Oral History of Philip Lacovara, Esq.

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewer is Carrie Johnson, and the interviewee is Philip Lacovara. The interview took place at NPR Headquarters in Washington, D.C., on June 12, 2024. This is the first interview.

MS. JOHNSON: Good morning, Mr. Lacovara. Let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me your full name and your date and place of birth.

MR. LACOVARA: My full name is Philip Allen Lacovara. I was born on July 11, 1943. It turns out, to my surprise, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, something I did not realize until I saw it appear in a column by Mary McGrory of the old *Washington Star*, who had introduced the discussion of the argument of the Nixon Tapes case in the Supreme Court by referring to me as "portly but stately" and "Brooklyn-born." I did look it up, and in fact, the hospital where I was born is in Brooklyn, although I'd never thought of myself as a Brooklynite.

MS. JOHNSON: Did you object to portly but stately?

MR. LACOVARA: I liked the stately part. The portly was more or less accurate, but since then, I think I've made progress on that front.

MS. JOHNSON: Let's start at the beginning. What do you know about your family history?

MR. LACOVARA: My grandfather emigrated to the United States at the beginning of the 20th Century with his family and became an American citizen. He had three children, including my father. My mother's parents were born in the US, at least her mother was. Her father was an immigrant as well.

My grandfather was a pharmacist living in what is now called SOHO in Manhattan. It was then just plain Greenwich Village or Little

Italy. My father went to City College, the public college where many children of immigrants went, and then went to Columbia Law School.

MS. JOHNSON: So your father was an attorney?

MR. LACOVARA: My father was a lawyer, and his experiences a young lawyer were quite dramatically different from what I experienced thirty years later. When he graduated from Columbia in 1936, even though he was a member of the Columbia Law Review, which at that point meant that you were part of the top fifteen in the class, he was not able to get a job on Wall Street. In that era, Italians and Jews were not welcome in the major Wall Street firms. He told a story about being escorted into a meeting with the hiring partner at a Wall Street firm and was introduced as "this is P. Philip Lacovara, he's Italian," and the interview ended about three minutes later. So he then got a job working for then-DA racket-busting district attorney Tom Dewey. My father was an anxious man, and on his first day, he was given a stack of files in a criminal case and was told to go into court and arraign these criminal defendants. He decided this was not for him, so he quit right away and found another job in a field that occupied him for the next fifty years or so.

MS. JOHNSON: What was that?

MR. LACOVARA: He became a trusts and estates lawyer and was quite successful at it and well-regarded. Ultimately, he wound up as the general counsel of the Fiduciary Trust Company in New York. It used to be at Number 1 Wall Street and then moved with some drama to the second tower of the World

Trade Center. He had died before 9/11, but virtually all the people with whom he had worked who were still working at the bank died on September 11.

MS. JOHNSON: I'm so sorry to hear that. How tragic.

MR. LACOVARA: It was tragic. To have a personal connection with that building and to watch it burning. I was on my way to Washington on 9/11, and our flight was running down the runway to take off from LaGuardia when the pilot jammed on the brakes, and we went back. We were in the lounge at LaGuardia watching on television as the towers burned and collapsed.

MS. JOHNSON: Wow.

MR. LACOVARA: Indeed.

MS. JOHNSON: How about your mother?

MR. LACOVARA: Basic education. I think she had two years of high school. After she died, I found in her papers a certificate that she gotten some kind of training as a seamstress, although I understood that she worked as a comptometer operator at a company. I guess they're still in business, Hammacher Schlemmer. They now have a big catalog business, but she worked in the accounting office, I guess. A comptometer was a high-class name for an adding machine. She was very proud that she was a comptometer operator.

MS. JOHNSON: Absolutely. Your father must have lived a long life if he worked that long.

MR. LACOVARA: He actually died at age 70. I was in Yugoslavia at the time. He had a heart attack. I was on an international human rights mission for the American Bar Association and got a call from my wife saying I think you should cut

the mission short and come home because your dad is not in good shape. I got back and had a chance to see him right before he died.

MS. JOHNSON:

MR. LACOVARA: Yes. She died four years after my father. He died in 1984. My mother died in 1988.

MS. JOHNSON: Any brothers or sisters?

MR. LACOVARA: Two sisters, one of whom died a few years ago, and one is still alive who has two daughters, one of whom is a major Hollywood producer. My sister constantly sends me notes about what awards my niece Rachel is winning, Emmys and things of that sort. It's kind of exciting to watch a completely different form of family development taking place.

