

ORAL HISTORY OF
ALAN ROSENTHAL

First Interview – March 3, 2011

This interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Alan Rosenthal and the interviewer is Judy Feigin. The interview took place at Alan Rosenthal's apartment in Rockville, Maryland, on Thursday, March 3, 2011. This is the first interview.

MS. FEIGIN: Good morning.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Good morning.

MS. FEIGIN: Let's start at the beginning, with the beginning being as far back as you know it. How far back do you know your family history?

MR. ROSENTHAL: On my father's side, I know it back to my great-grandfather, Herman Rosenthal, who came to the United States in the early 1880s. For a while, he was working on some kind of commune in the Midwest which was rather peculiar, I think, given that he was basically a scholar. But he ended up working for the New York Public Library as the director of its division on Slavic and Baltic collections, and indeed we've now established a memorial fund at the library to which I contribute each year. I don't know much else about his life.

MS. FEIGIN: Where did he emigrate from?

MR. ROSENTHAL: He emigrated from Russia, although his roots were in Germany. How he got to Russia, I'm not clear, but that's where his son, my grandfather, was born, and he emigrated to this country along with his father Herman. My grandfather's name was Max. He was a gynecologist/obstetrician and one

of the founders of a hospital in New York City, the Sydenham hospital, which was up in Harlem. It's now no longer in existence. It was taken over eventually by the city, and then Mayor Koch, I think, closed it down. I think there may be a clinic on the site, but the hospital is gone. In any event, my grandfather, as I say, was very active in the founding of that hospital. It's where I had, at the age of three, a tonsillectomy and subsequently in 1936, when I was 10, I had my appendix removed there. All I can now recall is there was a bust of my grandfather in the hospital lobby.

Max had three sons – my father, Morris, and his two brothers, Harold and Alan, after whom I was named. It's interesting that my father had very definitely wanted to go away to college, and his father, my grandfather, saw absolutely no reason. "We have Columbia here. It's a perfectly good university, there's no reason at all why you should go elsewhere," so he was required to go to Columbia and did go to Columbia. His two younger brothers, as he, did not want to go to school in New York City, and my father was able to persuade my grandfather to let them go elsewhere, so one went to Harvard and the other to Dartmouth. That's basically what I can recall on my father's side, given that I remember little of my paternal grandmother.

On my biological mother's side, I recall very little. My birth mother's name was Elizabeth. She came from St. Louis. Her father, my

grandfather, was a lawyer in Clayton, which is a suburb of St. Louis. He was a very active Republican politician and in the state Senate for a number of years. Apparently in that era, there was a corrupt Republican machine in St. Louis and a corrupt Democratic machine, the Pendergast machine, in Kansas City, and I was told at one point that my grandfather barely escaped going to jail, which apparently did happen to one of his political mentors in the St. Louis area. In any case, I know nothing at all about any of my maternal relatives past my grandfather.

My mother, who met my father in the early 1920s – I'm not clear today on the particular circumstances – took ill several years after my birth in 1926 with multiple sclerosis, and she had her ups and downs over a period of years and then died in the summer of 1935, which was just short of my 9th birthday. I don't recall at all having any contact with my maternal grandfather or any of my other relatives on my mother's side. I understand that my maternal grandfather, Richard Ralph, came East at one time during the 1930s to visit us, but I have zero recollection of that. As a matter of fact, the only other relatives on that side of the family that I ever met were my grandfather and my maternal grandmother who were divorced. My grandfather then remarried and had a child by his second marriage, my half uncle, who was just a year older than I am, and years later in Washington, he and I got together a couple of times. I was working at Justice. He was a lawyer and was in the Army JAG stationed

in Washington so we had him over to dinner once and I had lunch with him. But my contact, as I say, with my birth mother's family was negligible. It's a source of some regret to me that I know so little about my birth mother's family and had so little contact with them at any point during my life.

My father, less than a year after my mother's death, remarried, and he married a woman with whom he had gone to school way back when and they were good friends. My stepmother had been married previously and had divorced her husband several years before she married my father. So in terms of my ancestors, that's about all that I can recall. Again, it's really a source of some regret to me that I had so little contact with my birth mother's family.

