

picked that house in the drawing, Mrs. Greengross(?) who was the first one to occupy that house, convinced my father to switch houses for the one that she picked. When my father came back and told my mother about it, my mother was furious, because my mother did not want the house without the separate dining room in it.

Q: Oh.

MEL: And a few of those houses has a separate dining room. My father was a pushover. He was a very soft guy.

Q: He always was. Sweet guy.

MEL: And they had, Greengross, had a daughter who was a grown daughter at the time, and they convinced my father that they really needed a house with a separate dining room, and my father didn't care so much . . . as it worked out, I think my father got a better house, because the corner houses didn't have the same privacy.

Q: Yeah. It was a nice house.

MEL: And that's the house that we rented until the government sold the houses. And then we bought that house.

Q: So that you were too young at first to have a job. But you remember the other people . . .

MEL: Oh, yeah.

Q: . . . the other, the older boys and girls. Were there a lot of kids here?

MEL: Yeah, at that time, there were a lot of kids around. A lot of the names are just names that some of the people know now as far as history goes. But next door or two doors down from us were the Hochenbergs(?).

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: And diagonally across the street were the Porters. Then three doors up were the Weisses. And all of these families, just about every family on that block, it was called Co-op Circle at the time, I can't think of any family that didn't have kids. Every single one of them had kids . . .

Q: So you all . . .

MEL: . . . ranging in age from grammar school through high school.

Q: So you had playmates.

MEL: Oh, plenty of them, plenty of them.

Q: So how did you like it when you first came?

MEL: Very much. Because it was really . . .

Q: Because you came from Princeton, whereas most of the other people came from New York, so that the reaction was . . .

MEL: It was really a very, very tight family . . .

Q: Yeah.

MEL: . . . at that time. One of the charms, one of the nice things about Roosevelt is that it was a, an extended family for everybody living in town. And I guess a lot of the old-timers still have those memories of, of the extended family. Unfortunately, too much of it has dropped away.

Q: Did your parents enter into the social life of the community?

MEL: Yes, very much so. But, virtually, everybody did.

Q: Yeah. Were there organizations at the time?

MEL: There were organizations. There were very, very few people who had cars. Everybody leaned on everybody who did have a car, everybody cooperated. Whenever my father was going into Hightstown or into Princeton, he'd call up people and they would give you orders for all the

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: . . . but he did not complete it till afterwards.

Q: Do you remember anything about the co-ops? You know, what co-ops there were?

MEL: Well, in the old Britton house, Greengross(?) ran what was known as the CDA, which stood for Consumers' Distributor Association, which was a clothing store. The old grocery store was known as the commissary. And old man Klyman(?) and old man Kahn(?). Kahn was, was Francis Monwynn's(?) father. They were the, they were the managers of the store and waited on people at the store. And there was a conflict in town as to which one was the boss and which one was going to be the manager.

Q: Well, you hit on a nerve there. Was that the problem in all the co-ops?

MEL: Yeah, it really was. There was, there was an old joke that when they started the factory, at that time there was fifty, sixty employees in the factory. And, as an example, if there was fifty, there were forty-nine Jews and one Italian who was working there at the time. And it was hell trying to get work out of that one employee when there were forty-nine bosses. [Laughter] So that was, that was the problems with the co-ops then.

Q: Yeah. And the farm, also, was _____ in the co-op . . .

MEL: Yes.

Q: . . . and I'm sure they had the same set of problems.

MEL: Except that there were some very, very good . . . farm managers, whether they did it because of love . . . people like Katzenellenbogen and Bill Singer.

Q: Yeah.

MEL: The farms were successful.

Q: Yeah, they ran better than the other co-ops.

MEL: They ran better than the other co-ops.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you remember, in the beginning, of the break-up of the co-ops? Do you remember anything about that? I know you weren't involved in the factory, nor was your father.

MEL: I don't remember too many of the details on that.

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: I'm not even sure that I was, at that point, I might have been . . . do you know, do you remember what year it was? I was just thinking, I might even have been away from Roosevelt. I don't remember too many of the details.

Q: Well, when . . .