MS. JOHNSON: A lot of family achievement in your family for sure.

MR. LACOVARA: As with any family, people achieve in different ways.

MS. JOHNSON: Can you describe your family gatherings when you were a kid?

MR. LACOVARA: Oh gosh, yes. I don't know whether this is true of all immigrant families, but most of the lifestyle consisted of family gatherings rather than extended relationships with people who would be called "strangers," that is anybody not connected by blood or marriage. There were regular, particularly Sunday, dinners during the wintertime where people would gather. Either we would go to my grandfather's house in lower Manhattan, or people would come to our house. During the summer, there was a ritual rendezvousing at Jones Beach trying to find other family members in the throngs of the hundreds of thousands of people. The way one did it in

those days was that one of my mother's brothers would be assigned to go out to Jones Beach early, take a particular beach umbrella near one of the particular landmarks and then would walk down a hundred yards on the beach and plant the flag, almost literally, the colored beach umbrella. And then everybody else would wander around once they arrived trying to find this needle in a haystack. My children still remember when they were younger, and this was happening at the tail end of those family gatherings: dining at the beach on pepper and egg sandwiches which were made all the more delicious as taste treats because of the sand. They can still remember chewing on sand when they were just getting their first teeth.

MS. JOHNSON: Amazing. What about the menu for those Sunday dinners, and who did the cooking?

MR. LACOVARA: My mother was a fabulous cook and one of those cooks who, when she was asked about a recipe, said well, you throw a little of this in or a pinch of that. I remember after we were married, my wife asked her about her recipe for cheesecake, and she told her approximately how many eggs and how many bars of cream cheese and how many things of this, and when my wife put all this in, it turned out making about four cheesecakes. She asked my mother whether she'd gotten the proportions right, and mom said well yes, but I usually make several because it's to give to my brothers, to give to our neighbors, and so forth. So her sense of cooking was preparing for a large assortment of beneficiaries. But as an Italian family, we had pasta on Sundays and some sort of meat sauce, what

Italians call gravy, or at least in New York that was what it was called. When I grew up, it was during the period when on Friday nights, no meat was allowed, so Friday night was fish. And since my mother had grown up relatively poor, that basically consisted of dried codfish, or I think the Italian term for it is baccàla. It's kind of salted cod. Pretty tasteless unless you put a lot of something else on it, but it was nutritious, and it was not meat, and that was about the best one could say for it.

MS. JOHNSON: What role did religion play in your family life and in your life as a young man?

MR. LACOVARA: Both of my parents were serious about the Catholic faith. My sisters and I went to Catholic schools throughout our whole careers. I went to Catholic grammar schools, Catholic high school, Catholic college. My sisters did the same. They went to the same grade schools in both of our communities, and then both of them went to Marymount Manhattan in New York City, and I went to Xavier High School, a Jesuit school, in lower Manhattan.

MS. JOHNSON: If you can recall, in those early years, what did you like to do for fun? What were your hobbies?

MR. LACOVARA: My hobbies. There were two things. One in my formative years, I grew up in a small suburb just outside New York City called Great Neck, and there were a lot of young people about my age. This is the post-war period, so I was sort of in the Baby Boom era, although I was born during the war. There were young boys and girls my age, and we would just go out into

the roadway and play ball, boys and girls, going all the way up to early teens. Bicycle riding. I was an avid biker. I would bicycle to meet a cousin of mine halfway. He lived about ten or twelve miles away, and we would meet in the middle. So we did that. But among my principal hobbies were building models of airplanes and other basically World War II-type memorabilia. We grew up in the shadow of World War II. Many members of the family, although not my father, were veterans so we had a tangible connection with the war, and building model airplanes was one way of trying to capture a little of that as a youngster.

MS. JOHNSON: What were you reading in those years that made an impression on you, if you remember?

MR. LACOVARA: At that stage, I was reading the serious reading, such as it was, and I'm talking now at age 10, I was reading *Readers Digest*, which was sort of the everyman journal of the United States. I think it doesn't exist as such anymore, but it was a way of getting exposed to a larger world because among the articles that I looked forward to reading was one called "Life in these United States," as I remember, and then another one was "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met." These were little vignettes about people with strange interests or activities, and so for a young fellow growing up in a suburb of New York, it was a way of learning about the world.

