

THE WILLIAM BREMAN JEWISH HERITAGE MUSEUM  
ESTHER AND HERBERT TAYLOR  
JEWISH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ATLANTA

**MEMOIRIST:** IRVING SCHOENBERG  
**INTERVIEWER:** MARVIN WEINTRAUB  
**LOCATION:** DUNWOODY, GEORGIA  
**DATE:** FIRST INTERVIEW (July 7, 2005)  
SECOND INTERVIEW (July 14, 2005)

INTERVIEW BEGINS

<Begin Tape 1 Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing Irving Schoenberg. Today is July 7th, 2005, for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, which is co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. We are at the home of *Colonel* Schoenberg?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Colonel Schoenberg, Mr. Schoenberg, whichever you prefer, I'll use. The Colonel is sitting here at his home down Winding Ridge *Circle*? . . .

**Irving:** Court.

**Marvin:** . . . Winding Ridge Court. I say Atlanta, Georgia, but . . .

**Irving:** Dunwoody.

**Marvin:** . . . Dunwoody—which is not an incorporated city, but may be next week—Dunwoody, Georgia<sup>1</sup>. Nice to be with you.

**Irving:** Thank you, Marvin.

**Marvin:** We'll discuss a few things today, and then carry on one day next week.

Let's start with some of the basics—date of birth . . .

**Irving:** Five November 1925 [11/5/1925].

**Marvin:** . . .1925, good night, that means you're going to have a birthday in November.

**Irving:** In November I'll be eighty years old.

**Marvin:** You're a youngster. I do know you keep very active, and we'll get to that in a little bit. And where were you born?

**Irving:** St. Joseph, Missouri<sup>2</sup>, which is in the northwest corner of the state.

**Marvin:** I haven't been to "MO." [Missouri] It's one of the two states I have not driven in.

**Irving:** Well, you need to do that.

**Marvin:** I'll get there one day. St. Joe, MO [Missouri], and how about your parents? Let's talk a moment about [them]. Were they born in St. Joe?

**Irving:** Oh, no. My father and mother both were born in a country that is now called the Republic of Moldova<sup>3</sup>.

**Marvin:** Moldova.

**Irving:** M-O-L-D-O-V-A. At the time that they lived there, it was an area called Bessarabia<sup>4</sup> and Bessarabia went between Romania and Russia back and forth during the

<sup>1</sup> Dunwoody is an affluent suburb, located in DeKalb County, in the northern portion of the metro Atlanta area.

<sup>2</sup> St. Joseph is the county seat of Buchanan County, Missouri and the principal city the region.

<sup>3</sup> The Republic of Moldova is in Eastern Europe, bordered by Romania to the west and Ukraine to the north, east, and south. The capital city is Chisinau, also called Kishinev.

<sup>4</sup> Bessarabia is a region in Eastern Europe, bounded by the Dniester river on the east and the Prut river on the west, with a history of annexation/reign by Romania, Ukraine, USSR, and Russia.

war years [World War I]<sup>5</sup>. My parents both left there. My mother [Mary Bertha Hochman] left in 1909, and she was seven years old at the time. My father [Morris Schoenberg] had gone off to a gymnasium<sup>6</sup> in Chisinau [also called Kishinev], which is the capital city of the Republic of Moldova. He was sent away to school and was fifteen or sixteen years old when he got word—through a very minor government official, a friend of our family—that the Czar<sup>7</sup> was out to get students who were too radical and too inclined to raise hell. So they got him out, he was about fifteen years old, and he came to the United States.

**Marvin:** Where did they land, do you know?

**Irving:** Yes, both came through Ellis Island<sup>8</sup>. My mother came with her family, she was the last of the ten children who came [to] this country<sup>9</sup>. My father and mother both came from a *shtetl*<sup>10</sup> called Telenesht<sup>11</sup> which I visited in 1996. Kishinev is the site of some of the worst pogroms<sup>12</sup> in Jewish history, in 1903 and again in 1905. The family left in 1909, but my grandmother and grandfather already sensed that things were not going to get any better. They had ten children to worry about, and so they decided it was time to leave. The oldest brother—for whom I am named—Israel . . .

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<sup>5</sup> World War I was a global war originating in Europe and lasting from 1914 to 1918.

<sup>6</sup> A European secondary school that prepares students for university.

<sup>7</sup> Czar Nicholas II, (1868 – 1918), was the last Russian emperor. He was killed, with his wife Alexandra and their children, by the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution in 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Ellis Island in Upper New York Bay served as the major immigration station for the U.S. from 1892 to 1924. During that period an estimated 12 million immigrants passed through facilities there, where they were processed by immigration authorities and obtained permission to enter the country.

<sup>9</sup> Irving Schoenberg's maternal grandparents—William Velvel Hochman and Charna Bronstein—had ten children: Israel, Henry, Hymia, Fannie, Mollie, Sarah, Rebecca, Golda, Jacob, and Mary (Irving's mother).

<sup>10</sup> A *shtetl* was a small town with a large Jewish population, which existed in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. They were mainly found in Russia, Poland, Austria, and Romania.

<sup>11</sup> Telenesht is located north of Chisinau and is the administrative center of the region.

<sup>12</sup> A pogrom is an organized massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular, Jews in Russia or eastern Europe. The Kishinev pogrom was a major anti-Jewish riot that took place in April 1903. Further rioting erupted in October 1905.

**Marvin:** That's on your mother's side?

**Irving:** All of this is on my mother's side, the Hochman side.

**Marvin:** H-O-C-H-M-A-N?

**Irving:** Yes. My oldest uncle—my mother's oldest brother, Israel [Hochman]—had been drafted into the Russian Army<sup>13</sup> and served for thirteen years. You never knew how long you were going to serve when you got drafted, and he served thirteen years, as far as I can tell [through] my genealogical<sup>14</sup> research. He sired four children and [he and his wife] lived in a small town not too far from Telenesht. The family arrived in dribbles and drabbles—the children left one at a time, two at a time. There were four boys and six girls, and of course, the boys were all interested in avoiding military service.

So after my Uncle Israel [Hochman] was in the military, my Uncle Henry [Hochman]—who was the next oldest son—they managed to get him some kind of papers, and he was smuggled out of Europe and came . . . this is quite a story. He was headed towards the United States, and by this time the family had decided they were going to go to St. Joe, Missouri because there was already a colony being formed, of people from Bessarabia and Telenesht, going to St. Joe, Missouri. That's a very strange story, how they picked that out. The family began to move, and the older sisters and older brothers started leaving in about 1905. The oldest boy at that time was my Uncle Hymia [Hochman], and he came directly to the United States.

But my Uncle Henry, who was next older to him, got on a boat in Bremerhaven—I presume—somewhere up in the North Sea. For some reason, he got

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<sup>13</sup> The Russian Army was active from the early 1700s to the Russian Revolution of 1917.

<sup>14</sup> Genealogy is the study of families and family history.

communicating with a man who was Hispanic<sup>15</sup> and spoke Yiddish<sup>16</sup>, so they could communicate somehow. This Hispanic fellow said to my Uncle Henry, “Where are you going?” He said, “To St. Joseph,” but he didn’t say, St. Joseph, Missouri, he just said, St. Joseph. This fellow said, “Ah, San José!”<sup>17</sup> so my uncle ended up in South America. I’m not sure whether it was Argentina or Puerto Rico or Costa Rica, but for three years he was there, and he eventually came back to St. Joe, Missouri.

The family worked, saved their pennies and dimes, and managed to bring [the siblings] over one at a time, two at a time, and the last four children—of which my mother was the youngest—she and two sisters and a brother, all came with my grandparents and landed at Ellis Island in 1909.

**Marvin:** So all ten. How about your grandfather? You said this is your mother . . .

**Irving:** My grandfather came too. The two grandparents came with the four youngest children.

**Marvin:** . . . ah, the four youngest children, meanwhile having sent the other ones.

**Irving:** Yes, everybody else had gone. The only one left then, in Europe, was my Uncle Israel, the oldest of the four [boys]. It wasn’t until 1922 that they were able to get him out. But [they] saved enough money to pay the passage for the whole family, so he reunited with the family in 1922.

An interesting comment, the first thing he said was, “Where’s my baby sister?”—my mother, Mary—and this was 1922. So my mother was already twenty years old. He only lived, Uncle Israel, until 1924.

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<sup>15</sup> Relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Latin America.

<sup>16</sup> Yiddish is the historical language of the Ashkenazi Jews.

<sup>17</sup> San José is the capital city of Costa Rica.

**Marvin:** Just two years [in America].

**Irving:** Yes, I don't know what killed him, but something. The reports are strange as to what was the cause of death. But [in] 1924 he died, and I was born in 1925, so thus the name, Israel.

**Marvin:** How did your father end up in St. Joe?

**Irving:** There was a relationship between my father and my mother . . .

**Marvin:** Back in the old country.

**Irving:** . . . in the old country. My father's family also came from Telenesht, and they knew each other, the families knew each other. But my father didn't come until about 1915 or 1916. One of his first cousins—my Uncle Chaim Fishman, my father's first cousin—was already living in St. Joe and, incidentally, married one of my mother's sisters. So my father and my Uncle Chaim were first cousins, and they both married sisters—double relations.

My father managed to get out. Again, people told him that the Czar was going to send him to Siberia<sup>18</sup> if he didn't get the hell out. So he came to the United States, and he lived in New York City [New York] for a short while, barely surviving—he told me in one of our conversations—because he had a second cousin, or somebody, living in New York. Then he went to St. Joe to visit his first cousin, my Uncle Chaim. While he was there, he met my Aunt Goldie [Golda Hochman Wienshienk], who was my mother's next oldest sister, and they fell in love, but they didn't get married right away. My father went back to New York, and what do you know, he got drafted into the United States Army in 1917. He told me that he was one of 100 men who were called down to

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<sup>18</sup> In 19th century Russia, criminals and political radicals were often sent to labor camps in the region of Siberia as punishment.

the draft board. They examined them, and they chose two—my father was one. So he got into the Army in 1917, and they sent him up to Camp Upton, New York, that's on Long Island [New York]. He hadn't been there very long, and they put him on a ship going to France.

**Marvin:** Going back home.

**Irving:** Going back home, yes. I remember one story, he was given a rifle, the sergeant gave him a rifle, and took him to the rail of the ship and said, "You see those white waves out there? Shoot at them." The rifle was probably a Springfield 1903 model<sup>19</sup>, which is what they had then. So that was my father's firing range experience. He got to France, and he was in France until the end of the war, until 1918. Then they sent him over to Eastern Europe. Because he spoke Russian, he was a translator, so he stayed [past] the end of the war. He didn't get back to the States until after about twenty-some months over there.

**Marvin:** So he missed the Czar's army for seventeen years but spent a few years with the American army.

**Irving:** Yes, quite a few years.

**Marvin:** Did he ever get back to the *shtetl* while he was there?

**Irving:** No, he never did. When we were stationed in Germany in 1959 to 1962, I tried to get him to come back to visit us. We weren't very far from a lot of the World War I battlefields. He didn't want to come, he wasn't interested, so he never did come.

**Marvin:** Just for the record, and we'll get to it later, Colonel Schoenberg spent some time, obviously in Europe. We'll get to his military career later . . .

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<sup>19</sup> The M1903 Springfield, formally the U.S. Rifle, is a five-round magazine fed, bolt-action service repeating rifle, used primarily during the first half of the 20th century.

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** So . . .

**Irving:** So, let me continue with my father.

**Marvin:** Yes, I want to see how he got back to St. Joe.

**Irving:** When my Aunt Goldie—the one who my father thought he had a love affair going with—when he left to go to France, my Aunt Goldie decided to get married to my Uncle “Abe” [Abraham] Wienshienk. She felt sorry for my father—the poor soldier boy over in France—and she told her youngest sister, my mother Mary, “Why don’t you write to Morris? He would really like to have some correspondence.” So he began writing to my mother, and after the war he came back to St. Joe, Missouri, and they got married, eventually.

**Marvin:** What did the family do in St. Joe?

**Irving:** Well, one of the reasons that St. Joe was attractive is that there were five big meat-packing plants. Anybody who could lift anything could get a job, and this word got back to Telenesht, that if you’re going to come to the United States, come to St. Joe. There are people here who speak Yiddish and who are from our same place, and you can get a job just like that, and they did.

So my Uncle Henry and my Uncle Hymia, the third-youngest boy, came to the United States with my Uncle Chaim Fishman—they were very, very close friends—in 1905. They immediately went to work in the meat-packing plant. People were told that when you come here, you can get a job very quickly, and they did.

**Marvin:** Is there still that large Jewish community in St. Joe?

**Irving:** No, unfortunately. At one point there were 300 Jewish families in St. Joe and there were three congregations. [The] Orthodox,<sup>20</sup> to which my family belonged and where I grew up, was called *Shaare Sholem*, Gates of Peace. The Conservative was called *B'nai Yaacov*, the Sons of Jacob, and the Temple was the Reform, *Adath Joseph*, A-D-A-T-H. *Adath Joseph* is still functioning, and the Conservative is now a combination. The Orthodox was combined with the Conservative, and the Orthodox synagogue was torn down many, many years ago.

It's very, very difficult to get a rabbi<sup>21</sup> who will minister to very few people. The Temple has a hard time keeping a rabbi, and the Conservative congregation imports a rabbi a couple of times a month or for the High Holidays,<sup>22</sup> however they work it. There's a man who lives in Kansas City [Missouri] who's a rabbi but primarily an educator.

**Marvin:** Since we're in that area, let's talk about you growing up in St. Joe. What's a nice Jewish boy like you doing in St. Joe in—say—1930, when you begin going to school?

**Irving:** One of the things that was most interesting is the fact that this large family of mine—all my aunts and uncles—the only one who was dead was my Uncle Israel, who died in 1924 . . . I grew up with nine aunts and uncles, or nine sets of aunts and uncles—except for Uncle Israel—and my mother and father; and that family spawned 25 first cousins.

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<sup>20</sup> Orthodox Judaism is the traditionalist branch of contemporary Judaism. Reform Judaism is a liberal strand characterized by a lesser stress on ritual and personal observance. Conservative Judaism has historically represented a midpoint on the spectrum of observance between Orthodox and Reform.

<sup>21</sup> A rabbi is a Jewish scholar or teacher—especially one who studies or teaches Jewish law—who is appointed as a Jewish religious leader.

