A TEI Project

Interview of Harvey Schechter

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (March 11, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and I'm interviewing Mr. Harvey Schechter at his home in Beverly Hills, California. The date is March 11, 2010. So Mr. Schechter, we're going to start with your birth date and then after you give me that, if you can move on into what you remember about your parents' family history, and possibly your grandparents' family history.
Schechter
Very simple. But first of all, Mr. Schechter was my father. I'm Harvey, so let's start on that. I remember quite a bit. I was born in Brooklyn, January 4, 1924. I'm now eighty-six years old. It was a poor--it was a working-class neighborhood. My father [Morris Schechter] had been a union organizer for the laundry workers, and it was a dangerous position, because I heard about a gangster named Little Augie, and I looked him up on Google, and sure enough Little Augie was a gangster who had threatened my father, and once as kids do I was probing in a closet looking at things, and I found a shoebox, and there was a pistol in it. I asked my mother [Dora Schechter], "Why do we have a pistol?" and she didn't answer. Next I knew, the pistol was gone, but my father carried a gun for protection.
It was a typical Jewish family in Brooklyn. I was born in '24, I went to a neighborhood public school, P.S. 158. In Brooklyn they didn't name them, they gave them numbers, and P.S. is Public School

158. It was about four blocks away. In the beginning I walked to school. I remember walking with my friends. It was three blocks away, four blocks away. There was never any concern as we have today about kids. You just walked to school and played outside, didn't have to make a date. Our neighborhood had lots of kids. It was a mixed Jewish and Italian neighborhood, Jews and Italians. One funny thing was some kid moved on the street with a name like Armstrong, and I remember we asked him, "Are you a Jew or are you Italian?" And he said, "I'm American." We said, "We're Americans too, but are you a Jew or are you Italian?" And at that age it never occurred to us that somebody could be something other than a Jew or Italian. Those were the only two kind of people. There were a couple of Poles on the street, but it was primarily Jewish and Italian, and we got along very well. In fact, when one street would go to fight another street, but not a real like gang with guns or anything, it was the Jews and Italians of Schenk [Avenue] against the Jews and Italians of Miller, Miller Avenue. We didn't know the word integration, but this was our street.

At age seven, 1931, I developed an illness, a low-grade fever, and by the time they figured out what it was, namely Rheumatic Fever, my aortic valve had been damaged, and that was the beginning of the rest of my life. Every spring I would get sick with terrible pains, rheumatic fever in the knees, ankles. I was confined to bed for months, and as Hope [Mendoza Schechter] says, she hates to play games with me, because I learned--amused myself during the day with games. There was no TV. I listened to the radio sometimes, but I learned to live with this thing called Rheumatic Fever. I was the sickly one. I wasn't supposed to run or play games. I never learned how to swim, because I wasn't allowed to swim. It was too strenuous.

And I was always the referee or the umpire. In Brooklyn there was a game called punchball, which is basically baseball with one exception, namely there are no gloves, no bats, and you punch the ball with your hand. We used to use what was called a Spaldeen. I always thought it was Spaldeen. Later on I found out it was Spalding. Those were the quality balls and all the kids would chip in a penny to buy a ball. And I was the referee. I wasn't allowed to play, and I wasn't allowed to run, but I did sometimes and I paid for it. I'd go to other streets to play punchball, away from my mother,

and invariably one of the neighbors would tell my mother, "I saw Harvey playing punchball on Miller Avenue and Bradford Street," and I would catch hell.
I wasn't allowed to go out in the snow. We lived on a street that had a slope, and the kids used to go belly-whopping on sleds. I don't know if you ever heard the term. There was a sled and you ran and then you threw it down and you bellied on it and you went down. I used to look out the window and beg my mother and father, "Let me go out belly-whopping." At one point my father said, "All right, I want you to go outside. I want you to go in the snow. But if you get sick, I won't let Mama come near you. You're just going to lie in bed sick." So I didn't go out.
Espino
Can you talk to me a little bit about what would happen? Like the times that you did go out and play, what would be your symptoms?
Schechter
It would start out with a sore throat, and then I'd start to run a low-grade fever. This was before sulfa drugs, and they had nothing to treat it with. The prescription was, "Go to bed." Just go to bed and stay in bed until the fever stops. I missed a lot of school, because it would usually happen in March or April and quite often I'd stay out of school till June, till it closed. I lost a year because of that, but it didn't affect me. I was always a good student and there were always books in the house. My father had a bookcase full of books from his Socialist days, so I remember reading Tom Paine's "Common Sense" and things like that.
Living in Brooklyn was fantastic. A million kids. You just walked outside the house and there were all these kids on the street, and we were age-graded. If the guys who were fourteen and you were twelve, and they would let you play with them, that was like going to play for the Dodgers. You were really, you were good if you could play with the fourteen- or the fifteen-year-olds. It was a wonderful life.
Now, this was the depression.
Espino
Before we go on to that, there's something that you mentioned about your father being threatened by this so-called--
Schechter
Well, this was before I was born.

Espino
But did he ever tell you why?
Schechter
One of my big criticisms of myself is that I wasn't smart enough to say to my father and say to my mother, "Tell me about your lives." And even when they got older I was still too stupid. I was into my own world and Hope, and I never sat down and said--and I tell this to young people. "Sit down with your parents, your grandparents, and have them tell you what their lives were like. Just ask lots of questions." And I was too stupid.
I know my father was a union organizer. I know that he was an active Socialist. He ran for state assembly on the Socialist ticket. Tammany [Hall] came to see him and said they wanted him to run for them, and if he ran for state assembly, they guaranteed he'd be elected, and he told them to take their endorsement and stick it. He wasn't going to sign up with the Tammany boys, and he lost. I remember pictures of him in the newspapers. This was Kings County, Brooklyn. He wrote for two papers. One was the "Socialist Call," which was in English, and the other was Der Vorvitz, which was Yiddish. He was self-educated. He never went to school. Came here when he was a little boy and just educated himself. He learned English at what was called the Education Alliance on the Lower East Side. They were all Lower East Side people. In fact, when my father and mother married in 1915, they moved up. They moved to Brooklyn, and that was really something.
Now, let me digress. On the Lower East Side, my grandmother [Sarah Laufer] lived in a cold-water five-story walkup, no elevator. Cold-water flat means no hot water. Whatever hot water you wanted, you had to boil. The heat was in the kitchen. There was a big black wrought-iron stove, and that's where they cooked their meals and warmed the apartment. They all had boarders to help them pay the rent. The toilets were in the hall at a landing. There were four apartments, two toilets to be shared by the four apartments and whoever lived there. Bathtubs were in the kitchen. The bathtub was a bathtub with a board over it. That's where you washed your dishes, and that's where you took your baths.
But they came from Eastern Europe, where they had outhouses. They didn't have any water inside. So to them this was great. Hey, we've got a faucet and we don't have to go outside and bring in

water, and we don't have to go out in the middle of the night outside, so this was a step up for them. And then the next step was to Brooklyn, where we had an apartment where the bathroom was in the apartment, right off the kitchen. It was the third floor and then it was cheaper. Now the higher you go, it's more expensive. Then it was cheaper, because you didn't have to go up all the way. My family had to move from there, move one block to a two-family home, because the doctor didn't want me walking up all those steps. I used to come home from school, and I called my mother, and she would lower down cookies or an apple on a string in a bag. If I had to go to the bathroom, I would go to Mrs. Daly's house, a little one-family house, and those were the adjustments we made. My mother never went past the fourth or fifth grade. She also came from the Lower East Side. That's where they met. And my grandfather, my maternal grandfather [Mendel Laufer] had a little candy store, and he took my mother out of school to work in the candy store. And the teacher came to see my grandfather, as I remember the story, he said, "Let her go to school. She's a good student." And my grandfather said, "I need her in the store." So he didn't care about her education. He had been a garment worker and had lung problems because of the lint that he breathed in, so he had what they used to call consumption. I don't know exactly what consumption was, but I know he always had a difficult time bringing up phlegm. He would go into the bathroom and he had a little can, and he would put it on fire and he would breathe in whatever. My grandmother died in '36, and he stayed on in the apartment.
My father's parents [David & Malka (Mollie) Schechter. She died early and he got remarried to a woman named Ghana (Anna).] also came from the Lower East Side, where they moved to Williamsburg, what's now Bedford Stuyvesant. So they got out of Manhattan and came to Brooklyn, which was a step up. But for us kids the depression, except some families, was no problem. We always ate. Sometimes dinner was a bowl of thick soup with a piece of bread and some butter. I took lunch to school. We didn't have a cafeteria. When I took lunch to school, quite often it was lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers, two pieces of bread, basically a salad between two pieces of bread, and no lunchmeat, no cheese. And my mother was great at watching pennies.

I remember once not far from where we lived there was a section with pushcarts. These men used to push these big pushcarts, and they had vegetables and fruits and god knows what else. They were always cheaper than the stores, the A&P. I remember my mother was once arguing with the pushcart owner about a few pennies, carrots or whatever it was, and I was embarrassed. I was so embarrassed I walked away, and I said to my mother, "That's embarrassing. You're talking to a man about a penny or two." And she said, "Do you enjoy those chocolate-covered donuts I bring home?" "Oh, I love them." She said, "That's where those donuts come from. A penny here and a penny there, and pretty soon I can buy a box for each member of the family."

We were three children. My brother [Harold Schechter] was eight years older, so I really didn't have much contact with him, except he would carry me to the bathroom when I was unable to walk because the pain was excruciating. So I'd get on his back, he'd carry me to the bathroom and then carry me back. He was brilliant beyond words. He turned twenty in April and graduated from CCNY [City College of New York], which was the Harvard for the poor kids in New York City, City College of New York. He was the smartest of all his friends. He helped them, and he was pre-med and couldn't get into medical school. And if he'd gotten in, I don't know how they would have paid for it. They had no money.

And my brother made one big, big, big mistake. At age twenty-one he met this girl in the neighborhood, and they married secretly, absolutely secretly. Once my mother was in the market down where the pushcarts are, and some woman said to her, "Mazeltov." And my mother asked her, "Why are you giving me a mazeltov?" She said, "Because Harold is married to Dinah [Kessler]." My mother didn't know. "Oh," she said, "oh, that. Oh, yes, thank you." And when my brother came home that day, my mother said, "Harold, are you married?" "What?" And finally he admitted he was married. She said, "Well, if you're married, you should live with your wife, so pack up." And they were two and a half blocks away, down on Barbey Street. Moved out. My mother said, "If you're married, go live with your wife. You don't live here." And she was crushed.

And that one move on his part ruined him, because World War II came. My brother went into the air force, came out a lieutenant and was assigned to air traffic control in Egypt. He came back. By this

time he had a little boy, my nephew Steve [Schechter], who's now sixty-five. Let's see. Steve was born in '43, so that's what? That's fifty-seven, sixty-seven. He came back. A couple of his friends took advantage of the G.I. Bill, and one became a dentist, and one became a doctor. And my mother was leaning on my brother. He was living in a Quonset hut. Do you know what a Quonset hut is? It was a military building like so, metal. They were very easy to put up, and they were used in the military to put up housing for the troops, like so, Quonset, Q-u-o-n-s-e-t. When these guys came back from military service, there was no housing, so they found areas where they put up Quonset huts, and they divided them up for military people who were married.

So my brother lived in a Quonset hut with his couple of kids. They had a good time with all the former G.I.'s and stuff, but his father-in-law, when he told him he wanted to go to school, Mr. Kessler said, "You're a married man with children. What are you talking about going to school? Go get a job." And he was a schmuck. He was intimidated by his wife [Dinah] and by her brother, who was a doctor, and by his father-in-law. So he got a job with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company selling insurance.

I was in California, and I said, "Harold, the place for you to sell insurance is here in California, Los Angeles." But she wouldn't leave her mother and her brother and sister. So he worked at the low end of insurance and the big opportunity was slipping away. He never made anything of himself, and it was heartbreaking, because he was the smartest of all the guys. He was the one that helped them with their studies, and he wound up selling insurance, and he was selling encyclopedias. He was selling aluminum siding, and he became a real con man.

Espino

Do you remember your mom, growing up with your brother and you, her ideas about education, her philosophy about education, as kids?

Schechter

Her idea, very simple. I was shocked to learn that--Harold was going to CCNY. He could get in. He got in and he was very good. I was in California. I did my last year of high school in Santa Barbara at La Loma Feliz. It was a private, very expensive private school.

Let me digress to that. Is this what you want to hear, what I'm saying?
Espino
Yes.
Schechter
When I had this very serious Rheumatic Fever relapse in 1941, spring, I damn near died. I was in an oxygen tent for three or four days, because then they didn't use the little tubes. They had an oxygen tent, plastic, and there was ice in the back, and the oxygen flowed through the ice. And I survived that. And I overheard the doctor saying to my mother--I was in a ward, nine people in the ward, and I'm sure it was welfare or low rate. And the doctor said to my mother that, "You've got to get Harvey out of New York. He will not survive another winter." He said, "We don't know that a warmer climate will be beneficial, but we know that he can't stay one more winter in New York." And then he said to her, and they thought I was asleep, he said, "And if we're lucky, Harvey will make it to thirty-five or forty, if we're lucky." And my mother said, "Thirty-five or forty is not very much, but at least it's not seventeen."
So now the question was, how do we--my father had no money. My father was working as a laundry truck driver. After he left the union, he got a job through a cousin driving a laundry truck in Brooklyn. So how do you go to California? I had two uncles in Los Angeles, and I was a little bitter because neither one of them would take me. And then as I got older, I realized that they were very apprehensive. Suppose I come out and I get sick again and I died, and they'll feel, gee, they didn't take good care of me. So they both said no.
So my brother was looking for a place in California, and he found this place called La Loma Feliz in Santa Barbara. So he wrote to the doctor who was in charge, Dr. Ina M. Richter. She was a real Prussian. She could have been a member of the German general staff. They wrote back, Dr. Richter wrote back and said they'd love to have me as a student, and room and board for nine months was eighteen hundred dollars, two hundred dollars a month, and you have to pay transportation. That was twice what my father was making. So my father wrote back and said, "He's a good student. Do you have scholarships?" Back came a letter, "Okay. We'll give him six hundred dollars," so it's still twelve hundred dollars. So they

tried to borrow money and asking someone for twelve hundred dollars in 1941 was like asking for it would be a hundred thousand today, fifty thousand, with no guarantee I'm going to pay it back. And they just couldn't come up with the money.
So they wrote a letter to Dr. Richter and said, "We can't come up with the money. Thanks for the scholarship." And the plan was for my mother and me to go to Los Angeles. My mother would find a job, because the war industries were building up, and we'd take a small apartment, and I'd go to school here and she would work, and then she'd look for a job for my father, and then he and my sister [Mildred] would come out. My brother was married and he was already living separately.
Then came a telegram from Dr. Richter saying, "If you will agree to pay twenty-five dollars a month for four years, no interest, I will put up the twelve hundred dollars for your son." My father sends a telegram back, "We agree." Back comes another telegram--these are the days you didn't make long-distance calls then. And they wrote back and said, "I have a friend in New York, a Mrs. Kelley, and she will come and meet with you," and size up the family. And sure enough Mrs. Kelley came to the house, to the apartment, and Mrs. Kelley asked an important question. "How are you going to pay Dr. Richter twenty-five dollars a month? Your husband's only making a hundred dollars a month." And my mother said, "I have it all figured out. There are two sisters who are foster children. The county pays twenty-five dollars a month for each child. They provide clothing and anything like that, medical care, and all you have to do is house them and feed them." And my mother said--first of all, with twenty-five dollars she could feed the Russian army. So she said that twenty-five dollars would go toward feeding the girls. She said, "If Harvey was here, I'd have to feed him. And the other twenty-five goes to Dr. Richter." So they said okay.
And the arrangement was that I would take a train out to Santa Barbara in early October, and it was Yom Kippur, and some of the neighbors were a little bit surprised that I would travel on a high holy day. Forget about that. So one night in early October, the fifth or sixth or something like that, we all went down to Grand Central Station and I boarded a train, and to save some money, they sent me by chair car to Chicago. Then I had to change to another station. One station was the LaSalle Station. I don't remember what

the other one was. And once I got there, I went over to transfer to the other train, and that was a berth, so I could have sleeping. It was a three-and-a-half-day trip from the very beginning. I arrived in Los Angeles and two uncles met me at the station, took me to one uncle's house, where my aunt had breakfast for me. Then they took me back to Union Station, and I took the Daylight up to Santa Barbara, where I was met by the headmaster, and he drove me up to the ranch school. It's at the end of Mission Canyon Road above the mission, and there I was.
Education--I did my last year. They had so few students that I was the valedictorian, and Jane Lee was the salutatorian. But we were the only two graduates, so I had one honor and she had the other. Graduation's over and Dr. Richter said to me, "What are your plans for the summer?" I'm eighteen years old, three thousand miles from home. What do I do? I didn't have two ten dollar bills to rub together. So she said, "During the summer we take the horses over to pasture in Santa Ynez, so there aren't many horses here. You take care of the horses. You work with Eddie Castaña," the ranch guy, "and I'll give you ten dollars a month, room and board." Great. Great. So I worked during the summer, took the horses over, came back by station wagon, and I worked taking care of the horses.
But before that, I left out something. I wrote about it. I came out October '41. Two months later, Pearl Harbor. The doctor called me into her office and she said, "Tommy Masonheimer," I still remember his name, "just joined the army." He was going to, quote, "kill Japs," end quote. "So you're in charge of the horses." I was the oldest and the biggest one of the students, and I remember saying to her, "But Dr. Richter, what about my heart?" And she said, "You worry about horses and I'll worry about your heart." Virginia, I thrived. I gave you that thing with the picture. When my mother saw that picture, she cried. She said, "They're starving my son." I was about 145 pounds, but I thrived. I worked so hard, I mean physical work, bales of hay and cleaning out the stalls and working in the manure pit. You name it, I did it. In fact, one horse got sick, Danny Boy, Morgan stallion got sick. My responsibility was to give him enemas. But I loved Danny Boy, so, fine, give him an enema? Give him an enema. Because he had eaten some moldy hay. Danny died.