I will also say that, before I started reading serious books, I was an avid reader of Classic Comics, which summarized the plots of the basic

staples of English, American and French literature. My first exposure to *Les Mis* came in a Classic Comic 70 years ago or so.

MS. JOHNSON: These were separate books, or did they appear in newspapers or both?

MR. LACOVARA: Classic Comics were the equivalent of comic books, which I also read. *Readers Digest* was a pamphlet-sized mailer that my father subscribed to. He also subscribed to hard-bound books, but they were more sophisticated than I was accustomed to. He also subscribed to the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*, and I would read some of those. They were written with the level of simplicity that a ten-year-old could master. It was at a time when nothing terribly salacious or R-Rated was in general circulation. I read mystery magazines early in my youth.

MS. JOHNSON: Fantastic. What kind of approach did you take to school in your early years, and how important was education to your parents?

MR. LACOVARA: Education was extremely important, as I think every immigrant group recognizes that the way to get ahead, to demonstrate acceptability in a pluralist society, was by demonstrating that you could do at least as well as anybody else, and the way to do that was by getting a good education and going into a profession, if possible. That's the route my grandfather took. He became a pharmacist. In fact, he went to what was then the Columbia University School of Pharmacy. My grandfather was the class of 1916, I think. My father was Class of 1936 at Columbia. I was Class of 1966 at Columbia, and one of my daughters was the Class of 1992 at Columbia. So we have four generations of Columbia alums.

My parents were quite enthusiastic about making sure that we went to the best schools that we could get into and to make sure that we did our homework. There was nothing that was considered more important than getting your homework done before you could go out and play or do anything else, including television.

MS. JOHNSON: When did you get a television? Did you have one in your early memory?

MR. LACOVARA: I remember the first set that we had was probably 1949 because I can visualize it in our apartment in Elmhurst Queens. The television set itself was about as big as a 55-gallon drum, and the screen was probably about as big as an iPhone. Because my father was the most successful member of the family, we were the first people in the broader family to have a television, and so various relatives would come over to watch things like Milton Berle. I think Milton Berle may have been the variety show that was on as early as 1949. People would cluster around trying to get a glimpse of this little, tiny image. It was another bonding experience for the family, of which there were lots.

By the way, I should say I remain an inveterate television watcher. I am probably as unsophisticated a television watcher as you're likely to encounter, and this continued through all of my schooling years, partly because we had a lot of children early on, and I kept the TV on in the background while I was studying as my equivalent of white noise. To this day, I've got the television on if I'm writing a draft award or writing an op-ed, I've got the TV on in the background. I may have no idea what's

happening, but it's the background noise that has been a phenomenon in my style of doing things for let's say 75 years.

MS. JOHNSON: It seems to be working pretty well.

MR. LACOVARA: I'll let others be the judge of that.

MS. JOHNSON: What's the TV tuned to these days most often?

MR. LACOVARA: Most often now it's tuned either to CNN or to Turner Classic Movies. I'm a big movie buff. One of the highlights of my recent life was, two years ago I think it was, one of my sons gave me a trip as a Christmas present. We have a family phenomenon called Kris Kringle. One of my daughters picks names out of a hat to assign two people to each other for exchange of allegedly anonymous gifts, and one of my sons got me for Kris Kringle passes for the annual meeting of the Turner Classic Movie people in Hollywood. It was a three- or four-day film festival, so that was a great experience.

MS. JOHNSON: That sounds like a lot of fun. Did it become apparent early on that you were good at academics, that it was a successful thing for you?

MR. LACOVARA: I think the answer to that is probably yes. I did well in grammar school, although I don't know whether there were ranks in class. But when I got to high school, Xavier High School, at the end of my first year, I was doing well enough, so I was given the option of entering one of the honors classes. They had two different branches. The so-called Greek honors, which meant that you took, in your remaining three years, Greek as one of your foreign languages, or the science honors class. I thought maybe I

would be a scientist or something at that point, and that meant that you had an extra year of science and studied German, because in the mid-1950s, German was identified as the language of scientific research and publication.

When I graduated, I think I must have been first in the class because I did get the award for the top person in the graduating class. I received first honors each semester.

MS. JOHNSON: How did you come to attend Xavier?