**Marvin:** [whistles]

**Irving:** They ranged in age, of course—some of them are considerably older than my mother—but I had first cousins that were way up there in age compared to my age. Because we are such a close-knit family, we all lived within spittin’ distance of each other on Ninth Street and Tenth Street. We used to call it Lokshen Boulevard and Kugel Avenue.<sup>23</sup>

**Marvin:** [chuckles]

**Irving:** I could walk across the street to my aunt’s house, my Aunt Becky Fishman—who was like another mother to me—and I had other relatives that lived on Ninth Street, and some lived on Tenth Street. Uncle Henry—who finally came to the United States after three years in South America—had a store down near the meat-packing plant. He catered to the Poles and the Yugos<sup>24</sup> and all the ethnic groups that were there, working in the plant. (There’s a very interesting story about how he conducted his business.) He lived in South St. Joe, but all the rest of the family lived very close together, on those two streets. So you could walk to the synagogue. We lived on Ninth Street, the synagogue was on Seventh Street, so no problem. We walked to the synagogue for all the holidays.

I grew up knowing that I was very definitely a Jew. My grandfather and grandmother were wonderful people. We always had *seder*<sup>25</sup> on the first night, *seder* on

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<sup>22</sup> The High Holidays mark the beginning of the Jewish new year and include Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

<sup>23</sup> *Lokshen kugel* means "noodle pudding" in Yiddish. A *kugel* is a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish dish; a baked pudding or casserole, most commonly made from egg noodles or potato.

<sup>24</sup> People from Poland (“Poles”) and Yugoslavia (“Yugos”).

<sup>25</sup> The *seder* is a ritual performed by a community or by multiple generations of a family, involving a retelling of the story of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. It is often accompanied by a feast, like the *seder* that marks the beginning of Passover.

the second night. I started Hebrew school<sup>26</sup> at the Talmud Torah<sup>27</sup> when I was about seven years old and went until I was *bar mitzvah*<sup>28</sup> at age thirteen.

I had to come directly from grade school. From grade school I had to come down on Tenth Street, where the Talmud Torah was, and where the Hebrew instruction was to be given. So I was not a *Talmudic* scholar,<sup>29</sup> by any means, but I learned to read Hebrew and the prayers for holidays, et cetera.

**Marvin:** You're talking about your grandmother and grandfather—this is your maternal grandmother.

**Irving:** All my maternal family.

**Marvin:** None from your father's family?

**Irving:** My father's family all remained . . . eventually he got his mother and father [to America], because he served in World War I and he was a citizen. As a result of his service, he was able to bring his mother [Raisel Fishman Schoenberg] and his father [name not given] and two brothers, two younger brothers, and they all came to the United States.

**Marvin:** To St. Joe.

**Irving:** Yes, under his sponsorship. No, not to St. Joe, to New York.

**Marvin:** Okay.

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<sup>26</sup> Hebrew school can be either the Jewish equivalent of Sunday school (focused on topics of Jewish history and learning the Hebrew language), or a primary, secondary, or college level educational institution where some or all of the classes are taught in Hebrew.

<sup>27</sup> Talmud Torah schools were created in the Jewish world—both Ashkenazic and Sephardic—as a form of religious school for boys, where they were given an elementary education in Hebrew, the Scriptures, and the Talmud.

<sup>28</sup> *Bar mitzvah* is a Jewish coming-of-age ritual for boys, aged 13. *Bat mitzvah* is the corresponding ritual for girls.

<sup>29</sup> A Talmudic scholar is one who studies the Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology.

**Irving:** One brother in the Bronx [name not given], one brother in Brooklyn [name not given].

**Marvin:** And the parents?

**Irving:** The grandparents, whom I visited as a small child, they stayed in New York.

**Marvin:** So you really are just talking about maternal family.

**Irving:** Mostly my maternal family.

**Marvin:** Yes, your mother's side, interesting.

**Irving:** I have to tell you this story. Since the Schoenberg family was relatively small, but it was an integral part of the overall Hochman family, whenever the High Holidays came along, of course we were all in *shul*.<sup>30</sup> My grandfather—with a long white beard, who went to *shul* every day twice a day, morning services, afternoon services—I always thought my grandfather looked like God, or that God looked like my grandfather.

**Marvin:** [chuckles]

**Irving:** [He was a] very stately man, very serene. And all of us—my contemporaries, all of my generation—had to go sit with my grandfather at the front of the synagogue. There was an honored place at the front of the synagogue. He would go through every one of the males. Not the girls, because the girls were upstairs.<sup>31</sup> The women, the aunts and the grandmother, were all upstairs. My uncles and my father and all the males were downstairs. Every one of us males had to go sit with my grandfather

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<sup>30</sup> Yiddish word for temple or synagogue.

<sup>31</sup> A *mechitza* is a physical divider placed between the men's and women's sections in Orthodox synagogues and at religious celebrations. In some synagogues, a balcony (usually with a 3-foot wall) where women sit, serves the same function as a *mechitza*.

for a short time, and every year he would introduce [us] to his buddies who sat in the front pew.

**Marvin:** Again, for the record, you mentioned Hochman, H-O-C-H-M-A-N, which is your mother's maiden name.

**Irving:** That's right.

**Marvin:** [We'll] keep all that squared away for us.

**Irving:** Incidentally, in Russia there is no "H", so the name was [*Goichman*]. When I do genealogical research, I have to consider that possibility.

**Marvin:** You're to be commended. I don't want to do genealogical research. [laughs], but I can tell you're into it.

**Irving:** Yes, I am.

**Marvin:** Well, that's an interesting background. So you're growing up, and you mentioned the Talmud Torah. How about elementary school and high school? You went, I assume, in St. Joe?

**Irving:** Yes, across the street from where we lived on Ninth Street was a school called Young School, a grade school. I only went there one year because they tore it down right after that year, but there was an interesting story about that. When my mother and her siblings—and many other Jews who came from Europe—came to St. Joe and could only speak Yiddish—that's her language—there was one woman in Young School. She was a German woman, and she could understand enough Yiddish to teach these kids how to speak English to go to school. So my mother arrived in 1909, she was seven years old. They had kids who were fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years [old] in the same class

because that was the only place in the entire city where they could start getting an education. So [I went to] Young School for one year.

The next school was Everett Grade School, and it was up on Fourteenth Street, so from Ninth to Fourteenth Street. I was there through six grades. By the way, in doing my genealogical research—and writing this book that I’m writing—I was able to find a fellow who had done a Master’s thesis on all the schools in St. Joe. So I was able to go back and actually find the names of the teachers that I had in the first through the sixth grades.

After I finished sixth grade, I went to a school called Roosevelt Junior High School. It was right next door, up on a hill, and it had been the original high school, Central High School. They had changed the name. So I went there for seventh, eighth and ninth grades, Roosevelt Junior High School. Ninth grade has significance, and I’ll talk about that a little bit later.

For the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, I went to Central High School and graduated there in 1943. Now, let me talk a little bit about Central High School. There was a woman there who was the principal. Her named was Calla E. Varner,<sup>32</sup> V-A-R-N-E-R. She became one of the most decorated, most honored, public school principals in the history of this country. Remember the “*This Is Your Life*” television program?

**Marvin:** Yes.

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<sup>32</sup> Calla Eddington Varner served at Central High School for many years, was named Principal Emeritus by the school, honored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as a “Great Living American” in 1958, and was a guest on the popular *This Is Your Life* television show, hosted by Ralph Edwards. The Calla E. Varner Educational Foundation, founded in her honor, provides academic scholarships for higher education to twenty students each year.

**Irving:** They did one on her. Ann and I were in Washington when she was brought [there]. She and J. Edgar Hoover,<sup>33</sup> and a couple of other people, were honored as Great Living Americans at that time. I have an article out of *Reader's Digest* [magazine] many years ago, talking about what a wonderful woman she was, a real educator. She had a great deal of influence on me, as well as a woman named Ruth Spangberg, who taught government, and that's another great story.

While I was in Central High School, I got interested in ROTC.<sup>34</sup> Many of my cousins and other friends of the family had gone through the ROTC program. I guess there was something in my blood that maybe came out of the fact that my father had been a soldier in World War I. I had a trunk in the basement with his bayonet and his helmet, his gas mask and his leggings, papers and so on, some of which I still have.

I guess I was very motivated, but I started thinking in terms of the military. The ROTC at Central High School had a very good reputation. Calla Varner, the principal, was a great believer in supporting it. There was a sergeant—he was a staff sergeant—who treated high school kids like men. When I became a cadet captain, and company commander, I wasn't a senior in high school, I was a *man*, and he treated me like a man, and that was unusual. Most high school kids, and even below that, are treated like children. His name was Sergeant Jule McCroskey. He looked more like a general than a lot of generals that I got to know. I mean, straight, a handsome guy, every crease, every shoe shined, and everything else.

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<sup>33</sup> (John) J. Edgar Hoover was the first Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and an American law enforcement administrator.

<sup>34</sup> The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is a college program offered at more than 1,700 colleges and universities across the U.S. that prepares young adults to become officers in the military.

I used to spend Sunday afternoons—almost three or four hours—shining leather and brass, because Monday morning was inspection. I had a special pair of shoes and a special black belt, Sam Browne [belt].<sup>35</sup> I could only wear it on the days of inspection. The uniform had to be perfect, and that inspection was very important.

**Marvin:** So [from] there you went on to college someplace?

**Irving:** Yes. When I finished ROTC in 1943—I finished high school—the war [World War II<sup>36</sup>] was on. There was no question, everybody was going to go into the military. I was angling for an appointment to West Point,<sup>37</sup> and maybe this is a good time to talk about that.

**Marvin:** All right.

**Irving:** In the ninth grade, I was president of my class and the faculty sponsor was a man named Lewis Wallace. Lewis Wallace and I struck up a nice friendship, and he knew that I was thinking about West Point. So I went from junior high school over to Central High School, and I was there for three years. Before I graduated, one day Lewis Wallace called my mother and father and said, “I know that Irv is interested in going to West Point. I’m running for the Missouri state legislature, and I know that most Jews—in fact practically all Jews in St. Joe, Missouri—are Democrats.”<sup>38</sup> My mother used to work

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<sup>35</sup> A Sam Browne belt is a wide belt, usually leather, supported by a narrower strap passing diagonally over the right shoulder. It is most often a part of a military or police uniform.

<sup>36</sup> World War II was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945. The vast majority of the world’s countries eventually formed two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. By the end of the war, more than half of the Jewish population of Europe had been killed by the Nazis (political party of the mass movement known as National Socialism, an extreme racist and authoritarian group) in the Holocaust.

<sup>37</sup> The United States Military Academy, also known as West Point, is a four-year federal service academy in West Point, New York. Graduates are trained to become officers in the U.S. Army.

<sup>38</sup> The Republican (conservative) and Democratic (liberal) parties are the two major contemporary political parties in the United States.

at the polls at election time. She always worked, she liked to do that. My mother was very gregarious, a wonderful sense of humor, ability to do public speaking, and so on.

So Mr. Lewis Wallace says, “May I come down and talk to you?” He comes down to the house. Mother and Dad are there, and I’m there, and he says, “I’m running for the state legislature, and if you could help me with the Jewish people in St. Joe, I would very much appreciate it.”

Now, let me back up. Lewis Wallace married a woman named Tekla Anderson [who] was the daughter of Leo Anderson, who was the Chairman of the Republican County Committee. Lewis Wallace said, “I will talk to my father-in-law, I will talk to other people and see what I can do.” So my mother said, “As far as I’m concerned, I am now a Republican.”

**Marvin:** Sounds like a bribe. [laughs]

**Irving:** It was, it was. She and my father became Republicans. Eventually my mother became the vice chair of that Republican committee for the county of Buchanan. She eventually became the chairman of that Republican committee. I don’t know that she ever went around really harping on being a Republican, but she considered herself a Republican. Lewis Wallace did get elected to the state legislature, and his wife, Tekla Anderson, was with him for many, many years. I used to see him periodically.

**Marvin:** But, you’ve gone from the ninth grade into West Point? [laughs]

**Irving:** No, when I graduated from high school, as I told you, everybody went into the military. The Army came out with a program called ASTRP, Army Specialized Training Reserve Program.<sup>39</sup> It gave an examination to determine whether or not you

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<sup>39</sup> ASTP was a military training program instituted by the United States Army during World War II to meet wartime demands both for junior officers and soldiers with technical skills.

were qualified to go into a college program. The college program was to produce second lieutenants for the Corps of Engineers.<sup>40</sup> So I got accepted into that program, and in the summer of 1943—July—I reported to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and I was inducted into The Reserves.<sup>41</sup> I was given an ROTC uniform that I wore at the University of Kansas in the ASTRP program, and I took college courses in math and English, basic freshman courses. The objective was to determine whether or not you were qualified to go on and get a degree in engineering.

After six months—from July to December—I got a letter from the Army saying that I was a first alternate [to West Point]. Leo Anderson had called a newly-elected Republican congressman by the name of Bill Cole, C-O-L-E, and said to him, “There’s a Jewish boy in your constituency. I want you to consider him for a nomination to West Point.” So I got first alternate nomination<sup>42</sup>.

My principal nominated me. In my group was a fellow named Carl Meyer Jr., M-E-Y-E-R. His father was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a business that inoculated pigs, cattle, all kinds of animals. Carl Meyer, a very wealthy man, had given a lot of money to the Republican committee—the Republican campaign—and Bill Cole got elected. He defeated a man named Dick Duncan. That’s another part of the story. Bill

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<sup>40</sup> The United States Army Corps of Engineers is a U.S. federal agency under the Department of Defense and a major Army command made up of some 37,000 civilian and military personnel, making it one of the world’s largest public engineering, design, and construction management agencies.

<sup>41</sup> A military reserve force is a military organization composed of citizens of a country who combine a military role or career with a civilian career. They are not normally kept under arms and their main role is to be available to fight when their military requires additional manpower.

<sup>42</sup> To be selected for admission to West Point, a slate of possible nominees is created and the “principal” nominee is the first pick and, if fully qualified, will receive the appointment. The other nominees on the slate are referred to as “alternates.” If the principal nominee is disqualified for some reason, the first alternate is the top pick from the other possible candidates.

Cole called me up to his office one day and said, “I’m nominating you as a first alternate.”

Dick Duncan was a judge, and eventually became a congressman. His law partner was a Jewish man by the name of Louis Kranitz. My family and I had known the Kranitz family, I grew up with several of the kids in the family, so they were very well known to me.

My mother and father called Lou Kranitz and said, “Could you get us an appointment with Dick Duncan to talk about the possibility of Irving going to West Point?” So Louis Kranitz got us an appointment with Dick Duncan. My mother and father went, I didn’t go. This is one of the reasons I decided to write a thesis on the point system in the service academy.

**Marvin:** That’s why you know so well. [laughs]

**Irving:** Yes. So my mother and father go see Dick Duncan, and Dick Duncan says, “Well, you have a very fine son, and I think a lot of him. However, he has to get two years of college. So you have him get two years of college and come back and see me.” In 1943 you couldn’t get two years of college. You were either 4-F<sup>43</sup> or something [else], you had to go into the military. So that was the brush-off, what he was doing was telling my mother and father to get lost. It wasn’t until Bill Cole got elected as a Republican—defeating Dick Duncan—that my family was able to do something. So I got the first alternate.