MS. FEIGIN: Tell us some more about your dad. What did he do after going to Columbia?

MR. ROSENTHAL: My father was born in 1897, and as I say, he went to Columbia College. He also was, during World War I, in naval aviation, an aviation cadet, but the war ended before he got his commission, so he never was active in the war at all. Then he, as I said, went to Columbia, got his degree in the business school and shortly thereafter went to work for a company for which he worked his entire career, Stein, Hall & Company, based in New York City, though it had a factory in Chicago, I think. It was in the business of importing various products principally from what was then the

Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, tapioca and tea, and they also manufactured in this country various materials including apparently envelope glue. In December 1941, immediately after our entry into the war because of Pearl Harbor, he accepted a government position as an Assistant Director of the Board of Economic Warfare, Assistant Director in charge of the Office of Imports, and so he came to Washington. He was with that office until early 1945 when he returned to New York, before the war actually ended, and resumed his position at Stein Hall. When he left the company in 1941, he was a vice president. He returned as vice president but very shortly thereafter became president at Stein Hall, a position he occupied until he retired in the mid 1950s, and he died in 1958.

MS. FEIGIN: Tell me a little bit about what he did during the war.

MR. ROSENTHAL: He had complete control, or his office did, over materials imported into the United States during the war years, and he made several trips abroad during the war, one of them that I recall to somewhere in Africa, but a lot of what he did was not discussed around the dinner table. This was wartime, so the old adage at that time was “loose lips sink ships” – you may have heard that – [laughter] so we really didn’t talk. One thing about it that was interesting was the vice president of the United States up until 1945 was Henry Wallace. Wallace was dumped by Roosevelt for Harry Truman in his last term. Well Henry Wallace was overall superintendent of the Board of Economic Warfare, that was one of the

assignments that Roosevelt gave him, and so Wallace and my father became very well acquainted, and I can recall Wallace coming to our house for dinner on a couple of occasions, I think in the 1943-44 range. Needless to say, we kids didn't partake of the dinner, but I did have occasion to meet and shake his hand, and that was about it. We were then, of course, dismissed. So that's why I was down here during the war years and went to high school down here.

There's a funny story about that. I have to back up at some point to my early years, but when we moved down here immediately after Pearl Harbor, it was a matter of where we would go to school. We lived on West Kirke Street in Chevy Chase, just above the Chevy Chase Circle in Maryland, and my parents learned quite early in the game that the Montgomery County public schools were terrible at that time. They additionally discovered that, on a space-available basis, sons and daughters of federal government employees could go to the District of Columbia public high schools, paying a relatively nominal tuition. They were able to get me into the Woodrow Wilson High School which I attended and graduated from in February 1944.

MS. FEIGIN: Midyear?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I accelerated. I went over the summer because I was going into military service because the war was still on and I wanted to get in some college before going into the military. So in any event, I went to Woodrow

Wilson.

My sister was not quite that fortunate. The junior high school associated with Wilson was Alice Deal, still is. Unfortunately they were not taking at that point any non-District residents because of space considerations, so she attended Leland Junior High School, the junior high school that served the Chevy Chase area in which we lived and it was an absolutely terrible school. When my family went back to New York, they were so despairing of the quality of education she had received at Leland that they sent her to a very rigorous boarding school to catch up.

The thing about Wilson that was interesting was, I'm now moving many many years to the point where my youngest son was headed to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School (BCC) which is the school that I would have gone to if I had been sent to a Montgomery County public high school. Well, in the spring of the year before my son James was entering BCC, there was an orientation session for the parents of incoming 9th graders, and we attended it, of course, and the then principal, a woman named Ann Meyers, said to us, "You parents of incoming BCC students are so fortunate, why this school combines the best features of, without exaggeration, Oxford and Cambridge." She laid it on, not with a trowel but a steamshovel, the virtues of the school [Laughter]. I couldn't resist it. When we got to the social hour, I introduced myself and I said, "Ms. Meyers, you may be interested to know that when I was of high

