INTERVIEW WITH CLIFF BRENNER

INT: This is Andrew Harrison. The date is March 26, 1997. I'm in Mr. Cliff Brenner's office at the United Way building. Mr. Brenner, do I have permission to tape this interview.

CLIFF: You do. Thank you very much.

INT: What I'd like to do is start off by talking to you about your childhood and then progressively your adult years. Where were you born?

CLIFF: I was born in Philadelphia, actually born downtown, what was then St. Agnes Hospital. My parents lived in West Philadelphia.

INT: And was that a primarily Jewish neighborhood at the time?

CLIFF: It was.

INT: Would you say most of your neighbors were Jewish?

CLIFF: Yes, very much so.

INT: What line of work was your father in?

CLIFF: Well, let's see. My father was a cutter in men's clothing and then, with the onset of the Depression, he lost his job and then became a peddler in the eastern part of Pennsylvania Dutch country just outside of Philadelphia, in Chester, Lancaster, Berks County, and drove around to the farmers and sold a very rudimentary line of work gloves, work shirts, overalls, things like that, for quite some time. Also at that time, he and my mother began to have differences and they separated. I don't know the exact year but it was in the early thirties.

INT: Did you practice Jewish customs in your household, keep the Sabbath, keep kosher?

CLIFF: Well, I don't know about Jewish customs, but until I reached elementary school and kindergarten I spoke Yiddish almost exclusively. We were not a practicing or synagogue-going family. It just happened to be that type of environment so the first language I learned was Yiddish. Of course, I learned English so alongside of it, but at home I spoke Yiddish and then when I got to school I started to speak English. It's still very much in my subconscious. I speak a little Yiddish now.

INT: Is that right? Were you bar mitzvah?
CLIFF: I was not bar mitzvah when I was thirteen. When my youngest son, Michael, was bar mitzvah, I was called to the Torah and without anybody really knowing what was happening I became bar mitzvah.

INT: Do you remember as a child any anti-Semitic incidents that stay in your mind?

CLIFF: Well, there was always a sprinkling, nothing terribly exaggerating, of course. You must remember the environment, and there was a great deal of anti-Semitism abroad in America at the time. But, you know, I lived in a Jewish ghetto so except on those occasions when we ventured outside of the ghetto to school and other places, we didn't experience too much. Some of it wound up in violence, very moderate violence compared to today, like fistfights and things like that, but a good bit of it was verbal and just the kind of thing that I think young people of our age exchanged in those days no matter what ethnic group you were involved with. So to that extent there was anti-Semitism, immediate anti-Semitism. In fact, I played a lot of sand lot ball, baseball and basketball, and on the teams that I organized, we always had non-Jews on the baseball and basketball teams. The section of West Philadelphia where I grew up there was a little, small Italo-American enclave, and three or four of our very good players were Italo-American kids that I knew from school and the same with basketball. Some Irish kids that I befriended from school were very good basketball players. When I was in my early teens, we organized a basketball team and we booked via postcard and newspaper ads I think the year I was fifteen, before I started playing high-school basketball. We must have had some 60 or 70 games where we traveled by trolley and sometimes the adults would drive us around the city, to every neighborhood of the city. I knew Philadelphia. When I was fifteen I was out of the ghetto pretty much. I knew Philadelphia very well, South Philadelphia, Kensington, Roxborough, Manayunk, everywhere, places where many of the kids who were my neighbors never ventured to, but with basketball, especially for basketball, we played most of our baseball at Belmont Plateau, which is in West Fairmont Park, but when you went out with the basketball teams, it was not too subtle but it wasn't violent particularly, you knew you were in a hostile environment. Everybody played for keeps. We played in a lot of churches, we played in recreation centers. I still remember most of the courts. We played in a place, 10th and Glenwood, called Nalco Recreational. Nalco comes from a former abandoned building north which housed North American Lace Company, which was formerly a large Philadelphia industry and had been abandoned—turned over to a boys’ club. Nalco had a basketball court where the sidelines were the walls, but the walls had these wall-type installation steam radiators. In the winter they would be very hot. When you came down the sidelines, the opposite team would shove you into one of the hot radiators. You know, you had a lot of hostility out there, but we played a lot of games. The following year I was playing high school ball, but the year before was a lot of fun. I played a lot of baseball at Belmont Park. I did not play football. I was only about five-eight and a hundred and forty pounds. I liked football, but I got killed every time I tried to play. I had to stop.

INT: Did that broaden your horizons by playing in those leagues?

CLIFF: Well, I think I always felt that I was. It certainly was an assimilating process. I lived in a
ghetto but I was out of the ghetto. I was out of the home, already exploring the other world, at least at the edge, certainly not deeply. I began to date. I dated Gentile girls and Jewish girls alike. I felt, you know, that that was the times in which we lived. I was not synagogue-orientated. I was not bar mitzvah. Of course, I was culturally very Jewish but I also was quite comfortable running around with Irish kids and Italian kids and later, in high school, black kids. My high school and junior high school had very substantial black populations. I had a lot of friends among them.

INT: Did you enter into World War II at any point?

CLIFF: I was in service for almost three years. Took my basic training in Engineers at Ft. Belvoir and I went overseas in the Engineers, and when I returned after the war in Europe was over, I was sent to Infantry Officer School at Ft. Benning which I did not finish because the war in Japan ended. I was in the closing weeks and I resigned. I would have had to commit to two more years and I was not about to do that, so I put in almost three years of active duty.

INT: Did you run into any problems because of your Jewish identity?

CLIFF: Oh yes. There was a lot of anti-Semitism.

INT: Just pretty much-

CLIFF: It was a little bit on a more intense level than the early experience of being a teenager, but nothing terribly substantial. Probably in the unit I did most of my service in as an engineer was the railroad unit, rebuilding railroads in Italy. I guess I was the only Jewish person in the whole-I may have been alone in the whole battalion, but I know I was in the company. You pretty much lived on your own. I was then nineteen years old.

INT: After the war you went to Temple. What was your experiences like at Temple?

CLIFF: Well, before the war I went to Penn State. I was seventeen. I went off to Penn State and did two years in engineering school. I didn’t have any problems at Penn State. I had a lot of friends there. But again, it was pretty much a continuation. I was comfortable. I was asked to pledge a Gentile fraternity. I had to tell my very good social and basketball friend that he did not want to do this to himself because he would have gotten into big trouble. He asked me to come and pledge and I said-you don’t want to do that. I don’t know if you’re aware of it but I’m Jewish and you don’t want to get into sponsoring me. This was a very fancy fraternity and I didn’t have any money then. I was working at little odd jobs to stay in school. But I got along comfortably in much the same way. I think part of it was that there was always a temptation to pass, so to speak, which I didn’t want to do, but I didn’t look particularly Jewish and I didn’t have a particularly Jewish name, so many of my non-Jewish friends assumed I was not Jewish. I always tried to very rapidly seek the opportunities to point out to them that I was so that there wouldn’t be any unpleasantness or misunderstanding, which could have very easily happened. But I got along fairly well at Penn State. The army was a little bit different. There were always a couple of maniacs in
the Army who you had to cope with. It probably was a good thing that they were restrained by
the Army. It wasn’t the same as the Army now where they probably could have gotten away with
a lot more. At that time—during World War II—the discipline was such that if you stepped out of
bounds you found yourself in some kind of disciplinary unit and out of the unit that you were in.
The Army was not integrated with blacks until I got back from Europe and President Truman
integrated the the armed services. When I returned to the States, I went to Officer Candidate
School and there were two blacks in the unit, in our training company. The officer who was in
charge of our company was from the South. He was telling us how to dress. He took his cap and
he said, this is the way you wear the cap when you’re in Columbus, Georgia. You don’t wear it
like this like those niggers do. These two black guys are sitting there. He wasn’t even aware of
their presence. They were the first blacks in Infantry Officer Candidate School, blacks in OCS at
Fort Benning—almost a miraculous situation. You didn’t have to do your bunks. The only thing
you had to do was make your bed, but mopping your bunks and tidying up and kitchen police
(KP) at the Officer Candidate School were done by a black service company. So on one hand you
knew it was not right, on the other hand, you know, you were being relieved of very burdensome
duties in the interest of spending more time learning to be an officer. Of course, I had been
through all of that in basic training so I didn’t mind getting away with that, but I realized it was
not right, you know, and I’m sure that changed. Anyway, when I came to Temple—I transferred
to Temple because I wanted to remain in Philadelphia—I was very fortunate that Temple
accepted me. They weren’t accepting transfer students at the time but I didn’t want to go back to
Penn State, and not many of the other schools. I guess if I would have had freedom of access I’d
have gone to Penn, but I didn’t have any great career interest at the time. I was undecided. I had
been an Engineering major, Electrical Engineering major. I enrolled in Temple as a Math and
Physics major so...but I got in because they let me take the entrance exam and I had always been
very, very good at those kinds of examinations and I scored a perfect grade on their entrance
exam. So they said, we’ll keep you, and I got into Temple. At the end of my two years, or
actually I contracted it into a year and a half and a summer I graduated. I joined the Math Faculty
at Temple to teach freshman math. I did that for two years and got a masters degree in
mathematics.