Carl Meyer Jr. was sent to a prep school on the Hudson River, Cornwall-on-the-Hudson. There were 33 young men competing for an appointment to West Point,

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<sup>43</sup> The 4F classification in the U.S. selective service for the military means that a person is not fit for military duty due to medical, dental, or other reasons.

and all 33 had principal nominations. All they had to do was pass the exams—physical, aptitude, and mental—take the exams and pass. Thirty-three of them there; 32 of them got in, Carl Meyer, Jr. didn't get in. I got in.

Why he didn't get in, I've never been able to determine. His father wanted him to go to West Point, I'm not sure that Carl Meyer, Jr. really wanted to go. But for three years he got the principal nomination, and for three years in a row he didn't go. First I went, and then another friend of mine from St. Joe went, and a third friend of mine from St. Joe went. So there's politics there.

**Marvin:** Oh, yes, yes. Well, that's an interesting story of how you ended up at West Point.

**Irving:** So the Army sent me a letter that said "you have an alternate appointment, and we've established a West Point prep school at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. If you would like to go to that, go down to Fort Leavenworth and get sworn into the Army of the United States (AUS), and then report to Cornell University." So I did. I got there in January of 1944, and I was there until June of 1944, when I got word from the congressman's office that Carl Meyer, Jr. did not pass and that I was going to West Point. They gave me two weeks' leave and I went home. I reported to West Point on the 1st of July, 1944.

**Marvin:** Good. Let me go back to your education in St. Joe. You mentioned the Talmud Torah, and others. How many Jewish students were in a class like that? It was a small . . . would you say 300 families?

**Irving:** Jewish families? Probably about. I've got a wonderful picture of the kids at the time that I was there, probably about 40 to 50.

**Marvin:** That's all age groups?

**Irving:** Yes, but unfortunately it was not very well run. You were in the first grade with the second grade, or maybe the third grade, the entire time you were there. It was just repeat, repeat, repeat, learning to read the prayers in Hebrew and knowing about the holidays, and going to the bar mitzvahs. All of us had to do that.

**Marvin:** That was at the Orthodox congregation.

**Irving:** That was Orthodox.

**Marvin:** You also said at that time there was a Conservative and Reform [congregation].

**Irving:** There were some Jewish kids who were in the Conservative congregation, not necessarily from the Orthodox [congregation], but who also went to Talmud Torah. I can't think of anybody who was in the Reform Temple who went to Hebrew school.

**Marvin:** Was there also that clear a divide socially?

**Irving:** Very definite divide, a very noticeable divide. I belonged to a high school fraternity, which was composed of kids from all of the congregations. So there was no distinction whether you were at the Temple or B'nai Yaacov or Shaare Sholem. We were guys that all got along. It was a little bit too selective, it was almost elitist, because it was a national fraternity called Pi Upsilon Pi<sup>44</sup> (PUPs). It became Pi Tau Pi.

**Marvin:** Was this only for Jewish high school students?

**Irving:** Yes, Jewish high school.

**Marvin:** I'm not familiar with that.

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<sup>44</sup> Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity was founded on non-sectarian principles, but throughout the organization's history, the membership was largely Jewish.

**Irving:** Some of my best friends—Elliot Spar, Gene Sembler, Ted Vegder—were not invited to join the fraternity. They were invited to join AZA,<sup>45</sup> and they did join AZA. It was never a very comfortable feeling. We were all Boy Scouts<sup>46</sup> in a Jewish troop.

**Marvin:** Sponsored by which organization?

**Irving:** I don't know. They were just volunteers—I think they had support from all three, but nobody specifically said, "We give our support."

We used to meet in a very interesting place. When the immigrants started coming to St. Joe, they had a settlement house.<sup>47</sup> There were settlement houses all over, there was a settlement house in my hometown across the street from the B'nai Yaacov synagogue. My aunt and uncle, the Vegders [Samuel and Mollie (Hochman) Vegder], had a grocery store practically next door. Then, down a hill but on the same property, was a hut and that was the Boy Scout hut. That's where we had our Boy Scout meetings. The fellow who was the scoutmaster, a fellow named Jack Zurow—still living, 93 - 94 years old in a home in St. Joe, Missouri, where one of my cousins lives—was a very great influence. I mean, they got the word across, we were good Boy Scouts.

**Marvin:** So let me just clarify, you say the family is no longer in St. Joe except one cousin?

**Irving:** I have one first cousin and his wife. Stanley Fishman, who was the son of Chaim Fishman and Becky Fishman. My father [Morris Schoenberg] was married to one of the sisters [Mary Hochman] and Stanley's father [Chaim Fishman] was married to

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<sup>45</sup> Aleph Zadik Aleph (AZA) is an international youth-led fraternal organization for Jewish teenagers that currently exists as the male wing of BBYO. AZA is for teens 8th grade - 12th grade.

<sup>46</sup> The Boy Scouts of America is the largest scouting organization and one of the largest youth organizations in the United States, with about 2.3M youth participants and about 1M adult volunteers.

another sister [Rebecca Hochman]—so we were doubly related. Stanley Fishman was two years older than I was. He was the guy who got me into the fraternity.

**Marvin:** There seems to be both a cohesive Jewish community and a break at the same time. It's a little strange.

**Irving:** Everybody got along well, they just didn't socialize. If you had a wedding, there might be some people from the Reform [congregation], but most of them would be in the Orthodox [congregation] or Conservative [congregation]. It wasn't a difficult time, but it was definitely known. The German Jews belonged to the Temple, and the Eastern European Jews belonged to the synagogue.<sup>48</sup>

**Marvin:** Well, that's an interesting background of growing up.

**Irving:** Oh, yes.

**Marvin:** We got you all the way to West Point, in about forty minutes. [laughs]

**Irving:** In 1943, when I got word that I was going to be appointed to West Point, I ran into what I called the Cossack<sup>49</sup> mentality. You know who the Cossacks were.

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Irving:** My parents grew up under them, all of my aunts and uncles grew up under that influence. They still remembered the pogroms. They all knew what "Living in the Pale"<sup>50</sup> meant and how Jews were very much ostracized. As soon as I got word that I was

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<sup>47</sup> The settlement movement was a reformist social movement that began in the 1880s and peaked around the 1920s in England and the United States. Its goal was to bring the rich and the poor of society together in both physical proximity and social interconnectedness.

<sup>48</sup> German Jews refers to those who immigrated to the U.S. immediately prior to the outbreak of World War II. Eastern European Jews migrated from the Russian Empire to America between 1891 and 1914.

<sup>49</sup> The Cossacks were a group of Russian military warriors who still exist today, but without the same military power they had in the past. Cossacks were among those responsible for carrying out the pogroms in Russia.

<sup>50</sup> Created by imperial decree, the Jewish Pale of Settlement was the part of the Russian Empire within which Russia's Jewish population was required to live and work for more than 130 years between the late 18th and early 20th century.

going to West Point, friends of my mother and father—older Jewish women—came up to me and said, “Oh, you’re going to West Point?” and I said, “Yes.” They said, “Well, they don’t let Jews graduate from West Point, so don’t be disappointed. If you go there, they have to let you in, but you’re not going to graduate, so don’t get disappointed.” That’s what I call the Cossack mentality. I came back after my first year at West Point, and this same group—older Jewish people who knew my parents—asked, “You still there?” “Yes, I’m still there. Finished my first year.” “Hmm. Well, probably they’ll let you stay two years out of the four. Don’t expect to graduate.” Came home after my second year, the same thing. “You still there?” At the end of four years, I came home as a second lieutenant, and one of the first questions I got was, “When are you getting out?” [laughs]

**Marvin:** [laughs] Jews don’t stay in the military.

**Irving:** Jews don’t stay in the military. “When are you getting out?” The other thing that was funny was when I showed up in the summertime with my white uniform on, [people asked], “Ah, how do you like the Naval Academy?”

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** “I like the Naval Academy, but I go to West Point.” [They are] so far removed from reality, in many of those older Jewish families, it just is amazing.

<End Tape 1 Side 1>

<Begin Tape 2 Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing Irving Schoenberg. It’s still July 7th, 2005, and this is Tape Two.

We were talking about West Point, Irv, and you were telling me Jews don't go to West Point, (chuckles) according to everyone in St. Joe. At least they never graduate. You obviously graduated.

**Irving:** I did graduate.

**Marvin:** Tell me about four years at West Point as a Jew.

**Irving:** Well, let me tell you first that, there have always been Jews at West Point, always. I can't prove that every year there was a Jew at West Point, but generally speaking there were always Jews at West Point. A book is being written about the Jews at West Point by a fellow named [Lewis] "Lew" Zickel,<sup>51</sup> who used to live here in Atlanta, Georgia, graduated in the class of 1949. He and I talked about this on a trip to Russia, that he'd taken on the job. He lives in Dobbs Ferry, across the [Hudson] river, not too far from West Point. [He] is very active in the Cadet Jewish Chapel—there's a very active Jewish chapel at West Point. So there've always been Jews at West Point. Mickey Marcus,<sup>52</sup> for example—who fought in the War of Independence for Israel<sup>53</sup>—the Class of 1927 or 1928.

When I entered West Point in 1944, a very unusual thing happened, and I have written a paper called "*The Turning Point at West Point.*" Let me back up a little bit. I say there were a lot of people in the military in 1943, during the war, of course. You were either drafted or enlisted or whatnot. Well, there were about 12 million people in

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<sup>51</sup> Lewis Zickel, was a graduate of West Point and a veteran of the Korean War. He was a member of the Dobbs Ferry Village Board of Trustees for ten years, and during his tenure he was responsible for numerous engineering projects in the Village. He was instrumental in the creation of the West Point Jewish Chapel, and following its completion, he was the President of the West Point Jewish Council.

<sup>52</sup> David Daniel "Mickey" Marcus was a U.S. Army colonel who assisted Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, and who became Israel's first modern general.

uniform, and a large portion of those were in the Army. In 1943 the Army put out a battalion-level message—it went down to all battalion commanders—and said, “You look at your people. If you have men in your outfit who you think are qualified as officers, who could compete for an appointment at West Point, we want to know who they are.” [They] had to not have reached their 22nd birthday by the 1st of July, 1944. So out of the 12 million people—or whatever number was in the Army—they started screening, and they picked 400 to go to Amherst College to further compete for the appointment. Out of the 400 at Amherst College, for about six months—or however long they were there—they selected 120 to go to West Point. Do you know what percentage of them were Jews? Damn near 50 percent of the 120, and that group of Jews were my classmates entering on the 1st of July, 1944. [It was] the largest number of Jews ever to enter the academy.

There were two classes already at West Point, the Class of 1945 and the Class of 1946. We were the Class of 1947. Alan Gould, one of our good friends, was my classmate. [Bernard] “Bernie” Abrams was one of my classmates in that group. Bernie and Alan and I got congressional appointments. Those others, who were at Amherst, got appointments directly from the Army. Here we are, the largest group of Jews ever to enter West Point, [and there are] mandatory chapel services every Sunday morning. The great big Protestant chapel up on the top of the hill, the Catholic chapel down below on the plain level, but no Jewish chapel. Where did you have Jewish services? In the movie theater. The rabbi would come down from Poughkeepsie [New York] or Newburgh [New

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<sup>53</sup> The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 broke out when five Arab nations invaded territory in the former Palestinian mandate immediately following the announcement of the independence of the state of Israel on May 14, 1948.

York] or someplace, and he'd run the service, and then we'd go have breakfast in the dining hall.

The authorities realized, "Hey, we've got a bunch of Jews here. Let's give them their own chapel. The Catholics have one, the Protestants have one, the Jews ought to have a chapel." So we got the oldest chapel on West Point, which is in the cemetery—where Mickey Marcus is buried—and that's where we began having services. There's a plaque on the wall in the old Jewish chapel that has the dates of birth and death, but no name. It's Benedict Arnold's<sup>54</sup> plaque, the traitor. Everybody has to see that one at West Point. So for four years, we had Jewish services at the old cadet chapel.

Your first year at West Point you go through basic training, it's called "beast barracks."<sup>55</sup> Bernie Abrams and Alan Gould and I were all in the same new cadet company, Company 6, and that's where we became friends for the first time [in] 1944. I've written a thing called "*The Tale of Three Cadets*," about how our lives intertwined and crossed many times, and they have.

**Marvin:** To jump ahead, that's how you ended up in Atlanta.

**Irving:** That's exactly right.

**Marvin:** But we'll get to that later.

**Irving:** For the first year we went through beast barracks, and the fact that I'd had a year in the military already didn't hurt me a bit, in fact, it helped me. I found that I had a lot of Jewish classmates. [Richard] "Dick" Littlestone was one of my roommates.

Bernie and Alan were both in the same company, I'd say the first year or first two years

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<sup>54</sup> Benedict Arnold was an American Revolutionary War general best known for his defection from the Continental Army to the British side of the conflict in 1780.

<sup>55</sup> Cadet basic training (commonly known as "Beast Barracks") is a seven-week process that turns people accepted into West Point from civilians into cadets.

at the academy. We went to services every Sunday morning—cadet services—they didn't have a chaplain. It was on a temporary basis.

**Marvin:** Sounds like a Reform congregation. [laughs]

**Irving:** So I went through my first year with no serious results and managed to get through plebe year<sup>56</sup>. Went into my second year and had to fight pretty hard to stay up with academics because it was tough—they put you through the paces—but I got through that okay. Then, in 1945 the war ended. I had been at West Point about two years when the war ended. The Army decided that instead of a three-year curriculum—when I entered in 1944 I was to graduate in 1947—they decided they were going to go back to a four-year curriculum. In order to do that, my class had to be split in half, with half to graduate in 1947 and half to graduate in 1948. They did it primarily on the basis of age. Bernie Abrams and Alan Gould were both six to eight months older than I was, so they got in the upper half of the class and they graduated in three years. I was five from the middle because of my birthday, so I was put in the four-year class. Surprisingly, a lot of my classmates who, by age could have been in the three-year class, opted to go for the fourth year at West Point. I think most of them are glad they did it. If you look at the record of the two classes—I just found this out when I went up to our fifty-fifth reunion—there were more general officers in our Class of 1948 than there were in the Class of 1947. Several of my classmates made four stars, and a lot of them made three stars. So it was interesting to see that.

The Naval Academy did the same thing, they broke up their Class of 1947 into two classes. They called them the Class of 1948A and the Class of 1948B. I met my

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<sup>56</sup> The first year at West Point.

wife, Ann, through a member of the Class of 1948B—[Richard] “Dick” Rubinstein, from the Naval Academy.

**Marvin:** How’d you get hooked up with the Naval Academy?

**Irving:** He [Dick] was from Kansas City, Missouri, and my wife’s from Kansas City.

**Marvin:** All right.

**Irving:** We were at Operation Camid,<sup>57</sup> cadet midshipmen amphibious maneuvers, at Little Creek, Virginia. It convinced me I never wanted to go in the Navy.