school age, I lived in the BCC district and my parents paid tuition to send me to a District of Columbia public high school so I wouldn't have to come here." Well she glared and said, "Well that must have been some years ago." [Laughter] "Well Ms. Meyers, I can't really claim to be a recent BCC graduate." We're talking about, I guess this was 1985, 1986, 1987, somewhere in that period. She said, "I will have you know that this year we have a number of District of Columbia residents attending this school and their parents are paying substantial tuition to have them come here." I said, "Well I guess times do change." But the fact was that the Montgomery County schools in the early 1940s were of very poor quality, and this was mainly because the county was controlled by a rural element and education was not a particular priority. Now after the war, things changed because a lot of the people who came down here to work for the government during the war years stayed here and these were well-educated people who placed a high priority on the quality of education for their kids.

MS. FEIGIN: You mentioned coming down right after Pearl Harbor. Before we get to your early childhood, do you remember Pearl Harbor today?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I remember Pearl Harbor today because I was living at home, the radio on, it was a Sunday, and I was listening to the Redskins game. I think they were playing the New York Giants though I am not certain of that, and there was an interruption during the broadcast to the effect that there had

been some kind of an attack on Pearl Harbor. So that's what I remember of it and what I was doing when the news first hit.

MS. FEIGIN: Where were you born?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I was born in the Lenox Hill Hospital in the middle of Manhattan on September 30, 1926.

MS. FEIGIN: Where were your early years spent?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Well, my early years, of which I have no personal recollection, but what I'm told is, that we lived, for reasons I'm not clear, it may have been because of my mother's health problems at that point, we lived on West 89th Street in the Manhattan home owned and occupied by my grandfather, the physician, and after a point, I'm told, when I was about two, we moved to New Rochelle. I have no recollection of my time in New Rochelle. We then moved to Larchmont, 40 Lincoln Street, in Larchmont. I was probably about 5 then.

MS. FEIGIN: In Westchester, New York?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Westchester, New York. And I went to the Chatsworth Avenue Elementary School in Larchmont in the first and second grades. All I remember of that time was that one of the subjects was French. They taught French in the first and second grade there. Not that long ago, in connection with our move, I found my French book. So that would have been, I think, through 1933. In any case, we moved from Larchmont eventually to New York City. But in the interim, because of my mother's

increasingly ill health, in the summer – now this is something people will not believe – in the summer of 1933, I am at that point 7, I guess, or about to turn 7 – my sister is almost three years younger than I am, and we are sent off for eight weeks to a resident camp. My sister had her fourth birthday at the camp. People, when I tell the story to them, don't believe it. How could our parents have sent somebody not yet 4, somebody not yet 7, off to a residential camp for eight weeks? But this was something that my father obviously saw as a necessity given the conditions at home. The following year we didn't go to the camp because we had whooping cough; we both had whooping cough in that summer of 1934. Now, 1934-1935, my sister and I were dispatched to a boarding school, and this again was because of our mother's ill health. We went to the Cherry Lawn School in Darien, Connecticut. I have actually very little recollection of that stage. I think that I blocked out a good deal of the period of time when my mother was very ill, and where there were therefore these kinds of accommodations made, camp and boarding school. I have actually very few recollections of my mother at all. In the summer of 1935 she died.

In 1935-1936, my sister and I and our father lived in an apartment house on Bank Street in Greenwich Village, on the corner of Bank Street and Greenwich Avenue. Then in the spring of 1936, my father remarried and we moved to a brownstone. She brought to the marriage a son by her prior marriage who was born in 1932, so he was at that point 4 years old.

Eventually, my father adopted him, so he took the name Rosenthal ultimately.

MS. FEIGIN: So there were three children?

MR. ROSENTHAL: At that point there were three. Then my father and my stepmother had a child of their own in 1939, so I, with my sister, had a half brother David and a stepbrother Jon. When we moved back to New York, a year after we were at the Cherry Lawn School in Darien, my sister and I, and then eventually my stepbrother, attended private elementary schools in New York. We first went to the City and Country School, on 12th Street in Manhattan. My father, and my stepmother along with him, had a fight with the principal, so we were moved to the Little Red School House, which now is combined with Elizabeth Irwin High School, but in my time there was no high school, so we went there through the 8th grade, and I graduated from there in the spring of 1940.