MEL: It worked successfully for the first nine or ten years. But also during that period of time, there was a lot of government subsidy. And I remember that Roosevelt was, or Jersey Homesteads was really a tight-knit community unto itself, because we were not like, in Hightstown, we were the intruders. There was constant problems when the kids went into Hightstown as far as going to the movies. Everybody, not everybody, but most people who lived in Roosevelt were, were looked upon by the surrounding areas as being leftists. In fact, somewhere in my house, if you're interested, I have an old scrapbook that my father kept which shows clippings from the various New York papers about "Red Town comes to Central New Jersey," and "Czar Boris Drezen . . ."

Q: He looked _____. . . [Laughter]

MEL: Right. The Czar of the workers in Central Jersey gives speeches to his employees. It's a very interesting scrapbook, at the time the . . .

Q: What did you do here for entertainment?

MEL: Well, it was very . . . when I was a kid, we used to have a teenage canteen in what is now the firehouse.

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: It was very, very difficult to get out of town. When we did get out of town, we used to go the big night spots like Bogatz's(?) farm . . . [Questioner laughs] or like Grudin's in Perrineville, because they had girls coming out from New York to those two places. So there were strange girls, because if you fooled around in town, it was like fooling around with your own sister.

[Laughter] So you were, you were looking, you were looking for the outsiders.

Q: So you were a member of the teen . . . you went to the teen club . . . did you make clubs like we used to do in New York? We'd always had little clubs. Or was it all just one . . .

MEL: It was pretty much everybody . . . altogether with the older kids protecting the younger kids when they went to Allentown and when they went to Hightstown.

Q: Yeah.

MEL: The, there was a lot of anti-Semitism in the area. And when the younger kids used to go into town, the older kids, they were the big brothers who used to protect them.

Q: How was it at school in Allentown?

MEL: In the beginning, there was a lot of problems in Allentown, a hell of a lot of problems.

One of the reasons why there were so many problems, is that the kids from Roosevelt came with a totally different educational and intellectual background. Then, all of a sudden, they had an influx of kids who were the best students, the brightest students, the ones who showed up all the rest of the farm kids and blue-collar workers who were associated, or going to schools like Allentown.

And very early on, there was a movement in Jersey Homesteads to move our kids out of Allentown because it was an ag[ricultural](?) school to Hightstown. It took a lot of years to do that, because although Hightstown was closer, it was in a different county.

Q: Yeah.

MEL: And part of the reason why the Jersey Homesteads kids were not liked in Allentown is because they walked away with all of the educational prizes. They were always so far intellectually superior to 98 percent of the other kids there, that it was, it led to a natural conflict.

Q: Did you have any conflict because most of them were Jews?

MEL: Oh, that was just a question of being a scapegoat. They had a, they couldn't say, "Look, we don't like them because they're brighter . . .

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: So they said, "We didn't like them because they were Jews."

Q: So that you felt anti-Semitism.

MEL: Oh, very definitely.

Q: Although you lived in a Jewish community.

MEL: Oh, there was a tremendous amount of . . . Roosevelt, or Jersey Homesteads, it was the, it was like being in your own house, that was the safe place.

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: As soon as you went out of town, it was no longer safe. That's where the, the anti-Semitism was. And at that time, the kids in Jersey Homesteads always used to work together. We used to go out in groups together. At the old Hightstown movie house, as an example, was split into four quadrants, and the left-hand, lower quadrants was reserved for blacks. That's the

only place that blacks were permitted to sit. And the kids from Jersey Homesteads used to go en masse and sit down in the black section. We refused to sit . . .

Q: I remember that went on . . .

MEL: . . . in the white section.

Q: . . . that went on for many, many years.

MEL: For many years, that went on.

Q: When the government first sold the houses, do you remember how much they sold them for?

MEL: It ranged in price from twenty . . . I might be off by a couple hundred dollars, but somewhere around twenty-eight, twenty-seven-hundred dollars. No, I think the two-bedrooms when for about eighteen. But of the one-story houses, I think they started at about twenty-seven or twenty-eight and went to as high as thirty-two or thirty-four hundred.