Anyway, summer's over. We bring the horses back, and Dr. Richter said, "What are your plans for September?" I had no plans. What the hell, I was eighteen years old. What did I know about plans? She said, "I'll give you twenty-five dollars a month." Boy, two and a half times. "Room and board, and you take care of the horses. You will supervise study hall. You will help Anna in the kitchen with the dishes. Whatever has to be done, you'll do." I said, "Great." And she said, "You'll go to Santa Barbara State College and enroll." And that's when I said to her, "How am I going to get to campus?" Virginia, she looked at me like--of course, there was gasoline rationing. You got four gallons a week. We were way up at the end of the Mission Canyon, above the Botanic Gardens, and those cars got fifteen miles to the gallon. No way could I drive. I had learned how to drive, had a license. So she looked at me like, you're the dumbest teenager I ever met. "With all the horses here, you ask me how you're going to get to college? You go by horse."
I was a good rider by that time. I was a very good rider. I'd get up five, five-thirty in the morning, go out and feed the horses, give each one of them a flake of hay, make sure they had water, and then I'd come back in, have my breakfast, go back out. If the weather was going to be nice, I'd put the horses out at the tie rack where they'd spend the day, and I'd saddle Chica, that was my horse, and ride off to campus. And people would say to me, "Where did you park your horse?" I said, "You don't park a horse. You tie it up." And I would not do today what I did then. I would tie up Chica to a tree on the edge of the campus, loosen the saddle just a little bit, take out the bridal so it's not irritating her mouth, and put my boots in the saddlebag, go to class. Come back; Chica was there. Saddle was there. No one took anything. Santa Barbara at that time had about twenty-five thousand people. And it was wonderful. It was just wonderful.
Espino
Well, did other people ride horses as well?
Schechter
No.
Espino
You were the only one?
Schechter

To the best of my knowledge, I was the only one who rode a horse. In fact, the "Santa Barbara News Press" wrote a story about me and the fact that I was raising chickens, I built a chicken coop and stuff like that. But I don't know of anybody else who rode a horse.

Espino

And back in New York, I mean this is going to sound like a really dumb question, but how often did you find yourself in the presence of horses?

Schechter

The only horses that I knew about were two kinds. The cowboys rode them in the Saturday afternoon movies. Ten cents you could see two movies and one of those serials. And the other horses were the ones who pulled the wagons with vegetables. The Italians used to yell, "Vegetables, fresh vegetables!" But that's what I knew about horses. But I took to it, and I loved it, and I learned a lot about horses. In fact, I wanted to be a veterinarian.

One of my great stories about Texas--there weren't many veterinary schools in the country, and after my first year at the ranch, I didn't want to stay on the campus, because the [student] population had dropped to about seven hundred, mostly girls. There were about fifty men. Most of the men were visibly disabled, twisted arm, twisted leg, whatever, and I was the picture of health. The New York Heart Association published a booklet called--and they wouldn't use this word today--"Cripples Who Do Not Limp." And the thrust of the booklet was, "You're a cripple, but your disability is inside your chest, so nobody can see it."

And I used to be so embarrassed during the war, because here I was, I was nineteen, I was strong, healthy, tanned, and the army turned me down. In '43, January '43, I was sent up to Fresno with a lot of guys from Santa Barbara for induction, and Dr. Richter said to me, "Harvey, you must promise me one thing. Army doctors are not very good. You must tell the doctor that you have Rheumatic Fever. Will you do that?" And I said, "Yes." "You promise?" "Yes." "Okay." I don't know if you ever heard about what happened, but you take your clothes off. You're in your birthday suit, and you only have one thing, a black bag around your neck with your wallet, your wristwatch, your ring, whatever. Those are your possessions. And you have a folder with your name on it, whatever, and you line up. And one doctor comes along with a stethoscope, and he's doing

this. He's just--finally he came to me and he said, "Next." And I said, "Dr., how does the heart sound?" He said, "Why? You have a problem?" I said, "I have Rheumatic Fever, and I understand my aortic valve has been damaged." So he comes back and he puts the stethoscope back on, and he takes my folder and with a big red crayon he writes, "Four." Now I'm 4-F. I said, "I really want to go in." I said, "I'm a very good typist, and I'd like to go in for limited service." And he asked me, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a college student." He says, "Go back to college," and he moved on.

Then they brought out the guys who were going to be sworn in, and the ones--you're not part of that group. And I felt like a second-class citizen, you know, you're not good enough. And it was awful, absolutely awful. This was January and as the guys kept leaving the campus to go into the service, when we were just a handful, fortunately I was at the ranch then, so I wasn't in town. But it was embarrassing, just, what's wrong with me? Are you a slacker? Do you have a special exemption? So I decided to leave the campus. I didn't want to be there, because all the girls were dating officers and sailors and marines, and there was little old me. Not that I had any dates. First year I had no dates, because I didn't have a car, and no way I could get anywhere.

So a couple of the professors, McRary in chemistry, and Addicott in biology, were going up to Salinas to work for the Department of Agriculture. Have you ever heard the term guayule? G-u-a-y-u-l-e. Guayule is a desert plant with a tremendous amount of high-quality rubber. The Japanese had captured the rubber plantations in Southeast Asia, and we had no rubber. So while we had synthetic rubber, Buna S, it would last a few thousand miles on a tire, and they were making them like crazy. And the government decided, if we can have homegrown rubber, that would be right. So they set up an experimental station in Salinas, guayule research, and these two profs went up there to do research, one biology-botany and the other chemistry, and they asked me if I wanted a job as a lab assistant. I said, "Yeah."

I was paid $1, 635 for the year. That was my annual salary, and they found me a room across from the guayule project. There was an elderly couple. He was a security guard; a tiny little four-room house, two bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen and one bath. I went up by train, and McRary took me to the place, and I was there

for a year. Then I saw that the war was changing. I went up in June of '43, yes, went up June of '43, and in May of '44 I realized there was not much future at Guayule.
Meanwhile, I had applied to Texas A&M for the veterinary school.
Espino
Before we go on to the next phase in your life, I just wanted to ask you a little bit, if you could just elaborate a little bit more on what joining the service during World War II meant to you at that time, and why--
Schechter
I didn't get in.
Espino
But I mean, why was it something that you wanted to do? Why was it something you aspired to? Maybe you could just kind of elaborate.
Schechter
But I want to come to education too, how my mother felt about education.
Espino
Yes, we have to go back to that as well.
Schechter
This was the good war. If you were not in uniform, you had to do some explaining. Throughout--wherever you went, there were little flags about that big in the windows, front windows, with stars, which you had one son, one person and usually a son, very few women, one son, two sons, three sons all in the military. They were little gold--they had gold frills around the little flags. The Gold Star Mothers were those who had lost a son in combat, so they were different from the others. It was--everybody was in. We talk about the Vietnam War; we had five hundred thousand men in combat in the Vietnam War. We had over fifteen million, thirty times what we had in Vietnam. In fact, there's just a story right about the women who flew the planes, the WASPs [Women Air Force Service Pilots], the Women's Air Service Patrol or something.
Espino
WACs?
Schechter
WASP, W-A-S-P. The WACs were the Women's Army Corps. They were different. These were pilots who were flying bombers from the United States to Europe, did all sorts of flying, no combat. But they

had thousands of women flying them. Everybody was in. It's a lie, but you wanted in. In fact, when I told some of my young staff this story that when I got turned down by the army, when I got back to Santa Barbara, I went to the Coast Guard. There was a Coast Guard station in Santa Barbara, and I said, "I want to join up." Guy said, "What's your draft status?" I said, "Four-F." He said, "Goodbye." I said, "I'm a good typist. I can do land service or free some guy for sea duty." "Goodbye." And what I found out later was that because of my health condition, if the government had taken me knowing that I had this, I would become a government ward forever. Even after they discharged me, they had to take care of me medically forever, and so the whole idea was, "If you don't qualify, out."
I don't know if that answers your question, but when I was in a public setting, I was embarrassed. When I was in Salinas, Salinas was a big military town for recreation. Nearby was Fort Ord. Nearby was Monterey, and there were a number of guys used to come into Fort Ord, into Salinas for drinking, movies, whatever. In Salinas, the main street was called Main Street. I was on Alisal Road, and I would go into town. Invariably--I don't want to exaggerate--I'd be stopped either by the military police or the Shore Patrol, either the MPs or the SPs. They'd see me, they'd say to me, "Come here. Let's see your ID." And I'd pull out my ID, show I was 4-F. "Okay. Go on." I was sitting at a bar, went in for a beer, and I was sitting next to a guy who was in uniform. I said, "I would love to have your uniform." He says, "You want to switch clothes?" He says, "I'm in the combat engineers. We're going over pretty quickly. You go in my place." So, I said to myself, Harvey, don't be a schmuck.
I don't know how to explain it, but I was really a minority, really. I was not part of the crowd. I don't know what else to say. It was rough.
Espino
How about the news you were getting back from Germany and the treatment of the Jewish people? Did that--
Schechter
I knew that before. I didn't know about the Holocaust. Before we went, I knew what they were doing to the Jews, because some Jews, some of the neighbors, the neighbor next door had his two nieces come over from Vienna. He had a tiny little apartment, tiny little apartment and a wife and little girl, and he took his two nieces

in. They were teenagers, and they lived one on top of the other, and they survived. Their parents didn't. The girls were his brother's daughters, so I knew about what was happening to the Jews. We didn't know about the Holocaust, but we knew they were jailing and killings and beatings, which made me wonder about Dr. Richter. She was a German from the Germans. Her father was a doctor, and she said she was going to become a doctor, and they wouldn't let her in. She forced her way into medical school, and no matter what criticism she had, she went through and became a doctor. And for this German woman to say to my parents, "I'll put up the money, no interest, just pay me back over four years, three hundred dollars a year."

I've told people that there were many times when I was on the verge of saying to her, "Dr. Richter, why did you do this? I'm three thousand miles away. I'm a Jewish kid in Brooklyn. You don't know anything about me. Why are you putting up that much money?" Virginia, the words wouldn't come out of my mouth. I could never ask that question. And afterwards I said, why didn't you ask her? But I just felt she did it, she didn't have to justify it or anything. But she was remarkable. I'll tell you about her.

On occasion she would say to me, "How would you like to drive my Cadillac?" She had a 1942 Cadillac, one of the last off the assembly line, all gray. She says, "Come on. I have to make some house calls." So I would drive the Cadillac and she'd sit alongside of me. We would go to Haley Street, which was the black section. I'd sit in the car and she'd go inside. She'd come out and she would use language that was offensive. "That god damn dumb nigger. I told him he's got the flu and he should stay in bed and stay away from the kids, and I walk in there and that," mm, mm, mm, "he's in bed and the kids are with him." But she's the one who made the calls for free. On the one hand she was, "You are--." On the other hand, "I'm here at no cost to you." So she was such a contradiction, a real contradiction, and I kept my mouth shut. I didn't want to say, "Dr. Richter, you know you shouldn't talk that way." Harvey, keep your mouth shut, drive the Cadillac. She was a remarkable woman.

Espino

In your mind did you say that?

Schechter

No.

Espino
Or were you old enough to know that that was not the kind of--
Schechter
Oh, sure. Sure, because I came from a liberal family. I'm pretty sure my brother in the thirties was a communist, pretty sure he was, because a couple of his friends were. And they would come to my house and argue with my father. My father had been a socialist, but an anti-communist socialist. He was a democratic socialist. I remember they'd come to the house. This was after the time--this is where I got my anti-communism. This was after the Moscow trials, and my father is arguing with these college graduates. Yes, they were graduates, because they graduated in '36, and he never went to school. And I remember him saying--I was a little boy. I was eight years younger, so I sat in the kitchen and just listened, didn't say a word. My father would say to them, "Herbie, there's no way you can persuade me that these men who fought the revolution sold out the Soviet Union to the Nazis. There's no way that these men did that."
Well, with the New York Times and this and that, and then it turns out--I don't know how carefully you watched any of this. The New York Times had a reporter named Walter Duranty, and Walter Duranty was the rock of Gibraltar for stories on the Soviet Union. He was Mr. Accurate. Years later it turned out he was a Soviet agent at the New York Times, Walter Duranty, and, oh, the stories he wrote, which everybody would quote. "Well, Walter Duranty says--." And he was a paid agent of the Soviet Union. So that's where I learned my anti-communism. My father, he knew more in a minute than--he said, "I never met these guys, but I know them. I followed the Russian revolution." So, how did I get onto that?
Espino
How did you get onto that?
Schechter
I don't remember.
Espino
Oh, we started talking about the doctor, the teacher. And how did you develop ideas that speaking, using derogatory terms towards other people--
Schechter

Yes. In our family, they were shocked by what happened to the Scottsboro boys, about Pellagra down in the South, the way the blacks were treated. And that was--the term then was Negroes. It was just, we were part of the liberal Left, and that was not kosher.

Espino

What about in your community growing up, elementary school? Was it diverse, more diverse than your neighborhood?

Schechter

No. The only Negroes that we knew, some of the buildings had a Negro super, a janitor--they called them superintendent--to put the trash out and do things. But I don't remember any black kids. It wasn't until I got to Santa Barbara State that there were a few. And years later, years later there was one young black man, a black student who graduated, and I saw him, I believe it was at an airport, but he was running the magazine concession, like that's the only job he could get, and he was a UC Santa Barbara graduate.

Espino

Did you know about segregation growing up?

Schechter

Sure. Sure.

Espino

So you knew there were places where--

Schechter

Sure. Of course. And we were the flaming liberals.

Espino

How did you understand your status as somebody Jewish, when there was a lot of anti-Semitism as well?

Schechter

Well, the anti-Semitism in New York took an interesting form. There was a group called the German American Bund, and at one point they had a rally in Madison Garden with about twenty thousand people who showed up, swastikas all over the place. They used to have street-corner Nazi speakers up in Yorkville in a certain part of Manhattan. There's a very interesting book. I think the title is "They Were Good To Their Mothers." ["But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters"] And it's the story of the New York Jewish gangsters, who used to break up Nazi rallies. These were guys--Meyer Lansky was one, Bugsy Siegel, and they would use the strong guys from the unions to break heads. I read

about it. Somebody sent me something on e-mail, and I knew the story that, in fact, some of the gangsters when Israel was created, made sure that arms for Israel went through, and arms for the Arabs fell into the ocean. They were in such control over docks. Someday somebody is going to write this whole story.
There was a group called the Silver Shirts, William Dudley Pelley. There was a guy called Gerald L.K. Smith, who was a silver-tongued anti-Semite, anti-black, anti-minority. In fact, when I started with ADL, Gerald L.K. Smith was still alive and still holding meetings at the Embassy Auditorium at 9th and Grand. We used to send people to cover his meetings. So, in fact, the interesting thing--when I came back to Brooklyn in 1944, I'd been away almost three years, hadn't seen anybody from the family. Some of the people in the neighborhood said, "Did you encounter much anti-Semitism in Santa Barbara?" And I said, "I didn't encounter any. Everyone was so nice to me. They were wonderful." So it was a spectacular experience. That's [one of the reasons] why I love Santa Barbara so much.
Espino
And the school that you talked about that you went to was a special school for--
Schechter
It was a private school.
Espino
But was it for children who were ill?
Schechter
Some were ill and some were just in private school. The doctor and two other women owned the school, and La Loma Feliz was its name. They had two hundred acres up at the end of Mission Canyon, olive trees, citrus, oranges, lemons. In fact, when I used to take care of the horses on the hot days, I'd get up early in the morning. It was kind of overcast. A lot of the mornings would be somewhat cool, damp, and we had three locations for the horses. The mares and the colts were up on the hill, the main barn, and then down below there was a corral with a shed, and down there was the orange grove. I had to come through with a bucket, and I'd pick oranges off, put them in the bucket, because they were cold and wet, and I'd put a burlap sack over it. And all day long I didn't eat the oranges, I would just squeeze the juice and throw the shell

away, the peel away. It was wonderful. It's how they used to talk about California, you go outside and you take an orange off the tree. It was wonderful.