MS. FEIGIN: That was a very progressive school.

MR. ROSENTHAL: It was indeed, and still is.

MS. FEIGIN: Do you remember anything about that?

MR. ROSENTHAL: It was progressive only to a point. I had in the 7th grade a teacher named Marjorie Kneeland, who, I don't remember the term precisely that we coined referring to her out of her hearing, but it was not particularly flattering, although she was a magnificent teacher and she was extremely strict, particularly where it came to English grammar. I have a number of

shibboleths that I have employed in reviewing the work of folks, both in my Justice days when I was a supervising attorney in the Civil Appellate Section and more recently with law clerks who worked for me at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, but she taught me a number of things, including that you don't split infinitives unnecessarily. There was nothing progressive about her, but she was an excellent teacher. A lot of the other teachers were considerably more laid back. I thought we received a decent education.

When I graduated from that school, I took the examination for admission to either Stuyvesant or Bronx Science and was accepted at both. I went to Bronx Science. It was quite a trip because we were living in Greenwich Village, and Bronx Science was up in 180-something Street in the Bronx just off the Grand Concourse so I took the A train on the Eighth Avenue line. I guess it was a half-hour, 45 minutes getting up there. Science was an excellent school academically, but I can't say I enjoyed it that much. It was run like a reform school. We were continually reminded that we were there as a matter of the sufferance of the administration and if we stepped out of line, they threatened us with William Howard Taft which was the closest high school in the Bronx. But for me, living as I did in lower Manhattan, it would not have been William Howard Taft, it would have been some other school, assuming I stayed in public school. They ran it, as I say, like a military school in terms of the

discipline. I was there a year and a half, until we came to Washington right after Pearl Harbor. I don't regret the time there.

MS. FEIGIN: Was the student body evenly distributed among male and female students?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Oh good God no. In those days it was all male. It didn't become co-ed until well after that time. There wasn't a woman in sight. I think Stuyvesant also was entirely male at that point. I don't know offhand precisely when it became co-ed; I know they both are co-ed now. Indeed I have two nieces of my wife who went to Stuyvesant.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you have women teachers?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Yes. As a matter of fact, I took German and that was because they didn't offer Spanish, and the teacher was a woman, Frau Weiss. Frau Weiss must have been about 4'8". When the word "Prussian" was invented, they had to have her in mind. As a matter of fact, at times when some of the students were not as attentive as she would have liked, she expressed some regret that corporal punishment was no longer allowed in the city schools of New York. [Laughter] I don't recall whether the majority of the teachers were men or not. I had men teachers, and I had Frau Weiss, and I think I had at least one or two other women.

MS. FEIGIN: Tell me a bit more about your family life. For example, was your family politically active?

MR. ROSENTHAL: My father was very active. He didn't run for political office but he took great interest in political affairs and was on a number of – which we'll get

to later on in the saga – but he belonged to a number of organizations that were politically active, political action committees, that sort of thing. He was a very staunch Democrat and was very active in the campaign of Adlai Stevenson in 1952, when Stevenson ran against Eisenhower. Yes, I'd say he was politically active, which later on became a problem for me.

MS. FEIGIN: Living in New York City, were you involved in a lot of the cultural things in New York – theatre, things like that?

MR. ROSENTHAL: To some extent. I don't think that was particularly a large part of our life. I might say that I was not involved directly in any kind of religious enterprise. My birth mother was Episcopalian and indeed one of the few things I can remember of my years in Larchmont was attending an Episcopalian Sunday school, and the only thing I remember about that is that we made sheep out of pipe cleaners. [Laughter] To remember just that of the entire experience!