MR. LACOVARA: I was fascinated by the military element of it. I knew very little other than that about it. I was young. I was almost a year ahead of myself in grammar school because of the way overcrowded classes were being set up then. You could start either in September or February and graduate equivalently either in June or September. So I never actually graduated from grammar school. Rather than continue on to so-called 8B, which would have been in the fall, I asked my parents whether they'd let me take the entrance exam to go to Xavier directly, and I was accepted and did that. I was fascinated by the military feature of it, and there are a lot of stories about what happened there and how that was a formative part of my life, perhaps the most formative part of my life. I graduated from Xavier at 16 and then skipped a year in college, so I was only 19 when I finished Georgetown.

MS. JOHNSON: Let's go back to Xavier for a moment. What about it was so appealing to you, and what year was this? What was going on in the world in terms of the military?

MR. LACOVARA: This was the mid-1950s. I started in 1956, so it was the time of the Cold War. Everybody now has visualized the duck-and-cover imagery of children trying to protect themselves from nuclear holocaust by hiding under a wooden desk. It seemed like a sensible thing at the time, although in retrospect it's kind of bathos. I was growing up in that era, and it was in the aftermath of the Korean War that this was happening. It was the depths of the Cold War and lots of things were going on even in 1956. It was the "Suez crisis," when the French and British tried to retake the Suez Canal from the Egyptian, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had seized the Canal, and that led to a major flap. And then in 1957 I remember being in class when someone came in to announce that the Russians had put the Sputnik satellite up into orbit. That was kind of a dramatic illustration of a whole new world because in the 1950s, science fiction consisted of lots of movies that I loved, such as *Destination Moon* and *It Came from Outer Space*, and things that were understood to be fictitious. But here all of a sudden in 1957, man has put something into space, and that was a psychological as well as technical revolution.

MS. JOHNSON: Beyond your imagination in many ways.

MR. LACOVARA: Absolutely. If you think about it, it was only four years from then until Kennedy's pledge that we would put a man on the moon in that decade, as we ultimately did. In that relatively short period of my life, things that went from being science fiction to being hard, cold reality, and it was exciting to live through a period when that was happening while there

were still all the political and military tensions of the Cold War and occasionally, as occurred in the 1960s with Vietnam, a hot war.

MS. JOHNSOSN: Tell me a little more about Xavier. How many students per class? All male?

MR. LACOVARA: Xavier was all-male, and still is. The school was founded in 1847, so it's 175 years old or so. All males. We had I think about 270 students per year, with classes of about 30. That was much better than my grammar school where we had 60 or 70 persons in a classroom taught typically by young nuns. You couldn't quite tell how young they were because they were wearing wimples or whatever the headgear was called, so you couldn't see any hair color. I think both my wife and I tried to reconstruct this and figured that a number of the people who were teaching classes of 60 or 70 students, and every one of whom learned to write and read, were probably in their early 20s, and certainly with no degrees in educational theory. But at Xavier, we had I think ultimately when I became a cadet colonel, we had about 1,000 young men.

MS. JOHNSON: That's bigger than I thought.

MR. LACOVARA: The military component was described as the regiment, and it was about the size of an infantry regiment of about 1,000 young men.

MS. JOHNSON: What was the entrance exam like, if you remember?

MR. LACOVARA: I don't remember much about it. It was a basic aptitude test. A little bit of math, a little bit of English facility.

MS. JOHNSON: Once you arrived at the school, was there a class every day? Was there a period of time every week where you would get certain kinds of military-like training?

MR. LACOVARA: Yes. We wore uniforms every day. We had dress blue uniforms that were specialized, that is they were specially designed, and you had to buy them from a uniform supplier. They were worn on Mondays and Fridays, and then Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, we had Army surplus khaki uniforms for the so-called enlisted men, that is people who are not officers. In the fourth year, there were probably about 40 or 50 young men who became officers, and we used Army surplus officers' uniforms, the one that they have now reinstated as the standard Army uniform for the current military officer corps, the so-called pinks and greens, two shades of khaki.

As part of the regular academic exercise, there was a class each year, a series of courses, in military science and tactics, and one learned all sorts of academic aspects of military science. And then we had drill. We were organized into squads, platoons, companies, battalions, and regiment, and we drilled at an armory not far from the school. We used surplus rifles. Officers carried sabers, which was kind of an interesting phenomena going on the subway, taking the F train and carrying a gigantic sword. And if you were on the rifle team, you took your rifle home with you on the subway. That, of course, would probably not be de rigueur in modern New York City, probably just as well.