Espino

Did you have a say in that decision?

Schechter

Which decision?

Espino

The decision to send you across the country by yourself.

Schechter

In fact, I got excited about going to Santa Barbara. I remember my father--so many years, you've triggered a memory. He said to me--because we were talking about going to Los Angeles, my mother and me. And he said, "You're going to Santa Barbara." And I said, quote, "No shit," end quote. And he said, "Don't talk that way." We went home and then he told me that they had gotten a telegram from the doctor saying, "Come on." It was quite an experience.

I got to Santa Barbara in early October. We had one Santa Ana period after I got there, and Santa Barbara usually doesn't get that hot, but it was hot. So the headmaster took us down to the beach, filled up a couple of station wagons, took the kids down to the beach. If there were two hundred people on the beach, it was a lot. The headmaster's name was Robinson. He said, "Boy, there are a lot of people on the beach today." And I said to him, "If you think this is a lot of people, you ought to see Coney Island on July Fourth, where you can't even find a grain of sand to put a blanket down." It was quite an experience.

My mother used to spend money she couldn't afford to buy me cod liver oil for the winter months so I could get vitamin D. So I come to Santa Barbara and the doctor does some shopping, and she brings a case of cod liver oil. And she says, "Take this out to the barn. This is for the horses." [laughs] And I'm saying, "My mother's squeezing pennies to get me a bottle so I can have some cod liver oil with the vitamin D," which tasted awful, "and we're feeding--." We used to give the horses grains and mash and stuff and just a shot of cod liver oil poured and mixed in, and they ate it. "We give cod liver oil to the colts?" "Ah, yes."

Espino

So you lived differently then.

Schechter
Oh, I lived like a king. My brother went to college in a subway train. I went to college on a horse.
Espino
Did you ever get sick? Did you ever get sick like you did back in New York?
Schechter
That was it. That was it. From October 1941 until February 1984, forty-one years, no, forty-three years, I had no problem with my heart. But at age sixty I passed out on a plane. I was bringing my staff back from Las Vegas, and my aortic valve decided it wasn't going to work anymore. Fortunately, the ADL board president was an anesthesiologist, not an attorney, so she kept--it was a short flight. She told me that she had a couple of men lay me out on the floor in the aisle, and she was doing pumping the chest, and she said to the stewardess, "Bring me some oxygen." So she brought a little one. She said, "I need another one. This is no good, not enough." So she said, "Well, there's another one up at the cabin, but FAA regulations--." And Myra [Rosenberg] said to the stewardess, "If you don't bring me the oxygen, he's going to die." So she went and got the oxygen. Meanwhile, they radioed ahead to Burbank to have the paramedics meet the plane, and they met them on the tarmac and took me right to St. Joseph's Hospital in Burbank, where I was stabilized. They put in a temporary pacemaker and then two days later, three days--this was a Friday. Sunday they moved me over to Cedars [Sinai Hospital], and Monday, Jack Matloff, the king of the cardiac surgeons, took out my bad valve, put in a pig valve, put in a pacemaker; here I am.
Espino
She saved your life.
Schechter
Myra saved my life. Yes. As what's her name, Dr. Richter saved my life. But once I got to Santa Barbara, that was it. No more rheumatic fever, no more anything.
Espino
And your parents never thought, never contemplated moving out here to be with you?
Schechter

It was no place for them. When my mother got older and we had a house, she would come out in cold winter, cold weather. She was miserable, had nobody to talk to. We lived in Sherman Oaks. Nobody walked. They came out of the house, got in the car and drove. She used to walk three, four blocks to the Von's Market, and she'd go shopping up and down the aisle, looking for specials. And then she would sit on the bench, because people were coming and going. In Brooklyn at least she had people to talk to. She had neighbors; not in southern California.

Espino

In your house back in Brooklyn when you were growing up, what language did you speak? Did you speak English?

Schechter

English. I picked up Yiddish just by listening, but my father and mother were more like American.

Espino

They spoke English to each other?

Schechter

Yes. If they didn't want us to understand, they'd speak Yiddish, but we knew. I started to tell you I was shocked to learn that when my sister graduated from high school, my father said, "No college. It's enough. We'll have her get a job." And my mother said, "No. She's going to college." And she went to Brooklyn College, became a teacher, taught Spanish with a heavy Brooklyn accent.

Espino

Well, that's what I wanted to get at, because your mom was taken out of school to go to work, and then I was just wondering how she passed--did she pass something down to you and your siblings?

Schechter

I'll tell you one thing that I can remember. You came home from school and you sat at the kitchen table with your little inkwell, and you did your homework. Once your homework was done, you had dinner. Then you could listen to "The Lone Ranger" or something like that.

I was in the fourth grade, and my class was putting on a play about Indians, and we sang songs. And there was an Italian guy, Randazzo, something like that, and he got me giggling. You know when you giggle and you can't stop? And we started to giggle, and the teacher stopped the play. She made him go around to one side

[of the stage] where the flags were, I went to the other side, standing there with our face in the corner, and she started the play again. When the play was over we went back to class. She said, "I want to see your mother." So I came home and I said, "Teacher wants to see you." "What did you do?" "I didn't do anything. She's picking on me." My mother said, "She's not picking on you. You were bad." And I love to tell the story. She didn't call the ACLU. She didn't call a students' right committee. She didn't get an attorney to sue. "You were wrong; teacher was right." My job was to go to school, behave myself, and bring home good grades.
At that time--I don't know what they do now--report cards had two lines. One was academic and one was deportment. So my mother wanted to see an A over an A, that I was good in academics and that I was good in the classroom. It wasn't negotiable. It was just, "Your job is to go to school and bring home good grades." And as you go along. It never occurred to me to settle for a C. Some kids are thrilled to get a C.
In fact, I had trouble with Hope [Mendoza Schechter]. When Hope went back to school to get her bachelor's, she would take an exam and get like a ninety-three, which was an A. She wanted the hundred. I'd say, "Hope, an A is an A is an A. It's an A." "I want--." So finally she came around.
Espino
[laughs] That's a great story. Well, so your mother was looking at your report cards, she was talking to--
Schechter
They had to sign them and [we had to] bring them back [to class].
Espino
Okay. Well, you could have forged them. I mean, there are ways to--
Schechter
That would never occur to me. My mother would say, "How come I didn't get a report card last month?" She was very knowledgeable.
Espino
Your brother is so much older than you, so it's hard to know--I think it might be hard for you to know what kind of values she instilled in him and how did he--
Schechter

The same thing, I assume. I assume. When he graduated from college in '36, I was twelve years old. We had very little in common, very little. He was off with his friends.
A depression story. One summer my brother got a job at the laundry where my father worked. He drove a truck. He worked six days from eight in the morning till six at night. His weekly salary was eight dollars; delighted to have a job, because eight dollars meant eighty ten-cent pieces. Subways were a nickel, so he was earning his subway fare to and from Brooklyn up to the Bronx, and it was an hour, hour and a half ride. We were toward the end of the line, so he would sit with his friends and study and talk and read. It was a whole different world.
Let me tell you my favorite Texas story. I applied to Texas A&M, didn't hear from them. And when the weather was getting cooler in New York, I had to get out of there, couldn't stay. So in September [1944]--
Schechter
I bought a [railroad] ticket to College Station, Texas, from Brooklyn, from New York, and I went to College Station where Texas A&M is. It's where I applied for the veterinary school. I only had about a thousand dollars that I had saved from working in Salinas. I went to see the dean of admissions, came in, checked in at a small hotel. Boy was it hot. God, was it hot. This is long before air conditioning. I went to see the dean, introduced myself, and told him, "I applied for admission. Never heard." So he went to the file cabinet and pulled out [my file]--in his wonderful drawl he said, "Mr. Schechter, we turned you down." I said, "Can you tell me why?" I said, "I was a straight-A student. I had ranch experience, and two of my letters of reference were written by Santa Barbara veterinarians who were trained here at Texas A&M." He looked me in the eye and in a wonderful Texas drawl he said, "Mr. Schechter, Texas A&M is supported by the people of Texas. You, suh, are not a Texan." I said, "Thank you very much," went to the nearest Western Union [office] and sent a telegram to Doc McCrary, my chem prof, and I said, "Willard, I'll be there in two days. Enroll me." That's the time when there were no time deadlines. They were so glad to get people back on the campus that whenever you showed up, you were in.
Espino
Wow.

Schechter
But I'm not a Texan. Go ahead.
Espino
Well, I wanted to ask you about, just getting back to your early education, if you witnessed any kind of tracking. In some of my other interviews, because most of the people that I'm interviewing have had their experience here in Los Angeles, and primarily they're of Mexican descent, so the majority of them have experienced some sort of tracking where they weren't allowed to take the academic courses. Was that anything that you ever witnessed?
Schechter
Well, the high school I went to, Thomas Jefferson, turned out more Ph.D.'s and more doctors and more lawyers and more architects, and the Jews were the elite academically. Yes, I had some Jewish friends who were bums, but most of us were [good students]. You just went to Thomas Jefferson. I couldn't finish the last year because of my illness in '41, but no, I never heard the term tracking. I know Hope was tracked. She was shunted from academic to vocational. They may have had some.
You know, the union that Hope worked for, International Ladies Garment Workers' Union [ILGWU], is very interesting, the members. Because they were unionized, there were certain positions where you could earn a good salary, cutters, so forth. The Jews wouldn't let their kids come into the industry. "I'll be a cutter. I'll be a presser." "But you're going to school. You're not coming in here. You're not going to go down the path that I came." The Italians, completely different. They brought their kids in, because, "This is a good job. It's a good union, good benefits." So here you had two ethnic groups side by side in New York City. The Jews with rare exceptions wouldn't let their kids come in. If anyone came into the industry, he came in as a boss, came in as a contractor, came in as a manufacturer, but not to work in the shop. The Italians, on the other hand, said, "Hey, it's good money. This is a good place." I'd be willing to bet that much of this happened in New York with the Puerto Ricans and with the blacks. This was a place to get a good job.
Espino
Right. But you did mention two situations where young girls were asked not to go to college, were asked to go into the workforce.

Schechter
My father.
Espino
Your father, one, and your grandfather in another. Your mother, with your mother.
Schechter
Oh, yes, yes.
Espino
I mean, she wasn't going to go to college, but she could not continue her education. So were girls, was there some sort of gender--
Schechter
You have to go back. My grandfather was an Old World guy, and he needed help in the candy store, and I guess my mother was it. She was older than some of her female siblings. You're right. His attitude was, "You go to work." I'm talking about later on, the next group.
Espino
And then your sister was--
Schechter
Yes, my father, which was a surprise to me.
Espino
So it wasn't common then for--because it is common in other cultures, where the boy is promoted or encouraged to move on in his education, and the girl is asked to get married.
Schechter
I was surprised to learn that about my father. But he ran afoul of my mother. She said, "Mildred [Schechter] is going to college." And there was no argument. She went to Brooklyn College, graduated, became a teacher.
Espino
So you don't remember seeing any type of pattern with that in your community where you grew up, where the girls didn't go to college but the boys did?
Schechter
No. Well, I have a problem answering your question, because I left Brooklyn before my senior year, so what happened to the girls in the neighborhood I don't know. Some of the guys I grew up with, I told you, they were bums. One drove a truck, one went to work for

his father, who repaired school furniture. You tend to glamorize it, but there were lots of Jewish guys that just became salesmen, storekeepers, whatever, and so I was referring to those who were university-oriented. But if you look at Harvard, I understand 25 percent of the kids there are Jewish. Education is still a big value with Jews.
Espino
Okay. I think we're going to stop right here. That's exactly an hour and a half, and then we'll pick up next time with what happens at UC Santa Barbara and your undergraduate [days].
Schechter
Sure.
Espino
Great. Thank you.

1.2. Session 2 (April 1, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is April 1, 2010, and I'm interviewing Harvey Schechter at his home in Beverly Hills, California.
Last time, Harvey, we ended up with your graduation from UC Santa Barbara. But there's one thing that I wanted to talk about that goes back to that period and then we'll move forward, and that is, you mentioned, I guess he was a hired hand who would work at the school that you were attending. His name was--
Schechter
Tommy Masonheimer?
Espino
--Eddie Castaña.
Schechter
Eddie Castaña, yes.
Espino
I was just wondering what the Mexican population was like in Santa Barbara at that time, if this person was Mexican.
Schechter
He was Italian.
Espino
He was Italian?
Schechter

I was oblivious to Mexican Americans. I was living in a Caucasian society. I was attending a very expensive private ranch school, and that was my life. And then when I went to what was then Santa Barbara State College before it became UC Santa Barbara, it was all Caucasians. Now, there was one guy in our fraternity, Fernando Rodriguez, but we used to call him the Greek god. He was as handsome as handsome could be, and he was very--no trace of what you think of in terms of Mexicans. But the Mexicans in Santa Barbara at that time, they were almost like hidden from view. They were there, but you didn't see them.

Espino

So they didn't do the labor of the school that you attended, or of the university?

Schechter

No. The school--Eddie and Tommy Masonheimer. Tommy took care of the horses. Eddie did the work around the ranch, stringing fences, whatever had to be done. We had orchards with oranges, lemons. We had grape--we had olive trees, and he did a lot of that work. And the woman who worked in the kitchen was a Caucasian woman, so, I had no ties.

Espino

That's interesting. So then how did you get to Los Angeles? Was that straight from--

Schechter

Well, a digression. In the spring of '47, my graduation year, I fell in love, and since she was in L.A.--I was going to go to UC Berkeley, and since she was a Los Angeles girl, I switched from UC Berkeley to UCLA, and getting into graduate school at that time was a piece of cake. It was just--it was right after the war. This was 1947. They were all looking for students. I applied to UCLA, and I had a good GPA, and I got into the graduate department at sociology and moved on down.

I think I told you about my bellhop days? Let's go back a ways. In 1942, I graduated from high school, and the doctor who ran the school suggested that I enroll at Santa Barbara State College. I asked her, "How am I going to get there?" and she said, "With all the horses here, how can you ask that question?" And I went to school every day on a horse. I tied the horse up to a tree, took off my boots and went to class, came back hours later. The horse, the

saddle, the bridle, everything was there. I wouldn't do it today, but that was 1942, September '42 till June of '43.
I was turned down by the army. They called me up in January of '43 for the draft, and because of my bad heart I was rated 4-F. It was awful. I wanted to go in, and, of course, everyone was going in. Campus was losing students by the hundreds. The [army] doctor asked me, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a college student." He said, "Go back to college." I came back to Los Angeles, and I went to the Coast Guard station, said, "I want to join." Guy said, "What's your draft status?" I said, "Four-F." He said, "Goodbye." I said, "But I'm a good typist. I can do land duty." "Nope. Go away." And it was embarrassing.
I don't know if I told you this in the first interview. The New York Heart Association put out a pamphlet called "Cripples Who Do Not Limp." They would never use that word today. And cardiacs looked perfect. If I show you pictures of me when I lived on the ranch, I looked like the picture of health. But the injury is inside. You can't see it. It's not a twisted leg or deformed arm, so it was embarrassing. If I recall correctly, the number of men on the campus dropped to about sixty, sixty students, and they were all visibly, clearly disabled, and about six hundred women. It was just practically nothing.
So I was going to drop out of school for a year, and one of my professors asked me if I wanted a job as a lab assistant with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I said yes, up in Salinas. The Japanese had captured the rubber fields in Southeast Asia, and we needed rubber. And there was a desert plant called guayule, g-u-a-y-u-l-e. It has a very high, excellent quality rubber content, and it was discovered not long after 1900 by some men who were down in Mexico. They saw these kids playing with a crude rubber [ball], and they asked them where they got it, and they said they made it. What they would do is chew on the guayule and little pieces of rubber would come out, and then they'd put it--and if you put enough little pieces, you had a rubber ball of great quality.
So based on that, the U.S. Department of Agriculture set up a guayule station in Salinas, a research station. We had thousands of acres of guayule growing. They had a pilot plant, and they had all these scientists. One of my profs I went with was a chem prof. The other was a botanist, and they were researching what's the best

way to grow the best guayule, what's the best way to extract it, and so forth and so on. They had a synthetic rubber called Buna-S, and it would serve a tire three, four, five thousand miles, but at least they could keep making it. And after a year as a lab assistant, I saw the future, that there was no future in the guayule project, so I resigned. My annual salary was $1,635, on which I saved money, because I had a room with an elderly couple. He was the security guard at the plant. But it was also difficult living there as a civilian, because Salinas had an air force base, nearby was Fort Ord, and Monterey wasn't that far away, and a lot of the military used to come into Salinas, and I was constantly being, repeatedly being asked by the military police and the shore patrol, "Let's see your ID," because I'd look like a deserter. I would have done anything to have a uniform.