INT: What led to your decision to become a journalist for the Bulletin?

CLIFF: Well, it was a very strange set of circumstances. I left Temple. I did a little itinerant
teaching for a while. I did some substitution in the public schools. It was very unpleasant. I did a
little more math teaching for Temple but not under a regular appointment. I did some teaching in
a unit that they were getting started for electronics and TV in Chester, and I then took a civil
service examination for a statistics job with state government. I told you I’m very good at exams.
I’m not good at the subject matter, but I know how to take exams. I’m a real expert (and still am)
at taking standardized tests, multiple choice and so on and even better at essay type examinations.
I write pretty well, so even if I don’t quite know what I’m doing, I do very well. So in the state
exam I came in first, and I took a job in Harrisburg as a statistician for the then Department of
Public Assistance, now the Department of Public Welfare, and I worked writing up research and
papers and everything. I also got engaged and got married. My wife came out. We lived in
Carlisle, Pennsylvania for a while but I got very bored and restless, ambitious and so on, so I applied for a fellowship at Bryn Mawr College, leading to a Ph.D. I was awarded the fellowship; it was the highest paid one, twelve hundred dollars a year, and between that and my G.I. Bill I was making about $2600 a year. We were living on that money. My wife was pregnant. And one of my classmates was the wife of a columnist at the Bulletin, Earl Selby, you know about the Bulletin. We got to be friendly and one day we were having lunch. We were both unhappy graduate students at Bryn Mawr. Neither of us liked it so we used to get together for lunch and commiserate all the time about how we’re going to get out of this place, so one day at lunch she told me her husband was having a terrible time. He was a very popular and busy columnist. Terrible time with his assistant. She was an empty-headed lady and didn’t know how to do anything, so his wife said he was looking for another assistant. I said, I’m applying right now. And it was probably my Ph.D. I worked three years for him. He was a leading columnist in Philadelphia and I became a pretty good newspaper man if I may say so myself, working for him, and he was a very, very, very difficult taskmaster but good, so I worked as his assistant and kind of got a subsidiary reputation, because the two of us-there was nobody else-we got out six columns a week, every day but Saturday. And I also acquired a reputation for creativity and hustle, energy, and a lot of things like that. In any event, I was working one Saturday, off the books. He came over to me and said, Richardson Dilworth is looking for a press assistant for his campaign for mayor. Are you interested? I said yes. He said, well, it’s time for you to move on. So I interviewed for that job and I got it. That’s how I got to the Bulletin. That’s how I got to Mr. Dilworth.

INT: The editor you’re talking about is Earl Selby, correct?

CLIFF: Yes.

INT: What was your impression of Dilworth upon meeting him?

CLIFF: Well, you know, upon meeting him I was very awed. This was 1955. He had literally been pounding around in Philadelphia for the past eight years and had a very large reputation. He had just resigned as District Attorney, and I was still just pretty much a kid. I remember going into his office for the interview. He had a little campaign office. It was an office within his old law firm, and it was morning and I was facing a window without shades or blinds, and the sun was up right in my eyes. So when I came in and sat down I decided to start breaking down the awe right away. So I told him, I see you’re an astute pupil of Field Marshal Rommel. He said, I don’t know what you mean. I said, well, you certainly put me at an advantage interviewing me with the sun in my eyes, which is the way Rommel used to attack, from the east, with the sun in the enemy’s eyes. So he laughed and that sort of broke the ice, although I was always very formal with him. I never did, as many people who would meet him just once, refer to him as Dick, I always referred to him as Mr. Dilworth or Mr. Mayor. I never was really on an intimate personal friendliness basis. We were involved and practically lived together during the campaigns and I was with his mayoral team. He was very much a father figure for me.
INT: Did he ever tell you to call him on a first name basis?

CLIFF: No. But I used to marvel when people would meet him and the next time they would see him they would say Hi, Dick. He never minded, but I could never bring myself to call him Dick. My two associates in the mayor’s office always called him Dick, my two peers.

INT: You developed a reputation as his press secretary as a straight shooter to the press. Is that what you prided yourself on?

CLIFF: Well, I understood what the job was very much. I was always forthright and honest. I never lied or told untruths. If I didn’t know something I always said I didn’t. That was one thing I learned from Earl Selby. Never speculate what you don’t know. The easiest answer is “I don’t know but I will find out if I can,” so I dealt pretty openly with them. We ran a very much of an open shop. Got us in trouble, but you get in trouble no matter what you do. You’re in the job like that, so you might as well get points for being honest, direct and prompt, forthright, and I tried to do that all during my time with him and subsequently. I don’t deal with the media too much these days, but when I do, I don’t mess around. I follow through. I don’t like the media much anymore. I more or less had an elevated, idealistic view of the media when I first started, but that’s really been eroded tremendously over the years. But I don’t know. So many of our institutions have, that they’ve really been just part of what’s happened to a lot of segments of our society generally.

INT: Dilworth had a reputation for occasionally making comments designed to elicit a response like United States recognizing China to the U.N. Was that a public relations nightmare for you?

CLIFF: I would say it was. Yes, I had a few of those.

INT: Did you ever have a talk with him about toning down his rhetoric?

CLIFF: Never in time.

INT: It was always after the fact.

CLIFF: Right. And always until the next time. No, I never tried. I really never tried to directly say, “Don’t be what you are,” because I understood and a lot of his friends understood that if we tried to change the spontaneity of his approach to public life then you would have a different person, probably not as valuable and as useful a person, but I used to—we had a very open—in the mayor’s office we had a very open shop for those days, and actually through pretty much the mayors that followed him. We had a news conference every week, religiously. Religiously. I mean I insisted on it, that we not dam up the flow of news, that we keep it going. And before all of those, the morning of all of those news conferences—we usually had them on Wednesday, I would have a briefing paper that I would prepare in consultation with some of the people around me, what are the likely questions and so on, what’s your view on it, and I would always brief him on what kind of questions to anticipate and he listened but in many instances he would go his own
way. I would say, you know, you ought to respond thus and he would respond totally differently. There wasn’t anything I could do about it, and I accepted it because in many instances his judgement was probably better than mine in certain contexts, so I didn’t suffer so much. Some of the things were nightmares. The Red China thing was a nightmare in a sense, and it literally was a nightmare because I remember being up half the night trying to rescue his gubernatorial nomination on the phone. By the end of the night it was decided he would withdraw.

INT: Did that also mean a possibility of perhaps him becoming vice president timber?