My parents were non-observant Jews, my father and stepmother. They actually had attended in their youth the Ethical Culture School. So to the extent that we were involved in anything, it was the Ethical Culture Society, and I indeed attended some of their youth functions over the years. During the years on Bank Street in the Village, my parents believed in having a few hours a week of the weekend free from the kids to the maximum extent possible, and it happened that within a block and a half of our residence there were two movie theaters. There was a Loews

Sheridan and a block away from it was the Greenwich Theater. Every Saturday afternoon we were dispatched to the movies. That's my sister and myself, not the younger ones. I don't know whether you recall those days, but what you had was a double feature, a newsreel, coming attractions, and a cartoon. This was 1:00 to 5:00, so were pushed out the door either to the Greenwich or the Sheridan. They did some modest sort of screening of what we were being sent to see, but they got rid of us that way.

MS. FEIGIN: Are you a movie aficionado as a result of this?

MR. ROSENTHAL: No. I don't like modern-day movies. What we have is Netflix. The last movie that we saw, probably this week, went back to 1943 or something. Most of the movies today have little appeal to me. I think I live in a bygone era anyway because I listen quite religiously on Sunday nights to the Big Broadcast on WAMU FM. Ed Walker now lives in this building; he moved in a couple months ago.

MS. FEIGIN: We should say for the record that he's the moderator of that show.

MR. ROSENTHAL: He's the moderator of that show, it's the old radio shows: Gunsmoke, Dragnet, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Deluxe Radio Theatre, all of those great radio programs as Ed would put it "of the '30s, '40s, and '50s." As a youth, I listened to the radio constantly. When I was doing my homework in the evening, I always had the radio on. Henry Aldridge, and even

before that, in my younger days, Jack Armstrong, and all those. I sent in for the rings, sent the boxtop and the ten cents in for this magic ring.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you listen to the Fireside Chats?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I don't recall listening to the Fireside Chats at all. In my youth, I was not very politically active or even particularly interested.

MS. FEIGIN: What kind of magazines and literature came into the house?

MR. ROSENTHAL: One thing that I recall is *The New Yorker*, which we get to this day. I don't recall what other magazines. Newspapers, we got both *The Times* and *The Herald Tribune*. Morning papers in New York were *The Times*, *The Herald Tribune*, *The Daily News*, and *The Daily Mirror*. *The News* and *Mirror* were tabloids. Afternoon papers included *The Journal American*, *The Sun*, *PM*, and the *World Telegram*. We got two morning papers and *The World Telegram*. I don't recall what magazines. I'm drawing a blank on that, apart from *The New Yorker*.

MS. FEIGIN: There were so many more newspapers then in New York.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Oh yes, oh my Lord, in terms of general circulation, there were at least four morning papers and I think five afternoon ones and now it's down to virtually nothing.

MS. FEIGIN: Do you remember the kinds of games kids played?

MR. ROSENTHAL: One of the games that we were not allowed to play – my father wouldn't have it in the house – was *Monopoly*.

MS. FEIGIN: Because?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Because he thought that it glorified absolutely the wrong values.

Monopoly. What was the objective in *Monopoly*? To get all the sites of a particular color, put houses on them, and then milk your opponents dry paying rent. He did not regard that as the kind of ethic that he wanted to see instilled in his kids. [Laughter] We had *Sorry*, we had all of these Parker Brothers games, with the exception of *Monopoly*, which was not allowed.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you sneak out and play it with your friends since you seem to know how it works? [Laughter]

MR. ROSENTHAL: I undoubtedly did play at somebody else's house. The proscription was simply that he wouldn't have it in our house. I don't think we had to conceal the fact that we might have played it at some friend's house, but he didn't want it under his roof.

MS. FEIGIN: So you moved to D.C. and then came back to New York. Is there anything more you want to tell us about the early years?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I went to Woodrow Wilson High School in D.C. in the middle of the 10th grade. I had taken the first half of biology at Bronx Science, and one of the things we covered in that first half was dissecting a frog, and I found that particularly distasteful, and also the formaldehyde in which it was pickled, I found the smell of that very unwelcome. Well I get down to Woodrow Wilson High School, I started the beginning of the second semester, and I'm taking the second half of biology. What do I find but at

Woodrow Wilson High School, dissection is in the second half of the year. [Laughter] I said to the teacher, in effect, “been there, done that.” She said, “Well then, you’re probably an expert at it. You’ll be able to do it even more efficiently than the rest of the students for whom this is the first time.” [Laughter]

I was on the Woodrow Wilson debate team. I enjoyed my years at Wilson. The living conditions at that point with the war on were not great. With gas rationing, our parents drove us nowhere. They had, I think for my mother’s car, which was just used for pleasure – my father commuted to work by car so he got an additional gas ration – but for my mother’s car, it was three gallons a week or something like that. If we couldn’t go somewhere on the bus or a bicycle, we didn’t go.