One night I was sitting in a bar in Salinas having a drink and talking to a young man in uniform, and I said, "Boy, I'd love to have that uniform." He said, "You want to exchange?" And he said, "I'm in the combat engineers, and we're going to the South Pacific really soon. Want to change clothes?" I said, "No." But when I tell young people that story, that I wanted in, because of the Vietnam era, "You mean you wanted to go into the military? You wanted to go?" And I had to explain, "This was the good war. This was--everybody's in."

Anyway, I came back to Santa Barbara. Oh, I'm sorry. I left the guayule project, went back to Santa Barbara for a few days and then took a train back to New York, the first time I'd been back since I left in October '41, spent the summer in New York, and I got a job in a defense plant making radios for navy fighter planes. I didn't know a damn thing about mechanics, but I had a simple process in the course of the assembly line. They taught me how to solder and I would solder this yellow wire to this point to this yellow point, and this green--you had to be stupid not to be--just do it by colors.

Summer was over, and I had to go back to California, get out of cold weather. I had applied for admission to Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine, hadn't heard from them. So I bought a ticket to College Station, Texas, and went to see the dean of admissions. He pulled the file--I said, "I applied for admission. I didn't hear from you." And he said, "Let's pull the file." And he says, "Mr. Schechter, we turned you down." So I said, "Could you tell me why? I was

straight A. I had two years of ranch experience, and two of my letters of reference were written by veterinarians who had gotten their D.V.M. here at A&M." And he looked me in the eye with that wonderful Texas accent he said, "Mr. Schechter, Texas A&M is supported by the people of Texas. You, suh, are not a Texan." I said, "Thank you," and I went to the nearest Western Union station, and I sent a telegram to Willard McCrary, my chem prof. I said, "Willard, enroll me. I'll be there in a few days," and that was the time when there was no deadline in terms of registration. They were so happy to have guys coming back. So I enrolled.

Espino

Do you think that that was--

Schechter

Anti-Semitism? No, I think it was anti-California. There were only ten veterinary schools in the country, and Texas A&M could handle a hundred. There was an animus towards California, and there may have been, you know, Schechter, you're a Jew, but it didn't come out. And when some people ask me that question, I said, "What makes you think Texas A&M would have an anti-Semitic director of admissions in 1943, '44?" Because when I came back to New York, I arrived the day of the invasion, June sixth. Big headlines at Grand Central Station, "D-Day."

Anyway, back to Santa Barbara. Went back to the ranch. Doctor took me back, and I had changed. I was no longer the cowboy. So I was there about a month, and I told the doctor I was going to be moving into town. I moved into town and found some temporary living quarters, and then somebody said, "Why don't you go to the different hotels? Maybe you can get a job there in exchange for a room." So I went to a few, El Encanto and I believe I went to the Biltmore. "No, we're not giving up rooms for people." They were all running full.

I went to the Carrillo Hotel, which was a commercial hotel on Carrillo and Chapala Streets, right across from the Greyhound Bus depot, and the assistant manager said, "No. Our rooms were full." And they were only charging two and a half, three dollars a night for a room with a private bath. As I was walking out the lobby, out of the hotel, this bell captain came over to me and he said, [imitates tough accent] "Hey, kid, you want to be a bellhop?" And I said, "I never was a bellhop." And he said, "That's good. I'll teach you my

way." So he said, "You want the job?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Be here tomorrow, twelve o'clock, fingernails clean, shiny shoes, white shirt, black tie, dark tie, and I'll see you tomorrow at one o'clock." He walked away, and Virginia, I was out in the street and I said, "What was that all about? How much am I going to get paid? What's this all about?"
But I was there. It was a Sunday, and that was just doing two hours on what they called the gun, the old elevators with the manipulating controls. Put in two hours, had no idea what I was going to get paid, and he said, "Be here tomorrow, four o'clock. You work from four to seven. Saturday you work from noon to seven." "Okay." They gave me a uniform, bellhop uniform, and the first day I worked, I couldn't believe how much money I made. At that time, a dollar an hour was fantastic. God, I was making three and four dollars an hour, so I knew enough to say to the other bell captain, "Ted," I said, "this is what I made. Do I have to give you any of it?" Because some bellhop jobs were so lucrative that they paid for the jobs. He said, "No, kid. That's for you." Then I found out they were paying me a dollar a day, thirty dollars a month. Once again I asked him, "Am I supposed to sign this check over to you?" "No. That's for you." These were two rough Irishmen, and they treated me as if I was a grandson. They were very protective. They made sure I made money. They were wonderful, and when they died, I was at their funerals. They were great, they were just, just great.
Espino
Well, that reminds me of something, when you mimic their accent. At that time, people were coming from different places to California, and your accent now is--you obviously are not native from California.
Schechter
No. I've got a Brooklyn accent.
Espino
Yes. So, I mean, was that common, to run into people who were not natives of California?
Schechter
Yes, because of the military. At the Carrillo Hotel--where UC Santa Barbara is was a Marine Air Corps station. That's where the Marines were--the pilots were given the training out over the ocean before being sent to the South Pacific. So I was in touch with everybody

from all parts of the country, Marines and sailors and army. Camp Roberts wasn't far away. They used to come down to Santa Barbara for R&R. Every once in a while if I'm careful I can hide my Brooklyn accent, but it's my natural. This is who I am and this is how I speak and if you have a problem with it, that's your problem, it's not mine.

Espino

So tell me how you got to then--so you spent a year as a bellhop?

Schechter

No, three years.

Espino

Three.

Schechter

From--I started about Christmastime of '44, and I worked all of '45, all of '46 and '47 up until September, when I went down to UCLA.

Espino

Were you still attending Santa Barbara at that time?

Schechter

Sure. I graduated in '47.

Espino

That's what I have here, you graduated in '47. So you were working and--

Schechter

Everybody was working.

Espino

It wasn't your full-time job. You were still a student.

Schechter

But I was putting in twenty-two hours a week. It was--five times three is fifteen; no, I was putting in more. Saturday was seven, so that was twenty-two; Sunday--I was putting in twenty-four hours a week. But Santa Barbara was easy. It really was easy.

Espino

Was there any other diversity? Did you notice a diversity in moving into the city?

Schechter

In UCLA? In Los Angeles?

Espino

No, once you--because you left the ranch or the school and then you moved to--

Schechter
It was all white. Santa Barbara was all white. Santa Barbara was a tiny town. When I got there, they had about 25,000 residents. State Street didn't even go all the way. It stopped at Constance [Street]. It was a white city.
Espino
So things like the internment of the Japanese or the bracero program, where they brought Mexican workers, did any of those two things have an impact on you?
Schechter
Well, on the Japanese, we were happy. Please understand that. I even got rifle; genius, I got a rifle. In Santa Barbara they had to-- State Street runs down into the ocean. All the streetlights facing the ocean had to be painted black on the ocean side. You had to have black curtains, because Santa Barbara was shelled by a Japanese sub off of Goleta. That's when my mother sent me a telegram. The "New York Daily News" had a big headline, "Jap sub shells Santa Barbara." My mother sent me a telegram, "Come home. Come home," go back to winter. We were delighted when Roosevelt issued the order to pick up the Japanese and remove them. And there were all sorts of stories circulating that Japanese farmers were plowing their fields to point to where the air bases were. There were lots of rumors floating around.
Espino
Do you remember any other rumors?
Schechter
Well, we knew that they were floating these balloons, which would supposedly land in Oregon and Washington and set forest fires. Whether that was true or not, that's the story.
Espino
Was there a Japanese American population in your perimeter?
Schechter
I didn't know any. I didn't know any, but I can tell you that people in California heaved a sigh of relief when they were being picked up, and it was only later, when I got to graduate school, that I started to read about what had happened. You know, now you're not supposed to say Japs, but we used the term Japs all the time. The Japanese for the most part were the gardeners in Santa Barbara, vegetable growers, whatever they were.

Espino
We're back, and you were telling me about the Japanese Americans, how they were farmers and you didn't really come across them very often.
Schechter
Yes. I don't remember any Japanese Americans on the Santa Barbara State College campus. I just don't remember them.
Espino
And then what made you decide then to move to Los Angeles after--
Schechter
Graduate school. I knew enough to know that a bachelor's degree is no big deal. So I applied to UCLA and got in, and I had made so much money as a bellhop that my first year I didn't have to work. I had enough money to cover my expenses.
Espino
Wow.
Schechter
All expenses. It was a hundred dollars a semester, if I recall correctly. To my surprise at the end of the first year, this prof, one of the best at UCLA, said he wanted me to be his T.A., Phil Selznick. And I said, "Are you sure you want me? You've got Phil Cavalerio." He said, "No, no. I want you." So I was his T.A. for two years, which gave me $1200 a year, which was enough to live on, a hundred and twenty bucks a month.
There was a widow--I found an ad at UCLA that there was a lady who had a room for rent, twin bedroom in Brentwood, a beautiful neighborhood, a hundred feet or so below, south of Sunset Boulevard. So I went to see her and it turned out that she was a widow, that her husband left her practically no money, but she had the house. But she needed income, so she used to rent to students, and she told us, "If anyone ever asks you, say you're my nephew." And there were three of us, wound up four of us in two twin bedrooms, and we had kitchen privileges. That's when I learned how to cook. It was wonderful. We were living in Brentwood, thirty-five bucks a month with kitchen privileges. She used to eat her--she had a little bedroom and sitting room off the kitchen, and she would eat early, so when we came down for our meals, she was out of the way. It was a great deal, just fabulous.
Espino

How did you determine what you would study? Because you didn't study veterinarianism.

Schechter

No. As I started to say, I had changed. So when I came back to Santa Barbara, I found that I was struggling with entomology, but I was thriving on sociology. So I went to see my counselor. I went to see a counselor, and he said, "It's obvious that that's what you're really interested in, sociology, that the ranch was just a flirtation." So we switched my major from biology, pre-veterinarian, so I graduated with a sociology major and a biology minor. That was how I did it.

Espino

But you were also studying unions, because that's how you met--

Schechter

No, no, no, no, no.

Espino

Not yet?

Schechter

After I got my master's degree in June of '50, the Institute for Industrial Relations at UCLA said they would like to study trade union democracy and would I be interested in a grant, $1200 for ten months? And I said yes. And the union they had picked was the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Of course, as I said in that paper I wrote, you don't bother studying the Teamsters if you're looking for trade union democracy. There is none. So that's where I met Hope [Mendoza].

Espino

But that wasn't something that you were looking for?

Schechter

No. It just came along. If they'd have asked me to study the feeding habits of the bumblebee, I would have done it. It was a job and it kept me in the university world, and I did that for--they renewed it. I wrote the paper. It was never published. And then, let's see. It was from September '50 through June of '51, September '51 to June of '52. I went to New York, spent the summer with my family, and I came back, and I was looking for a job. And someone told me that there was a job open at the Anti-Defamation League, that the guy who had the job had gone to law school. They said, "Maybe the job is still open." The guy who had

the job before me was named Frank Mankiewicz, the son of Herman Mankiewicz, the man who did "Citizen Kane," who was blackballed by Hearst because he did that movie. His uncle was Joe Mankiewicz. His son is Josh Mankiewicz. Sometimes you see him on ABC. And Frank went on to become an attorney, got involved in the Democratic Party activities, went on to become Bobby Kennedy's press secretary, and he's the one that made the announcement that Kennedy was dead.

Frank said to Hope a long time before that, in 1948, '49, somewhere in there he said, "If I move to East L.A., can you get me elected?" And she said, "It's worth a try." But he never moved. He wasn't moving to East L.A.

Espino

Well, before we go on to that period, I want to ask you a little bit about your graduate work at UCLA and if you were involved in any political organizations, or what classes were interesting to you. Can you talk to me a little bit about some of the things that were inspiring to you when you were a graduate student?

Schechter

Well, you have to understand in '47, '48, there was a very strong pro-Soviet movement by some students, and I was one who, having had a socialist father, knew that they were bad news. My father [Morris S. Schechter] was vigorously anti-communist, because he had dealt with them in the unions. And I don't know if I told you this. My brother [Harold Schechter], I always suspected he became a member of the Communist Party, and my brother used to bring his friends to the house to talk with my father. This was at the time of the Moscow trials in 1936, and they were pointing out that, "All the evidence shows that these men have betrayed the [Soviet] Union." And my father said, "There's no way you're going to get me to believe that these men who put on the revolution, sold the revolution out to the Nazis. There's no way you're going to persuade me of that." And they said, "But Walter Duranty of the 'New York Times'--." Years later it turned out that Walter Duranty was a Soviet agent. He was paid by the Soviet Union, and everyone quoted Walter Duranty of "New York Times." [He was trusted like Walter Cronkite.]

Anyway, I was one of the opponents of the far Left on campus. At that time, UCLA had a rule, the university had a rule, Regulation 17,

no political activity on campus by students. None. They created a group called Students for Wallace, Henry Wallace, who had been the vice president, and thank God Roosevelt dropped him and picked Harry Truman, because Wallace was in the back pocket of the commies. So they created a group called the Independent Progressive Party. They ran Wallace as their presidential nominee, and the marvel of that, of the 1948 election, is that Harry Truman won. The Democratic Party was split. The Left was going with Wallace. [The regular democrats were going with Truman.] The Right was going with [Senator Strom] Thurmond, the [segregationist and racist] Dixiecrat.

And how Harry Truman pulled that off--one of my roommates at UCLA was a man named Alvin Achenbaum, a student, undergraduate, as brilliant as brilliant can be, and he predicted that Truman would win. His cousin was a famous ABC commentator [Martin Agronsky], and he wrote a letter to his cousin saying Truman is going to win and why, and I wouldn't let him send it. I said, "He ridicules you as his dumb young cousin. You want to give him documents." So he never forgave me for--we're still in touch. We're still in touch, and that goes back, let's see, '47, that's sixty-three years ago, just spoke to him a few days ago.

We had warned some of the girls who were being used by the hardcore communists to have demonstration on the UCLA campus. There were a couple of girls we knew, and we said, "Don't. The university is going to boot you out." "Oh, they won't." "I've got to do this." And one poor girl from New York City, I felt so sorry for her. She led the Students for Wallace demonstration. She was notified by the administration that she was being expelled, and she had to go back to New York, was kicked out of UCLA. Heartbreaking.

Espino

Well, what did that term mean to you back then? Because it probably means something different today. If someone is listening to your interview today, they'll have the ideas of what communism is, but at that time, how would you have defined it back then?

Schechter

Well, we had plenty of evidence. In 1948 the Soviet Union sent troops in and took over Czechoslovakia, and "Commentary" magazine ran a brilliant article entitled--I still remember it--"I Saw

It Happen in Prague Twice," once when the Nazis came and once when the communists came. And there was a big split in the Democratic Party. In fact, years later, oh, god, what was the name--the communists had a theoretical monthly journal called--it was something "Currents," [Political Affairs] and they admitted that one of the big mistakes they made was to create the IPP, because when they created the Independent Progressive Party, they took the communists out of the Democratic Party and put them all in there, and they were never able to get back in [the Democratic Party] the way they had been before.

But we used to argue like crazy, god, into the wee hours of the morning. Europe was in rubble. Truman was standing up to the communists. He created the Truman Doctrine, which saved Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan, which was building up Europe. He was called everything under the sun, and all these people were worshipping Joe [Joseph] Stalin, the butcher. So I don't know if I answered your question.

Espino

Well, I guess I was wondering about the ideas that were swirling around at that time about communism, not necessarily what was happening in Europe, but how did people understand it here in the United States, and why were you so opposed to it.

Schechter

Well, because of my father. I saw it as a brutal--I saw what happened in the Soviet Union. I saw what the Soviet Union was doing to the satellite nations, and I saw it as, like, Mao killed, god, how many millions? Stalin starved millions of peasants in the 1920s, so I saw it as another form of Nazism, without the anti-Semitic dimension. Today a lot of people, "You're Red baiting." You don't understand, and you'd better be careful, because they're going to bite.

Espino

So then how did you feel about like the McCarthy era and people who--

Schechter

I have mixed feelings on the McCarthy era. On the one hand, I knew that many of the people who were designated as communists were, in fact, communists. We became friendly with a couple. He had been a rather high official in the Communist Party, who broke

with the party, and he and his wife gave testimony, and they were pilloried. His name was Max Silver, and her name was Louise Light, and she was a chiropractor;. No, she was an osteopath. And when some of these names came up, Max would say, "He's a communist. He was part of this, part of that."

One of the big things that happened was some Jews got their--woke up, because there were a significant number of Jews in the Communist Party--was the 1939 Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact. No, it happened in '38, sorry. When the word came out that Hitler and Stalin had formed a pact, first of all, the communists didn't believe it. They didn't believe it. And then when they went to their cell meetings, I know one man who came to the meeting and, "We'll have a big discussion. What happened?" And what was the line to be? "What was the party line? How do we explain it?" And he said, "We're going to talk about this." And the leader said, "There's nothing to discuss. You explain it this way." He said, "What do you mean there's nothing to discuss?" So he left the party. There was a fairly large movement out of the party by Jews and some others."