So, at the end of the two years, the class had split. I became the Class of 1948 and Alan and Bernie became Class of 1947—with, of course—a lot of other people. They graduated in 1947, and I stayed for the fourth year.

**Marvin:** Let’s go on, then. So, you got four years in and you’re now a Second Lieutenant.

**Irving:** Yes. In September of 1947, the Defense Act of 1947 created the U.S. Air Force. There was no Air Force academy, so the Air Force said, “Hey, we want graduates of the academy [West Point] to be officers in the Air Force. How about you, West Point, giving us 40 percent of your class of 1948, to commission them in the United States Air Force?” That’s what they did, and I opted to go into the Air Force.

**Marvin:** That was a bright move, Irv. [laughs]

**Irving:** Very bright. At the time, I really wanted to fly. We had been given some flying training up at Stewart Field in New York, and I took to it fairly well and decided I wanted to fly in the Air Force. When I took my physical exam at the end of four years,

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<sup>57</sup> Operation Camid was a realistic amphibious training program for American Cadets and Midshipmen, located on the landing beach at Little Creek, Virginia—outside of Norfolk—in August of 1946.

they said, “Your eyes are a little bit off, but if you get out away from the books, there’s a chance they’ll come back and you’ll be able to pass.” So I said, “Okay, I’ll go in the Air Force and I’ll take the exam a little bit later and see if I can get in.” I took the exam five times, and never passed the eye exam.

At one point, when I was stationed out of Barksdale Air Force Base [Bossier Parish, Louisiana] and I was working for Major Caffarelli. He was a good-looking guy, and he was the Base Adjutant;<sup>58</sup> I was Assistant Base Adjutant. He said, “I just got your Form 88.”<sup>59</sup> —the results of the physical exam—and he said, “You’ve been disqualified because of your eyes.” I said, “Well, I was afraid so.” He said, “But I’m going to sign off on it and say you are qualified.” I said, “Hot dog! (claps) I’m gonna go fly.”

Well, I went home that night, and I had a terrible dream. I dreamt that I was flying a very large airplane with about a hundred people, and I couldn’t see the runway, and we crashed. The next morning, I went back to the major and I said, “Sir, I appreciate what you’re trying to do, but the honor system tells me that you shouldn’t do that, and I don’t think I want to go through with that.” He told me I could go to navigator training, and I said, “No, if I can’t fly it, I don’t want to sit through that.” So, that’s how I got in the Air Force.

**Marvin:** Got in the Air Force, never flew.

**Irving:** Not as a pilot.

**Marvin:** As a navigator, but you didn’t go to navigator school?

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<sup>58</sup> Adjutant is a military appointment given to an officer who assists the commanding officer with unit administration, mostly the management of human resources.

**Irving:** No, I came close to flying at one point. After I'd been at Smoke Hill Air Force Base, Salina, Kansas—my first duty station—I was in the maintenance and supply group. I was Squadron Adjutant of the supply squadron. I was home, and I had an apartment downtown, which I shared with another officer. Got a telephone call from the major, who was my group commander, and he says, “Schoenberg, how'd you like to go to ECM<sup>60</sup> school?” I said, “I'm not really interested in that, sir. I'll be in the Air Force, but that's not my thing.” He said, “Well, I got bad news for you.”

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** He said, “There are five bachelors in the group . . .”

**Marvin:** Goddammit. [laughs]

**Irving:** “. . . and we drew names out of a hat, and you are the one.” Now, normally that request was put in by one of the bomb squadrons, 301st Bomb Wing, but they were all on temporary duty. General [Curtis E.] LeMay kept them overseas a hell of a lot, and the guys that were supposed to go to fill that quota were not available. So somebody had to go from Smoky Hill, so I got selected.

I said, “Okay, Major, when do I have to go?” He said, “Tomorrow.” I said, “Tomorrow??” He said, “Yes, tomorrow, because you've got to start class the day after tomorrow.” I said, “Sir, what am I going to do with all of my belongings? Not that I have a lot, but I do have some, and I have an automobile.” I had to go to Keesler Air Force Base [Biloxi, Mississippi]. He said, “We'll fly you down to Keesler, and then we'll come and get you a week later and bring you back. You can get all your stuff, put it in your car,

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<sup>59</sup> Medical Record: Report of Medical Examination.

<sup>60</sup> An electronic countermeasure (ECM) is an electrical or electronic device designed to trick or deceive radar, sonar or other detection systems, like infrared (IR) or lasers. It may be used both offensively and defensively to deny targeting information to an enemy.

and you can go back down to Keesler.” “Yes, sir,” I said, “That’s an order?” He said, “Yes, that’s an order.” I said, “Okay.”

So the next morning I go down to the squad room, and Captain Arlo Anderson—who was my squadron commander—comes in to sign the morning report. He was so busy with supply squadron, running all the warehouses and commissary<sup>61</sup> and everything else, he was hardly ever in the squadron. I ran the squadron. He came in and signed the morning report, and then he left. So he comes in this particular morning, and I said, “You know, Captain Anderson, I’m leaving.” He said, “You’re what??” I said, “I’ve been told I’m going to school.” He said, “Well, nobody told *me*.” And I said, “Well, I’m sorry, sir, but that’s the way it is. I’ve already started packing, and I’m supposed to leave today.” He said, “Come with me.”

So we go up to wing headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel Beshard. Anderson—a real nice guy—goes in. He says, “Colonel Beshard, you take Schoenberg away from me, I can’t run this squadron. I don’t have anybody. You can’t do that.” Beshard says, “Well, I’m sorry, Arlo, but we’ve got to send somebody.” And fate stepped in. There was a Sergeant Loeb—who looked like a Sergeant Loeb—a little short guy. I don’t know whether he was Jewish or not, but he was a Master Sergeant,<sup>62</sup> the highest ranking they had. He was the Sergeant Major<sup>63</sup> in the personnel office, and he heard the conversation through our very thin doors. As he’s listening, a major walks in, reporting for duty from Keesler Air Force Base. He hears the conversation and he says to Sergeant Loeb, “I’ll go down to Keesler. My wife and kids are still in a house down there. I’ll join

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<sup>61</sup> Military commissaries sell groceries and household goods.

<sup>62</sup> A Master Sergeant is the military rank for a senior non-commissioned officer in the armed forces.

<sup>63</sup> Sergeant major is a senior non-commissioned rank.

that class.” So Sergeant Loeb gets up from his desk and he goes and says, “Colonel Beshard, I’ve got somebody to send down to Keesler.” Then he says, “Schoenberg, get the hell back to work.” [laughs]

**Marvin:** [laughs] So you never got . . .

**Irving:** I never got there.

**Marvin:** Well, that shows the power of an NCO,<sup>64</sup> doesn’t it? [laughs]

**Irving:** It sure does.

**Marvin:** Well, that’s a good story.

**Irving:** So that’s the closest I ever came to flying as a regular officer.

**Marvin:** Good, well, I thought you’d flown for a while.

**Irving:** Nope, I wanted to.

**Marvin:** It also says you’re a bachelor at this time . . .

**Irving:** Oh, yes.

**Marvin:** . . . and you made reference to meeting your future wife through the Navy.

**Irving:** Yes. That didn’t come until some years later. I was a bachelor for eight years.

**Marvin:** Well, you were a bachelor longer than that, [laughs] while you were in the military, eight years. [laughs]

**Irving:** Yes, well, when I graduated, I didn’t get married. I graduated in 1948 and got married in 1957.

**Marvin:** Okay.

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<sup>64</sup> In the United States, Commissioned Officers (CO) are members of the armed forces who have an official commission obtained through experience at a Service Academy, ROTC, or an Officer Candidate School. A Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) is a military officer who has not earned a commission and usually obtains their position by promotion through the enlisted ranks.

**Irving:** I was at Smoky Hill Air Force Base in the squadron.

**Marvin:** Where is Smoky Hill Air Force Base?

**Irving:** Kansas. It became Schilling Air Force Base, they changed the name.

Remember, [David C.] Schilling<sup>65</sup> was a hotshot fighter pilot.

We got word that the base was being closed and that the entire wing was being moved down to Barksdale Air Force Base, Shreveport, Louisiana. So we left in November of 1949, and went down to Barksdale, and who did I run into, but Alan Gould! He was with the 91st Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, and they had been stationed at McGuire Air Force Base [Burlington County, New Jersey]. In the consolidation, they brought the 91st down, and the 301st combined into one unit under the Fourth Air Division.

**Marvin:** Now, just for the tape, all you people listening to this, you're going to have to look up all this stuff. We're not getting into real background. Go ahead, Irv.

**Irving:** So, got down to Barksdale Air Force Base, and not too long after that I got promoted to First Lieutenant, and I got selected to be the Assistant Base Adjutant. I left the supply squadron and went to the base. I had been working on the base a year or so when there was a quota<sup>66</sup> for an administrative officer to go to Okinawa [Japan] for the

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<sup>65</sup> David C. [Carl] Schilling was a U.S. Air Force officer, fighter ace, and leading advocate of long-range jet fighter operations.

<sup>66</sup> A fixed minimum or maximum of a particular group of people allowed to/needed to do something, such as immigrants to enter a country, workers to undertake a job, or members of the military to perform certain roles.

Korean War.<sup>67</sup> I figured—I'd seen friends of mine being called up—I said, "It's about my time," so I volunteered, and I said, "I'll go."

I didn't know where I was going at first, but they told me I was going to Okinawa to join the 307th Bomb Wing. The 307th came out of MacDill Air Force Base, [Tampa] Florida. They had been taking people on temporary duty to fill up the slots of this 307th, which was stationed over at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa. So I checked out of Barksdale Air Force Base.

By the way, I had a very interesting career in Shreveport, as a bachelor. They had a Holiday in Dixie thing and they needed escorts for the beautiful girls. I had some experience doing that, so that was fun. And I joined the [Shreveport] Little Theater. I did several shows with the Little Theater [in the Marjorie Lyons Playhouse] at Centenary College [of Louisiana].

So I report to Camp Stoneman, Pittsburg, California, to be shipped overseas. Eventually they called my name, and I went out to Japan, stayed there a couple of days, and then went to Okinawa.

Let me back up. I met a young lady . . . Dick Rubinstein, who had become my good friend—Naval Academy, same year I graduated—we had met on Operation Camid, the amphibious maneuvers. His family is from Kansas City [Kansas], and over the years, my family had adopted Dick, and Dick's family had adopted me. So "Aunt Fan" [Rubinstein] and "Uncle Leo" [Rubinstein], Dick's parents, were very well known to me. When I got orders to go to the Pacific, and I had a couple of weeks' leave, I was in

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<sup>67</sup> In 1950 communist North Korea invaded South Korea. The U.S. came to the aid of South Korea and Communist China and the Soviet Union supported North Korea. The war ended three years later in a stalemate.

Kansas City and I stopped in to see Dick's parents. Dick, by the way, had been called back out to active duty. He had gotten out of the Navy because his father had a stroke. They were in the bottling business—they did *Squirt* and all kinds of soft drinks—and he had to go back to help his father in the business. So he got a compassionate discharge<sup>68</sup> from the Navy, just a year or so after he graduated from the Naval Academy.

**Marvin:** What year was this?

**Irving:** I think he got called back in 1950, when the [Korean] War broke out, so he'd been out two years. He was now assigned to an aircraft carrier out in the Pacific, the [USS] *Bon Homme Richard*. So I stopped in to see his mother and father, and Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo said, "Hey, if you're going to California, we have relatives in California—the Riskins—and you want to meet them because they have a daughter that you would like very much, Cathy Riskin."

So I made a point of doing something about that. When I got to Camp Stoneman, I had a first cousin living in San Francisco, and I got in touch with him and his wife. But I also got in touch with the Riskins, and the daughter certainly was a very attractive young lady, who was at Stanford University, co-ed<sup>69</sup> at Stanford.

I get to Okinawa, and I'm assigned as the Assistant Wing Inspector General (IG). We had a real mess going on. People ended up over there without pay records, without personnel records, our tech order library was practically nonexistent, and we had damn good aircraft mechanics, and sergeants, who were literally operating from memory; they didn't have any documents. But we managed to get through that.

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<sup>68</sup> A compassionate discharge (or dependency/hardship discharge) occurs when there are family problems which can only be resolved by the soldier's discharge from the military and return home.

<sup>69</sup> A young woman who attends college.

**Marvin:** And Curt LeMay<sup>70</sup> let that go on? [laughs]

**Irving:** We were working hard to get it straightened out, but it took a while. One of my interesting duties as Assistant IG was to interview young airmen who were applying for marriage, who wanted to get married. There was a little village outside of the air base, Kadena Air Base, called Koza, K-O-Z-A. A bunch of “nasongs”—native Okinawan girls—not bad looking, not bad at all . . .

**Marvin:** Brings a smile to your face.

**Irving:** Yes. As we always used to say, “When I arrived in Okinawa, I looked over the railing of the ship, and saw these very short, dark nasongs. Six or eight months later, when we left, I looked over the rail and saw those tall, blonde, good-looking gals.” [laughs]

I would have these young airmen come in for an interview. They’d want to make an application to get married. My routine was, “Well, we have 20th Air Force regulations, Far East Air Force regulations, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization regulations, and SAC [Strategic Air Command] regulations. A lot of paperwork.” He [the soldier] said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “How long have you been here?” He said, “Almost four months, sir.” I said, “You’re on your six months TDY [temporary tour of duty]?” He said, “Yes, sir. Shall I start filling out the papers now?” I said, “Whenever you want to, just come on in and we’ll start filling out the papers. But, you’re going to have to extend your tour at least three months more. So if you’ve got four months, you’re going to have to go at least for seven.” Did they ever come back? Never. The whole purpose was to

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<sup>70</sup> Curtis Emerson LeMay was a general in the U.S. Air Force and vice presidential running mate of George Wallace in the 1968 presidential election.

discourage them from doing it, and that worked. But, I had some very interesting experiences as the Inspector General.

**Marvin:** I didn't know the IG was in the matrimonial business . . . [laughs]

**Irving:** I didn't either. [chuckles]

**Marvin:** . . . or lack of.

**Irving:** Yes, I didn't either, but that's who handled it. You would have thought the personnel office [would have done it], but they assigned it to the IG's office, and I did it. I worked for two very interesting lieutenant colonels: [Lieutenant Colonel] George Sutling and [Lieutenant Colonel] Thomas Hoyle Jackson Fowler from North Carolina. Good men.

**Marvin:** But Ann wasn't in this group . . .

**Irving:** Oh, no, no . . .

**Marvin:** We're trying to get to Ann. [laughs]

**Irving:** Okay, back to Okinawa. I lived in a Quonset hut.<sup>71</sup> I was the only unmarried officer in the Quonset hut. I was giving up my quarters allowance because the other married guys were getting their quarters allowance. There were six of us in a Quonset hut. You had to have a box with an electric light bulb on all the time because the mold and the humidity over there is terrible. A pair of shoes would be gone in a month, be absolutely gone. So I started writing to Cathy Riskin.