MS. FEIGIN: We should make clear there was no Metro then.

MR. ROSENTHAL: No subway. We were just a block and a half up from Chevy Chase Circle, which was the end of the Connecticut Avenue bus line, so I could walk down there and catch a bus going downtown, and that was about it. If we wanted to go to the amusement park that was still existent at Glen Echo, it was by bicycle or not at all.

MS. FEIGIN: Was D.C. very segregated at that point?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Absolutely. It was totally segregated. In the District, the only restaurant that I think was desegregated was the one at Union Station. Everything else was at that time segregated. The buses were not segregated in the

District and in Maryland. The buses were segregated in Virginia, and when there was a bus – the Capitol Transit Company then operated the buses and street cars – when a bus crossed the river to Rosslyn and was going beyond that, any of the African-American passengers had to get to the back of the bus. There was total segregation. Schools were segregated, everything was segregated.

MS. FEIGIN: Woodrow Wilson was entirely white?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Absolutely. In the District of Columbia at that time, there were two school systems. There was Part I and Part II. The white schools were Part I, black schools were Part II. Separate but equal? Not at all. They were separate, but not equal. And one of the things about that was we got brand new textbooks, “we” meaning the white schools. When the textbooks got sufficiently used that they were no longer suitable for us Caucasians, what do you think happened to them? In the county here I think there was one black high school and that was up in Rockville. The black students all went there no matter where they lived in the county. Racial segregation all the way through. Certainly segregation in the housing. Segregation in all public accommodations.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you, as a young white boy, have any contact with people of color at all?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Not here, but in New York, because the Bronx High School of Science had black students. I had zero contact during my years in Washington

between Pearl Harbor until my family moved back to New York in the summer of 1944. I had zero contact here with any blacks.

MS. FEIGIN: Was that something that seemed odd to you?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Yes it was a little odd. Certainly, good lord, in the Little Red School House there were a number of black students. In New York, I had contact in schools. Also I socialized with black students. New York was not exactly free of all Jim Crow. I recall that blacks were not only segregated in New York residentially, but there were plenty of restaurants that did not welcome blacks. Washington, D.C. in the war years was a southern city and, in terms of the ability of blacks to go to restaurants, attend theater, etc., this could have been Atlanta, Georgia, just as easily.

MS. FEIGIN: My understanding is the Mall during World War II had a lot of makeshift buildings. Can you tell us a little about that?

MR. ROSENTHAL: They were temporary buildings. And indeed, in the winter of 1943-1944, I was finishing high school and I got a job as a file clerk over the Christmas vacation in the then War Department. This was a temporary building along Constitution Avenue up in the vicinity of 20th, 21st, 22nd streets. There were several of them stretched out along Constitution Avenue on the Mall. At some point after the war, they were all demolished and are obviously not visible today.

MS. FEIGIN: I gather there was an influx of women in D.C. to work during the war?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Absolutely, because there were all kinds of opportunities, particularly in the government, because the younger males were all supposedly away in the military service.

MS. FEIGIN: Did your stepmother work ever?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Yes. She was a psychologist, and she worked for many years. Actually, she could claim being a psychologist, which she couldn't today, because today, at least according to the American Psychological Association, you have to have a doctorate in order to use the term psychologist. She had a master's degree, not a doctorate, but she was grandmothered. I guess that's the term [laughter]. So she was a member of the American Psychological Association. She taught school for a number of years before she married my father. As a matter of fact, I think it was the City and Country School, a private school. In her later years, after she married my father, she had sort of a private practice. She did not work as a psychologist in any kind of school or other facility. She saw clients or patients, whatever you call them, privately.