If you want to read a great book, read "The God That Failed" by--anyway, it's chapters by different members, people who were in the party. One of the most powerful was the one, Richard Wright, the black author. The chapter he wrote telling about his experiences in the party and how they tried to control what he was writing, and he left. He said that he thought he could still be friendly with them. He didn't understand it.

The prof for whom I was a T.A., Philip Selznick, wrote a book--in fact, I just happened to check it last night--called "The Organizational Weapon: An Analysis of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics." And I checked Amazon. I lent my copy to someone, never saw it again, can't remember who I gave it to. The book is now selling for $135, a used copy. It's a classic. And Phil Selznick talked about how new members of the party would be isolated and insulated, isolated from other influences and then insulated, totally surrounded. Wherever you go, it's with party members, picnics, parties, whatever it is. Great book, "The Organizational Weapon." I don't know if anyone can get a hand on what library. UCLA's got it. I'm sure Berkeley's got it.

Espino

I think that's very interesting that these discussions were occurring and they weren't antagonistic in the sense that these were your roommates or your classmates, and you remained friends with them afterwards.

Schechter

We used to argue like crazy. There were a couple that we didn't become friends with, like this one guy, Murray Korngold. He was clearly a CP [Communist Party] functionary, clearly. He was a graduate student at UCLA.

Espino

What does that mean, CP functionary?

Schechter

Communist Party.

Espino

Right. I know Communist Party, but what does it mean to be--

Schechter

He was on the payroll, or he was the guy who was assigned. "You work the campus," and under party discipline. You do what the leader tells you. So some of the great evenings I had was talking to Max Silver. He was a short man, very heavy accent, but, boy, was he knowledgeable, was he knowledgeable. But Max died and Louise died. It might be interesting just to go to Google and check the name Max Silver.

Espino

And then you got involved with the Labor Study Center, and that was because they approached you? Or how did that come to pass?

Schechter

There was a man at Institute of Industrial Relations named Arthur Carstens, who was Jewish. Apparently--I don't remember how we met first, but they had a suite of offices in the Business Administration Building. I was over at the Anthro and Sociology Building, and how we met I don't remember. But he asked me, "Would you be interested?" And I was looking. "Hey, sure. Great." And because of my father's union ties, and I knew about the ILGWU, I knew about [David] Dubinsky, I said, "Of course."

Espino

How did you know about Dubinsky?

Schechter

[laughs] Everybody knew Dubinsky.

Espino
Everybody; it was that common?
Schechter
Oh, David Dubinsky, he was like the Walter [P.] Reuther of the day. David Dubinsky came to Los Angeles. He's the one who fought the communists. He's the one who took the ILGWU back from the communists in the twenties, '26, '27. They had been so irresponsible that they built up a debt of a million dollars, and Dubinsky and some of his buddies took it back from them. They were very socialistic, but very anti-communist, very anti-communist.
Espino
Can you talk to me a little bit about the--at that time it was called the Industrial Relations Institute.
Schechter
The Institute for Industrial Relations.
Espino
Because that's at UCLA, and it would be interesting to have your perspective on the people that were working there.
Schechter
Most of them were doing--I remember there was a big study, Roethlisberger and Dixon, on time management, how long it took a worker to do whatever. There was one guy who was clearly heading for a heart attack, because he was working all the time. They were all doing different studies on union management relations. That's what mine was, a tiny bit. And these were Ph.D.'s. I was just a graduate student with a master's degree. We didn't talk very much about--now that you ask me, nobody ever said, "Harvey, how's it going?" Art Carstens would act almost like he wasn't interested, and I never had someone sit with me the way a Ph.D. advisor would say, "Look. What are you doing? And have you tried this? And have you done that?" No. I was like a free agent. I had a desk and had a certain amount of secretarial help, not very much, because I told you when I wrote the paper, I wrote it myself. I was a good typist, so I typed it up myself. It was about yea thick, double-spaced.
Espino
Well, how did you plan your strategy? How did you determine what you were--
Schechter

I didn't. I didn't. I bounced off the walls. I just asked questions that I thought were important questions, what was intelligent.
Espino
Because when I was interviewing Hope, she said that the union was very supportive of what you were doing--
Schechter
Yes.
Espino
--and that everyone was expected to talk to you.
Schechter
They were told to be honest with me, to answer my questions truthfully, to take me with them. That was only the hired help, the paid staff. I didn't go anywhere with the members, but I met them at executive board meetings and things like that.
Espino
And your objective was to understand how they operated?
Schechter
The objective was to determine how do they continue to be a democratic organization, how do the wishes of the membership, how do those wishes impact on the management. Take ADL. You have a professional staff, but we also have lay board members, executive committee members who vote policy, and then it's for the directors to carry out the policy. But again and again, as a former director, I was able to steer the lay people toward what I thought they should be doing.
Perfect example. After I retired, they voted me life membership with voting rights on the regional board and the executive committee. Regional board met quarterly and executive committee met weekly, no, monthly, lying, monthly. I could go to any meetings, vote, speak up. But I decided not to become a mother-in-law in the kitchen for the new director. That's unfair. My predecessor was a gentleman. He died. He was out of the way. I was king without a living king hanging around. So I retired in June, first executive committee meeting was in September, first Wednesday in September, and I went to the meeting. Now, I don't play poker because you can read my cards in my face. If I've got four aces, I'm jumping off the walls. If I've got a two, a seven, and a nine, I'm like this. So I don't play poker.

I was seated at this meeting with a couple of wonderful older women who were very staunch supporters of me, and one of them passed me a note. It said, "What's the matter?" I wrote back, "Nothing." Back came the note, "Don't lie to me. I see that you're unhappy. What's taking place?" So I said, "We'll talk tonight." And then I lied. I looked at my watch, I said, "Oh, my god. I've got an appointment. I've got to leave." I slipped out of the meeting and never came back. Never came back. I still get notices. I'm a member of the executive committee; never came back. No reason to come back, because if my successor was doing something that I didn't like or I thought was traveling a wrong path, it's not fair to him that the old king is sitting there saying, "No, boy. In my day we did it this way." And it was the most brilliant thing I ever did. That's when I found the new career of finding all these wonderful young people.

Espino

Well, then, that takes me back to the union. What did you find there? Did you find anything that went against what you had imagined? Or how was their democracy?

Schechter

The hired help ran the show, and what they did was cosmetic. When it came to important stuff, it was the professionals, and where they had to throw a bone to the lay people, they did. But the ILG did things that were way ahead of their time. For example, ever heard of Unity House? Unity House is a beautiful resort in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. I've never been there, but my roommate used to work there as a waiter during the summer months, because his father was a member of the union. It was a place where union workers could go, get out of the city, go to a nice resort for a very low price. It was subsidized by the union. "Hey, workers, you don't have to go to Las Vegas or Bermuda. Here we've got a beautiful place. Get out of the city, two weeks."

The ILGWU created a health clinic right there on the first floor of the Sportswear Joint Council on Maple Street. They didn't do surgery, but if you were sick, there were doctors, there were nurses. If you had a sore throat, you had a fever, you would get what you would go to an emergency room for. People could bring their children. This was unheard of. This was the early fifties. Nobody had it. Companies didn't have it, no union had it, to the best of my

knowledge. This was part of Dubinsky's old socialist ideas. You've got to take care of the workers, got to be good to the workers. This was amazing.

Espino

Did you have a chance to visit the facility?

Schechter

The health?

Espino

Yes.

Schechter

Sure.

Espino

What did you see? What do you recall from that visit or the visits that you had?

Schechter

People waiting to be treated. It was right downstairs. In fact, I don't know if you know the name Ulene. The head of the Sportswear Joint Council--there were several joint councils. One was for the cloak makers, which were the higher-paid, and then there was the sportswear, which were primarily sewing machine operators, and those were the least experienced, least skilled. Sportswear Joint Council, the head manager was John Ulene. His son [a doctor]--I'm blocking on his first name--became an NBC guy talking about health. Now, whether he worked for the medical center I don't remember, but this was something they could point to with pride. "You join our union, you don't have to go to a doctor and pay five dollars."

Espino

And the union membership at the rank and file were primarily Latinos and Latina women.

Schechter

Yes. Yes, primarily that, and then blacks started to come in. Now, the more skilled jobs, the better-paying jobs, were held by Jews and Italians, the cutters, the pressers, and what they used to call the cloak makers, the ones who made suits and coats as against sportswear.

Espino

Men's clothing.

Schechter

No, no, no. ILGWU, women's. The men's clothing was a different union. That was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, and that was run by a man named Sidney Hillman. And you may want to check the name Dubinsky. They were like twins, Dubinsky and Hillman. If it was men's, it was Hillman. If it was women's, it was Dubinsky.

Espino

Okay, so suits for women and coats, I guess you're saying.

Schechter

Yes, that would be women. That would be women.

Espino

So how did you feel about that? I mean, was that an observation that you made at that time, where you would see the hierarchy of higher-paid being more Jewish, more--was that something you observed?

Schechter

Sure. But it was a matter of skill. In other words, no one said you cannot become a cloak maker because you're Latino. You never heard anything like that. In fact, as the Jewish workers aged, I told you earlier they didn't want their kids in the union, in the garment industry. Italians did; Jews didn't. As they aged, they passed from the scene, and they had to be replaced by someone.

Espino

So what are some of your other observations then of the union as you were conducting your study? Other than Hope. [laughter]

Schechter

What are my other observations? Well, I did some things that were not kosher--

Espino

You did?

Schechter

--for the union. Because of Hope. There was a very popular bathing suit company, Rose Marie Reid, near the airport, and they wanted to organize that shop, but they couldn't get access to the employees. So Hope came up with an idea. "Why don't you become a deputy registrar of voters?" We got ten cents a name. "And go there and offer to register their employees." But before I went to Rose Marie Reid I was smart enough--it was on Century Boulevard. I was going to different companies saying, "I'm a deputy registrar of voters, and

I'd be happy to register your employees during their break, during their lunch. Would that be possible?" There was no charge, and the answer was always, "Yes. Come on in." And then they would announce, "If you want to register to vote, there's a young man in the cafeteria, and he'll register you to vote."
And after doing two or three, four of them, however many, I came to Rose Marie Reid, introduced myself. I said, "I'm deputy registrar of voters, and I did A and B and C, and I'd be happy to make this service available to your employees." "Oh, come on in." And they put me up in the cafeteria, made an announcement, and then these people would come, and you know the Registrar of Voter form had a name and address, and I got ten cents a name. And then I would give Hope a list of those who had registered who worked at Rose Marie Reid. I did it for several companies, clearly illegal. But I think the law doesn't go back fifty years.
Espino
But was it something that you felt was going to provide a better quality of life for the workers?
Schechter
Yes, yes. In fact--
Espino
Or was it just you were in love with Hope?
Schechter
No, it was both. Of course I wanted to keep her happy. Sometimes she would ask me to follow certain employees, and I learned that you follow from across the street, not behind them, and if they went to a car, I would go and get the license number. And at that time--in fact, I even wrote about it in this thing I just gave you. At that time it was easy to check a license plate. Can't do that now. You have to tell who wants it and what do you want it for. I'd get the license number, and the union would check them out through whatever contacts they had, and they knew who to go see, try and persuade them to join the union.
Espino
So basically, when you followed these people, you were following them to get their home address and the phone number?
Schechter
Yes. No, not phone number.
Espino

Not because they were engaged in some sort of--
Schechter
No, no, just to get the names and addresses of people for union organizers to visit. They used to call them house calls, and many times Hope, evenings she'd be out making house calls. Sometimes I would go with her so she wouldn't be alone, and I'd sit in the car and she'd go in and say who she is and she'd like to come in and talk to them, and sometimes they said no and other times they said, "Sure. Come on in."
Espino
Were you able ever to witness one of her house calls?
Schechter
No.
Espino
Home visits?
Schechter
No. We thought that might be too much, because you see this guy wearing a suit. Is he with the police? Is he with la migra [immigration]? No. But she was very good, she was very good. She got a lot of them signed up. They had to sign a card that they wanted to be represented by the union, and then if they had enough cards, they would go to the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] and say, "We want an election. We want to have an election." And then depending upon how the election came out, the shop would be organized or not.
Espino
One thing she mentioned in her interview is that there was gender discrimination as far as how much the women organizers were paid versus--
Schechter
Yes, ma'am. [laughs] I'm laughing. I'm getting ahead of myself. Hope was assigned the state of Arizona, and she would drive there and spend the whole week there and come back, and she would have to submit expenses, and she had an apartment there that the union paid for. But they didn't reimburse her mileage. "You put seven dollars of gasoline in; we'll give you seven dollars." Nothing for the wear and tear on the car, nothing for the tires. At one point Hope found out that the janitor was making more than she was, and

when she complained, the answer was, "He's a married man with children. You're single." It was awful.
Hope and I--about eleven months after we were married, she resigned from the union. No, toward the end of our first year of marriage. I think I said we were like two trains passing in the night. When I was home, she was out. When she was home, I was out. So in those days, as I said, the woman gave up the job. Hope was ready to give up the job. So she wrote a letter to David Dubinsky. It was a drop-dead letter. It was a nasty letter. So she said to me, "What do you think of this letter?" I said, "It's a wonderful letter, but you're not going to send it." She says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Hope, you're dealing with a major national-international figure, and you don't tell someone who's so powerful to drop dead. You may apply for a job and he may hear about it, or someone may check a reference, and they'll queer the job. He'll kill you a thousand ways from Sunday, and you won't know you were hit." "What do you want me to do?" I said, "I'll write your letter." [laughs]
I swear to god, I remember as if it was yesterday. "Dear Brother Dubinsky: It is with tears in my eyes and a sob in my throat that I write this letter. As you know, I got married, and because of my duties now as a married woman," etc., etc., "and my husband's responsibilities, I regretfully have to inform you that I have to resign my position with the union," blah, blah, blah. "I do this with a heavy heart. I don't want to leave. I love this union." I was pouring the grease on it, and I said, "Hope, that's the letter you're going to sign, and that's the letter you're going to send." And she listened to me and did, got a lovely letter back from Dubinsky.
Espino
But what was in the first letter? Why was she so upset?
Schechter
Because of the salary, because not reimbursing her for the trips to Arizona, because she was treated like a second-class citizen as a woman. She and one of the men would be assigned to shop X, and Hope would do all the house calls, and the son of a bitch at the meeting would report as if he did it. He wasn't even around. And when she complained, "Oh, come on. Come on, Hope." There were so many unfair things that happened, and this was the great democratic union.

Espino
How far do you think she would have gone if she were a man?
Schechter
At that time not very far. Not very far. They had one guy, Felix [De La Torre], a very nice-looking Latino guy, but he was more Ramon Navarro. He was--you don't know the name. A very handsome actor. He was sort of the Don Juan of the--but I never saw any accomplishments by him. Hope believed that she was a hard worker.
I'll tell you one thing that really endeared me to her, on top of everything else. Near the Sportswear Joint Council building on Maple Street--it was eleven hundred something Maple--there were some real junky-looking apartment houses, pretty bad, and little kids, and the kids used to be playing outside. And Hope would talk to them. Hope always wore nice suits. She always looked very professional, and she kind of took a liking to these kids, bonded with them. Christmastime came and she said, "Is Santa Claus coming?" "Well, we don't know." So Hope went and bought toys for all of them so they would have something for Christmas. And I said, "Wow, that's fantastic." So she's a tough lady, but do you know the word "sabra," Israeli sabra? The people who are born in Israel are called sabras, like the fruit, tough on the outside but mooshy in the middle, and that's Hope, tough on the outside but mooshy in the middle. Every once in a while she's ready to kill somebody, and then she'll come back down to the mooshy part. That's my wife.
Espino
Well, initially you were just friends, in the very beginning?
Schechter
I was intrigued.
Espino
Okay, we're back. I started to ask you about your relationship with Hope. In the beginning you were essentially friends and not--you didn't start dating until a bit later, after--
Schechter
About six weeks into when I--
Espino
Okay, we're back. It's interesting how we keep getting interrupted when we start to talk about your relationship with Hope. You said after six months of meeting--

Schechter
No, six weeks.
Espino
Six weeks of meeting, you started to date.
Schechter
Well, yes. It was about six weeks that I was assigned to Hope for the week, and as I wrote, we never stopped talking, we had so much in common. It was toward the end of the week I asked, "Would you like to go to a movie?" And she said, "Yes," and we had a wonderful time. That's where I, in that thing I wrote, you know, ten dollars covered the evening with dinner and a movie and gasoline, came home with a dollar or two. Those were the days.
Espino
She was very popular, though, at that time, and young, attractive.
Schechter
Well, the guy who had the--there were a couple of guys. One was the head of the Teamsters Union, Tommy Pitts. He really wanted Hope. There was an attorney with the union named Abe Levy. He was the son of the international officer for the union, Louis Levy, and he was a married man with two children. He was ready to divorce his wife and marry Hope. The guy who had the hots for her was Gus [Gustavo C.] Garcia. Gus Garcia was a very prominent attorney in Texas. I think it was San Antonio. He's the guy who handled the case where a conviction had been set aside because for god knows how many decades, no Latinos had ever served on a jury in Texas, and so he was not judged by his peers. It was Gus Garcia took that case. In fact, we have a friend who's a Harvard law graduate, and when we mentioned the name Gus Garcia he said Gus Garcia was so eloquent that when he was pleading a case for the U.S. Supreme Court--when the light goes on red, you're supposed to stop. Mid-sentence, you stop. He was pleading and the light went on, and I believe it was [Chief] Justice [Earl] Warren who said, "Mr. Garcia, please continue." He was so eloquent. And he said to Hope, "You and I could be the king and queen of the Latino world." But Gus had a problem--alcohol. And Hope wasn't going to go to Texas.
In fact, she and I had dinner with one of my bosses from New York, and he said, "Harvey, I've got a great position for you as the director of the ADL office in Houston." And Hope said, "If Harvey

wants the job, he can go, and I hope he has a good time. I'm not going to Texas." So while Gus Garcia was madly in love with her, there was no--she wasn't going to Texas. Hope wasn't going to leave Los Angeles. "You want to go? Go."