MS. JOHNSON: There's a famous photo of Justice Scalia, the man who became Justice Scalia, with his rifle on the subway.

MR. LACOVARA: Yes. Scalia and I reminisced fairly often about our respective experiences. I told him once that I had visualized a young Xavier High School boy who had grown up in Elmhurst, New York, as an Italian-American and gone to Georgetown, as being a Supreme Court Justice, and I said to him I didn't have you in mind for that. He took that well enough.

MS. JOHNSON: I'm sure. So did you carry a saber or you had your rifle?

MR. LACOVARA: I had a saber. I was an officer in the fourth year. I was the cadet colonel in charge of the whole regiment.

MS. JOHNSON: What responsibility did that involve? It sounds like a big job.

MR. LACOVARA: It was the equivalent of being the student body president, not elected. I was appointed by the authorities who, I guess, assumed that I had the right judgment and temperament. Among other things, apart from being responsible for the training of the regiment and its public exercises such as the parades on 5th Avenue on Columbus Day in October and St. Patrick's Day in March, I had responsibility for the discipline of the thousand young men. If I thought it appropriate, I could assign punishments and suspend people from the regiment and so forth, or from school.

MS. JOHNSON: Did you have to do that sometimes?

MR. LACOVARA: Very rarely. For the most part, the people who went to Xavier and stayed there understood that part of what they were learning was character, and character involved basically exercising good judgment and recognizing

that if you're part of an institution, you've got to abide by the rules, and the rules probably made sense, and if they didn't somebody could change them over time.

There were a couple of occasions where I did suspend people and had them walk penalty tours, marching in the quadrangle with a rifle on their shoulders, and some of those people became some of my best friends, with whom I'm still in touch sixty years later.

MS. JOHNSON: Tell me a little bit more if you could about the experience of participating in those parades, what it felt like, what it looked like.

MR. LACOVARA: It was an exciting opportunity for young men. These were parades of quite considerable scale back in the late 1950s. First of all, they were celebrating major holidays, for New Yorkers in general because both Columbus Day, which was nominally to celebrate an Italian who had helped discover America, that has become a much more controversial phenomenon in this era, but at the time, that was thought to have been a really good thing worth celebrating. And St. Patrick, of course, the patron saint of Ireland in a city with a massive Irish population, was regarded as an event worth commemorating. So we had to organize around 40th or 41st Street in Manhattan and wait around for a long time until our turn in the parade came, and then we'd march up to about 86th Street. So it was a long march, and it was marching. It wasn't just walking or sauntering. One had to stay in step, and we had a band and a fife and drum corps and so forth, and somebody was beating cadence and other people were counting

cadence. And as a colonel, I was head of the regiment, and I had a ceremonial function which was when we got to St. Patrick's Cathedral where the Cardinal Archbishop of New York would be sitting out on the steps in front of St. Patrick's in a chair, kind of a throne. I had to stop the whole parade and march over smartly to the Cardinal and genuflect and kiss his ring. There are pictures of this that I have somewhere around. It would be typically a photograph that would make the daily newspapers in New York like the *New York Daily News* because it was an interesting visual for a newspaper to carry. So there was a typical, almost routine, photograph for each of these parades. It would be the Xavier colonel kissing the Cardinal's ring. And then I would go back in line and off we'd go the next thirty blocks or so.

MS. JOHNSON: How would you stop? Did you have to whistle? How did you signal everyone else to stop?

MR. LACOVARA: I had a loud voice, and when I said forward march, it would get repeated by subsequent commanders down the line, and if I said regiment halt, if I yelled it loud enough, even in the midst of the crowds, and those years there were massive crowds lined up along the parade route, generally people could hear what I needed to say.

MS. JOHNSON: How was this experience so formative for you? How do you think it shaped the person that you became?

MR. LACOVARA: I think, and I think this is also the view of a lot of my contemporaries at Xavier, and indeed is a reason why Justice Scalia was estranged from

Xavier until much later, and I can go into that if that becomes interesting. I think there was a sense that we did get an aspect of character development from being part of this kind of structured institution. We didn't abandon any sense of self or identity, but there was a sense of participation in something bigger, the regiment, for example, that had its own proud tradition. And there was the sense, just the phenomenon of marching with other people gives you a sense of participation and responsibility because if you've ever seen any kind of military unit marching, you can immediately see if somebody's out of step. It's symbolically important. You want the whole entity to thrive and to do its job and to look right. So if you're out of step, that metaphor "marching to a distant drummer" is reflective of exactly what happens when you're out of step. And you may say well that's what we want to do is cultivate individualism, but there are some times when you need to be part of an organization. So that helped. There was a very distinct and intense religious formation as a Jesuit school. Mass attendance a couple of times a week was expected. Religion was not only an academic part of the program, the academic coursework, but was a theme that suffused the school. So that was part of the character development.