MS. FEIGIN: Was it unusual to have a mother who worked in that generation?

MR. ROSENTHAL: It was a very part-time business. I think it was a lot less common overall than it obviously is today where there are a very substantial number of families in which both parents are working. Indeed today in many instances it's a matter of economic necessity. Then, I think it was much less common.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you have what we would today call nannies?

MR. ROSENTHAL: In the year between my mother's death and my father's remarriage, as previously noted, we lived in an apartment on Bank Street and we had a governess. That's what she was called. Subsequently, all the way through, both in New York and down here in Washington, we had a cook. The one thing that my stepmother did not do was cook, except on weeknights when the cook was out. But we didn't have anyone taking care of the kids, not a governess or anything of that order.

MS. FEIGIN: When you left Washington, where did you move back to in New York?

MR. ROSENTHAL: When the family moved back to New York, they moved to an apartment on Park Avenue and 93rd Street, in New York. This was in the summer of 1944. I had just completed one semester at the University of Pennsylvania. I graduated from high school in February of 1944 and I immediately started college. Then I went into the military service.

MS. FEIGIN: Before we get to your military service, let me ask what made you choose Penn?

MR. ROSENTHAL: What made me choose Penn was in large measure its location. My family was very soon I knew heading back to New York, and one thing about Philadelphia is it is more or less equidistance between New York and Washington. I knew I was going into military service, I knew my family was moving, and I thought it would be desirable to go to school somewhere in the New York/Washington region. So I went to Penn.

Actually I applied to very few schools. Even though it is not anywhere near New York or Washington, I did apply to the University of Wisconsin [laughter] though I can't tell you if I was accepted there. I can't tell you why I did that. I probably could have gotten into Penn at that point if I had a grade point average of zero because universities were looking for male students. Where were the male students? They were all in the service. So it was a hell of a lot easier to get into college at that point if you were a male than it is today. Out of necessity today, kids apply to 55 different schools and it's a crapshoot getting into college, at least into the very selective colleges. At that stage, in the winter of 1943-1944, with the war in full blast, with kids coming out of high school and for the most part heading right into the military, male students that is, the college admissions standards were considerably reduced.

MS. FEIGIN: What was the draft age?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Eighteen.

MS. FEIGIN: You weren't quite 18?

MR. ROSENTHAL: No, I went in earlier than 18 as it turned out. I entered three months short of my 18th birthday. I was avoiding the draft. This was because I had a strong aversion to ending up in the infantry, so for me, the choices were one of two, and both of them were something that you worked on before you turned 18. Either try to get into the Navy V12 program where they sent you off to college before you actually got into – in Pennsylvania, I

had a lot of Navy V12 students in my classes – or try to get into the Army Air Force. I decided to opt for the Army Air Force, so I took the examination to get into the aviation cadet program and was successful. I passed the physical, so when I entered Penn in February of 1944, I was already in the Army Air Force Reserve, even though I was just 17. I knew that what was going to happen was I was going to finish one semester of college and then I was going to be off into the wild blue yonder.

MS. FEIGIN: There was no general deferment for college?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Absolutely not.

MS. FEIGIN: So you were following in your father's footsteps kind of. He'd been in aviation.

MR. ROSENTHAL: I had some reservations about the Navy, although in a way that would have been a better program. The one thing I wanted to avoid was the infantry. Actually, in the latter stage of the war, they were even drafting them into the Marines, which would have been even worse. I wanted to avoid the infantry. So at the end of the semester, I was off. But what did the Army Air Force do? They sent me to college for a while. As a matter of fact, I spent two semesters at the University of Buffalo.

MS. FEIGIN: Studying Air Force stuff?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Actually no. When I returned to the University of Pennsylvania, I presented them with the transcript from my two semesters at Buffalo, and I became immediately an upper-level sophomore. They gave me full

credit. The courses I took there were college-level courses – chemistry, physics, calculus, economics, geography.

MS. FEIGIN: Did the Air Force run the classes at Buffalo? Did they have a base up there? How did you get to Buffalo?