Espino

What were some of the qualities that she had that you witnessed as not just as a woman, but I mean as a labor organizer, as somebody who was in a powerful position, uncommon for her--

Schechter

Commitment to poor people. Commitment to the exploited people. In fact, what got her started was working in this shop, and the boss was cheating the employees. That's when she said, "This is ridiculous." And she grabbed up all the time cards, which was--and then, "Lookit." She marched them all down to the union. Look at what she did when her biological father sent those delegates to talk to her, those emissaries. She was a teenager, and she said, "We have no father. When we needed him, he wasn't there. Goodbye." Slammed the door. She's a toughie.

And I guess partly it was beauty, partly it was uniqueness, because to me it was always, you know, the blonde, la rubia. Beauty to me was Betty Grable and these people. And here came this swarthy young woman; god. I think I told you her mother, when she'd get darker in the summer, and she was wearing a white dress, her mother would call her mosca en leche. [laughs]

Espino

That's mean.

Schechter

Mama said it. I didn't say it. Mama said, "Mosca en leche."

Espino

But she didn't carry that. She didn't carry an embarrassment of her skin color or her--

Schechter

But I don't know if I told you [unclear] remember what I said. When we bought the house, she was going out looking for houses, because we had to get out of the apartment, and she said, "You have two choices. Either get me a psychiatrist or buy a house, because I can't live in an apartment." In fact, it was difficult for her to even--and this is luxury. I would tell her, "Hope, I don't have the time to go looking at apartments. I'm too busy at the ADL." This is

1958, '59. We bought in '59. I said, "You go look, narrow it down to a few places." Now, part of that was true, but there was a thing I never told her. I told her it subsequently.
Being a good civil rights worker, I wanted to see how the real estate agents treated her. Did they say, "Well, you ought to look in East L.A."? They took her to fine places in Sherman [Oaks]--we first wanted to live in Los Angeles. What we liked, we couldn't afford. What we could afford, we didn't like. And for substantially less, you got great deals in the valley, fabulous deals. I think I told you, we got a double lot, big house, swimming pool, palm trees on the street, thirty thousand; thirty thousand dollars. We paid it off in eight years.
Espino
You wanted to make sure that she wasn't going to experience discrimination?
Schechter
No, I--
Espino
Or you just were--
Schechter
I was running a test. I wanted to see if there was something we had to do about these real estate people, and they treated her like a queen, showed her lots of lovely homes. We hit on this one. We had a friend who was in the building business take a look at the house, and I said, "Ed, what do you think?" He said, "Buy it." I said, "What should I offer him?" He said, "Grab his asking price," because he was putting on a new heavy shake roof, and he hadn't gotten back to the real estate people to increase the price because of the roof. So we said, "Okay, we'll pay you what you want." So he wasn't able to jack up the price. Thirty thousand.
Espino
That's a great deal.
Schechter
It's not even a down payment [on a house today].
Espino
Well, next time I want to talk about your involvement with the CSO [Community Service Organization] and how that started, because now you're talking about much later, and I'm curious--I guess I'll

just ask it right now. Did your involvement start before you met Hope, or after you met her?
Schechter
Never heard of CSO until after I met Hope. And in many ways--not in many ways, in all ways, she called the shots. "We're doing a fundraiser for CSO." I'll tell you one story and then I have to get ready. We went to a fundraiser in East L.A., and Jimmy Cruz of the Bricklayers Union came up to me, and he'd had a little too much to drink, and he said, "Your wife is a fancy lady. She lives in Sherman Oaks." So I said, "Jimmy, what's the problem?" "She moved out of the barrio. She lives in Sherman Oaks." I said, "Jimmy, what's so wonderful about the barrio? The idea is to get out. You want to live in poverty? Why not move out? Look what the Jews did in New York. First they lived in slums. Then they slowly moved out." He didn't understand me. So I wasn't going to argue with him. He'd had a little too much to drink.
Espino
We can talk about that resentment next time, because Hope did mention that as well, that some people were questioning her move out and her distance from--
Schechter
Yes, sure, and the way she dressed. She was at some sort of a meeting, and she was wearing a suit. She always looked great--suit that she made, and an attaché case, and one of these women said, "You fancy lady with the suit." And Hope said, "If you weren't so god damn lazy, you would make your own suit. I made this suit." She was not taking any crap from anybody. That's mi esposa.
Espino
Well, we'll stop right there. That's a great story. Thank you.

1.3. Session 3 (April 15, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is April 15, [2010], tax day, and I'm interviewing Harvey Schechter at his home in Beverly Hills, California.
Today, Mr. Schechter, Harvey, were going to start with--just to go back and sum up some of your observations when you were doing the study of the ILGWU [International Ladies Garment Workers Union]. You wrote a paper, and I was wondering if you could talk to

me a little bit about what you witnessed as far as union democracy, maybe some of the strengths of the ILGWU in achieving union democracy, and then we'll talk a little bit about some of the weaknesses.

Schechter

Well, you're taking me back sixty years, because that was 1950, '51. It was obvious that while there was a great deal of involvement of the lay people, who were garment workers and served on the executive boards, it was really managed by professionals. John Ulene, who was the head of the Sportswear Joint Council, Isidore Stenzor, who was the head of the cloak makers, which was the more skilled, better paying jobs, and they ran the union with the staff. But the good part about it was that they had a beneficent attitude towards what the union was supposed to do, and that's why, as I said once before, they had a health center, which was unheard of. Nobody had health centers. Now we're talking about Obama Care; this is sixty years ago. So it was very forward-looking, very progressive.

The professionals really ran the union, so I don't know what the term union democracy means. You can vote for the president of the union, but with the ILG it was the professionals who ran the union. But they ran it for the benefit of the workers, so we kind of overlooked the word democracy. I don't know of any cases where the membership wanted something that the management didn't give them, or that the management wanted to do something that was contrary to the wishes of the members. They were very, very forward-looking, very, very concerned, and this came from, I believe, their socialistic backgrounds, their Left-wing democratic views.

Now, at this point I have to say that David Dubinsky came out of that same tradition, but he was the one who fought the communists in the twenties, so that he made it a union that had no room for communists in the union, and they drove the communists out of the union.

Espino

Do you see that as--when you're looking at democracy, would that fit in as something not democratic or democratic?

Schechter

Absolutely, because the Communist Party was not democratic. It was authoritarian, and they ruined the union in the twenties, put it into debt for over a million dollars, and they weren't interested in the union. The union was just a way of gaining power to help the Soviet Union. Most important to the communists was foreign policy. They had platforms on fair employment, on fair housing, on segregation in the South, on the treatment of the--used the term Negroes, but that didn't mean anything to them. And I think I mentioned last time, if you ever want to get a feel for the Communist Party, just read the book "The God That Failed," on the experiences of a variety of people, especially the piece by Richard Wright, the guy who wrote "Native Son" and "Black Boy." He was really booted out of the party.

Espino

Did you see anything that you thought they could improve on? I know that you weren't a labor historian, but maybe on the ground level, your instincts, something that you witnessed?

Schechter

Well, keep in mind that I was all of twenty-six, and when I thought I was a hotshot, as I look back there's so much I didn't know. But I had the advantage of--let's see, in 1950 I was twenty-six. I had the advantage of a master's degree and a great instructor in Phil Selznick, but I didn't see anything that they could have done for the workers that they weren't doing. Every once in a while they'd get accused of signing a sweetheart contract just to get the employer into the union, but not really, not really.

Espino

You didn't witness a specific situation where they signed a sweetheart contract?

Schechter

No. No, I didn't. I heard about it, and then I heard the justifications, but I couldn't say that they went to XYZ garment firm and signed a sweetheart contract.

Espino

How about race relations? Because as we talked before, the majority of the members were Mexican, Mexican immigrant, Mexican American.

Schechter

Well, it depends on the division of the union. In the cloak makers section it was primarily Jews and some Italians. And, in fact, if you look at the national ILGWU, one of the longtime vice presidents was Luigi Antonini, but he was sort of the token Italian. For the most part, it was a Jewish organization. When they sent out an international vice president to Los Angeles to--I don't know why they sent him out; Louis Levy. And it was his son, Abe Levy, who was an attorney for the union. So there was a little bit of nepotism there. So that was primarily Jewish and some Italians. In the Sportswear Joint Council it was Hispanics, some blacks, but I don't remember any significant number of blacks or Negroes in the union at the time. I just don't remember it.

Espino

Do you remember any perceptions that were swirling around at the time about these different groups? There are some people who have told me, and this is not related to union work, but this is related to just general ideas of Mexicans, for example, "They should be in vocational classes, because they are good with their hands." Were there any kind of ideas, impressions about the kind of work that these different groups did, what they were good at?

Schechter

No. Well, Hope [Mendoza Schechter] had a personal experience about being shunted off into vocational.

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Schechter

As I think back--

Espino

Okay, we're back. Perfect.

Schechter

As you think back, now, these were jobs, and because they were union jobs, they were getting more money than if they were working in the sweatshops. So I don't recall any agitation. They were just thrilled to be there, to be included and to be able to bring their kids in or a sister or a brother-in-law.

Espino

So stereotypes about the different workers and what they were good at and what they weren't good at, you didn't remember hearing anything like that?

Schechter
No, no.
Espino
Okay. Well, let's go move on, then, to your involvement with the CSO [Community Service Organization]. Last time you told me that it was Hope who introduced you to that organization. Can you talk to me a little bit about what activities you were involved in, what role you played, what you witnessed? [laughs]
Schechter
I was her escort. I had never heard of CSO until I started to date Hope, and we'd go to different social events and fundraisers and things like that. There was a place at 1st and Soto, a bar--Hope will have to give you the name of it--where they used to hang out, and you could go there almost any time of night and there were always some CSO people. You could have a beer, you could have a taco, and they would talk. I just came along. I listened, because I was interested in Hope, not in CSO or any of these activities. But she's the one who worked politically, helped deliver those districts, helped register people, helped to get people to vote.
I remember in 1952, we were working on the Adlai Stevenson campaign for president, and Hope assigned me a certain precinct, and I had to go to every house. And she taught me the phrase, "Ha votare usted?" Is that right? "Did you vote?"
Espino
Ha votado?
Schechter
"Ha votado usted?" It's been sixty years, and I didn't speak any Spanish other than a few phrases. So I'd knock on the door and say, "Ha votado usted?" and then, "Please go and vote." Most of them were unregistered, but there were some, they were too tired, they had just gotten home, and we were wiped out in the early hours of that campaign. But Eisenhower was sweeping the nation, and he won big, really won big, and I started my career with ADL the next day.
I was hired in October, about mid-October, and I said to my boss at ADL, "Would it be okay if I didn't start till November fifth? That's the day after election day." And I said, "I'm working as a volunteer on the Adlai Stevenson campaign." And my boss said, "Well, the job's been vacant for so long, another two weeks isn't going to make any

difference." He was a magnificent man. So I helped--there was a big rally at a theater, one of the small theaters in East L.A., and years later, years later I heard that some of the Jews were angry at me, because they had heard that I was with ADL, and I was working on this thing which was put on by the Mexicans in East L.A., and the Jews had a different thing and I wasn't working for them. A guy named Julie Sampson, I still remember his name, and he threw it up at me. And I said, "I wasn't on the ADL staff at the time. I didn't start till after the election." He said, "I didn't know that." I said, "Well, why didn't you call and ask me?" So there was a certain amount of tension between the Jews and the Mexicans in--I'm not saying Mexican Americans, I'm saying Mexicans--in East L.A. But that was the only thing.
Jimmy Roosevelt was coming out to speak, if I recall correctly. It was in one of the movie houses owned by Jack Y. Berman, and Jack Y. Berman was active in ADL, and the reason his middle initial was Y was because there was another Jack Berman in East L.A. who was a communist. So Jack Y. Berman put a Y in there to distinguish him from the other Jack Berman.
Espino
That's fascinating, because usually you hear about the coalition, because there was coalition among Jews and Mexicans, Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles around the forties and fifties, but you're talking--
Schechter
But you had personalities, and you know, "Why is he working for them? He should be working for us." I mean, Julie Sampson was very active in B'nai B'rith, and that's where it came up years later. He threw it at me.
Espino
Was that your first involvement? I mean, I know that you were--
Schechter
With Mexicans?
Espino
Right. I mean, you were going to these events with Hope as her date or as her boyfriend. But once you started to get involved, was this the first campaign you worked on, or were there other things that you did before that?
Schechter

No, I didn't work on any campaigns before, because I was a student at Santa Barbara. I think the first time I voted was in '46. I think Jimmy Roosevelt was running against Earl Warren, and I voted for Roosevelt because I was a New Yorker and Roosevelt was god to us. And in '48 I voted for Harry Truman, but I wasn't active in the campaign. I wasn't active in any campaigns until '52, and that's because of Hope. Hope was the one who, "Come do this, come do that."

Espino

How did they receive you, the members of CSO?

Schechter

I was Hope's boyfriend. I never had any hostility until the business with Jimmy Cruz I told you about. He was going after Hope, not after me, and by that time we were married. We were living in the valley. I never felt--maybe I was blind, maybe I was stupid. Once I did something that Hope said was awful. There was some sort of a big CSO thing, and somebody said, "Harvey doesn't speak any Spanish." I said, "Yes, I do." And then I remembered, "Huera warinche mata la chinche." [laughs] And a scream went up in the room, and I didn't know what the hell I'd said. Somebody had taught me the damn phrase. It's like "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," where they taught him all sorts of Greek expressions which were dirty. I said that and Hope said, "Oh, my god. Don't say that again." She never did tell me what it means, something about cockroaches?

Espino

I'm not sure. [laughs] Chinche, yes, I think that is a cockroach. Yes, it's not vulgar.

Schechter

Well, huera is light, light-skinned.

Espino

Warinche, I don't know that that means.

Schechter

But when I said, "Huera warinche mata la chinche," "Aah!" That was the last time I said that in public. I still remember it.

Espino

Well, tell me a little bit about your relationship with the Roybals [Edward and Lucille], because in some of your writings you talk about how you would spend every weekend with them.

Schechter

Friday nights. It was a ritual. I would go to Hope's family for dinner, meet with her after work, and as I think back, I realize what an ungrateful guy I was. I never once brought a box of candy. I never brought a pie or ice cream. I was thinking about that recently. I said, Jesus, Schechter, you're a taker, not giver. Estingy. But no one ever said anything, and this only hit me years later. Go to mamacitas and have dinner, and then we'd visit for a while, and then we'd go to the Roybals over on Evergreen. Hope would sit with the ladies and talk and have coffee and pan dulce, and after I had my pan dulce and coffee I'd go in to be with Lillian [Roybal Rose]. Her name is now Lillian Roybal Rose, and I went in to speak with--I think I told you this, because she was suffering from rheumatic fever. Years later, Eddie [Edward Roybal] told me they decided it was rheumatic fever, but I didn't know that at the time and they didn't. It was like standard. It was, that's what you did on Friday nights.

Espino

Generally, were they meetings--

Schechter

No.

Espino

--or they were just social evenings?

Schechter

It was social. A few other women came over. There was a gal named Sally Gonzales. There was a guy named Joe [Carlos]--Hope would remember his name. There was Lucille's brother [Albert Becerra] who would come. It was just Friday night get together, sit and talk about whatever. But I would go in and be with Lillian.

Espino

And read to her and play games.

Schechter

I learned years later that Lillian was very unhappy when I married Hope. I guess this is an eleven-year-old girl or nine-year-old, or however old she was, had this crush on this guy who was twice her age, bald or balding, and it kind of came as a shock to me. But I could see where a young girl, she's getting attention, and she used to look forward to my visits. I was the bright spot in her invalid life. She'd wait for Friday nights when Harvey would come.