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: And the original tenants, the ones who had shared by putting up their initial amount of money to enter the co-op . . .

Q: Yeah, I think that was \$500.

MEL: . . . which was \$500, which my father also put up when he decided to stay here even though he was not part of the co-op, per se . . .

Q: No.

MEL: . . . those people were given the preference at those prices. And, virtually, everybody bought the houses because of the price. The government set up the price as not only an inducement, because the government also felt an obligation because it was closing out. And almost everybody bought the houses. If I remember correctly, our house, which was a four-

Q: Uh-huh. Did you know Benjamin Brown at all?

MEL: Yes, I remember him as a kid. I don't remember too much about him. I remember that he was a very, very respected figure within the town, but he was considered to be the thinker.

Q: Uh-huh. Do you feel he had any effect on the town?

MEL: Oh, definitely, there was no question about it. It was his intellectualism that brought the whole thing together. My own memories of him are very vague, but my own memories are that he was more of a thinker, and that a lot of people took advantage of him because of the fact that he was a thinker.

Q: When do you think that Jersey Homesteads began to integrate into the surrounding area?

MEL: I would say that it was all part of World War II . . .

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: . . . and that no longer could people in the surrounding area look at Jersey Homesteads as being an enclave onto itself, because the kids in Jersey Homesteads were faced with the same problems that they were. We had proportionately just as many kids going into the armed forces as they did. We had our share of tragedies. And I think that this is what brought that about. It's a very, very subjective view, but . . .

Q: Well, but that's what we're, that's what we're interested in getting. Since their attitude at first was very, very hostile.

MEL: It's interesting. Since their attitude was so negative in the beginning, to take Allentown High School as an example. Allentown gave the kids from Jersey Homesteads on a, an official level as well as on an unofficial level, a very, very hard time, until the reality of our kids pulling out of Allentown came about, and then they fought to keep us there. Because they realized that

their intellectual standards would go down tremendously if we pulled out.

Q: And they did go down.

MEL: And they did.

Q: They still aren't good. Now you're one of the early residents, so that you married and lived in town . . .

MEL: I married and lived in town. And the feeling that people like myself have about Roosevelt, a lot of it is nostalgia, a lot of it is, is memory. My wife, as an example, can't understand my feelings . . .

Q: Uh-uh.

MEL: . . . even though she has been living here for twenty-four years, to me she's still a newcomer. [Questioners laugh] And she can't understand my feelings about Jersey Homesteads or the feelings that I have towards the people in town and towards the economics of the community and the fact that I personally would not try to make a living off of this town. Because my own feeling is that there is, that this is still a great place to live and that it still has a lot to offer.

Q: And you, your children grew up here and they went to the same school that you went to. Not the . . .

MEL: They went to the same grammar school.

Q: Yeah. Elementary school.

MEL: Right. The high school was different, because I went the first two years to Allentown. Allentown was such a crummy school, educationally, at that time, that my parents switched me out of Allentown to the Petty School, which was about two years before we switched to

Hightstown, as a community. And at that time, even though the cost for day school was very low . . .

Q: Uh-huh.

MEL: It was financially very difficult for my father to do it.

Q: Yeah.

MEL: And I don't . . . my children have a very, very warm feeling about Roosevelt.

Q: Did you . . .

MEL: Roosevelt is a protected community, protected atmosphere.

Q: And they, they have the same feeling that, well, of course it can't be the same, but they have a warm feeling about the town, having grown up here.

MEL: They do, and it's very, very interesting to look upon the current make-up of the residents of the town. You have a heck of a lot of second-generation people who have come back.

Q: Yeah, which, which says something.

MEL: It very definitely does.

Q: Now your kids went to the same school. How do you think, when they went, it compared to the school when you went? We're talking about our elementary school, which was, we all agree, was on a high level.

MEL: I think that it was still a very, very good school. I think that what happened when my kids went, you did not have as much of the intellectualism of the parents that were originally here. The people who came out to Jersey Homesteads, although many of them were self-educated originally, were people who had an ideal, were people who were very, very intellectually oriented. And I think that as society grew, that that started to dissolve. And I think by the time that my