone call from Mary Jones from Metter, Georgia. She had a twelve-hour wait for a plane. So, I picked her up and brought her to the house. I took out my album. My daughter Joanie, who turned sixty-eight two days ago, was looking over our shoulders. There was a picture of Mary Jones and I kissing. She said (Joanie), "You kissed my father!" [laughter]

SI: She was the one you kissed on the dock in Bremerhaven.

PZ: Yes.

SI: How was the trip through Europe? Did you stay anywhere for any amount of time between Egypt and Bremerhaven? Were you just traveling?

PZ: We didn't travel through Europe. We embarked in Alexandria. We dropped off a whole series of people who were transferred from the hospital in Egypt to the hospital in Germany. Then, from Bremerhaven, we went across home.

SI: I imagine that was faster.

PZ: Yes. That's the ship that I was the commanding officer on--in hiding. [laughter]

SI: What was it like coming back home after being overseas for all that time?

PZ: I felt like Methuselah. I was infinitely stupid--I had never graduated from college. I went back to the free college, to City College. They were very nice to me. They gave me credit for every sports course they had, for a sex course they had. I was able to graduate in one semester.

SI: That's good.

PZ: Then, with the recommendation--I had a really nice recommendation from the Army post exchange, the international--I was able to get a job with *the* Jewish accounting firm. At that time, the "Big Seven" did not hire Jews. From there, I quickly found that I did not like being a public [accountant]. I had taken and passed the CPA exams.

I was offered a job by the client whose books I was auditing. It was the Lionel Trains. They had just bought a company that was a fishing tackle company and also--what are the planes that go around with the overhead motor, Sikorsky?

SI: Oh, helicopters.

PZ: Helicopters. So, they offered me a job and I took it. I took it when I had just bought a house, I had a six-month-old kid. I felt very brave, but it worked out fairly well and I was reasonably successful. The [next?] company I worked for--I put an ad in the paper and it offered a job and I took it--with a company that made everything to keep the bored housewife happy, except dildos. We drew the line on that.

We became a "football." Over the period of tenure that I worked for them, we were owned by around four different companies. The last one was Greyhound Buses. I did not get along with the guy who they sent in to check on me. I told him at one point that, "Look, I'm going to tell you what I think, whether you like it or not. I know you have the right to fire me, but I am going to be absolutely honest with you."

What happened was, they made a huge mistake when they did the pre-purchase audit. They did not take into consideration administrative costs. I could never figure out how it happened. The guy who did that is the guy who fired me. By this time, I was over sixty-five--no, I was sixty-two--and I decided to take early retirement. My wife was four years younger than I.

There was an ad in the local newspaper, small-town newspaper, that the school board needed a treasurer. I applied for that and I got that job. It didn't pay a real salary. It paid a minimal honorarium, but it gave me health coverage for myself and my wife. I kept that until we moved to New Jersey, after my daughter [moved to Pennsylvania]. It was fun. I knew half the teachers.

I said, when I reported for duty there the first time--I think I started with a three-thousand-dollar-a-year honorarium--I said to the business manager, "What are my duties?" He said, "Your main duty is to sign the checks." I said, "No one signs checks today. You buy a slot for that and the slot signs the checks for you." "Oh, really? You want to do that? Do it." So, I converted from a hand-signed check to a slot check. Then, they really didn't have anything for me to do. I hung around there. Occasionally, I would help the business manager with something.

SI: Did you get involved in any veterans' groups?

PZ: Yes, I did. There was a short-lived group that formed, (Amvets?), I think it was called, but it really never took hold. It was a veterans' group, that maybe it was during the short period I was in Parkchester. I remember we had a fundraiser for them. I did not like the American Legion.

Ended up, my youngest daughter was caught smoking pot in the high school gym with her two closest friends. They were given the choice of either going to court for a trial or going into a narcotics control group. The other parents and I and the girls agreed they would prefer the narcotics control group.

So, the next phase of my life, for the next twenty-five years, I was treasurer of the Valley Stream Bridge. I worked with them long enough and successfully enough that we were able to buy the building we were in. We had a Friday night bingo game that raised a lot of money. The organization still is in existence.

SI: Was that charity work?

PZ: I have a roll in my room with all the charity works I did. I've been a volunteer-nik all my life.

[Mr. Zipser's home health aide goes to retiree the roll.]