CLIFF: Well, the fact is that he was talked about, and if you read Ted Sorenson’s biography of Kennedy, Sorenson said that the one thing that he’d been afraid of prior to the 1960 convention was the prospect that Dilworth would become governor of Pennsylvania in ’58, because Dilworth, being very handsome and attractive and bright, the creative politician that he was, and being governor of a large industrial state with a lot of electoral votes, Sorenson thought he was the kind of person that could have stolen the presidential nomination away from Kennedy because he was a little older, more mature. Kennedy was a young man, a very young man at the time, and not terribly experienced. He was a senator. And Dilworth had a very big national reputation. A lot of the mayors around the country idolized him, even though he had only been mayor for a couple of years. When he walked into a roomful of mayors, you knew who he was. A room full of mayors, not just citizens. When he walked into a room—of course, first of all, he was physically very attractive. He was a very handsome man and a great war record and very articulate, witty and a conversationalist, so when he became mayor he immediately zoomed right to the top of the mayor’s organizations at that time. So Sorenson was not concerned about mayor, you know. There would never have been a Kennedy-Dilworth ticket, because they were both from Eastern states, but there could have been a Dilworth-Johnson ticket or a Dilworth-somebody else ticket, you know. But his tendency toward occasionally extreme statements always came back to haunt him. It was difficult. Politically, he impeded his political career. Certainly, would have been elected governor in ’58. By the time ’62 rolled around, he had had a lot of difficulties here, although he was doing very fine work. He had had troubles here. It didn’t help us, and he had been really at the “party” too long, being mayor, by the time we got to ’62. But he ran for governor again. He had too many scars, had even some open wounds, still running sores, and it was a very bad year in ’62.

INT: What would you say the climate was going into the 1950’s for Philadelphia Jews? How restrictive was it? How open was it?

CLIFF: It’s awfully hard for me to say. It was just about the time I was getting married and I lived in West Oak Lane. The first place where we lived was in West Oak Lane and—no, I’m sorry, I moved from Carlisle, where I lived, had the state job in Harrisburg, to go to Bryn Mawr. We lived in Wynnewfield, which was then almost entirely a Jewish neighborhood. I saw myself then as pretty much of a liberated, assimilated person, although I still lived in Jewish environments. I had a lot of Gentile friends from work and school. My close friends at Temple—five of us are still together fifty years later. Two of them are non-Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant. I introduced
one of them to his wife whom I had been dating. The other two are Jewish, so, you know, I’ve always sort of continued almost in the baseball vein. I never suffered from my Jewish friends or left them or left the neighborhood, but the neighborhood for me got bigger and bigger. And when I got into politics and government I had all kinds of friends, so I never really felt anything like that after the army, which was the palpable overt manifestation of anti-Semitism.

INT: You were talking about Philadelphia Jews in the 1950’s.

CLIFF: I think the war itself plus what happened to the Jews before and during the war, the Holocaust, made for a climate which further liberated the Jews in a pluralistic society, multi-cultural society. Personally I never felt it a curse. As I said, even as a young boy playing ball all over the city with all kinds of ethnic groups, going to school with all kinds of ethnic groups, I still was able to maintain bicultural ties in all religions and at the same time in the world and I think that happened to a lot of other people pretty much in the post-war period, even those who hadn’t been out in the larger world. There were a lot of kids that never ventured out of the ghetto, were in the army, in the navy and so on and began to see, you know, began to swim in the larger pools, so I think things got a little better. Jews were getting into positions of responsibility here and there. They had a very strong community in Philadelphia. Historically, going back to the Federation, just as we turn into the next century we’ll be celebrating the hundredth year of Federation’s existence. So, you know, the war, I think, was a great stimulus to improving the comfort level of Jews and the Jewish community at large.

INT: Were you active in any Jewish communal organizations, Zionist groups at all in the fifties and sixties?

CLIFF: I did not become active in-I was always sort of mildly interested in Zionism but the atmosphere in which I grew up was not Zionist oriented. It was largely socialistic, but not Zionist. It was Yiddishist, non-Zionist. I did not really become active in Zionist activities until my first visit to Israel, which was in 1961. I was overcome. I plunged in in a very big way and I have been very actively involved. I’m not an organization person. I don’t like structure that much. I don’t oppose it, but I don’t like it that much and I don’t like to be bound by it and almost all the organizations that I’ve been in, if they tolerate it I sort of have freelance status. I take a job, a mission, but don’t put me on committees. I was involved in Committee for a while.

INT: American Jewish Committee?

CLIFF: Yes.

INT: You were on the Board?

CLIFF: I was on the Board of JCRC for a while. I was vice president of the JCRC for a while. I’ve been foreclosed by moving up in those circles. Everybody liked me and regarded me as a useful, well-connected asset in community, but in the way of these things, that wasn’t the coin of
the realm. My brains and creativity and connectivity were not the coin of the realm. The Jewish infrastructure then and now was invested with money people who are able to contribute a great deal more money than I was able to. Gradually, I reached a certain level and then dropped out. I was on the board of the Exponent. I was vice-president of JCRC, and a troublesome one at that. The JCRC was very left-liberal orientated and I was not, and I was getting less so, so eventually I dropped out of JCRC and I dropped out of Committee. I've always been friendly with Murray [Fredman]. Murray is always trying to interest me in various things and so on, but I began—I would be in and out. I would be in, I'd get the salute, you know, get bored and something else would—the one thing I have tried to stay with was ZOA. I was for a while a Board member of ZOA. But ZOA seemed to be virtually moribund. People were clueless. They had no mechanism by which to—they were trying to attract some of the people of college age. There was a lot going on in the colleges, anti-Zionism. I began to do a little bit of freelance writing. I began to be a letter writer on Zionist matters to the Inquirer and Daily News, the Exponent. I reviewed books and so on. I have gotten bored with that kind of work too. But I think the one that I've had the most staying power, mostly on a freelance basis, is with my interest in Israel and Zionism. I was, for about a year up, until a few months ago, a consultant for the Federation. But they felt they didn't have the money for me to continue, so I'm no longer there. So be it. You know, I stay friends with everybody. I try to. Whatever disillusion and bitterness that I feel I manage to get rid of very fast because they are actually elements of self-pity. My biggest lesson learned from Richardson Dilworth was, don't even indulge in self-pity of thinking about what might have been, which is a very malignant form of self-pity. That's the biggest lesson I've learned from him. That's one thing he did not do was indulge in feeling sorry for himself, so I try. I've been unhappy from time to time. Various experiences with organized Jewry, politics, various jobs I had and everything like that, but everybody does so you can't dwell forever on that. Give yourself a week to get rid of it. I even talked with a guy this morning.

INT: When you said the JCRC had leftist leanings, what did you mean by that?

CLIFF: Well, Chernin was a lefty. He was the executive director of the organization. He certainly drove the organization. Ted Mann was a leading figure at the time I was there and of course, Ted Mann's political proclivities are well known, but, you know, his view of Israel and Israel politics is like a hundred and eighty degrees from mine, and I'm not even all the way there as far as Likud or anything like that. We are so far apart in that what Israel should do, so, you know, Ted Mann and Chernin and after him Barry Ungar and one of the rookies in those days at JCRC was Malcolm Honlein, now the executive vice-chairman of the Conference of Presidents. Malcolm told me before he left Philadelphia that I was his role model as far as my expressing myself and my politics and everything, so Malcolm, I think, has gotten a little cautious too.

INT: How did you see the dropout Aliyah issue for Soviet Jewry?

CLIFF: You mean dropping out at the end and coming to the United States?