**Marvin:** All right, that name is familiar, you mentioned her.

**Irving:** I had a very nice picture of her on my desk, and I began writing, and she wrote back, and I thought that there was something there. Now, this is a cousin of Dick

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<sup>71</sup> A Quonset hut is a lightweight prefabricated structure of corrugated galvanized steel having a semicircular cross-section.

Rubinstein. Near the end of my temporary duty—which ended up being about seven months—word came out from Headquarters USAF [United States Air Force] they were looking for instructors for the ROTC program, the college level ROTC program.

I found out I'd been promoted to captain . . .

**Marvin:** Ah!

**Irving:** . . . by reading the *Air Force Times*. I never saw an official piece of paper until I started looking for it. I found out by reading the *Air Force Times* I'd been promoted. That was interesting, because one of the officers that was at Barksdale Air Force Base with me had written on my OER [Officer Effectiveness Report] that "Lieutenant Schoenberg is a typical West Pointer."

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** It looked bad, and the thing went up to the colonel. Colonel Robinson was the base commander and he called me in one day. He said, "Have you had trouble with Captain Farley?" I said, "No, we were down at "Air Tac" [Air Corps Tactical School] together, and I thought he was a good friend of mine." He said, "Well, he wrote something that's not very good for your OER." He said, "I'm not endorsing it. I'm overriding it." It was on that basis that I got promoted to captain. [laughs]

Anyway, I was writing to Cathy, and the word comes down from Headquarters USAF [that] they're looking for ROTC instructors, and I figured with her at Stanford, this is a pretty damn good opportunity. I knew I wasn't going to get promoted to major for several years, and it was an opportunity to get a master's degree. And I always believed in [the] ROTC program because . . .

**Marvin:** You went through it in high school.

**Irving:** . . . I went through it in high school, and I believed in it. I had very good training, and I was impressed with the way they did that.

Incidentally, one day while I was in the ROTC program in high school, the Army came in and took our 1903 rifles [M1903 Springfield rifle] away from us to send them out to the people in the field, shooting with weapons made out of wood, broom sticks typically.

So I applied for ROTC duty, and on the application it says, “Where would you like to go?” So I said, “Stanford University, University of Southern California, UCLA”—any school on the West Coast. I got the University of Maryland.

**Marvin:** [laughs] That was a long way away.

**Irving:** A long way away.

**Marvin:** That sounds like a typical military act.

**Irving:** So I came back from Okinawa, I landed in California, and I had a couple of weeks’ leave before I had to report to ROTC. The first thing I did was get in touch with the Riskins and let Cathy know I was back. She said, “How’d you like to go down to Palo Alto [California] and see Stanford University?” “Oh, yes, that’d be great.” So she drives down in her car, and we stop in front of a fraternity house. She honks the horn, and out comes this very good-looking, tall, blonde fraternity man. I find out later that his name is [James] “Jim” Graham, and he and Cathy are semi-engaged.

**Marvin:** Ah, okay.

**Irving:** So that put the *kibosh*<sup>72</sup> . . .

**Marvin:** There went Cathy.

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<sup>72</sup> Put an end to; dispose of decisively.

**Irving:** . . . there went Cathy. However, Mr. and Mrs. Riskin—"Nat" and Rosalie—thought great things about me, and I think they were really disappointed. Jim Graham was not Jewish, and it ended up as a bad marriage. [They had] two sons, [he had a] Ph.D., and ran away with one of his graduate students, and the wife of another faculty member at Purdue University. Bad story.

I get to ROTC at the University of Maryland—College Park, Maryland—and I get assigned to teach freshmen and sophomores. The curriculum included a course in international relations—geopolitics—and there was a colonel from West Point who was head of that department. His name was Bucullough [pronounced BYU-kuh-luh]. He had quite a reputation in the academic world, and he instituted that. He felt that ROTC people needed to have that kind of background. So we had a textbook that had a chapter on France and one on Germany and one on Czechoslovakia, and I was teaching that course.

I also signed up to get a master's degree in international affairs. I had a letter from Colonel Bucullough to get into graduate school, so I got into graduate school. I ended up getting a master's degree in international affairs, taking courses at night. After I'd finished six hours, I decided that Georgetown University had a really outstanding school in international affairs. So I asked to transfer, and I transferred over. The first two semesters I had to take a course in political philosophy. I had to read ten books by Immanuel Kant and Immanuel Hermann Fichte<sup>73</sup> and all those guys. It was really hard going, but I passed with colors, I have to say.

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<sup>73</sup> Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Immanuel Hermann Fichte (1796-1879) were both German philosophers.

Then they told me that the next courses I had to take were catechisms,<sup>74</sup> the Catholic dogma.<sup>75</sup> I had to take two semesters of Catholic dogma. I said, “Hey, I’m Jewish, I’m not going to take Catholic [dogma classes].” They said, “I’m sorry, that’s a requirement.” So I said, “Bye.” I went back to the University of Maryland, and I finished my master’s there. [laughs]

**Marvin:** [laughs] Yes. We’re still getting ahead, Irv. [laughs]

**Irving:** Okay . . . oh, this is a very important part of my life. I got a call one day from the Air Force aide to the President of the United States. They wanted me to come over for an interview [because I was a] bachelor, assigned to the Washington area. “We’re looking for a White House aide.” There were seven Air Force, seven Army, five Navy, and two Marines—21 all together—social aides<sup>76</sup> at the White House under President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower.<sup>77</sup> I went over for the interview, I got selected, I came back to teach at the University of Maryland.

On Christmas leave from University of Maryland, I went back to Kansas City—St. Joe, Missouri—Kansas City, and went to see Dick [Rubinstein] and his wife. By this time he’s married and has a couple of kids. I had dinner at his house, stayed at his house, double-dated with a woman that lived nearby. Then I said, “You know, I’ve got to come back through Kansas City to go back to Washington [DC] for New Year’s. I’ve got a date in Washington, D.C.”

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<sup>74</sup> A summary of the principles of Christian religion in the form of questions and answers, used for the instruction of Christians.

<sup>75</sup> Dogma is a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.

<sup>76</sup> A White House social aide is a United States Armed Forces officer assigned to attend to the personal needs of visiting dignitaries at the White House and to facilitate interactions with the President and the First Lady of the United States.

The airport in Kansas City is where you flew from—St. Joe doesn't have an airport—so my dad drove me into Kansas City. I was going to spend the night with Dick and his wife. Dick is going to pick me up downtown, and he says, "We've changed plans." [Aunt] Fan and [Uncle] Leo have decided they're going to have dinner at their house, and Dick's sister Audrey and her husband George—who was a doctor—and [Dick's] cousin from Wellesley College is in from college. She's gonna be there.

Well, the story is that Ann is told she will go to dinner at Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo's, and if she had a date that night, that's too bad, she had to break it. She couldn't have a car because my mother-in-law- and father-in-law-to-be were going to use the car. They would drive her over to Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo's to meet with "the young people." The youngest person, other than Ann, was her cousin Audrey—who was about eight years older than she was—and this man that they were talking about, who was a friend of Dick's. He was going to be there at dinner, too.

That's where we met. We met at Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo's, and would you believe that I proposed to her that night?

**Marvin:** Good. Did you keep your appointment in Washington? Honorable.

**Irving:** Honorable.

**Marvin:** You proposed to her after meeting her for how long—six hours, five hours?

**Irving:** A very large snowstorm happened . . .

**Marvin:** Uh-huh! [laughs]

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<sup>77</sup> Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower was an American army general and statesman who served as the 34th president of the United States from 1953 to 1961. During World War II, he was a five-star general and served as supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe.

**Irving:** We had gone back to Dick and Jean's house—all of us, everybody from the dinner party—because one of Dick's kids had a bad cold or something. So we all went back there, and Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo said, "C'mon, we'll take you home, Ann." It was early in the evening, and I said, "If Dick will lend me his car, I'll take her home." He said okay, so Aunt Fan and Uncle Leo left. Ann and I, and Dick and Jean, and Audrey and George, are still there talking by the fireplace. Then everybody decides it's time to go home and I'm going to take Ann back to her house.

I took her back to her house, I said goodnight to her, and I said, "I really want to see you again." She said okay—she was at Wellesley College up in Massachusetts. I went outside and the snowfall is coming down in big chunks. I turn the ignition and this new Chevrolet [car], that Dick had given me to use, wouldn't start. [There was] a slight downhill on the driveway, and I let it coast [claps], tried to kick it in, nothing.

So I went back [raps table twice], knocked on the door and said, "We've got to call AA."<sup>78</sup> Ann said okay and called AAA. I said "How long is it going to be?" They said, "Three hours." So for the next three hours, Ann and I talked, and that's when I proposed.

**Marvin:** Nice. All that in five hours, then?

**Irving:** Yes. So I got back to the airport about seven o'clock in the morning, and I called her. I woke her up, [laughs] she's never forgiven me for that, either.

**Marvin:** [laughs]

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<sup>78</sup> The American Automobile Association (AAA) is a federation of motor clubs throughout North America and is best known for offering roadside assistance to members in need.

**Irving:** I guess that was 1954, and I went back in 1955, we officially got engaged in 1955, and got married in 1956—because of Dick Rubinstein! I never would have met her except for the Naval Academy.

**Marvin:** Yes. Well, why don't we leave it here, now, Irv? You're married . . .

**Irving:** All right.

**Marvin:** . . . we'll pick this marriage up—and how you got to Atlanta, and what you've been doing here—next time.

**Irving:** And we have to talk about the White House aide business.

**Marvin:** All right, do you want to talk about that right now? We've got a few minutes on the tape.

**Irving:** Okay.

**Marvin:** So, you become a White House aide because somebody picks you out of a hat. [laughs]

**Irving:** I don't know, I really don't know how they got my name. I guess they went to The Pentagon<sup>79</sup> and said, "We need a bachelor."

**Marvin:** A bachelor, yes, because you need escorts, as part of it.

**Irving:** Yes, it's what you do in the White House. So somehow or other, my name popped out as a bachelor assigned in the Washington [DC] area. I'm sure that my record was pretty good or they wouldn't have bothered with me, and that's how I got selected. A fellow named Lieutenant Colonel William C. Draper was the Air Force presidential aide.

There was a Naval aide, and there was an Army aide, and each was responsible for selecting the ones representing their service.

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<sup>79</sup> The Pentagon is the headquarters building of the United States Department of Defense. The phrase "The Pentagon" is also often used to refer to the Department of Defense and its leadership.

When you're a White House aide, you are top of the heap in the social list—and they always need escorts for the regattas, and for the balls, the DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] ball—and I got called to all these things. I got so many invitations that sometimes, during the Christmas holidays, I had to stay home and write official thank-you notes, so I couldn't come. I had so many invitations, I just couldn't do it all.

**Marvin:** What year was this, again?

**Irving:** 1954.

**Marvin:** This is the same year you proposed to your future bride.

**Irving:** Yes, that was an unofficial proposal.

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** [laughs] The official proposal came later, yes. I served in the Cherry Blossom Festival. White House aides always got involved in the Cherry Blossom Festival—it was good duty—banquets and balls and all kinds of things.

I think one of the most interesting things was that every Christmas . . . I've got a couple of paintings that I'll show you, that President Eisenhower did. He was a painter, he got inspired by [Winston] Churchill to start painting. Every year at about Christmastime, all the White House aides were called up to the White House—to the presidential living quarters—for a party. Mrs. [Mamie] Eisenhower,<sup>80</sup> and the President, and Mrs. [Elvira Carlson "Minnie"] Doud,—that was Mamie's mother—who lived in the White House.

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<sup>80</sup> Mamie Geneva Eisenhower was wife of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and First Lady of the United States from 1953 to 1961.

We go through a receiving line, and the President called me by name, by first name—I'll tell you about Mr. [Richard M.] Nixon<sup>81</sup> a little bit later, that was part of my White House experience—and I said to him, “Mr. President, I'm going home and propose to a young lady,” and he said, “She'll take it. She'll accept.”

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** “Don't worry. It's okay.”

**Marvin:** That gets you out of the aide business. [laughs]

**Irving:** Oh, yes, you have to resign. So in 1956, when we got married, I had to give up my White House aide position. I had two years at the White House.

But every year, when the President had us to his quarters for a party, we presented him with a gift. I think the highest grade of any of the aides was major, most of us were captains. One or two were lieutenants I guess, but mostly captains. [We] didn't have a lot of money, but we had to chip in. We didn't have to, but we chipped in to buy the President and Mrs. Eisenhower a present.

So in this year, we decided that the Steuben Glass—which Eisenhower loved—[would be the gift]. He presented Steuben Glass to visiting dignitaries at the White House. We would ask the Steuben people to make a punch bowl and all the cups, and the thing must have cost thousands and thousands of dollars. It had a Presidential Seal on it, it was absolutely [lovely]. I think my part of the thing was fifty dollars, at the most. But [we had] 21 times \$50, and the rest of it was picked up by the Steuben people

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Milhous Nixon was an American politician who served as the 37th president of the United States from 1969 until 1974. He was involved in the Watergate scandal (five burglars were caught at Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate hotel complex in Washington, D.C). Facing likely impeachment for his role in covering up the scandal, Nixon became the only U.S. president to resign.

as a gift. The President absolutely loved it, he thought it was one of the greatest things ever.

So I went home, and I proposed to Ann, and that's another good story, about how I slipped the ring on her . . .

**Marvin:** Well, let's pick up the wedding afterwards.

**Irving:** Okay.

<End Tape 2 Side 1>

<Begin Tape 3 Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub interviewing, for the second time, Colonel Irving Schoenberg. Today is July 14th, 2005. This is for the Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, co-sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.

That's a mouthful, isn't it? This is tape three, and again, we don't have any noise in the household. It's being refurbished, and we're in the home of the Colonel. What I'd like to do today, Irv—if I may call you Irv—

**Irving:** Well, of course.

**Marvin:** . . . is continue where we were, get the ending of your military career, and how you ended up in Atlanta. Because your family was heavily involved in St. Joe at the time. So let's see how you ended up here. To start with, you were a White House aide where we ended off.

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** How about picking it up there?

**Irving:** Okay. I was a White House aide for two years. I left the University of Maryland to come over to the White House as legislative liaison, and that was in combination with the fact that I had been appointed a White House aide.

I think one of the unique things about my White House experience was that at one of the receptions—just by circumstance, or by a hit-or-miss proposition—each of the White House aides would go and greet the guests coming in the White House. The guest that I went to greet happened to be the ambassador from Israel, Abba Eban.<sup>82</sup> I said to myself, “He and I are probably the only two Jews in the entire White House at that time.”