The other part of it was when I was convinced that I needed to soften my commitment to one of the military features of the school and do something else. That's what I would think is in retrospect the most formative part of it.

I had, as a reflection of this preoccupation with the military feature of Xavier, tried out and become a member of the drill team, the so-called X Squad, which had an especially spiffy set of accoutrements for the uniform, a white belt and white chaps, a white cap cover. We did special tricks with rifles and bayonets, flipping things around, throwing them over our shoulders, marching in different kinds of formations. It was all quite fun. But one day I was called to the office of the prefect of discipline, who was the sponsor of the regiment. He was a Jesuit priest. I met him there with another teacher, and they said we think that you're wasting your time doing this. We think that it would be much more productive for you if you dropped out of the X Squad and became a member of the speech and debate club. This was in my second year. I was heartbroken. I questioned it, and they said no, we really think this would be much better for you.

So to make a long story short, I succumbed. I joined the debate team. We had a very good debate team. I got a chance to go around the country doing speech and debate tournaments, which I think turned out to be useful for my eventual role as a courtroom lawyer, probably much more effective than being able to twirl a rifle with a bayonet without cutting off one of my limbs. Most important, when giving a demonstration debate at the Mary Louis Academy, I spied a young woman who was judging our debate sitting in the back of the room. I saw nothing but her ankles which were the only things exposed in her Catholic girls' school

uniform. I said, God, she's cute, and we've been married 63 years now. So that was pretty formative.

MS. JOHNSON: What year was that?

MR. LACOVARA: That was 1959. I've never forgiven her for the fact that of the four debaters on my team who had to be ranked one, two, three, and four, she ranked me last. But I got even with her, and I married her.

MS. JOHNSON: Give me your wife's full name.

MR. LACOVARA: Madeline Estelle Lacovara.

MS. JOHNSON: So you began dating shortly thereafter.

MR. LACOVARA: Began dating shortly thereafter. I got her name and her phone number from a mutual friend and started dating. Both she and her parents were resistant to this whole thing. She looked down on Xavier boys, thinking that they were just playing dress-up. Her father was not a big fan of mine because he thought that I was a little too aggressive and forward. I got a driver's license that summer. I had just turned 16, and I wanted to take her out in the car, and he was having none of it, so we broke up temporarily. Then I had an accident involving five other cars and he basically said I told you so. But after a bit of estrangement, we got back together again and then got married in college and had seven children.

MS. JOHNSON: She lived in New York City also or in one of the boroughs?

MR. LACOVARA: She lived in Queens.

MS. JOHNSON: What was her religious, ethnic background? Similar to yours?

MR. LACOVARA: Same. Also Catholic. Her maternal grandmother was Jewish. Her father was Italian and Jewish but was a practicing Catholic, as was her mother.

MS. JOHNSON: She lived not very far from you?

MR. LACOVARA: She lived at the other end of Queens County, and to this day, she tells me or anybody who's listening that I was the only cheapskate who insisted that when we went out on dates, we took the bus and the subway rather than taxis, whereas all the other young men she was dating would pick her up in a taxi and take her in a taxi somewhere. My response to this day is that I was planning for the future by being frugal. She still hasn't accepted that.

MS. JOHNSON: What kinds of things did you like to do together, like go to the movies? What did you do?

MR. LACOVARA: Xavier had, and may still have, what are called basketball dances. There would be after a basketball game in the gym followed by a dance with a live combo, typically somebody brought in or from one of the other schools or the Xavier dance band. It was kind of a sock hop sort of thing that went on for a few hours and would end at 11:00 so that people could get home by 12:30 or 1:00.

MS. JOHNSON: That's kind of a late curfew.

MR. LACOVARA: Growing up in New York then was quite different because there was a general sense that you could do things in the city and get home late at night, and you were likely to be safe. Whether the reality is different today, there's a sense, at least for younger people as we were, I'm talking

when I was 15 or 16 years old, that you could get out and around and take the trains late at night.