INT: Right.
CLIFF: I always felt that they had a right to live wherever they wanted to live, but that Israel had the duty to be a lot more aggressive and intelligent. Israel’s got to rank as one of the more stupid bureaucracies of our time. They inherited a great military tradition with the Swiss, and they got some good points of view from the British about how to run an army, and then their own stuff. How to run a bureaucracy they got from Central Europe. It is the most arrogant, dumbest ways of dealing with the public. I think given what the raw material was, mainly people who had not really been exposed to Jewish life in a significant way for many, many years, many generations, then to have come up with six hundred thousand making Aliyah to Israel was a pretty good job, all things considered, but they could have done better and they could have done better except that, you know, the absorption—I don’t know if you know the figures. The absorption of the six hundred thousand from the Soviet Union over a limited period of time plus the two very big exoduses from Ethiopia was equivalent to absorbing the population of France in the United States. So it was a tremendous job and I think that if you look at the total job and the circumstances under which it occurred and the condition of Israel—the condition of Israel—small country with limited resources struggling for its own external existence, internally not together, they did a pretty good job, but their bureaucracy is horrible in Israel and will continue to be because they can’t get over the Eastern Europe and Central European antecedents of civil service. They don’t have any of the free thinkers there now. You know, you now have a new bunch. The one thing good about Likud is they have a lot of young people in there holding major cabinet jobs, and they’ve learned their way around. I don’t think they will be as hide-bound as their Eastern European founders were. They were pretty much a bunch of sons of bitches to deal with, the Ben-Gurions and all those guys were very single minded. That was probably why the state was born. They were very single minded and they had an objective. You got in their way, you were destroyed. They were not liberals. They were certainly not liberal socialists or nice guys. They were sons of bitches who happened to have a socialist ideology, but nothing of it had anything to do with being liberal or nice guy, and when you read some of the biographies, you see some of the people that got destroyed in the process. Abba Eban. Why didn’t he ever get anyplace? He was a nice guy, you know. They just pushed him all over the place. Abba Eban probably should have been Prime Minister with his knowledge and intellect, the skills he had. The book review I just did that I hope is going to be published tomorrow is on Herzog, and I finally figured out why Herzog got to be president but never even got a smell of being Prime Minister, which he should have been. The reason is, he didn’t come from Poland or Russia. He came from Ireland. His parents made the mistake of going from Poland to Ireland instead of from Poland to Ireland to Jerusalem. I didn’t put this—I should have put this in the review because I didn’t realize it until later. If they had gone from Poland to Jerusalem, where they landed after some time spent in Ireland, Herzog, if he duplicated everything—the prophecy is impossible, but if he duplicated his education and all of the breaks he got, situations he got into, he would have been Prime Minister of Israel, which he should have been. The reason is, he didn’t come from Poland or Russia. He came from Ireland. His parents made the mistake of going from Poland to Ireland instead of from Poland to Ireland to Jerusalem. I didn’t put this—I should have put this in the review because I didn’t realize it until later. If they had gone from Poland to Jerusalem, where they landed after some time spent in Ireland, Herzog, if he duplicated everything—the prophecy is impossible, but if he duplicated his education and all of the breaks he got, situations he got into, he would have been Prime Minister of Israel, but having come from Ireland made him an outsider. Eban came from South Africa, an outsider, so the other guys that really were making it, you know, that’s almost the miracle of Netanyahu. Netanyahu’s father was a disciple and colleague of Jabotinsky so that made him automatically an outsider in Israel, among Israel’s insiders. Still is. They hate him, the Labor people. So I think they did a good job on Soviet aliyah. Got as many as possible and the dopes that are still in the Soviet Union probably will never make it. They are dopes. Some of them probably have situations that they
can’t readily pick up and go from, but they ought to pick up and go. That’s going to be a very unhappy place over the years. It’s not going to get better in Russia or the Ukraine or Belarus. It’s not going to get better. It’s going to get more chaotic, and the Jews will again, once again be the scapegoats. What are the Jews involved with in Russia now, the ones who have stayed? In emerging capitalism. They’re going to get their f-king brains knocked out because the communists are not dead yet.

INT: I’d like to go back just briefly to the Dilworth years. I’d like you to discuss what you consider to be your most important accomplishments and if there was any major setbacks as your role as press secretary to Dilworth.

CLIFF: Well, my role as press secretary; I was a well-placed cog but not a major factor in determining policy or anything like that. I had a very good sense of what was pending when policy was being made. If I may say so myself. I didn’t make any big mistakes during the six years I was in City Hall or in the campaigns. I guess I’ve made a few here and there but nothing that really showed. I had a very good sense of how to behave and what to do after I heard what the drill was, so in a sense I was a good servant of the policy, but I certainly was not a policy maker. I went back to Temple for three years after I finished down at City Hall. I did a pretty good job there, I think. Very creative work during my three years at Temple, but it got to be repetitive and I got bored so when the school board was reformulated under the new charter, I was very delighted to be asked to come back with Dilworth and at that point I was older and I had a greater sense of my capabilities. I started to become much more vocal in the councils of power. Instead of sitting in the second row I sat in front, and I think at the school board I began to feel a lot of things that needed to be done. I was able to express them as ideas and even coming into power and a lot of the things that we did, I actually feel that I was probably the reason why I and Bill Wilcox who was executive director of GPM engineered making Dilworth co-chairperson of the citizens groups that worked for the passage of the new charter. The reason we did was a very deliberate one which we decided. When we pass it (the charter), he will then be a prime candidate to become president of the Board, and that’s the way it happened. He was very visible during the campaign, and then when it came time for the Mayor to appoint the nine members of the new Board, you could not escape the fact that Dilworth had been one of the leaders in the past. The other co-chairman would not have made it. That was Thacher Longstreth, so Dilworth got the job and I take some credit for bringing up that political strategy to do it, and then he asked me to come back and be the resident pigeon in the office. Dilworth wasn’t always there but there was a president’s office and I sat in that office all day. I was an implementer and so on, so I pretty much was a traffic cop and I knew what was going on. I invented the Parkway School which still is in existence and a lot of other ideas, particularly during the interim period between the time that the board was named and took office. I suggested the task forces that were created at the time and really gave the new school board a lot of impetus. I suggested a five day institute for the new school board which we brought in five experts from around the country to talk about different responsibilities of school board members. They were almost all novices. We held that institute at night, from seven to ten, for five nights. I had a lot of ideas and I had the means of displaying them, and not only that, shepherding them along, helping move them along and get done if they
were any good. So in effect, my life changed a little and I felt that during that period of time I had
good opportunity to grow professionally and after two years of being at the school board,
because Dilworth had a six year appointment and I could obviously have stayed there, but I had
some disappointments and I wanted to really move up and out of the president’s office and do
some larger things and get a bigger meaning to my life and it wasn’t happening. When Shedd
came in, he worried about me because I was that close to Dilworth and he, you know, the
superintendent would have a very good relationship with the chairman and should not have any
intervening personalities or functionaries to get between them, and I was in the middle. There was
no question about it. And I think Shedd was determined to get me out of the middle and I was
moved into another job which I didn’t like, out of the president’s office, which if it had anything,
at least had the power and prestige of being the person in residence in the president’s office. I
wasn’t happy about what I was doing, but at least I had the power and prestige. They moved me
out of there. That was Shedd’s doing. At that point I decided that I was too long...simply an
extension of Dilworth. I decided to go out on my own, so I resigned.

INT: And then you took a job as a director of operations for city council?

CLIFF: Oh, it was horrible.

INT: Why was that?

CLIFF: Three months I was out of there. Actually, I should have been out of there after a month.
It was a very bad decision but I resigned actually at the end of a month and Paul D’ortona liked
me but was very angry at me because I was trying to assert myself and that was all it was. I was
trying to really do what he wanted, what he said he wanted me to do and I realized I was never
going to be able to do it. I resigned and we were both furious at each other. I had a screaming
match at his office and everything. I sent him a letter. I apologized for the screaming, and he sent
me a letter back. He said, take a couple of months. Get yourself situated. I won’t bother you
during those months. So the next two months I was coming to work every day and started to
solicit clients for our agency, but I didn’t have anything to do with city council. He didn’t bother
me, I didn’t bother him. I sent him a thank you letter at the end of it, he sent me a nice goodbye
note. But it was a terrible decision on my part. For the next eight years I had my own agency.
Moderately successful. Not a great artistic place to be in. I learned a lot, I got a lot done and I
pretty much established myself as one of the leading players in the public relations business in the
city. When Philadelphia Electric began to get into trouble. Someone I knew from City Hall was by
then the general counsel. He called me up. He had lunch with me one day and asked me if I would
be interested in coming in. They decided to form a communications department, to get somebody
from the outside world. I made a decision then to go with him, a very good one, and I was with
PE for the next fourteen years.