**Marvin:** Did he speak Hebrew, Yiddish, English, German, French? [laughs]

**Irving:** He was educated in England, so he spoke English very well, very fine man.

Then, [another special thing was] the fact that President Eisenhower and Mrs. Eisenhower and Mrs. Doud, all lived in the White House and every Christmas they had a Christmas party for the White House aides. Twenty-one of us always presented the President and Mrs. Eisenhower a gift. One time, a beautiful Steuben glass punch bowl, which I’m sure cost the Steuben people a lot more money than we contributed to it.

After I finished my tour in the White House—and I’m still a legislative liaison—eventually I became the executive officer there, and then my boss, General [Joseph] Kelly, asked me what I wanted to do from that point on. I said, “Well, not being a pilot, I don’t have any command experience,” and that’s really what I wanted. To make

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<sup>82</sup> Abba Eban was an Israeli diplomat and politician, and a scholar of the Arabic and Hebrew languages. In his career, he was Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Education Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and ambassador to the United States and to the United Nations.

a long story short, I got into the tactical [ballistic] missile<sup>83</sup> business and was sent to Bitburg, Germany. We had atomic weapons aimed at the Russians on 24-hour alert, seven days a week. I started out as a commander of B Flight and was proud of the fact that [it was] the first crew to make Lead Crew. If you're familiar with how SAC used to operate [you know] this was a select crew. One of my crews, headed by a captain, became the first Select Crew in all of the European command.

I went from there to be the Executive Officer of the group and eventually came back to the Pentagon. That was a surprise, because one of my classmates—Jay Joseph—said he had checked with the personnel people and I wasn't going back to the Pentagon. I'd been there before and I was probably going to be in the long-range missiles, like the Jupiter or the Titan<sup>84</sup> or one of those, and work somewhere out in the "boondocks."<sup>85</sup> That didn't please Ann very much because she wanted to be in a Jewish community, obviously. Instead of going out into the boondocks, I came back to the Pentagon. I was put into the operations business as Chief of Tactical Missiles. I was there two years and was then assigned up to the Office of The Secretary of The Air Force, where I wrote speeches. I was a Special Projects Officer.

**Marvin:** Wrote speeches?

**Irving:** Wrote speeches. At the end of that time, I got moved up to be the Deputy Executive Assistant to the Under Secretary of the Air Force. I left there to go to the

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<sup>83</sup> Tactical ballistic missiles include ballistic missiles with a range of 300 km or less intended for battlefield use. They usually employ conventional warheads, but often have the capability for chemical or biological warheads to be installed as well.

<sup>84</sup> Developed in the 1950s, the Jupiter was designed as an intermediate range ballistic missile, powered by a single LR-79 rocket motor. Titan was a family of U.S. expendable rockets used between 1959 and 2005. Titan I and Titan II were part of the USAF intercontinental ballistic missile fleet until 1987.

<sup>85</sup> An area in the country that is quiet, has few people living in it, and is a long way from a town or city.

Industrial College of the Armed Forces,<sup>86</sup> which was over at Fort [Lesley J.] McNair, still in the Washington [D.C.] area. Finished there, as an honor graduate, I might say . . .

**Marvin:** Ah!

**Irving:** . . . and got a master's degree from George Washington University in business administration. That was my second master's degree. I spent the next couple of years, until 1969, at the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force. In fact, I broke in three Under Secretaries,<sup>87</sup> who knew very little about the Air Force, I had to teach them. One very interesting thing [was] I helped select the first female colonel to be a brigadier general in the Air Force. Her name was Jeanne Holm.<sup>88</sup> Her name is in *The Greatest Generation*, [Tom] Brokaw's book.

I left there and went out to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to be commander of a worldwide organization called Air Force Contract Maintenance Center. A detachment of mine was in Tel Aviv, at Ben Gurion Airport. So, I had detachments in Europe, I had them over in the Far East. I made my one trip to the Far East, I visited Vietnam, and I was over there for a little while. What we did was, let contracts to aircraft people who maintained engines and combat-damaged aircraft. Rather than bringing them back to the States, we had local [people]—Philippines, Okinawa—all over the place. That was quite a trip.

I was in that job from 1969 to 1970, and the next thing I knew, I was requested by Major General A. J. Beck (Jewish, by the way), Commander of Air Force

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<sup>86</sup> The Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy—formerly known as the Industrial College of the Armed Forces—is part of the National Defense University which prepares select military officers and civilians for strategic leadership roles in developing and implementing national security strategies.

<sup>87</sup> Second-highest ranking civilian official in the Department of the Air Force.

Materiel Command's Warner Robins Air Logistics Center down in Warner Robins, Georgia. I accepted that job, and went down to Warner Robins and became the **Director of Materiel Management**, which was a **Brigadier General's** job. I stayed there for three years and finally at age 48—I had actually been selected for brigadier general, but that's a long story that I won't go into—Ann and I decided it was time to get out. The education of our three sons was most important in our lives.

**Marvin:** How old were the sons at that time?

**Irving:** David had one year of high school [left], so he would have been 17. Eric was three years younger, he was 14. Jeffrey was three years younger than that, so he was 11.

**Marvin:** You mentioned Ann wanting to go to a Jewish community.

**Irving:** Absolutely.

**Marvin:** Let me look at two aspects of this. Antisemitism<sup>89</sup> in the military?

**Irving:** People have asked me that question, Marvin. I think I may have said that Jews in my hometown had the “Cossack mentality”—believed that always there was antisemitism. There probably was antisemitism, [but] I personally never experienced it. Nothing that I can put my finger on said that “you are a Jew and therefore we treat you differently.” In fact, my career was exactly the opposite. I got promoted several times “below the zone,” which would indicate that I was satisfying my bosses. I was doing a job well enough to get those promotions.

**Marvin:** For people who don't understand, what do you mean, “below the zone”?

**Irving:** The criteria for being eligible for promotion. You have to have so many

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<sup>88</sup> Jeanne M. Holm (1921 – 2010), was the first woman to rise to the rank of general in the Air Force and the first woman to become a two-star general in any United States armed service.

years of service, so many years in grade, but there is an area called “below the zone.”

People with outstanding records are considered below the zone, and they select some of those with every promotion.

**Marvin:** A fair amount of your time in your travels appears to have been in the Washington, D.C., area.

**Irving:** That’s true, 14 years altogether.

**Marvin:** Well, that’s half your career, more than half your career.

**Irving:** Yes, of 30 years, that’s right.

**Marvin:** How would you describe your moving around, as a Jew, to communities with and without Jewish communities?

**Irving:** In Washington [D.C.] that was no problem. There were several congregations, and we belonged to one down in Alexandria, Virginia. The rabbi, we got to know quite well, and our boys went to Sunday school and went to Hebrew school. There was no question that they were going to be bar mitzvahed when the time came, because we thought that way, both of us. Ann and I both had good Jewish backgrounds. I was brought up in an Orthodox synagogue; Ann was brought up in a Conservative synagogue, but her family had always been involved and my family was very much involved in congregational life.

So as we moved around, we went “*shul* shopping.” We would ask locals where they belonged, and we’d eventually make a mis- . . . make a decision, and we continued to do that.

**Marvin:** You started to say “make a mistake.” [laughs]

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<sup>89</sup> Antisemitism is hostility toward, or discrimination against, Jews as a religious or racial group.

**Irving:** Well, we almost made a mistake one time . . . but we always belonged to a synagogue, always belonged to a synagogue. When we left Washington and we went out to Wright-Patterson, again we belonged to a synagogue, and the boys had to drive from outside of Dayton [Ohio]—where Wright-Patterson Air Force Base was—down into town for the Reform synagogue, Reform temple. Ann was very busy making those carpool [trips], she did a good job, but we were only there one year.

When we got ready to leave Wright-Patterson for Warner Robins, the chief Jewish chaplain, a fellow named [Calvin] “Cal” Levitan—whom I had served with in Okinawa . . . let me mention Okinawa. He was on a circuit. He rode from the Philippines to Okinawa to Guam, serving Jewish personnel.

**Marvin:** A large circuit for a circuit rider.

**Irving:** A large circuit. When Cal couldn’t be there one week out of the month, I and a Dr. Schneeberg used to conduct services. So I was the semi-rabbi, I like to call it.  
[laughs]

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** Cal Levitan, by the way, moved back and was in Wright-Patterson Air Force Base when I was leaving there to go to Georgia. Cal wrote a beautiful letter, recommending to the rabbi that Ann and Irv were coming down and to welcome them, and so on. Well, that’s another story. We ended up in the Conservative synagogue rather than the Reform, and that’s a rabbi kind of a question. That’s where the mistake almost came in. While we were at Warner Robins, Ann was again carpooling from Warner Robins, which is about ten, fifteen miles outside of Macon, Georgia. We went *shul* shopping both Friday night to the temple and then Saturday to the Conservative, and the

Conservative was warm, welcoming, and they wanted us, and we didn't get that feeling [from the Reform congregation], so we belonged to that synagogue. We've maintained that friendship with those people from Macon all of these years, still do. So we *shul* shopped, [laughs] and we selected, and we belonged.

**Marvin:** You *shul* shopped but ended up mostly in temples.

**Irving:** No, the Conservative was a synagogue. Once we got to Atlanta, yes, again we *shul* shopped and decided that Temple Sinai was for us.

**Marvin:** Temple Sinai, which is a Reform congregation.

**Irving:** A Reform congregation, and we still belong there, since 1973.

**Marvin:** So, you had good relations, as a Jewish individual, with the non-Jewish civilian community also? Did you have any relationship in the military?

**Irving:** Oh, yes. In the military, when I was at Warner Robins, I was *the* Salvation Army<sup>90</sup> representative on the Board, and I used to go to all the meetings. Interesting story. We chipped in, because the Salvation Army captain's lifelong ambition was to go to Israel, to Palestine. We chipped in, and we bought him a ticket, and he went to Palestine. He came back and he was about 17 feet off the ground. He was naturally thrilled.

**Marvin:** Interesting, from Warner Robins?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Because I know you've done extensive work in the community here in Atlanta. So you're at Warner Robins and you decide to get out of the military.

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Retire.

**Irving:** Yes. I was 48 years old, and I had 30 years of service. As I said, we were concerned about [the] education of our children—our three sons—and we figured it was time to go. So I put in for retirement, and I was retired on Saturday night, the 30th of June, 1973. The 1st of July was a Sunday. I was picked up on the payroll of Abrams Industries, and on Monday morning at eight o'clock I went to work.

**Marvin:** Ah! Abrams Industries, let's talk a minute, then. If you picked up that, you didn't job shop.

**Irving:** No. Abrams Industries' [Chief Executive Officer] CEO was my classmate, Bernard Abrams, who was an infantry officer in Korea—badly wounded, retired for disability as a captain—with Silver Star, Bronze Star<sup>91</sup> and all the good stuff that he got in combat. So if you want to talk about antisemitism, there really isn't any in the foxholes<sup>92</sup>, at least not in his case. Many of my Jewish classmates served in Korea.

**Marvin:** Let me take an aside, then—and we'll get back to Atlanta in a moment—because of the controversy surrounding the Air Force Academy. Currently, and for the future, it appears to be a group of evangelicals<sup>93</sup> are evangelizing.

**Irving:** Yes, it disturbs me greatly, very badly. If you look at the Naval Academy, if you look particularly at West Point, Jews have always been given their position. I told

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<sup>90</sup> The Salvation Army is a Protestant Christian church and an international charitable organization. The nonprofit reports a worldwide membership of over 1.7M, consisting of soldiers, officers and adherents collectively known as Salvationists.

<sup>91</sup> The Silver Star medal is awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States. The Bronze Star medal is awarded for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone.

<sup>92</sup> A foxhole is a small pit used for cover in battle, usually for one or two personnel, constructed so that the occupants can effectively fire from it. The phrase “in the foxholes” or “in the trenches” means to be involved, usually in something that's rigorous or difficult.

you about the Jewish cadet chapel [being] built, money raised by private individuals. The only thing the Army gave West Point for the chapel was the land on which to build and a set of criteria that determined what it would look like. So it's a Gothic-looking chapel, but it's very much a Jewish chapel, and very active with not only the cadets but with the Jewish community all around: Dobbs Ferry, White Plains and so on.

**Marvin:** So no real problems as you saw. Let's get back to Abrams, what sort of business was Abrams here in Atlanta?

**Irving:** Abrams Industries was, at that time, primarily construction, but store fixture manufacturing, real estate development, and there were two or three other, smaller companies. I came directly to the manufacturing company. Since I had a degree in engineering and also a degree in logistics and a degree in business administration, it seemed to fit.

**Marvin:** And you worked in those areas in the military.

**Irving:** Yes, I did.

**Marvin:** Did you sell to the military? [laughs]

**Irving:** Oh, absolutely not. But I was very much involved at Warner Robins as Director of Materiel Management with 3,200 people, and my budget for a year was \$1,000,000,000 (not "m" but "b"), billion dollars. It was a very large business, and by the way, I was there when much of the military equipment was sent to Israel in 1973.<sup>94</sup> Do you remember that?

**Marvin:** Yes.

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<sup>93</sup> Evangelicalism is an umbrella group of Protestant Christians who believe in the necessity of being born again in Christ, and affirm traditional Protestant teachings on the authority of the Bible. To evangelize is to convert, or seek to convert, someone to Christianity.

**Irving:** The C-130 aircraft—which was the primary aircraft for the Israeli Air Force—was my problem, my management. That’s how I met many Israelis.

**Marvin:** But you never gave Abrams any business while you were in the military.

**Irving:** There was no opportunity.

**Marvin:** [laughs] Okay, so you obviously maintained a friendship with Mr. Abrams over the years.

**Irving:** Oh, classmates since 1944 . . .

**Marvin:** Yes, which leads then . . .

**Irving:** . . . and by the way, Alan Gould was another classmate.

**Marvin:** Just for the record, who was Alan Gould?

**Irving:** Alan Gould, in my class at West Point, who came to Atlanta as the representative of Lockheed.<sup>95</sup> While he was here his wife, Mimi [Gould] had some heart problems, so he retired here. But he went immediately to work for Abrams, so he was with Abrams for a good many years, too.

**Marvin:** Before you were there.

**Irving:** Before I was there.

**Marvin:** Who recruited you, which of the two? Or do you [know]?

**Irving:** Bernie. Bernie and Alan both came down to my retirement ceremony out of Warner Robins.

**Marvin:** Ah!

**Irving:** And we used to come up here periodically to see [them].

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<sup>94</sup> Operation Nickel Grass was a strategic airlift operation conducted by the United States to deliver weapons and supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

**Marvin:** So during the retirement ceremony, you got recruited?

**Irving:** No, even before that.

**Marvin:** Before that.

**Irving:** Long before that.

**Marvin:** So you knew you were going to . . .

**Irving:** We went back to Israel on a “space available” [basis], and all of these people that I had worked with at Tel Aviv at the detachment—the Israeli aircraft industry and the Israeli defense department—all of them had people there to receive us and escort us. They flew us around all over Israel. We met all kinds of people. It was a great trip.