I worked for fifteen years as an ESL [English as a second language] teacher. I worked at the Monroe Township Library.

SI: Okay.

PZ: I worked with--I'm trying to remember the name of it--the RSVP program, Responsible Senior Volunteer Program. I was a volunteer tax preparer on Long Island.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PZ: My parents were first generation. Neither one of them had any help in learning the language. My father wrote phonetically. My mother very seldom wrote.

[Mr. Zipser's home health aide returns.]

That's it.

SI: Here, I will read these. There's a few certificates that Mr. Zipser has shared. One of them is your membership in the New York State Society of Certified Public Accountants, 1966. There's the Nassau County Department of Drug and Alcohol Addiction "Certificate of Appreciation."

PZ: Bridge.

SI: Yes, Bridge; The American Association of Retired Persons awarding you a "Gratitude for Dedicated Service" certificate as an instructor-coordinator-counselor in the Tax Aide/TCE Program. There's one from the State of New Jersey, The Department of Community Affairs, Division of Aging, Office of the Ombudsman for the Institutionalized Elderly. It's a Certificate of Recognition.

PZ: I worked there for fifteen years, too.

SI: Yes, for the Volunteer Advocacy Program, wonderful. This is a Ten-Year Service Award for the Joint Coalition of Community Service Agencies for "Friends of the Bridge;" this is great. It seems like you were doing this over a long period of time. You said you also do a lot of volunteer work here in Monroe Township.

PZ: And, now, I'm "Mr. Gardener" here.

SI: Okay. I saw you're doing things, like giving a talk on Memorial Day. Are there other activities you're involved in here at Monroe Village?

PZ: I introduced two things when I moved here--pickle ball and line dancing.

SI: Wow. You only moved here a few years ago, right?

PZ: Yes. March was the start of my seventh year.

SI: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the record? Do you want to say anything about your family? How did you meet your wife?

PZ: I met my wife when I was at a hotel in Lake George, New York. My wife was on an island in Lake George when it was raining like hell. It was the first time she and the two women she was with had ever camped. The tent obviously was [inundated with] water. So, they took a broom and touched it [a bulge in the tent roof], not realizing that would make the canvas porous. So, they got into their boat and came to the hotel I was at.

At that point, I had met a couple up there who I knew with their baby. I was dancing with the baby on my shoulder. I saw Adele, who became my wife, walk in, and I thought she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She reminded me of the picture of "The Three Graces" that we had in our public school, of the women sitting on top of a cliff, staring into space. She was a blue-eyed, blonde with her hair up, just the way those women looked.

I just flipped over her and I asked her to dance. She said, "Would your wife let you?" I said, "This isn't mine--it's a friend's." [laughter] That was a July 4th weekend and we were married in October.

SI: What year was that?

PZ: '52.

SI: Okay.

PZ: My kids were born in '54 and '56.

SI: Okay. You have two children.

PZ: Yes, two daughters.

SI: How many grandchildren do you have?

PZ: I had five grandchildren, two granddaughters and three grandsons. They are all married and they produced one great granddaughter and ten great grandsons. I still find that strange since my two brothers and I only had daughters. Including my in-law children and grandkids, I now have twenty-five direct descendants.

I took up with a woman two years after my wife died. I moved here with her. Sylvia, she was a Swiss woman who came to America in her forties. She was Catholic, but she was as much Catholic as I am Jewish. We were very happy together for over fifteen years. We frequently spoke about the extensive history we piled up

We moved here together. We resumed our gardening here together. We were a great gardening team. You give us a plot of land, we'll turn it green. [laughter] Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with cancer and died two years ago.

I was her caretaker for her last year of life. It was very demanding and I ended up with a bloody ulcer and pancreatitis, which is why I'm now on a fat-free diet. I currently allow myself one percent fat.

SI: One final question--what was your most vivid memory about serving in World War II?

PZ: Serving in the Army?

SI: Yes. What was your most vivid time? Was it something overseas?

PZ: I think standing on a pier in Egypt with no one there, with these other six guys, and unbelieving--we just couldn't accept it--there was no one. There was water in front of us, sand in back of us and nothing else, no one there. I've never gotten over the shock of that.

SI: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the recording?

PZ: I'm glad for every new day and still look forward to many more.

SI: You've done a great job; hope I didn't wear you out too much. [laughter] Thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 5/23/2024

Reviewed by Phil Zipser 6/1/2024