INT: How about we stop here and we resume this at another point?

CLIFF: Yes. Just as a matter of history I believe I was the first Jewish officer in Philadelphia
Electric and I knew it and I also made a decision, a conscious one: never behave as a token Jewish officer and I didn’t. There were a couple of others afterwards, but I was the first. Gus Amsterdam was a Jewish board member, and I think there were several others on the board.

**INT:** June 6, 1997. I’m in Mr. Cliff Brenner’s office. Do I have permission to tape our second conversation?

**CLIFF:** Yes, you do.

**INT:** Great. Thank you. I’d like to refresh your memory as to where we left off last time. We mentioned a few of your career moves prior to getting involved in public relations and I wanted to go over a few more things leading up to that point. One of the things that you had mentioned to me was that you had done some creative work at Temple in terms of being a PR man. Do you remember what they were and would you like to share with me some of your memories?

**CLIFF:** Well, when I first got to Temple, there was a very popular prime time Sunday night TV program sponsored by General Electric called College Bowl. So I got to Temple and one of the first questions I asked was, Have we ever appeared on College Bowl? It consisted of competing college teams of four members responding to questions and the prizes were really, compared to today, very modest. The winning team each week got something like $1500 for winning, and the players, the students, got sort of a choice of GE small appliances. But from a public relations standpoint, the really useful thing was that you got national exposure. It was a very well-watched program. So I was told that we had not been on it and the reason was no one had ever asked to be on it. I had a good friend at GE and I called him up and I said I need a “fix”. And he said, what kind of fix? I said, I need to get Temple University onto College Bowl this spring for my own personal benefit, to make a showing. So he said I’ll call you back, and he called back in a couple of days and he said, “You’re in luck.” He told me that a day after I called there was a cancellation from another school and he put Temple in the slot. So we selected a team. I went to the president and told him what we were up to and picked a faculty coach who was very good and eight kids were selected on a competitive basis, four first team and four as standbys. They practiced and rehearsed and so on. To make a long story short, you’re allowed to appear on the program five times, and if you retired undefeated you got an extra fifteen hundred dollars, so they appeared on five Sundays. But they weren’t five consecutive weeks. It was very interesting. They appeared four times and then the program broke for the summer. They came back as the opening program in the fall, and they won and there was a tremendous excitement on campus and among the alumni, because Temple always had somewhat of an inferiority complex about its own standing, so there was a lot of excitement and the development office decided to create a fund in honor of the team. The team was just sensational. The alternates never got on, but the four starters were so representative of what you hoped were prototypical urban university students and created a wonderful impression. This was, let’s see, thirty-five years ago. We had a young lady that was one of the four. We had a young black fellow who was a whiz at American history. He was one of the four. The young lady’s speciality was arts and culture. We had two kids, one of whom was a generalist, knew everything about everything, and the other was a medicine and science person.
Well, they knocked all the other five teams dead, so I was sort of the hero because I was the progenitor of the effort.

And I knew Temple very well. I'd been there as a student, as a graduate student, and as an instructor, and I have always been sort of a free-wheeling person. I've always tried to push the creative envelope beyond where it should go. I created a program the following fall after I got there. I went to all the football games, both because I like football and also I had to go, but they had a reserved seat section for faculty and administration, and they had something like sixty seats in a closed section with cushioned chairs and everything, and the faculty and administration used to get to sit there. I went a couple of times and then I went in to see the President and I said we're wasting it on faculty. I said, I don't mind, let's say, if a third of the seats are taken by faculty and administration on some kind of a rotation basis, so I persuaded him to let me design a program whereby we had media executives and political and business leaders take up the other forty seats, in addition to which the twenty faculty and administration people hosted them at a light supper before the game at the Cedarbrook Unit. Then after supper they walked over to the stadium. Well, Temple football was never much of anything but it was a nice evening. It was a pleasant evening out. It was fall and what we did was we strategically invited key faculty people and key administration people and I was in charge of inviting the politicians and the business people and the media people. That program may still be in existence, I don't know, but it went on for a long time. It was very, very useful, and the president at the time, Dr. Glatfelter, was really very, very taken with it because Temple had never been viewed as a downtown school, being up on North Broad Street. So this really brought them closer to the power establishment in town, which is what they needed for some of the things they wanted to get done. They were on the verge of making a case for state-relatedness on the part of Temple, which was then a totally private institution. They wanted to become state-related because they had a limited ability to raise funds, so they needed state money both for capital and operating requirements, and this was very helpful. Then, also with respect to football, the stands were always at least half empty and especially on the other side of the field where the visiting section was theoretically supposed to be, so I persuaded the athletic department to let the development department send out two free tickets to every contributor to the Annual Fund and all the tickets were for the center section on the other side. They were good seats, but they were on the other side. And the object was to try to fill it and make it crowded. It would be more interesting for the game and so on, but mainly, it probably was the only correspondence alumni got that didn't ask for money but offered them something. I understand that for some strange reason they terminated the thing. They were making really good money on concessions. They were getting possibly five thousand people in there as a result of this mailing, and these people would all come with kids. Very nice. I used to come up with an idea a week there, some of which were too much for them but I had a lot of respect there. I enjoyed Temple but after three years, it sort of began going through the same doors and I knew it was time to leave. I had done as much as I could do at the time. The other aspect of it was that I really wanted a vice presidency. I was assistant vice president, and they weren't ready to move on creating an external vice president, which probably would have meant that I would have stayed at Temple the rest of my work life if I would have gotten that, but they weren't ready and I still wanted to move up. The voters of the city had created a new educational home rule charter in
which I played a material role in the campaign, in the yes/no referendum. I guess I had talked to you about my time in the mayor's office. I and the then executive director of the premier civic agency, the Greater Philadelphia Movement, which has now been replaced by a successor group, Greater Philadelphia First, and the executive director was also a guy with whom I had done a lot of work when I had been in the mayor's office and he asked me to help run the campaign, and the two of us ran the campaign. We had sort of a hidden agenda and that was to make Mr. Dilworth president of the Board of Education. The way to do that, of course, was to make him highly visible in the campaign. They had Republican and Democratic co-chairmen of the campaign to pass the addendum to the Home Rule Charter for the schools, so we saw to it that Mr. Dilworth was appointed the Democratic co-chairman and Thacher Longstreth the Republican co-chairman. Well, Mr. Dilworth got a lot of visibility vis-à-vis the school system which he never had as mayor, because the two bureaucracies were totally apart. Thus, it was not a difficult matter when they had to appoint a nine member board, he was the first appointee by the mayor and then he was named chairman immediately. After he was named chairman, the referendum was in the spring and then all the restructuring took place during the summer and into the fall, and then in the fall the mayor named the whole board, including Mr. Dilworth. He came up on campus in the fall and asked Dr. Gladfelter to give me a leave of absence, which is the way I wanted to do it, and I got a leave of absence. I never returned. I got a leave and a year extension, but no more. So I stayed at the school board for two years as Mr. Dilworth's executive assistant and again, tried to do a lot of innovative things. In fact, I may have told you, I was the "inventor" of the Parkway Program and a lot of other stuff when we were sort of just getting organized. I really got going there. I guess it sounds very self-serving, but almost every place I've been where I was given more or less some room to run, I've taken great advantage of it and have been an impact player in all the places. And most of the places where I've worked were places that were undergoing either structural change or philosophical change and that, in addition to having a laissez-passer from your boss to go ahead and do what you think is needed but, you know, talk to me about it, to have both the psychological clearance for doing that, as well as the permission. Psychological clearance coming from the fact that you were in an atmosphere where change was expected and wanted, so I sought of tended to flourish in that kind of an atmosphere. It was true at Temple. It was true in my time at City Hall. It was true at the School District. But I only stayed at the School District for two years. I started to get very restless and feeling that I was very much simply an extension of my boss rather than my own true self, and I decided that I wanted to do something on my own, so I had a brief interim where the president of City Council (Paul D'Ortone) asked me to serve as his staff director, which I took, and after three months it was clear that it wasn't going to work, so I resigned and went into business for myself as a sole practitioner, primarily in education and public affairs, the two things that I had been doing. I didn't kid myself. I didn't know too much about business or marketing or anything like that, so I stayed out of marketing, as it affected the business world, though later on I discovered there wasn't that much to really know. It wasn't brain surgery. I stayed in business for eight years and went into several partnerships. I was making pretty good money at the time, working very, very hard, learning a lot because I was doing a lot of new business getting. I was the primary new business getter in the ultimate partnership where I had two partners, and also was more or less the one that was serving the most important accounts, so I was learning a lot about other people's businesses and meeting a lot of people and
getting a lot of self-confidence. It wasn’t terribly satisfactory, because the end of it all was simply to try to make money and while I was interested in that—I certainly didn’t sneer at money—I really wanted to move ahead professionally.