MR. ROSENTHAL: At the University of Buffalo, I was taught by their professors. It operated differently than the Navy college program. The Navy college program, the Navy students attended classes with the civilians. They were housed separately, and in the afternoon they had the Navy drills and whatever, but they went to class with civilians. So I had my semester at Penn, I had a number of Navy V12 students with me. Bear in mind that at that point, the Air Force was part of the Army. They didn't become a separate branch of the service until much later. We were entirely segregated from the civilian population at Buffalo. We went to class by ourselves. But we were taught by University of Buffalo professors who also taught courses to the civilian population.

They had this program at a number of schools. As a matter of fact, I was initially scheduled to go to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh where they had this program. They had them at a number of universities. But they decided to send me instead to Buffalo, and I must say that out of my experience in Buffalo, I made the only resolution I've kept over the years, which is not to go up there again in the middle of winter [laughter]. I was there from the beginning of July through January 1944-45.

MS. FEIGIN: Did you attend class in uniform?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Absolutely.

MS. FEIGIN: And then you had training?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Oh yes. And one of the things I remember, the University of Buffalo's main campus is now in Amherst, a Buffalo suburb, but its main campus then which still has some courses, I think, was in the city, Main Street, up on this hill and the wind blew across from the lake and I remember the physical ed class required us to run around this whole campus. The instructor rode in the back on a bicycle, exhorting us to keep running faster. It was not a particularly pleasant experience.

MS. FEIGIN: So you spent two semesters there? And then where?

MR. ROSENTHAL: They had a test that they gave to the aviation cadets that was designed to determine whether you were going to be shipped to pilot, bombardier or navigator school. It was weighted differently for the three different occupations because, for example, for navigators, coordination was not important, but for bombardiers, it was extraordinarily important. So I took that test, and I did very well for navigator. It was graded on a scale of 1 to 9 for each of the three different occupations. I scored very high on navigator and not that high on bombardier or pilot so I was going to be sent to navigator school. Well what happened was that before I got there, the Germans decided that knowing they'd have to deal with me, they should throw in the towel [laughter] so they quit, and at that point, they

decided they didn't need any further aviation cadets. They could see the Japanese war was probably not going to last that much longer, so I was summarily dismissed from the aviation cadet program, and ultimately I went to cryptographic technician school and learned how to operate the code machines.

MS. FEIGIN: Where was this?

MR. ROSENTHAL: This was at Scott Field, Illinois. Then after the Japanese threw in the towel, I was sent to an overseas replacement depo in Sheppard Field, Texas, and I was down there with sort of a fungible group. We were all people that had been bounced out of the aviation cadet program because of the close of the war. We all had basically the same education level, and I think most of us probably had gone through the cryptographic technician program. In any case, there were about 30 of us headed for God-knows-where overseas. We were given malaria, all these other shots. All of a sudden, a sergeant comes in and says, "Rosenthal, report to X", so I reported to X and he said, "Well, you're going to Maxwell Field, Alabama, to personnel school." I said, "Well that's pleasant news." He said, "Yes, you'll probably ship off in four or five days." I was sort of curious as to how I was the only one out of this group selected for this and I made some inquiries. I found out – it's amazing – a call had come in from I don't know where to select one out of this group of thirty to go to this personnel school. They had a slot for one person. Up in the

headquarters at Sheppard, there was a clerk assigned apparently to the task of randomly selecting somebody [laughter], so he was looking through the personnel files of the thirty. “My god, here’s somebody who went to Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, D.C. That’s where I went [laughter], so if I’m going to do a favor for somebody, I might as well do it for him.” That was how I got picked out of that group of thirty and sent to Maxwell. I never did go overseas. I was in the service for almost another year. I left a couple of days later. I left behind the 29 others from my group, and I have to assume they ended up somewhere, God knows doing what, maybe washing airplanes in the Arctic Circle [laughter], but that was how I happened to stay in the United States.

MS. FEIGIN: This is probably a reasonable place to stop and we’ll pick up here next session.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Very good.

MS. FEIGIN: Thank you so much.