MS. JOHNSON: These dances were in the gymnasium?

MR. LACOVARA: In the gymnasium proper. There were other formal events. The school that she went to was a private girls' school. It was a good academic school, and all the girls went on to good colleges, but it also had an element of finishing school to it so that there were events that were deliberately sponsored so that you were exposed to the finer things in life and knew how to behave in society. There was a cotillion, and there was a coming out, so-called, a debutante ball. And then we at Xavier had the same sort of thing. We had various proms. We had a military ball where the teenage girls wore floor-length gowns, the boys wore formal bowties and dress uniforms. So there were a lot of activities like that. And then movies.

MS. JOHNSON: You were how old when you graduated from Xavier?

MR. LACOVARA: Sixteen.

MS. JOHNSON: What was your thinking about what came next? Was it automatic that you would go to Columbia as your father and grandfather had?

MR. LACOVARA: I didn't go to Columbia until law school. When I was at Xavier, there were a couple of assumptions that were made about me. One was that because I was the colonel, and my three predecessors had gone directly from high school graduation to the Jesuit seminary to become priests, so there was a kind of track record, a well-worn path, from Xavier into the seminary. That was not anything that was in my game plan. So then the other

assumption that was made about virtually all of the students was that they would go from Xavier to another Catholic institution, a Catholic college, and since I was a Jesuit product, that meant essentially Holy Cross or Georgetown. I applied to two colleges, Holy Cross and Georgetown, got accepted at both, and decided Washington sounds a lot more interesting than Worcester, Massachusetts, and then the rest is history from there. I went to Washington and basically I'm still thought of as, in large measure, a Washington lawyer, although I've lived in a variety of places and practiced law in a variety of contexts.

MS. JOHNSON: What did it feel like to arrive here in that era? Was it a sense of excitement and promise?

MR. LACOVARA: It was tremendously exciting. I remember being dropped off by my parents with my big steamer trunk, which I had inherited from my grandfather who had taken this with him on his first and only trip back to Italy. And parenthetically, my daughter who lives in London told me this past weekend that she has that trunk, which I knew, and she is shipping it to her house in Portugal where she's planning to make it a central theme piece in some design layout of her house. So I remember being dropped off with my steamer trunk at Georgetown and looking forward to the excitement of being away, meeting a lot of new people.

I can also talk about one of the early events of that experience, kind of a freshman orientation, and in what is probably another highly ill-advised kind of characterization. One of the things that was organized for

entering students at Georgetown at the time was something called the "slave auction" when all of the incoming first-years were paraded, literally paraded, in front of the main building on the Georgetown campus where young women from the area colleges or seniors in high schools could bid on us and then we would be expected to go out on dates with them. It was, after all, 1960. This is just as the civil rights movement is beginning, and nobody at the time is thinking that this is in any way bizarre, insulting, degrading, rather than just humorous or intriguing. Now, of course, it's the kind of thing that you could never imagine.

I'll just interject there. When I went to Georgetown, Georgetown, and Washington as a whole, was still a sleepy southern city. I mentioned that we were married when I was at school. We lived in Arlington, In Arlington, Virginia, the buses were still segregated. My wife, who as an Italian young woman, would get a dark deep suntan. She was told to go sit in the back of the bus when she got on a bus in Arlington. In our lifetime. So it's almost unimaginable for people in 2024 to visualize what life was like for people who actually were every day in their lives the objects of discrimination and condescension, rejection, brutalization. But that was the environment in which I first went to Washington. It's also the era of Dwight Eisenhower and the beginning of the decolonization period in Africa.

I remember one of the first political causes that I became involved with involved Kwame Nkrumah. I can't even remember now which

African country was seeking independence from Britain, but he was the leader of the uprising, it may have been Ghana. It was not Nigeria. There were posters all around. So as young people are, we were rooting for the underdogs supporting de-colonialism or decolonization in Africa.

MS. JOHNSON: What do you remember about your classes at Georgetown?