INT: I’ve been curious just to how did you come up with the Parkway Program

CLIFF: We were having growing pains. High school enrollment was growing and the high schools were very crowded and at the same time, to build a high school was a long and involved and expensive proposition. This is sort of a hidden part of the story. Everybody thinks of taking a bow in a different way, but I had done some exploration. At the time, there was an effort growing, a movement growing, to start a Philadelphia Community College. The legislation had been passed in Harrisburg. They didn’t have a building, and they were unsettled on a building and they needed one pretty fast to take advantage of the legislation and get things going, but they couldn’t agree on it, and I had sort of done some thinking about utilizing existing facilities that were already well situated, office buildings and the Y and so on, to use the Y as a gym and then piece together a very makeshift thing until they could get settled on a building. I didn’t share this thinking too much with anybody. Finally, they decided that they were going to go in the old Snellenberg’s building, before they moved up to Spring Garden Street. So I sort of put that in the “computer memory” and let it lay there, and then when I was given the assignment of trying to figure out how to deal with the crowdedness in high schools—Now, this is literally the truth: I was sitting in my office at 21st and the Parkway and looking out on the Parkway, and I saw all these building, the Art Museum, the Academy of Natural Sciences, the Library etcetera, etcetera, and then of course by extension, you almost concluded any building that had classrooms, assembly type rooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums and everything, and I got very excited. I always think, in retrospect, it must have been the same feeling. You know, I was a math major and I knew the story of Descartes, the philosopher-mathematician who invented analytic geometry. How did he invent analytic geometry? He was lying in a hospital bed. He was very weak as a youth and he frequently was hospitalized, and he was lying in a hospital bed and looking out the window, and he saw the windowpane separated by the bars. (They weren’t solid windows.) And out of that he evolved the idea, the concept, that any point in a plane could be defined by a vertical and horizontal coordinate, and that was essence of analytic geometry which ultimately became not just a point in a plain but also solid analytic geometry, which is a point in space. So he got very excited and that’s the way he invented analytic geometry. Likewise, I got very excited. I sat down at a typewriter and I typed a memo outlining the whole idea that you would use not traditional facility but that you would use these other facilities, and I showed it to my boss and he was very excited. And it took a little while and then they finally decided to announce it. So I had my 15 minutes of fame. I was not given responsibility for putting the thing together in practice. I think there was still a lot of prejudice operating in the system, whereby somebody like myself, who was not an educator, would have the temerity to conceptualize this, so they recruited a director and it got off the ground very fast, primarily because my boss, Mr. Dilworth and the superintendent were very much in favor of it. It got a lot of national and international publicity, and I think within a couple of years there had been an estimated 3,000 clones all over the world, imitations of one kind of another, adaptations, variations, on the theme of it. Parkway was supposed to be the first
sort of manifestation of alternative education. Obviously, there were others before that, but this
was what sort of caught everybody's attention as a concept. Ed Bacon's son, Kevin Bacon, the
actor, is an alumnus of the Parkway Program. So anyway, I came over to the School District and I
did that and a lot of other things. At the end of two years I went into see Mr. Dilworth and said I
just feel like moving on and he wished me well and so on. There was no bad feeling at all, and I
started my own business and ultimately went into the partnerships.

**INT:** Did inflation and the Vietnam War hit school reform?

**CLIFF:** I would say that the Vietnam War more visibly. Of course inflation hurt, because for one
thing, there was a school building program going on and the cost of the building program to meet
rising enrollment was escalating tremendously, but more importantly, I think the conflict in the
outside world on the Vietnam War, on the rightness or wrongness of the war, created a lot of
student unrest and created a lot of unrest in the schools and discipline problems and drugs and
violence, increased violence, and demonstrations. More of it, of course, was going on in the
colleges, but it also filtered down to the high school students, primarily. Throughout the system
you had faculty...you had a lot of philosophical conflict between administration and faculty as well
as the students, so I'd say both of those things over a fairly extended period had an impact. In
fact, I had left the schools in '67. My business, over the next eight years, grew. But in 1973-74,
when you had the recession, I really took a bad hit. I mean that didn't kill the business but I was
really on the move up, and by that time had sixteen employees, and I had to cut by half as a result
of the recession of '73-'74, the oil embargo and so on. At about that time I started really wearing
- I was working maybe eighty hours a week, weekends and everything, and was making good
money but I really felt I wanted something else so a friend and former city official whom I knew
from city government and who was an officer at the electric company, met me down the shore at
a restaurant and apparently they were looking to start a formal corporate communications
department. They were in a lot of trouble also as a result of the oil embargo and inflation and
whatnot, and the conflict surrounding the nuclear option, rising bills because of the changeover
from coal to oil, and they had a lot of problems and they were very poorly prepared for it. They
did an audit, a communications audit of the company, and found a tremendous number of
shortcomings and disorganization. They literally had no organized way of communicating with
their publics in the outside world, and the principle recommendation of the survey was to start a
new department of corporate communications and to recruit someone from outside who had
sufficient experience to deal immediately with all the problems. The president—he was then
president, Lee Everett, the first three people he asked whether there was anybody they knew to
fill the bill, they all gave him my name. I had been around all over the place and different places in
the university and politics and run elections and knew the media and so on and so forth. He asked
me to come in to see him and they made a very interesting offer and I liked the idea. It seemed to
be the kind of thing that I was looking for, so I took the job and I was made general manager
during the probationary period of six months. In the spring of '76 I was elected an officer. I
stayed there fourteen years and left as a senior vice president.