Espino

Just to get to the specific of--I know that you were also ill as a child, so you wanted to keep her company, but did you feel that--not comfortable with the men, or--

Schechter

No.

Espino

--that was a more comfortable spot for you to be in?

Schechter

My reputation is, "Where's Harvey?" "Harvey's with the kids." Hope and I would go to a dinner party, and there'd be a lot of adults and then suddenly Harvey would disappear. "Where's Harvey?" "He's in the bedroom with the kids." I got a lot of kick out of, a big kick out of being with kids.

Last night one of our grandnephews called and said, "There's a girl who's doing a paper. She's fifteen years old and as part of this course she has to do an interview with someone who--." So I agreed and I was on the phone with her for maybe forty-five minutes. Fifteen years old, she's a student, she's a sophomore at a school in Whittier, and I enjoy it. I enjoy talking with these kids. I enjoy sharing with them the lessons in life that I've learned. I'm going to be sending her some stuff. She wants a career in the FBI, and she had heard that I knew something about the FBI, I had been working with them, so I said, "Sure." That's how we wound up with all these young kids in our family. Nobody gives them guidance. In order to drive a car, you've got to take lessons. In order to become a plumber, you've got to pass an exam. There's no exam for becoming a husband or a father or a mother. You get pregnant and there you are. You now have a family. And I think that's criminal.

I don't know if I told you this. If I were the king of the United States, I would make courses in money mandatory, starting about the fourth grade. What is money? What is interest? What is a savings account? What is a checking account? What is a CD? What is, what is, what is. Some of these kids don't know anything, absolutely don't know anything. I think I told you that if you owe five thousand dollars on a credit card, and you never put another charge on the card, and you pay the minimum, it takes you twenty-two years to pay off the card. And when I tell that to people, I say, "How long?" They said, "Oh, two, three years." I say, "Twenty." They can't believe it.

Hope and I went to a UC Santa Barbara alum thing the other night at Redondo Beach, a very nice yacht club. I spoke and I said, "This is a very happy occasion, but I want to introduce a somber note. 'Wall Street Journal' ran an article a few years ago. 'Too young to have a will? Think again.'" And I started to talk to them about wills. If you don't put it down, the state's going to decide what--if you add up what you've got, you've got a lot. And then I told them Hope and I had written our wills and trust so that the lion's share goes to UC Santa Barbara. We had originally said for Hispanic students, and the university said, "It's against the law. Can't do that." So we framed it legally but the same thing, "for needy students." So we figured the Latinos and the blacks are going to be primarily the needy students, so that's how we wrote our will.

Espino

Did you ever regret not having children with Hope?

Schechter

We have children.

Espino

Right. But a biological?

Schechter

These are better. These are better. They act up, goodbye. [Espino laughs] I'm serious. Our kids know that if they're serious about this thing called life, and if they're not going to mess around with pot and all this sort of stuff, we're here for them. If they're going to screw around, we love you but goodbye, have no time for you. It's wonderful. The kid messes the diaper. "Here, Mama. Take care of the kid. It's your assignment, not mine." We get wonderful things, notes about how well they're doing. It's great.

Espino

What about at the time when you were first married? Because you were both still young enough to have children.

Schechter

Yes, I was thirty-one.

Espino

Did you feel any pressure from your family or from her family?

Schechter

No.

Espino

Because these were old values still existed.

Schechter
Well, keep in mind that Hope and I are both pretty strong-headed, and I think I told you how I would dodge the question. People have said to me, "Harvey, Hope is a beautiful woman. How come you never had any children?" Sometimes I'd tell the truth, and sometimes I'd say, "My mother told me that it's dirty and I shouldn't do that, and I promised my mother I never would. So I never did that, so we didn't have any children." I said, "Now people tell me, 'You know, it's not dirty.'" I said, "Now you tell me? Why didn't you tell me then?" I always get a laugh. I always get a laugh. But if I want to level I say, "Hey--." I think I wrote that, that I didn't want to leave Hope a young widow with small children. So it's been fine.
Virginia, we get so many cards, letters, e-mails, phone calls from our kids on Mother's Day and Father's Day, and I've had people say to me, "You get more than I get, and I've spent a fortune on my kids." I was talking with one woman the other day, and she said, "Well, my son is very busy. He's got his own family. He doesn't call as often." I said, "That's horse manure. Doesn't take a lot of time to pick up the phone and call. He's not calling because he doesn't want to." I said, "I'm sorry to say this to you, but that's the truth." How long does it take to pick up a phone and call and say, "Mama, how are you? Thinking about you." Those are phony stories.
Espino
Well, let's get back to the CSO and then we'll move on to--
Schechter
Whatever you say. I'll talk about anything you want.
Espino
We'll move on to your next move. Well, probably you were involved in the two things at the same time, when you started working with the ADL. But whatever you can remember as far as maybe a specific event, a specific fundraiser with CSO or--
Schechter
Well, did you know that one of the sources of funding for CSO in the early days was the Jewish Federation Council?
Espino
Were you involved in the Jewish Federation Council?
Schechter

No. No. It was before my time. But a man by the name of Joseph Roos, R-o-o-s, was the executive director of the Community Relations Committee of the Federation, and he was the prime mover in getting Federation money to help CSO get started.

Espino

Okay. So you have your master's in sociology, and you've gained some political awareness from your father, who was political. At least ideologically he had ideas and opinions. And then you come to this organization, even though you're not involved in it because it's something that you're passionate about, but you still come to it. What can you tell me about what you observed, how it worked, what was successful about it, maybe some of the weaknesses, how it functioned?

Schechter

On numerous occasions, on numerous occasions I have spent time with Latino, quote, "leaders," and also with some black leaders who put to me the question, "How come the Jewish community is so successful in raising money and organizing these groups? We're struggling. You guys are well-funded. And if you look at it, you have American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, ADL, Jewish Labor Committee, National Council of Jewish Women, all this, and we have the same numbers as you do, and we can't do anything."

So I arranged to meet with these people and say, "Let me map out for you how we're structured, what it takes, the ABCs of organization." Virginia, I spent hours with them. They took copious notes and nothing ever came of it. And nothing ever came of it because individual A said, "Well, if individual B is active, count me out. I'm not going to have anything to do with him." And the rivalries, both in the black community and Hispanic community, were so numerous, in fact, nothing could happen.

I even met with some young Chinese, Chinese Americans. Hollywood was making a movie which was a movie about, oh, white slavery, the older Chinese man with the young blonde girls who were being sucked in through opium and stuff like that. And they were furious, because when the movie was being cast, they were going to have Chinese actors to play in it, and once they saw the script they would have nothing to do with it. So they came to see me, and they said, "You've got contacts with Hollywood. What can

we do to put a stop to this?" I had a long conversation with them. We worked out a campaign. They never did anything. The movie was never made. They never did anything. Why? They couldn't agree on who would sign the letter to the head of the studio. The older guys, the powers that be in the Chinese American community, they wanted to. The actors wanted to sign it. And there was such a back and forth. As it turned out, they never got the film made, which was good. But again and again, while there are rivalries in the Jewish community, they're not bloodletting. They're not cancerous. There's a wonderful story about a Catholic priest who says to a rabbi, "How do you manage to raise so much money for your efforts?" And the rabbi says, "Well, you start with five thousand years of persecution." Again, people give money for two reasons. One, because they believe, and, two, because they have to. And when I say they have to, they're in a situation where to say no would be harmful.

I don't know if I told you this. We honored the head of Von's Markets, and we made a fortune, because every supplier of Von's wanted to say yes. They wanted to make sure that--what was the name of the fellow who was the head of Von's? Used to be on TV commercials? Oh, god, it'll come to me. [Bill Davila] We were honoring him and Von's Markets, and they all wanted to make sure that Joe X knew that they had bought a table or made a contribution or bought an ad in the ad journal. I mean, why does a guy give $10,000? Because he has to. Unless he really believes, like he believes in research for childhood diabetes, and his kid has childhood diabetes. And we could never generate anything like that in the black community or the Mexican-American community.

Espino

Did you notice those rivalries that you're talking about within the CSO, among the Mexican--

Schechter

No. No. CSO had nothing. There was nothing to fight over. There were a couple of key guys. Tony Rios was one. Who else? J.J. Rodriguez, I think he was with the butcher's union. But no, there was nothing to fight over. They had nothing. They were the poor neighbors.

Espino

What about egos? What about individual egos?

Schechter
I found them very cooperative. Maybe there were times that something happened that I didn't know about, but I never encountered that.
Espino
So what you're talking about is something that you experienced much later, but not within the CSO.
Schechter
Yes.
Espino
Can you tell me a little bit about some of their functions that you attended, what were the dynamics and who showed up, and what kind of parties they threw? Any details?
Schechter
I remember one. I wasn't even there. But Hope and Sally Gonzalez and a few others--I think Hope even has a picture where they were waitresses at a fundraiser, and they were dressed like pirate girls, with the short skirt and boots and so forth. I wasn't there. She didn't invite me.
Espino
She didn't invite you. [laughs]
Schechter
I don't think she invited me. They were very simple, usually in a small place. For example, when I was with ADL, I would do our major annual fundraiser at the Century Plaza Hotel. I started out with eleven hundred, fourteen hundred, got it up to over two thousand people, and I never saw anything like that in CSO. It was always a small event, a hundred people, eighty, whatever it was. Forgive me, it was pathetic. But a lot of these people had no money, and they had no sense of, you've got to give.
Hope and I are very big givers. Last year we gave, I don't know, twelve or thirteen thousand dollars to various charities, to UC Santa Barbara, to the Federation, to Alzheimer's, you name it, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and I rarely say no. They need the money and thank god, we've got a little bit to give.
Espino
But generally with the CSO there was not a lot of money being generated for those campaigns?
Schechter

No, it was nickel and dime, nickel and dime. I'll give you a picture of what life was like in East L.A. One of the very successful congressmen was Chet [Chester] Holifield, the Democrat who represented much of East L.A. He was so well established that there was no way a Republican could beat him. In fact, a couple of times they didn't even file a candidate against him. And Chet Holifield had a field representative named Harold Lane, and Harold Lane was a sharp politico. He ran the office and the district. And Mrs. Holifield wanted a fundraising dinner in Monterey Park. Was this a hundred dollars a person? A hundred dollars a person, way back when. And Harold Lane said, "Our people can't afford it. We can get the Monterey Park Athletic Club or country club, and we can have a twenty-five-dollar dinner, and the people want to come see Chet." And Mrs. Holifield wanted, "No. All the congressman are having hundred-dollar dinners, and Chet should have--." And Harold Lane said to Cam Holifield, "We don't need the money. What are we going to do with the money? And besides, you can't do this to our people." And he prevailed. He prevailed. He just wouldn't let them put on a--and she was very unhappy that she didn't have a fancy dinner as the other congressional wives.
But there was no money in East L.A., and this certainly was the story for CSO. They were nickel and dime.
Espino
This will be the last question about CSO and then we'll move on to--well, actually, there were a couple of questions. One is, you talked a lot about your feelings towards communism, and there was a period or actually a situation where Roybal had to vote against the, or decided to vote against the Communist Registration Ordinance. Do you remember that discussion around that?
Schechter
No. Do you?
Espino
Yes, we talked a little bit about that.
Schechter
Well, I would make a distinction between a piece of legislation that's unfair, that's going to hit people who are not communist and who on principal would say, "I don't want to answer that question," as against the activities of the hardcore communists, so that wouldn't be a problem for me.

Espino
Right. Well, I ask you because you obviously have a lot of ideas and opinions and viewpoints, and so I'm trying to see how you were in this organization but not really voicing your opinion or giving your--
Schechter
No, I was sitting in the background with CSO, and if I had anything to say, I would say it to Hope. I wouldn't stand up. Didn't we go to one meeting and I stayed out? There was a meeting at some union, teachers' union building on 6th Street, and we went to the meeting and I said, "I'll stay outside." And they said, "Come on, Harvey. You're invited in." I said, "No, no. I'm not a member, and Hope is there," and I sat outside. I was very scrupulous that way.
Espino
You didn't have a personal relationship with any of the members? Like a close, intimate--
Schechter
No, only through Hope. Joe Carlos, that was his name, couldn't think of Joe's last name. Like, for example, I mentioned Sally Gonzalez and Joe Carlos and Lucille's brother Albert Becerra, but we didn't see them personally or go to dinner with them or anything like that. It was always group. What was the name of the bar at 1st and Soto? Carioca, it was the Carioca Cafe, and that's where the activists used to hang out. You could always drop in and there was always somebody there to sit and talk with. What was her name, Margaret?
Unidentified Female
Margaret.
Espino
The owner? The owner was Margaret.
Schechter
Donde vas?
Espino
Okay, we're back. And since your involvement with CSO seems to have been pretty limited and based on social--
Schechter
Ancillary, yes.
Espino
Your work with the ADL, then, was much more important. Can you tell me the year that you started there and some of your first--

Schechter
Started November 5, 1952.
Espino
Some of your first activities with the--
Schechter
Well, I didn't know what I was going to be doing. As I told the little girl last night, I was looking for a job, and I had two job offers. One was with Mattel toys, which I knew was an up-and-coming company, because the brother of one of our friends was an executive there, and I knew enough about the Handlers [Elliot & Ruth Handler] to know this toy company was going to go, and the other was with ADL as a civil rights and fact-finding director. I'll come to the titles in a moment. ADL was offering $5400 a year, Mattel 5500, and Hope and I talked and we agreed that, well, if I stayed with Mattel, I'd make a lot of money, if I went with Mattel, but I'd enjoy ADL more. So we agreed on ADL and never regretted it for a minute.
It was a wonderful job. I was there forty-one years, retired [in April 1988]. When I told the national director, Abe [Abraham] Foxman, that I was going to retire, he said--
Schechter
He said, "Come to New York. I want to talk to you." I said, "I'm coming in June." He said, "Why do you want to retire?" "It's enough." He pleaded with me not to retire. He said, "I have too many rookies around, and I need someone who knows the history, the culture of this agency." So I said, "All right. I'll stay another couple of years, but if you want me out, all you have to do is just pick up the phone and say, 'Goodbye, Harvey.'" And he said, "Oh, stop it." I stayed an additional total of five years. That was from '88 to '93, and by '93 I knew that I didn't have a role there anymore. When you're no longer the CEO--and they wanted me for one reason and one reason only, fundraising, because we had bought a building and I was good at fundraising. So I raised just about all the money that was necessary. Turned out it wasn't enough, because one man who assured us that we would be getting about $880,000 from his estate, when he died we got about $80,000, so we had a big hole.
But that's what they wanted me for, fundraising. And while I enjoyed fundraising and was damn good at it, I said, "It's time to

get out of here." But before I left, I had gone on a partial of two days a week, and the other days I'd go to Valley College, and that's where I met these kids and started this whole new career.

Espino

Right. Well, can we go back, though, to the very beginning of your work with ADL and what were some of the issues? Because that was an important time just for most--I mean, I don't know if Jewish people consider themselves an ethnic group, but for groups who were historically discriminated against. I mean, the fair employment, fair housing--

Schechter

Well, in 1952, an employer could say to you, "We don't hire Jews. We don't hire Mexicans." There was nothing you could do about it, absolutely nothing. A couple of states had Fair Employment Practices laws. New York had one and I believe New Jersey, but our efforts to get a Fair Employment Practice law, out of the question, so that we didn't get a Fair Employment Practices law until 1959, after Pat Brown was elected [Governor] in '58, and Jesse Unruh became the Speaker of the Assembly. You could discriminate in housing. "We don't rent or sell to your kind of people." A number of universities had quota systems, 10 percent for Jews and that was it. ADL launched the Crack the Quota campaign, which was very successful, and much of what we did we did by embarrassing the discriminators. You remember, I started seven years after the end of World War II, and we'd just defeated Nazism, and their hallmark was discrimination, so that we had the mood of the country on our side, not in terms of blacks, but in terms of Caucasians who were discriminated against.