**Marvin:** The boys with you?

**Irving:** Oh, no, just Ann and I.

**Marvin:** Just Ann and you.

**Irving:** That was our last big fling overseas before we became civilians and moved to Atlanta.

**Marvin:** So you go to work for Abrams. What did you do at Abrams?

**Irving:** I was president of the company for—

**Marvin:** President of Abrams?

**Irving:** Abrams Fixture Corporation.

**Marvin:** Okay, yes. You indicated there were a number of divisions. [There were] a number of presidents then, in the company?

**Irving:** Yes, there were presidents of the various divisions. Abrams Industries was the headquarters. We manufactured store fixtures, like checkout counters and displays for

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<sup>95</sup> In 1995 – 1996, Lockheed merged with Martin Marietta and Loral Federal Systems to form Lockheed Martin Corporation, a global aerospace, defense, security and advanced technologies company. Lockheed

Kmart and Wal-Mart and JC Penney, all those. Before that, it was W.T. Grant. Then I was responsible for starting a new line of business called the carpet industry displays, and we did that for a good many years. Eventually I was moved up. I was in that company for a total of 18 years, from 1973 until I hit 65 and retired.

**Marvin:** Retired young.

**Irving:** Yes, but the last eight years I was there, I spent as the Investor Relations Officer. Investor relations is something a lot of people don't understand. I won't go into detail, but, remember the Town Hall case, where everybody all got upset . . . Investor relations—financial communications and investor relations—[is the part of a company that] talks to the people that own stock, and that kind of thing. So after I'd been there for a couple of years, doing investor relations, surprisingly, I was asked to be on a committee in NASDAQ<sup>96</sup>, the National Association of Security Dealers [Automated Quotations]. For five years I served on a committee up in Washington, and the last three years I was the chairman of that committee, a very responsible position. I learned an awful lot. When I finally got out of Abrams Industries in early 1991, I was primarily responsible for establishing a seminar on investor relations at Emory University's [Goizueta] Business School and that went on for five years.

**Marvin:** So you got a little experience teaching.

**Irving:** I had taught at the University of Maryland and went through the Air Force Instructor Training Course—honor graduate, incidentally, again. I liked teaching, I enjoy teaching. I think I mentioned before that I was a great supporter of the ROTC program.

**Marvin:** Yes.

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has long had a presence in the metro Atlanta area.

**Irving:** That's what I taught at the University of Maryland, as well as a course at the College of Military Science, which was separate from the ROTC. I taught a course in the psychology of military leadership.

**Marvin:** That's interesting.

**Irving:** I had been very much influenced by a man—for whom I worked as a full colonel, as a two-star general and as a four-star general—General Joe Kelly, Class of 1932 out of West Point. He—I guess [you] would say—is really my mentor, and I've written a great deal about him. He became a four-star general, would have been Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and I'm convinced would have been chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff except that he was a smoker, and he had lung cancer and had to be retired. He was told by the Secretary of the Air Force he was going to be Chief.

**Marvin:** Okay. So you're working in civilian industries, you're in Atlanta, and your kids are late to early teenagers, growing up.

**Irving:** Enrolled in Dunwoody High School, right here near where we're sitting.

**Marvin:** Did they have to adjust to non-movement? They're here for a goodly while now, and they're used to moving about.

**Irving:** Well, the move from Wright-Patterson down to Warner Robins, Georgia, from Warner Robins, Georgia, to Atlanta, and that's it. So that was the only move.

David's bar mitzvah was in Kansas City rather than Warner Robins, because most of the family was out in Missouri and the Rabbi Hadas, H-A-D-A-S, had been very close to Ann's family for many, many years. He married us in Kansas City. So David went back to have his bar mitzvah in Kansas City.

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<sup>96</sup> The NASDAQ stock market is a U.S. stock exchange, second-largest in the world by market capitalization, behind only the New York Stock Exchange located in the same city.

**Marvin:** I see.

**Irving:** Eric and Jeffrey, in turn, had their bar mitzvahs here at Temple Sinai.

**Marvin:** So they almost consider themselves native Atlantans. [laughs]

**Irving:** Yes, almost. David is very, very active in Temple Sinai. He's been on the board, he's been all kinds of things, vice president . . .

**Marvin:** How about your activities since you retired? Let's start with the Jewish community.

**Irving:** Okay, the Jewish community . . . with Temple Sinai I served on the board, I served on committees. I haven't really been as active with the American Jewish Committee,<sup>97</sup> I've always supported them, but I've never really been very active. I've been active in the Boys and Girls Clubs [of America]<sup>98</sup> . . .

Bernie asked me to join the Kiwanis Club [of Atlanta],<sup>99</sup> which I did in 1976. Eventually I became the president of the Kiwanis Club, and I *think* I was the first Jewish president of that club. I don't know of anybody who had preceded me as president. I was in it from 1976 and still am. I have 23 years of perfect attendance at the Kiwanis.

Well, through friends of mine in Kiwanis, I was asked to be on the board of Boys and Girls Club, and that's interdenominational. It's primarily for low-income children, and a very high percentage of Blacks<sup>100</sup>. I was a vice president on the board. I

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<sup>97</sup> The American Jewish Committee is one of the oldest Jewish advocacy organizations and is widely regarded as the dean of American Jewish organizations.

<sup>98</sup> Boys and Girls Clubs of America is a national organization of local chapters which provide after-school programs for young people, often from underprivileged families.

<sup>99</sup> Kiwanis is an international service organization with clubs found in over 80 nations and geographic areas worldwide.

<sup>100</sup> African-Americans

helped write the long-range plan. I was very active in that and still am considered a member of the board.

Then one of my Kiwanis buddies asked me if I would be willing to serve on the board of Hillside Hospital—which is a hospital that began in 1888—the oldest charitable organization in Atlanta, of its type. It started out as an orphanage, is now a psychiatric hospital for kids from age eight to eighteen. It's considered one of the very finest in all of the Southeast, maybe the entire United States. Doing a hell of a good job.

**Marvin:** Where's that located?

**Irving:** Over off of Monroe [Drive], near Amsterdam Avenue, not too far from Grady High School. I've been on the board for eight years or so and firmly believe in it. They're doing a great job.

**Marvin:** So primarily your activities today are—[he's] building a house attached to his house right now—[what,] other than building your house?

**Irving:** I have been a very great supporter of The [American] Red Cross.<sup>101</sup> Ann has been on a committee called The [American Red Cross] Holocaust and War Victims Tracing [Center].<sup>102</sup> We're still finding people who lost each other during the Holocaust—brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins—people that the records didn't show where they went. The Red Cross—through this committee—has found over a thousand people, reunited them. Some absolutely unbelievable stories that we could

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<sup>101</sup> The [American] Red Cross is a humanitarian organization that provides emergency assistance, disaster relief, and disaster preparedness education in the United States.

<sup>102</sup> The American Red Cross Holocaust and War Victims Tracing Center accesses the extensive resources of the International Red Cross Movement, including the International Tracing Service, Red Cross societies throughout the world, Magen David Adom in Israel and hundreds of archives and museums to help families of victims of the Holocaust find information about loved ones and family members.

spend hours and hours talking about. So I've been a supporter of that. I've not been on the board, but I have gone to every committee meeting and have helped Ann, who eventually became the chair of that committee for two years. Then she had to give it up, but she's still on that committee. [Plus], at Temple Sinai, Ann has run the blood drive. They call her "Madame Vampire".

**Marvin:** Madame Vampire. [chuckles]

**Irving:** Madame Vampire.

**Marvin:** Let me ask you about the International Red Cross<sup>103</sup>. What are your feelings for them and their relationship with the State of Israel?

**Irving:** I follow very closely what they have tried to do. We [America] have the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, but we don't have the Magen David Adom<sup>104</sup>. When I have to send money for contributions, I quite often send it to the American Magen David Adom, which is the equivalent. Eventually—I'm convinced, I don't know how soon—the Magen David Adom will be recognized as one of the mainstays of the Red Cross. They all do the same thing; they just do it in different locations. The Red Cross here, I have supported both in contributions and in time.

We have a West Point Society of Atlanta,<sup>105</sup> which I'm active in.

**Marvin:** What do they do?

**Irving:** One of the things they do is encourage young people to apply for the academy. We honor them when they get accepted. I have served on many boards, Marvin, of selection for candidates to the academy: Newt Gingrich's board, Ben Jones —

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<sup>103</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross is a humanitarian institution based in Geneva, Switzerland, and a three-time Nobel Prize Laureate.

<sup>104</sup> The Magen David Adom is Israel's national emergency medical, disaster, ambulance, and blood bank service. The name means "Red Shield of David."

when he was congressman here—Senator [Max] Cleland, and others up in Ohio and various other places. I've written a master's thesis on the subject of the appointment system to the service academies. I've always felt that it was much too political. It's getting away from that, to a large extent, but there is still some political influence.

**Marvin:** How many Jewish individuals approach these boards? [If] I'm a teenager, I'm interested in West Point, do I approach you?

**Irving:** No.

**Marvin:** Do I find someone on the board?

**Irving:** No, the first thing we always tell people to do is to write to the admissions office. They will send you a packet, and the packet has all kinds of forms to fill out. It goes back up to the academy. The Naval Academy and Air Force Academy are all the same, for practical purposes. Congressmen have "x" number of spaces available at each of the academies, and they nominate—they don't appoint—they nominate. The President appoints, that's something that most people don't understand. And yes, there are always Jewish cadets at West Point. How many apply and how many get in? I don't have statistics, but they're always there, and that Jewish cadet chapel is very, very active.

By the way, there is no mandatory religious service, and every cadet—male and female—is allowed to choose where he or she wants to go. We have a Muslim in the Jewish cadet chapel. We have many non-Jews [who] go to the Jewish chapel.

Why? Well, we have an *Oneg Shabbat*<sup>106</sup>. . .

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** . . . after every service, and we have Passover meals up there.

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<sup>105</sup> Group dedicated to supporting West Point graduates in the greater Atlanta area.

**Marvin:** Does the *Oneg Shabbat* supply the wine too, or are you using grape juice?

**Irving:** I can't say.

**Marvin:** [laughs]

**Irving:** I don't think—no, no wine.

**Marvin:** [laughs] I wouldn't think so.

**Irving:** I've been there before, but I've never noticed that.

**Marvin:** I'll give you an aside. As you know, I was at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery [Alabama], and they have a prison there also . . .

**Irving:** Oh, yes.

**Marvin:** . . . which is pretty open. One day, the rabbi approached me and says, "You know, there are three Jewish individuals there. Would you like to take them to service?" So Doris [Weintraub] and I pick them up for a number of months and take them to service, and you know why they went?

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** To drink the wine. [laughs]

**Irving:** Yes. [laughs] So Jews in the military—and you know that out of the first class [to graduate West Point, in 1802], one of the two in the class was Jewish.

**Marvin:** Right.

**Irving:** Simon Magruder Levy.

**Marvin:** Talking about West Point and the International Conference of the Red Cross, of course, is of interest to most Jews who know about the area.

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<sup>106</sup> *Oneg Shabbat*, (Hebrew: "Joy of Sabbath"), is an informal Sabbath (or Friday evening) gathering of Jews in a synagogue or private home to express outwardly the happiness inherent in the Sabbath holiday.

**Irving:** One interesting trip that Ann and I made when she was on the board [Holocaust and War Victims Tracing Center] . . . The man who usually went to the international meeting of all the signatories to the Holocaust Tracing Organization [couldn't go, so] Ann was selected as the representative. I went with her, and we went to Berlin. We had a two-day meeting, talking to the people from the Netherlands and France, Israel had a representative, and so on. So it's been very interesting to see how that works. And Berlin was amazing, it reminded me of Atlanta, the cranes—[because] of all the big buildings.

**Marvin:** [chuckles.]

**Irving:** Very busy.

**Marvin:** Do you miss working for a living, for a paycheck?

**Irving:** No. No, because I keep very busy, Marvin. I'm writing a book . . .

**Marvin:** Ah!

**Irving:** . . . and I attend the Kiwanis meeting every Tuesday—not religiously—but I go almost every week. I try to play tennis to keep in good shape, but I spend a lot of time on my computer, communicating with people all over the world. And I am writing this book, it is autobiographical. I call it, *My Family, My Life*. And I'll tell you that I learned from a young woman here in town name Jacki Morris—there is such a thing as an ethical will, and so this book is my ethical will. They define it as, all the answers to all the questions that my great-great-great-grandchildren would have asked me had they had the opportunity.

**Marvin:** Well, all they would have to do is listen to this tape. [laughs]

**Irving:** Listen to the tape. [laughs]

**Marvin:** [laughs] But, no, you want them to go out and buy the book when it comes out.

**Irving:** No, the book will never be commercially published.

**Marvin:** Okay.

**Irving:** It's being written for the benefit of my children primarily, and my relatives. I have taken excerpts from it and [I'm] sending it to various cousins around the country too, just so they know what's going on. I am the family genealogist and historian. So I have on my computer the Family Tree Maker, and I have trained my cousins, primarily, to send me information about weddings and births and deaths and so on, and I've kept busy.

**Marvin:** How far back have you traced the family?

**Irving:** Back, absolutely sure, to 1866. My grandmother and grandfather were living in what is now the Republic of Moldova. It was then called Bessarabia, part of Romania, part of Russia; it went back and forth. I went back there in 1996 to see for myself.

Three interesting things happened, and this I think is worth telling. I organized a trip of seven people: myself; a fellow named **Victor Youkilis**, who lived in **Cincinnati [Ohio]**, and his significant other (his wife had died); his nephew, **David Schorr** and his wife; and Victor's son and daughter. The seven of us went to Kishinev—Kishinow, it's now called—and then went to Telenesht, the village. We had a Jewish man who did a TV program called *On the Jewish Street*. He came with us, and he had it all videotaped.

But three things happened to me. Number one, we were received by the president of the district, given red carpet treatment, and the thought occurred to me that my grandparents and my aunts and uncles who lived in a great antisemitic environment would not have believed what was happening to us. They knew we were Jewish. At one point, fifty percent of the population of this village was Jewish. Now, there are less than fifty people. So that was the first thing, that [because of] the antisemitism [my grandparents endured], they wouldn't believe [how well we were received].

Number two, I had this kind of emotional thing. When I walked the land, knowing that so many of my ancestors had been there, had lived in this place.

But the third thing that really hit home: thank God my grandparents had the guts and the knowledge and the stick-to-it-iveness to get the hell *out of there*. Because they avoided the pogroms, what came after 1903, 1905. They missed World War I, they missed World War II, and they all settled in St. Joe, Missouri. *Fiddler on the Roof*.<sup>107</sup>

**Marvin:** Let me ask this. You mentioned your parents—while we were chatting before we put the tape on—were here in Atlanta, at the Jewish home.