**INT** How was it as a Jew going into what usually was a Protestant-dominated chain of command?
CLIFF: Well, like many of the traditional business organizations, banks, utilities, insurance companies and so on, it was I wouldn’t say Protestant but certainly Gentile, but I think the electric company very dominantly Protestant. There was a Jewish board member. Gus Amsterdam had been a board member for a number of years. Gus Amsterdam was Albert M. Greenfield’s lieutenant (and ultimately his successor when Mr. Greenfield died) as chairman of Bankers Securities Corporation, and so he was a board member in Philadelphia Electric, but I was the first Jewish officer of Philadelphia Electric. There were several subsequently and I don’t know what the present situation is but I was the first Jewish officer, and I didn’t have any problems at all. I did my thing, which was to be...you know, I was given very, very much of a free hand by the chairman and the president to do anything that I thought was useful. And I organized the department. I reorganized it two or three times in the first five years as a result of the experiences that I was having there. There’s in draft now a continuation of the history of the company. The company was organized in 1881 and did an eighty year history. It was done by someone and then after I left they determined, had asked me about it, what they thought they could do, and I suggested that they do a continuation covering PECO in the nuclear era, which started about 1961, about the time that their old history ended. They had committed to involve the company in a major way, first by being the lead company of about twenty-five electric utilities in a federal government sponsored program on the feasibility of nuclear power for civilian purposes, and then being the builders of one of the earlier nuclear plants, the Peach Bottom plant. I retired in '89, in the spring of '89. In '91 the Limerick plant was completed and put into commercial operation, so you had a thirty year period which was defined as the nuclear era, so that’s the way this new history was treated. It describes the period. I helped out. I helped the writer. I didn’t write it, but I helped the writer get interviews with all of the people that were necessary. I’d call them and told them this guy is OK and is not going to get anybody in big trouble or anything like that, so I arranged a lot of the interviews. I read the early stuff and did some of the corrections and so on in an informal way. The only thing in it that really interests me, (I’m kidding of course), but in the book there is a page and a half describing my role during the thing and quoting the now retiring chairman, Joe Paquette, directly saying that the smartest thing that Philadelphia Electric did as it moved through the nuclear era was hire Cliff Brenner. I hope they don’t edit it out in the final version. Anyway, it’s in manuscript form and I have a copy of it. When I was given a copy of the last manuscript to read over, or again, informal editing, I took the liberty of Xeroxing a copy of the 2 pages for my grandchildren, I guess. Anyway, I did a lot of innovative things there, and that was my sort of trademark. I invented the sign at the top of the building, which has now gone through a tremendous amount of technological change. It originally started as simply converting a grid of lights to words, using the window washers to turn switches on and off to create the words. Well now the whole thing is done with computer. It used to take about a week to get a message up there with the window washers, and now they could just sit down at a computer and change the whole message in five minutes. I think it has probably been the most successful program in the history of community relations. Why? Because almost every community organization of any kind since the thing started in has been up in lights. I started it in '76. The top of the building was dark because of public protest during the energy shortage, and when I came there I told my boss I’m going to turn the lights on again. He said, how? I said, watch. And I converted the thing to a civic, patriotic thing. The first thing we had up there was an American flag, a depiction of the
Liberty Bell and the dates 1776-1976, and I said, let the public protest that. That was the bicentennial year. We left it up the whole year. So I had the lights on again. Then we started—there were other things which were if not totally universal had significant public acceptance. Now, everything's up there, so the result has been that people who wanted visibility for their particular cause or organization or whatever, and that's practically everybody, is in communication with the company, and when you communicate with people on a personal basis, that's a real community relations program. If you were able to meet their immediate need, put their message up on the board, you've done something for them, so then the interaction has become an enormously important community relations program. I used to handle much of it myself. Now, they have institutionalized the thing completely. And I had half a dozen separate portfolios. I did media relations. I did government relations, community relations, educational programs vis-à-vis the entire school community in Southeastern Pennsylvania, from kindergarten through college and university and graduate school along science education. I ran the information centers of the nuclear plants and had supervision of a public camp in Lancaster County, a thousand acres of campground. I started off lots of programs in all of those places, all kinds of new programs. And some of them fell by the wayside. Some of them weren't all together... you know. I got a lot of movement into the company's relations with its external publics. Most of the programs that evolved and survived were pretty good. The educational program I was very proud of. I had a committee of fifty educators from the entire educational community, teachers, science department heads, school superintendents, university people and I paid them for meetings. They had quarterly meetings as a total group. They split up into six committees and I paid them whenever they met. They got a professional fee for meeting. And they wrote curriculum, they started all kinds of programs. Most of the science curricula that are in the schools in this area now were written by teachers and others and field tested two years before they were put into schools. Field tested, corrected and field tested again and then offered to the schools for free. Most of those programs on energy, particularly, that are in the schools today at every level, the elementary, middle schools, secondary, college and university, are the product of this effort.

INT: Did you have trouble with selling the idea of nuclear power to the public?

CLIFF: We didn't sell the idea of nuclear power. I think a lot of people thought that's what we were doing, and it made it difficult and then the media thought that was so, and I had tremendous difficulty with the media. A lot of fights with them. We were sued at one point on the basis that we were selling, but you could look through the programs and see that basically what we were doing, we were having a full blown discussion of all forms of energy, including nuclear power, and their relative advantages and disadvantages, safety and pollution and cost, but a lot of other work that preceded it. For example, how is electricity generated? We did a survey. It was the first thing we did. The survey showed that four out of every ten of our customers were not aware of how electricity was generated, in other words, what was behind the switch. They had no idea what was behind the switch, and they thought the building on 23rd Street, that's where the electricity came from. They had no idea that there were plants connected with the whole load hundreds of miles away. So the theory was we had to start because if we were starting in schools, we knew that within a five-ten year period or longer, that the kids that were starting, let's say, in a
middle school or a high school, in no time at all they’re going to be our customers, so it was very important from the company standpoint to fulfill an educational mission of having customer understanding of what it is we do and how we do it, and there was a great lack of knowledge. There was very little by way of curricula in the schools, so we did that for almost the entire period. It won a lot of national awards. Companies bought the programs from us, bought the curriculum. Companies as far away as Mississippi would hear about it and would write in and say could we buy it from you. We gave it to free to schools within our service territory, but only on one condition: that the teacher that took the program, his or her particular grade level had to come to a training session first, but everything was free. It wasn’t a terribly costly program. I would say, of all the things that I did over there, that was the thing that I was most proud of because I’ve always had a good feel for education. My undergraduate degree is from the School of Education at Temple in secondary education, in math. I’ve never really thought of myself as an educator, but in all of the educational situations that I’ve had as a teacher, had as an administrator and as someone working in educational programs as I did at the electric company, I’ve always had more of a feel for that than anything else and I probably would have made a good teacher. I don’t think I was ever an especially good teacher or an especially good educational administrator, but I had a great feel for it. If I had been trained well, I think I would probably have done well in the field. But there are a lot of other areas in all of those areas. Out at our camp we had a little building that had an educational function. Right now they replaced the building out there with a large classroom building and an auditorium and laboratories, and they’ve run all kinds of programs there. There wasn’t anything that I let alone. The baseball field that they had out there for the campers and it sloped in the outfield and I turned the whole baseball field around by 180 degrees. I didn’t spend a lot of money but I did it, otherwise nobody would have ever done it. I turned it around, flattened out the field, a beautiful baseball field. I put up a basketball court out there, volleyball court. It’s a beautiful camp. We really turned it into something. I started a day camp out there for the community, brought in the kids. We had a lot of room and we hired a couple of teachers to run a summer day camp out there. I had a little place out there. I didn’t live out there. I had a little place that I could stay overnight out there, so my wife and I used to go out. My kids occasionally would go out there and spend time. I retired from PECO and since then I really have had no great career focus. I’ve done, as I’m doing here, different facets of consulting in the communications area. Sometimes it’s media, sometimes it’s political. Right now, my first year here which is sort of coming to a close and signed up for another year, has been primarily in the area of media relations, but I’m going to try to broaden it by getting this entity, this Fund, better known in the political and governmental community. There are some institutional obstacles that prevented my getting started with it, primarily the huge amount of unrest in the public education. We relate to the public schools here, so the huge amount of unrest in the public schools has prevented an outside organization like this from getting its proper fix in that picture, but I think things are going to get better. So I keep busy here, but I’ve done various kinds of consulting work, almost the whole range of public relations and related types of consulting in the last eight years. I did a year’s worth of consulting with the then law firm of Pepper, Hamilton and Sheet on the newly emerging field of marketing and public relations for law firms. Not very successful. They aren’t really ready for it. There isn’t too much of it going on, but at that time there were about five or six law firms that were doing it and I was doing it for a year. I resigned.
They wanted to sign me up for another year. Good money too. I wasn’t doing anything of great value for them so I resigned. I was, for three years, the vice chairman of Shadow Traffic, which we sold in more or less of a distress sale. It was not successful. I lost some money. I did that...while I was doing consulting I was vice chairman and actually had an office there and participated in the management. I gave up consulting for two years to take over the what essentially was the corporate communications department of Philadelphia Gas Works from about ’92 to ’94, but left in great frustration. That was a much smaller operation, and an operation where the contrast to the role I played in the electric company, where I had largely a free hand and roamed far and wide throughout the company, not having that kind of freedom of movement or creativity at the Gas Works, although I started, as I did at PE, I started the employee newspaper there because I felt the employees were not getting enough information. The one at PECO started as a four-page tabloid and now it runs twelve-sixteen pages every two weeks. It’s a big deal there. At Gas Works they still aren’t terribly interested. I had to really twist their arm to start it. It started as four pages. Maybe once in a while it emerges into an eight page issue, but not as much enthusiasm about it. When I was at PECO, I also had a very unique program I started myself which really caught the eye of the now retiring chairman and he started it for the whole company, for all of the officers in the company. But I was the only one who was doing it when I was there. Beginning on Memorial Day and going through June, July and August, I would visit, as much as I could, every single installation of the company, eighty-five, ninety separate installations, I’d go out there in the morning for an informal meeting with the employees at that installation. That’s rank and file employees in every department of the company, across the lines of every department in the company. I would go out, get up five thirty in the morning. The reason I had to get up early is a lot of the people would be going out in the field like linemen and people who work in trucks, but they would not be out yet. This would be before they were going out into their workday, for about an hour. And I’d go out and I’d give an informal talk on the state of the company and answer questions for as long as they could stay, usually an hour or so. And very frankly, if my superiors would have been there...I never pulled any punches, but I never got in trouble either so...for about the first couple of years I was viewed with great hostility. Not great, but with hostility and suspicion because the employee relations with the management were more or less what most companies were, neither here nor there but mostly veiled hostility and a certain amount of suspicion. They all thought I had a hidden agenda, and my agenda really was pro bono employee. I wanted them to know what management was thinking and what was going on. The questions were very, very hostile. I take it back. I think that was the most important thing I did at the company, not the education. The education thing was the most important thing outside, but this was the most important thing inside. At the end of three years, someone who had seen a number of these because he was in the safety division and he used to go around the system giving safety lectures, so our paths would cross. Sometimes I would have a group like from six-thirty to seven-thirty and he had the group from seven-thirty to eight-thirty. So he used to sit in a lot at the end of my thing and listen, and I said, you know, I’m getting very discouraged. There don’t seem to be any welcoming or any enthusiasm. I said I’m thinking about giving it up next summer. This was like in the late spring, and I had not yet formulated a schedule. So he said, “you’re crazy. They love it.” He said, “They don’t show it but they absolutely love it.” He said that you would be doing them a great disservice if you gave it up, so I decided to keep it up, but I also thought up