By way of a digression, one of the black deputy sheriffs with whom I worked a few years later told me that he was in the army, and he was assigned to transporting German prisoners of war who had been brought over here to work the fields in the South. [laughs] And he said, "We're members of the U.S. Army, and we have a convoy of trucks. It came lunchtime, so we stopped at a place to eat. The German prisoners of war could go inside and eat, and the black U.S. Army soldier--brought his food out, because they couldn't go inside." In fact, he also told--

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Schechter
He told me about a book that was available in the black community, "Traveling Without Embarrassment" ["The Negro Travelers' Greenbook: The Guide for Travel and Vacations]. You knew the places you could go to where you could get in. He told me that he was driving with his wife and two kids and no matter where they went, even though a motel sign said vacancy, no vacancy. And he said, "But it says vacancy." "No, we just sold the last room. Sorry." And finally he drove to the state police, one of their barracks or whatever they call them, and he walked in, he slammed down his badge and he said, "I'm a deputy sheriff in Los Angeles County." He said, "I've been driving. I'm falling asleep at the wheel. I've got my wife and kids, and no one will rent to us." And the sergeant sent one trooper out. He says, "Take him to the XYZ Motel." Walked in, he said, "This is Deputy Sheriff Curtis Howard from Los Angeles. I want you to give him a room." Otherwise they would have slept on the side of the road in the car.
Most people don't know what the United States was like in the early fifties, and I'm not talking about the South. I'm talking about Las Vegas. If I told you this, stop me. Negroes who entertained at the hotels could not stay at the hotels, could not go into the casinos. That came later with Frank Sinatra and some of the others, Sammy Davis Jr. But it was an absolute disgrace.
Espino
How about Los Angeles? What was Los Angeles like as far as employment, housing, opportunities?
Schechter
Well, there were lots of--first of all, lots of Jews were entrepreneurial, so it's a question if you start a business. But the economy was expanding like crazy, Los Angeles was growing, but we had housing problems. We heard that private employment agencies were using a code for job orders. When you call in, you say, "I need a secretary." They write up what's called a job order. And we heard from someone who was working inside of an employment agency that if somebody said, "No Jews," they'd write down "No fifty-threes." That was the code number for Jews. No blacks, no ninety-nines. Those are the two I remember. Now, there were two other numbers somewhere in the forties; one was Asians and one was Mexican Americans. We got a hold of--this person

brought these job orders to us and, okay, there was a whole stack like that. And we raised hell about it.
In fact, there was one Jewish agency that was working with the private employment agencies, and, oh, they were doing all sorts of positive work. So I didn't trust them. So I took my secretary down, and I told her to go to this agency and to say she wanted to apply for a job, and she wanted to fill out an application. And I said, "And don't leave the application there. Tell them you have to go move your car or something. Take it with you." And she brought back an application that said race, religion. So we met with these people and they were telling us about the great progress and all that, and nasty Harvey said, "Here's a copy of your application form. Look what it says, religion and race." Blood drenched out of his face, just [makes whistling sound]. And I said, "What are you giving us a story for?" Anyway, we had hundreds of these things, and we went to the federal government, because they had a President's Committee on Government Contracts. If you did business with the federal government, you couldn't discriminate. We blew some of these up as display posters, and we went up to Sacramento and there were hearings at the [California] State Senate, the Labor Committee, and they said, "Well, you know, a lot of this is exaggerated," and we just brought these things in, and we got a lot of news coverage and so forth. This helped get the State Fair Employment Practices. In fact, Carmen Warschaw was the first chair of the FEPC in California, appointed by Pat Brown.
Espino
Well, tell me a little bit about your relationship with Pat Brown. He was popular among Mexican Americans. How was he--
Schechter
Very popular among Jews. He was a Democrat. But I had no relationship with Pat Brown. Hope had the relationship. She was the politico.
Espino
You didn't work with him as far as trying to move forward some of your programs?
Schechter
No. We did it through Jesse Unruh. When Unruh became the Speaker of the Assembly, he said, "Nothing is going to go through this legislature unless we get a Fair Employment Practices law." He

was also responsible for a piece of legislation that most people didn't even know existed, the Unruh Civil Rights Act, a very simple one-sentence law saying, "There shall be no discrimination based on religion, race," blah, blah, blah, "by any business establishment whatsoever." And if you're a business establishment, you have a store, you have a business, you're covered. And we used that to a fare thee well. Jesse Unruh put his foot down. He said, "Nothing is coming out of this legislature unless this gets passed."
So while Pat Brown got the kudos, it was Jesse Unruh. And Jesse Unruh was a sharecropper's son, came out of the South, went to USC. He was known as Big Daddy, got very heavy, very fat. And he's the one that coined the phrase "Money is the mother's milk of politics." And he's the one who, when the law was that you had to adopt a budget by a certain date, he stopped the clock. The clock was stopped and he kept it in session. Big Daddy Jesse Unruh.
Espino
Did you have the chance to meet him?
Schechter
Sure. Sure. Hope knew him better than I did. Virginia, I said I'm very scrupulous, and I was working for an organization that's a 501(c)(3) organization, no partisan political activity. So I never, never, never got involved in politics in any way that would leave my fingerprints. I'll give you a perfect example. If Hope wanted to endorse a candidate, she could not say Mrs. Harvey B. Schechter, because that's like me sending a message to the Jewish community, "Hey, Harvey's for this guy." And I had a very high profile. She would have to endorse a candidate as Hope Mendoza Schechter. That's her name, she's entitled to it, do what you want.
And when I retired and David [A.] Lehrer took over, he called me up one day and he said he and his wife wanted to endorse a certain candidate, "And we want to endorse him as Mrs. David A. Lehrer." I said, "David, don't do it. Do it Ariella Lehrer, not Mrs. David Lehrer. You're asking for trouble." And he didn't do it. He listened to the old man. So I was very careful about politics.
In fact, there was one candidate named [George] Brown running for U.S. [Senate] against John Tunney. What was his first name? He was a lefty, and I got involved in his campaign. I sent out letters on personal stationery, not ADL. I paid for the postage, and he filed a complaint against me with the associate national director of ADL,

Arnold Forster. He said, "You're a 501(c)(3) agency, and he's campaigning against me." I was scared to death of Brown. He came from the Riverside area. Anyway, we were for John Tunney. This was a primary race. And Arnold wrote him a letter and said, "Based on what you sent me, I see no evidence that he invoked his association with ADL in his work." He said, "He's just exercising his right to free speech," etc., etc., "and if you have other evidence, I'd like to see it, but based on what you told me, he did not do anything that attributed his involvement to our agency." And it stopped. I remember his name was Brown. But I was very, very careful.

I got furious with one board president, Marvin Rowen. He sent out--because he was a board president, he had a copy of the membership. Otherwise we didn't give out the membership list to anybody. It went to the board president, the chair of the executive committee, and stayed in the office. And I was shocked to learn that he had sent out a letter to every member of the regional board urging a vote on whatever. And I called him up, I said, "How could you do this?" He says, "Well, I did it as an individual." I said, "But you don't know these people, or some of them, and you write to them. Where'd you get the list? You got it from us."

Which leads me to another story. One of my responsibilities that came with ADL was investigations of hate groups, and one of the things we would do was put the names of people on their mailing list so that let's say Hope would say she's Hope Marshall, and she wants to contribute some money, "to support your important work," and she would make it Hope A. Marshall. Then she would write to organization B, same kind of letter, and say Hope B. Marshall, Hope C. Marshall, so that if we started to get letters--there was no such person--started to get letters "Hope B. Marshall," we knew what the connection was between two organizations. So if she's getting stuff to Hope B. Marshall with material from Hope A., it means they're working together, so it was a very valuable investigative tool.

Espino

What were some of the incidents of hate crimes or hate groups that you witnessed?

Schechter

Well, one of the more dramatic ones was there was a salute to Israel at the Shrine Auditorium, and some young Nazis were going

down there to demonstrate. Fights broke out and some of these Nazis were arrested. The district attorney was Joseph Busch, B-u-s-c-h, and we had infiltrated that Nazi unit, so one of the guys was our guy. The guys would come up on charges, and we had--one guy pretended that he was just in the area, and he's not a Nazi and anything like that, and thanks to our infiltrator, we had pictures of him wearing a Nazi uniform, having coffee with some other Nazis, and that shot his defense right out of the water. Of the five who were indicted, one went to San Quentin, four went to county jail, and that was the end of their involvement with Nazism. They figured if this is going to be the price we have to pay, I'm not ready for this.

And the big shock to me--World War II is over and we lost, as it turns out, hundreds of thousands of men, and the Holocaust and all that. And I never thought I'd see the day when the swastika would be waved in the United States. I figured Nazism was dead, and I was as wrong as wrong could be. It wasn't long after I joined ADL that a man by the name of George Lincoln Rockwell, who had been a navy commander, created the American Nazi Party and proudly proclaimed his love of Hitler. Had headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, recruited some guys. In fact, one of the guys who he recruited, he didn't know at the time, was a Jewish guy named Dan Burros, B-u-r-r-o-s, and Burros was confronted by the "New York Times." A reporter got the story that Burros was a Jew, and he confronted him, and he said, "Aren't you the same guy who was bar mitzvah'd at this temple on this date? Isn't this your rabbi?" So on and so on. And Burros said, "If you publish that story, I'm dead." And the reporter thought that he meant that the Nazis would kill him. Burros committed suicide when that story came out, couldn't handle it.

We had the same thing in Los Angeles. The lieutenant of the American Nazi Party was named Leonard Holstein, half-Jewish. In fact, the nephew of our former dentist. And when there was an attempt made to burn down Temple Israel of Hollywood, and all they did was burn the front door, Leonard Holstein was a prime suspect, because he'd been bar mitzvah'd there. He was going to burn away his Jewish ties. Don't know what ever happened to him, but he had all sorts of problems.

Espino

Well, back to the--
Schechter
Is this what you want? You want something else? I don't know if I'm giving you what you want.
Espino
Well, I'd like to know a little bit about the idea of having an infiltrator. Was that something that you--
Schechter
That was my job.
Espino
Your idea?
Schechter
No, no, no, no, no.
Espino
Or was it common for organizations like yours to have infiltrators? Usually it's the FBI or the CIA.
Schechter
We worked very closely with the FBI. Sometimes we had someone in an organization where they didn't have anybody, and so I would give them the reports. One of the things that overwhelmed me was the fact that ADL did this kind of work. I didn't know it, and I didn't know that that would be my portfolio. And I loved it, and my job was to find people who would join these organizations and report to us what was going on.
Espino
How did you do that? How did you find people who were willing to do that?
Schechter
Well, first you look around for people who will pass. You want an Aryan type. It has to be someone you know, and you talk to them. What was crazy was some of them we'd pay. I had one guy who was getting a weekly salary, a weekly check, and I got word from New York that we had to find a buffer. There was a crazy case in the South where--nothing to do with race or prejudice--the police department had infiltrated a crime syndicate, and when they had enough evidence, the infiltrator was produced as a witness in a trial against the crime syndicate, and they were convicted. Then the Internal Revenue Service called the chief of police and said, "He worked for you?" "Yes, he did." It was on the record. "And you paid

him a thousand dollars a month." "Yes, we did." "You didn't pay any taxes on that. You didn't file a 1099 that he was an independent contractor. Was he on your payroll?" "No." "Well, you've got to pay tax on that." And the chief of police said, "Hey, we're on the same side." And the IRS said, "No, we're not. Our job is to collect taxes. You didn't pay taxes." And the chief screamed, "Are you crazy?" Guy says, "No, I'm not crazy. We're going to work out how much you owe and how much he owes." Because he didn't pay taxes and he had income.

So we got word from New York, "Don't pay any--," because I was only just giving him a hundred bucks a week, cash. They said, "Find a buffer." So I found an attorney at a large practice. I approached him and asked him would he be willing to--he said, "Sure." He said, "We've got so many investigators and so much stuff," he said, "we'll just feed him in." He said, "But we're going to file income tax forms, and he's going to file." And we said, "Okay." So he was getting about a thousand dollars a month at the time, and he filed forms and everything was legal. And my board president, he used to cosign the checks. We had a system of control whereby every check had to be signed by two people, the regional director, the board president, the secretary or the treasurer, but it had to be two people, never one person.

So one of my lay people said, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Every week I see I'm writing a check, signing a check for this very wealthy attorney." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, why are we giving him money?" And I said, "Because he has a big house and he can't afford it, and so we're helping him pay for the house." And this attorney said, "Come on, Harvey. What's going on?" I said, "You don't want to know. Just sign the check." He said, "Okay." But we were funneling the money to this attorney who paid the investigator, and then he filed a 1099 like he was one of his investigators, and he made him file income tax, because he knew tax law, and he wasn't going to get caught. One of the funny little things that happened on the way to the forum.

Espino

Any other notable cases you want to talk about before we stop?

Schechter

Sure. This is going to be published, right?

Espino

It's going to be public.
Schechter
I don't think I want to say about other things. No, this has been reported in the "L.A. Times," because there was a big to do, and I purposely didn't mention the name of either the investigator or the--
Espino
Right. Well, maybe some other public issues that the ADL faced, any other campaigns that you were involved in to stop something or end something or change something.
Schechter
Well, we had the famous case of Camelback Inn in Phoenix. Camelback Inn was run by a man named Jack Stewart, who was very careful--no, not very careful, very candid, sorry, about his admission policies, that Jews could come but when the temperature was 120 degrees. But during the high season, Jews could not come to Camelback Inn. We tested it, and we had the documentation. And he was very candid. So we waged a campaign to tell people--they used to fill the hotel with convention groups that came in the off season, the handbag manufacturers and stuff, and the names of these groups would be published by the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. So we would find out who was coming to Camelback Inn and we would approach them. "Why are you going there?" And we would reach Jewish members in the organization, saying, "Why are you going there? You can't go there any other time." And we had minimal success.
And then we saw that the National Association of Attorneys General were planning to go to Camelback Inn for a long weekend conference. The attorney general for the State of California was Stanley Mosk, who was a former president of the ADL board and a very distinguished California Supreme Court Justice. Another member of the association was Louis Lefkowitz, the attorney general for the State of New York. And so they both contacted the attorney general for Georgia, who was the president of the association, and said, "Why are we meeting there? It's discriminatory." So Georgia went to the Camelback Inn, said, "Is this true?" and Jack Stewart said, "Yes." So they cancelled their reservations. It's one thing for handbag manufacturers to cancel a hotel reservation, but when the attorneys general for all fifty states

say, "We're not going there," that was big news. "Time" magazine had a big story, "The Straw That Broke the Camel's Back," and a lot of very bad news stories.
So finally, now they were really hurting. They had a black eye. And Jack Stewart contacted my boss, the regional director, and said, "I want to talk to you about this whole thing." So Milton [Senn] flew to Phoenix and met with him; the place was at Scottsdale. And Jack Stewart said, "Okay. Okay on Jews, but no blacks, no Mexicans." So Milton said, "No." He says, "Well, we'll let blacks and Mexicans in a few years down the road, but for now Jews can come in." Milton said, "No. Either everybody can come in, or our activities will continue." So Jack Stewart said, "Okay." The irony is that the word went out that Camelback Inn was open to everybody, and Jack Stewart called almost a year later and he said, "I'm not getting any Jewish business." So Milton called B'nai B'rith in Phoenix, and he said, "Stewart's complaining, not getting Jewish business in, and he's got a black eye." So they said, "He can drop dead." So Milton said, "No, you can't have it both ways. You can't say, 'He won't let us in,' and then when he says we can come in, we're not coming in." So they said, "Well, we'll talk with him about having a big event there, but he's going to have to give us a good price." And that was the thing that broke the camel's back. Camelback Inn is open.
We had the same thing with Alisal Ranch in Santa Barbara, wouldn't take in Jews. In fact, their literature said, "Our clientele is predominantly Gentile." And Milton and I drove up to Alisal Ranch, Santa Barbara area, and met with Lynn Gilham--god, why do I remember these names--who was the owner, and we talked about his literature. He says, "These are facts. We have forty horses. Our clientele is predominantly Gentile. What's your problem?" We said, "It's discriminatory," and he said, "No, it isn't." So we hit him with the Unruh Civil Rights Act. "You're a business. You can't discriminate in the state of California." Those were a few that come to mind immediately.
Espino
Those were important campaigns. Before we stop, there's something happening right now in Arizona that you reminded me of, and that's--
Schechter
Oh, the business with the new law?

Espino
Yes. What would you think the best--
Schechter
I don't see how that's going to stand.
Espino
But what would you see as someone who's had these struggles, to change, to reverse discrimination, what would be the best approach to kind of get that removed or stopped?
Schechter
Well, what's probably going to happen is there's going to be a lawsuit saying this is a federal matter and you have no jurisdiction. But the people in Arizona are suffering because their land is being--the case of the rancher who was killed. And newspapers fail to make a distinction between immigrants and those people who enter illegally, and that's the bone of contention. But I think Mr. Obama is going to do something about it amnesty. I think he's going to do it. There's no doubt in my mind; he's going to do it. And the nation can go to hell, however they feel, just as he did with healthcare. Now, all the polls show people didn't want it. His attitude was, screw you, I'm going to give it to you.
And I'll tell you something, Virginia. You're going to pay a heavy price. Not me, because I'm at the end of the road. You and your children are going to pay a heavy price for this Obamacare legislation. Nancy Pelosi--they ask her what's in the bill. "Well, vote for it and then I'll tell you." What? Who's got time to read a twenty-seven-hundred-page bill? You're going to suffer, because you're going to get a shortage of medical skills. I know I'm in trouble. It doesn't kick in till 2013, 2014. I'm in trouble because if I need open-heart surgery, they're going to say, "Hey, god damn it, the guy's almost ninety. Why the hell are we going to spend all that money? How much longer is he going to live?" They won't say no. They'll just put me on a waiting list. So while they may not have death panels, they will have death panels in the sense of, "He can wait."
Espino
Well, I guess we'll stop there, since we're up to the current political situation, and I thank you very much for giving me your time, and I'm going to turn off the recorder now.

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