MR. LACOVARA: I remember the variety of people. I remember what I considered the richness of coursework. It was my first exposure to American government in a serious way, world politics. I had a course in modern foreign institutions. I will say also it was to some degree a time warp. One of my favorite stories about how things have changed since that time in terms of scientific knowledge is that in my course in geography, no one imagined plate tectonics. We learned that the earth is a solid ball essentially, and for one reason or another, occasionally there are earthquakes. Period. End of story. In chemistry, the atom is the smallest indestructible part of matter, and it consists of protons, neutrons, and electrons. There's nothing smaller than those. Oh, okay. And those are the three particles that exist. Protons, neutrons, and electrons. Okay. So I've said this in other settings. It's important even for scientists to be humble in asserting what we know to be true, because what I was taught was true by the people who seemingly had expertise turns out not to be true at all. So for me, that laid a foundation for recognizing that one has to be guarded in saying I am the possessor of truth and nothing more needs to be known than I now have in my own intellect.

MS. JOHNSON: Were clergy teaching? Was it a mix of people teaching? What was the background?

MR. LACOVARA: It was definitely a mix. There were a couple of Jesuit priests on the faculty. Certainly the religion courses that I had were taught by priests, but most of the science courses and the social science courses were taught by PhD lay people. Mostly men, although there were some women PhDs on the faculty at that time. And also, one other thing about Georgetown, just as Washington was kind of a sleepy southern town, Georgetown University for the most part consisted of the college, which was all men, and it was essentially a college for young Catholic men, so not much in the way of religious diversity, no gender diversity. That was long before Georgetown became what it is now described as a great research university. One of the things that I am most bemused by is that, when I'm watching a movie or a television show, some young person is so excited because she just got her acceptance at Georgetown. In 1960, if that happened, people would have said what the heck is Georgetown. Now it's got a worldwide reputation, and one could as easily understand that scene to be written as Georgetown as Harvard. That would not have been the case when I went there.

MS. JOHNSON: Two follow-up questions about Georgetown, first about education, and second about the living situation. The second first. Did you live in a dormitory in the early years? Did you have an apartment?

MR. LACOVARA: I did. I lived in my first year in a building called New North, which was connected to Old North, and Old North had been built in 1790. New North I think was built in the mid- to late-1800s. So that was New North. For the second-year accommodations, they were also for the most part on campus. Almost everybody lived on campus partly because I think it may have been required, certainly for the first year it was, and as a practical matter there weren't options for students to live elsewhere at that point. There was a new building called New South, which is still known as New South 65 years later. New South was relatively modern. It had a dining hall in it. It may have been air conditioned.

The way rooms were assigned in the second year was on the basis of a scoring system. The scoring system consisted of ranked choice. The team, two persons rooming together, who had the lowest number based on rank and class had the earliest selection. So, for example, if the person ranked first in class and the person ranked second in class were going to be roommates, they would have a score of three. I was I think third or fourth in my class at the end of the first year, which meant that adding me to anybody else's score would give anybody else a leg up. So I was a popular source of potential rooming accommodation.

I decided to room with a fellow who was not doing all that well. There's a story about him too. But as a result of putting my score and his score together, we never did qualify for New South, and the best room we could qualify for was in the gym, which is on the other side of campus.

There were about ten rooms, and the only advantage of being in the gym, it was one where you could sneak out. My roommate had an illegal car. That is, it was not allowed to have a car, and he had come from a major Detroit manufacturing family, and he had a really souped-up hot car. So we actually got a suite in the sense that it had a bathroom connecting two rooms, so the four of us whiled away our days in the gym. My favorite story was that I was sought after only because I had a good GPA. It wasn't my personality that led me to my popularity as a roommate.

MS. JOHNSON: You spoke so movingly about your dad's experience in graduating and confronting that prejudice. Did you feel that in any of the years of your early life in educational institutions, or had that mostly passed for you?

MR. LACOVARA: By the time I went to these institutions, I was part of the mainstream because these were essentially almost a Catholic ghetto. You brought your own ghetto with you. When I went to high school, everybody was Irish or Italian. There were a couple of Polish kids. We did have four black students in our class. A couple of them became quite successful. One of them in the arts became a prominent poet. But essentially it was white Italian and Irish kids. Georgetown, as I mentioned, was basically a Catholic men's college, and that was it. One of the satisfying elements in my life as seen by my father was when some years after law school I became a partner in a Wall Street firm, the same kind of firm from which he had been rebuffed. And it was a very tangible way in which America had moved on with respect to this cadre of immigrants. Now you've got,

of course, new cadres of immigrants who are facing this perennial cycle that the latest group is the one that gets repudiated or stepped on or kept out or kept down.

MS. JOHNSON: I propose breaking here and picking up next time with more of Georgetown, your marriage and early married life.