**Irving:** Yes, I brought them here from Tucson [Arizona].

**Marvin:** Are they buried here in Atlanta or did they go back to St. Joe?

**Irving:** Both are in St. Joe, Missouri. The cemetery has close to ninety percent of all of my family. *Shaare Sholem* Synagogue, the Orthodox synagogue.

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<sup>107</sup> *Fiddler on the Roof* is a musical by Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, and Joseph Stein. It is the story of life in a fictional Russian *shtetl* in 1905, when Czar Nicholas II was still ruling Russia. As the play opens, the villagers have learned of the Czar's edict that they must leave their home, and by the end, all are packed up and headed to America or Poland, to avoid the pogroms.

**Marvin:** Interesting. Well, what else do we need to talk about, now, Irv? We've got you to Atlanta, and we've got your family. Very active in the Kiwanians and with Hillside. What else are you doing to keep busy, other than playing tennis? [laughs]

**Irving:** [laughs] Well, I communicate a lot with my cousins. We have a net, we have a Hochman-Schoenberg net. So I've said to them, "When you want to let me know that there's a new child in the family or a wedding or a *bris*<sup>108</sup> or anything of that sort, give me the information, and I'll crank it into the Family Tree. I have a very extensive family tree. I got Ann interested in that, she's done a lot of good research.

**Marvin:** So you're essentially looking at both families, yours and Ann's.

**Irving:** Yes. Ann does most of hers, of course, but we are on the net with the ROMSIG, which is Romanians Special Interest Group. She's with the Lithuanian Special Interest Group [LitvakSIG]. There's a tremendous amount of traffic that goes on, asking questions about, "Do you know so-and-so? I'm trying to find information on so-and-so, and they lived at this *shtetl* or that *shtetl*," busy, busy. Genealogy, you'd be amazed, if you go down to south of town, where they have a branch of the U.S. Archives . . .

**Marvin:** Yes, I know.

**Irving:** . . . there are people in there all the time, reading the 1920 census, the 1910 census—every ten years there's a census—trying to find Aunt Sylvia or whoever. They're always down there, and it's the greatest hobby for retired people.

**Marvin:** I just assumed they'd all be Mormons. [laughs]

**Irving:** Oh, no, no. That's a good point. The Mormon church out in Salt Lake City—very cooperative. They have a branch—I think two churches, Mormon churches—

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<sup>108</sup> The Jewish ceremony of circumcision.

here in Atlanta. You can go and use their archives, use their library, and see what they've got available at Salt Lake City, and you can request it. You can request a tape or a CD of whatever they have.

<End Tape 3 Side 1>

<Begin Tape 4 Side 1>

**Marvin:** This is Marvin Weintraub again. We're still interviewing Irv Schoenberg, and we're still in his house, and it's still the middle of July, and this is tape four.

Irv, we were talking about genealogies and nets and why you got interested and how you're interested in other things, but let's go to the future. You say you're writing a book for future generations. What are your kids doing nowadays? Are they using their Jewish education, which—they seem to have good ones . . .

**Irving:** I think so. Ann and I are very fortunate that all three of our sons live in the Atlanta area, and we have four granddaughters.

**Marvin:** Ah! None have gone to West Point, the granddaughters? [laughs]

**Irving:** I doubt that. I doubt it seriously, but it's possible. Eric—the father of two of those daughters—after he graduated from the University of Virginia, was given an Air Force medical school scholarship and went through medical school at Tulane University. When he graduated, he became a captain and served for . . . well, it was in the First Gulf War,<sup>109</sup> one of the first people to arrive in Saudi Arabia. He has some very interesting comments about the Saudis, by the way. Eric graduated from the University of Virginia, as did his oldest brother—my oldest son—David. Both went to the University of

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<sup>109</sup> The Gulf War (1990 – 1991) was codenamed Operation Desert Shield for operations leading to the buildup of troops and defense of Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm in its combat phase. It was a war waged by coalition forces from 35 nations, led by the U.S. against Iraq, in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait arising from oil pricing and production disputes.

Virginia. All three graduated from Dunwoody High School. Jeffrey was four years at Princeton University up in New Jersey. David got a law degree from the University of Georgia. Eric got his medical degree from Tulane, where he met his wife. Jeffrey got his law degree from the University of North Carolina.

**Marvin:** You've got two lawyers, I don't know if that's good or not.

**Irving:** I don't, either. [laughs]

**Marvin:** "Kill all the lawyers!" [laughs]

**Irving:** I need a CPA among the family.

**Marvin:** Let's go back—for a moment—to their education at Dunwoody [High School], as three academically bright Jews.

**Irving:** Yes. We came to Dunwoody because the real estate people all kept saying, "That's a growing community. You'll like it out there. There are a good many Jews in the community." On this cul-de-sac, when we first moved in, it was fifty percent Jewish.

**Marvin:** You decided there are *too many* Jews? [laughs]

**Irving:** [laughs] Yes, maybe, but Eric had quite an accomplishment. There was a thing called Academy of Achievement. They pick out seniors that go out to California, all expenses paid. Herschel Walker [football player] was in the group that Eric got chosen for. Eric was a Presidential Scholar, three kids out of the state of Georgia were selected. Eric was one, a Jewish girl named Sylvia Sorrell was the second, and the third one was a young man that had a Chinese name like Wang or something. They served in the Fourth of July parade as grand marshals here in Dunwoody.

David is very much involved with Temple Sinai, as I said before, and has maintained his extremely good relationship with the coach of the University of Virginia

swimming team. He was the manager at Virginia, and he's now kind of an assistant coach, and travels with the team all over the country.

Jeffrey spent two years in a law firm, decided he didn't want to practice law. He got out, and he's sort of in the public domain these days. He worked for Senator [Max] Cleland for about five years, until he was defeated. Then he went to work for Congresswoman [Denise L.] Majette until she was defeated—well, before she was defeated; that's a long story.

**Marvin:** What's he doing now?

**Irving:** He's looking for a good position. Eric is an anesthesiologist, he has an M.D. degree [Doctor of Medicine] from Tulane, and he's head of the anesthesiology department at Barrow County Hospital in Winder, Georgia, so he lives in Gwinnett [county]. As Ann says, "It's almost in South Carolina."

**Marvin:** No, it's not that far. Just for the record, Dunwoody is an affluent suburb of the city of Atlanta. We're northeast of the city, essentially.

**Irving:** Right.

**Marvin:** Are your children as active in the Jewish community as you were?

**Irving:** I would say not quite, because the four granddaughters are almost twelve, almost ten, three, and six months. They're still very young.

**Marvin:** All right. I know you had—in addition to working with the State of Israel, and the Kiwanians—you've had other activities . . .

**Irving:** Oh, the USO.<sup>110</sup> I'm very much a believer in the USO, and I spend time down there with the people who operate it [in Atlanta]. It's considered one of the best USOs in the United States. For example, last Christmas I got a group of people from Temple Sinai, and we went down there to help the troops. We served meals. There's always a bar that they can have coffee and soft drinks and cookies and cakes.

**Marvin:** Well, I'm glad you clarified that bar. [laughs]

**Irving:** Yes, [chuckles] coffee.

**Irving:** And like B'nai B'rith's "pinch hitter"<sup>111</sup> does for the hospitals?

**Marvin:** Yes.

**Irving:** I think we're going to continue that with the USO. But, let me back up about USO. In St. Joe, Missouri, I enlisted in the Army in 1943. My mother was already a volunteer with the USO. She worked very hard, got to know a lot of the soldiers, and she has wonderful stories. But my own experience with the USO was also very, very positive. While I was at Cornell University, at a West Point prep school, we had a weekend—not very many, but we had a few weekends—down in New York City. We were riding the Lehigh Valley Railroad, very, very smoky and [laughs] it was a bad ride. I had to carry a uniform, one clean one to always have available. We'd stop at a place called Sayre, Pennsylvania and there was always a group of women there with milk and cake and

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<sup>110</sup> The United Service Organizations (USO) is an American nonprofit-charitable corporation that provides live entertainment, such as comedians, actors and musicians, social facilities, and other programs to members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

<sup>111</sup> B'nai B'rith International is the oldest Jewish service organization in the world and is committed to the security and continuity of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, and combating antisemitism and bigotry. The Pinch Hitter Program is B'nai B'rith's annual community service project where volunteers from the Jewish Community "go to bat" for non-medical hospital personnel on Christmas Day so Christian employees can spend the holiday at home with their families.

coffee and apples and oranges. They were typical of what was going on during World War II. There was tremendous support for the military people.

So, when my mother—may she rest in peace—not preached, but she always gave the impression that USO was a great thing. When I joined the USO board here in Atlanta, I have told—in fact, I’ve been interviewed on TV—“Why are you interested in the USO?” I said, “Because my mother was interested in the USO. It’s a carry on.” I feel that it is a good thing you can do to help the troops.

That Budweiser ad—at the Super Bowl—that Budweiser ad showed soldiers going back to Afghanistan or to Iraq, and it’s a good feeling to know that you’re helping those people.

**Marvin:** You’re pretty active. You’ve got Hillside, the USO, Kiwanians.

**Irving:** West Point Society.

**Marvin:** West Point Society.

**Irving:** Boys and Girls Club.

**Marvin:** Yes. I haven’t heard any Jewish activities in there except you said you were on the board of [Temple] Sinai.

**Irving:** Yes, I belong to the Jewish War Veterans. I can’t say that I’m very active with them, but I belong, I support them. And B’nai B’rith, I support the B’nai B’rith.

**Marvin:** But not the way you support Kiwanians, actively.

**Irving:** No, no, it’s true. I can’t tell you why, except that maybe there’s something about the Kiwanis program that appeals to me. It’s serving the youth of our community, and I think we do a good job. We started selling brooms or having pancake breakfasts and things of that sort. Every member pledges a certain amount of money every year, and

we use that money to support organizations like Boys Club, Girls Club, the Hillside Hospital, all kinds of things involving youth. That money, I think we give it to something like twenty-five different organizations. We've built up a very nice endowment, a foundation, and it's really helping the community. I believe that.

**Marvin:** How many other Jewish individuals are on these boards with you. any idea?

**Irving:** Not a lot, but there are several. There are several on the Boys and Girls Clubs, several have been honored for their long service and their contributions. The Hillside Hospital—yes, there are a couple of Jewish people besides myself that are on that board. And, as I say, they do a great job. Their success rate is somewhere between ninety-five and ninety-nine percent. People who come in who are severely disturbed, with severe emotional problems, kids that have been beaten or sexually abused—we had one girl there for a while whose face was a horrible mess from having been burned—things of that sort. You want to see those kids do well and finally get back into the community, and most of them get out in the community and finish their high school, get jobs, and the success rate is very good.

**Marvin:** So you think the Jewish community is actively involved here in Atlanta, with the general community, on boards such as we're talking about.

**Irving:** Yes.

**Marvin:** Major institutions.

**Irving:** There are several Jewish people who have been on Hillside, for example, for many years. Hillside doesn't get a lot of publicity, they don't want to talk about the kids that are there and why they're there. They're very protective. They're very aware of

what these kids are going through, so they don't want to give them any more problems than they've already got. But there have been Jewish people on that board for a long, long time. There was a woman named [Irma] Goldwasser, who just died not too long ago. She'd been on the board of trustees for years and years.

**Marvin:** How about the political aspects of it? Do you feel as if Jews are involved in the politics of Atlanta and Georgia?

**Irving:** Oh, yes.

**Marvin:** How so?

**Irving:** There are some very strong Republicans and some very strong Democrats.

**Marvin:** We've got Republican Jews? [laughs]

**Irving:** [laughs] Oh, yes. Bernie Marcus is one of them and Arthur Blank is another one. There are good people . . .

By the way, talking about activities, the Israel Bond thing. We always have a big event at Temple Sinai. Ann and I have supported that. One of our good friends, Arthur Hyman, was the last honoree, and the governor of Georgia, [Sonny] Perdue, was there. Rabbi Yaffi—he's head of the Reform movement—[was there].

**Marvin:** So that keeps you busy.

**Irving:** I like to be busy. One of my friends once said to me, "You know, you've got to have a reason to get up in the morning," and I have lots of reasons to get up in the morning, and that's the way I like it.

**Marvin:** What else would you like to chat about? Anything you think we have not covered? We looked at your military career, what you're doing now . . .

**Irving:** I've always believed that I've been a very fortunate individual. I had good support as I was growing up, under the influence of some wonderful teachers. I mentioned Calla Varner, and Bruce Fangler, people that influenced me; Sergeant McCroskey, who was my ROTC instructor, and people that I served with in the military, General Joe Kelly, for example. People from whom I learned a great deal. When I taught that course on the psychology of military leadership, I was really echoing the things that I saw demonstrated by people like General Joe Kelly. He was the kind of a leader that would march his troops to the end of the cliff and if he said, "Jump," they would jump.

But I have to go back to West Point. If anything really prepared me for life and motivated me, it was my experience at West Point. Four years of intensive physical, military and moral training. That's what disturbs me about the Air Force Academy, how they let that happen. I am dedicated to West Point. I've served on the board, looking for good candidates to nominate to be appointed to West Point. I just feel that my life would have taken a completely different turn had I not gone to the military academy, and then served thirty years in the military. I'm not ashamed to say that I'm a patriot. I believe in the United States. I served in the military because I wanted to serve my country.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of people that don't feel that or don't understand that, but the people have to serve the United States if we're going to continue to be what we are.

**Marvin:** Do you think we get that message out to the Jewish community?

**Irving:** Not as well as we could. I think a lot of that Cossack mentality still exists, [believing] that it's [the military] is an anti-Jewish organization, and it really isn't. There are anti-semites everywhere. You can't say that they're only in the military. Books have

been written about antisemitism in the Army, but it still goes on, and Jews continue to serve the country and serve it well.

There have been Jewish cadets from the military academy who have died in Iraq. They wouldn't be there if they didn't believe in what they were doing. They wouldn't have gone to the academy if they didn't understand—they *shouldn't* have gone to the academy if they didn't understand—that what they were committing themselves to was service to the country as an officer.

So it's a great institution, and I hope that nothing ever happens to change it drastically. There are people who say it's becoming too civilianized, too much of a liberal arts college, and that may be true. But over all, it's going to continue to do the job that George Washington had much to do with, and Thomas Jefferson had much to do with, when they realized that you have to have a military. If you're a power in the world, the power has to be supported by, and backed up by, the military.

**Marvin:** Well, that's a good closing statement.

**Irving:** Okay.

**Marvin:** Why don't we quit there? First of all, let me thank you on behalf of all the organizations, and I personally have learned a lot and enjoyed it. So we'll close it right there, and again, thank you, Irv.

**Irving:** And thank you, Marvin.

<End Tape 4 Side 1>

**INTERVIEW ENDS**