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one other thing. This was during my fat days. I’ve lost about thirty pounds, but I have put on a lot of weight just from overeating, primarily stopping exercising. Stopped playing ball. So I used to love coffee and doughnuts in the morning. Of course, everybody else does too if they don’t control themselves too well. So my groups were like thirty-forty people, so I told the local person in charge of whatever group I was talking to out there, whoever was my host, I said, I will pay for coffee and doughnuts for the whole group. You buy whatever you think will cover the whole group and have it ready there six-thirty in the morning or whenever it was that I started. I sometimes would get started very early, like with linemen, six o’clock in the morning. I’d be up at five. So starting with that year, we would have coffee and doughnuts. It just shows, you know, management for me was always that kind of thing. I would walk around a lot in my office, talk to my people in my main office. I had people there also out in the boondocks. They were there, but not too many. But in my main office I would do a lot of walking around contact, moving around, visiting and just a simple little thing like coffee and doughnuts turned around, because the host at all times would be instructed to say the coffee and doughnuts this morning are compliments of our guest, Cliff Brenner, vice president for corporate communications. Well, that went on for about ten years. It was nothing. It was a matter of spending thirty-five, forty bucks a pop for the doughnuts and coffee for having a great relationship with the group and having them predisposed to opening up their ears. So from the point of view of a management technique, they don’t teach you that at Harvard Business School or Wharton School, but it was the one thing that turned, for me, what I thought was an inattentive or at worst hostile attention situation into a very open situation and the thing flourished and the word of it got around the company and Paquette, who’s been chairman—I’ve been in retirement but he’s been chairman, but he was a vice president along with me, but he knew about this and when he became chairman he told me that he was going to have every vice president out in the field visiting and answering questions, and not only that, that the number of times and the quality of what you did was going to be a subject of rating for executive bonuses, so it is now institutionalized out there, and he gives me full credit. I walk on the street and I walk past an electric crew coming out of a manhole, and a guy will see me and say, hiya Cliff. I’ll walk over and I won’t know the guy. He’ll say, we remember you and miss you from coming out to see us every summer. He said, we really used to enjoy that. So I was probably, from the point of view of across the board, other than the chairman and the president, the best known officer of the company because I was out there, and during my visits someone, from time to time, somebody would get up and say, you know, you’re the only officer that comes out here. When I told Paquette that, that was one of the reasons he institutionalized it, to make sure that all the officers got out there. Very important from the point of view of employee relations between senior and middle management. The middle management were the bridge because they were, generally speaking, from my point of view, the hosts of these things. The middle manager in each location would preside over the thing and take the questions, you know, and call on the people and so on. It was a lot of fun. Actually. I miss it. I miss it very, very much. I made a lot of friends. I got to know all of the middle managers very well, and even though they were nowhere near my department, so it was very useful. I don’t enjoy work as much now because I don’t have that freedom of movement and the implied power that was given me and conveyed to me by my superiors. I met a young lady who’s active in cultural affairs for whom I had done a few useful things when I was at the electric company, and she said to me, “oh, here’s
the man who can do everything.” I said, “Not anymore.” She said, “Why not?” I said, “Well, you remember what Archimedes said, ‘give me a fulcrum and I will change the world.’” I said, “I don’t have a fulcrum anymore.” And that’s the key to it, you know. If people are given the measure of freedom to exercise their energy and creativity, you can get a lot of things done and it’s very difficult here. My first innovation when I came here last year, the last week of July, and what they wanted was an annual report from last year, so they gave me a file on annual reports from the preceding year plus the bids for this year, and they said to me, we need this desperately because no one knows what we do or how we do it. No one. And it’s very important. With the money we’re spending and grants that we’re going to report, it’s important that people understand what we do. So I read through the file and I read through the bids. Well, people wanted to produce an annual report of which you have probably seen many, this size, four color glossy color and thirty-six pages. I had done a number of them in PE and I know how many people read them, which is next to zip. They get it and it’s put on their desk in the mail. They go like this and then they go like this. That’s it. (Sound of something being torn and thrown into the garbage) And the two bids that we had were somewhere between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars for about 2000 or 2500 copies, something like that, with four color art. The same thing that everybody does. Everybody. By the way, my people at PECO wouldn’t let me change because I wanted to change. I wanted to send everybody an audiotape for an annual report with the voice of the chairman and president on the audio tape reporting, because everybody has a car or a VCR at home. So I wanted to say the hell with these things. We’ll send one of these to the SEC and just tell them that the full text of this is available from the company or send them a transcription of it, and the financial numbers you can do separately and tell people if they want it they can have it, to comply with the SEC, but they wouldn’t let me do it at the electric company and I was really pissed off. But here, I recognized the focus of this organization is the borders of Philadelphia, by and large, and the people that work here of course are interested, but if they wanted to become well-known they had to send out more than a 2000, yet the cost of these things, if you divide 2000 into 25,000, you’re talking about$10 plus a copy, and that’s a terrible waste of money. I waste money here and there, but, you know, on good and interesting things where you can say, yeah, you’re wasting some money but you’re getting a result for it. And the constituency of the public schools is substantially African-American. To a certain extent Hispanic, to a limited but growing extent. A certain amount of it is Asian. Still a significant amount. So I went to the executive director here, Warren Simmons, who employed me, and I said, are you willing to take a risk on this annual report? He said, tell me about it. So I said, well, what I want to do is I want to produce a four-page annual report which will have all the information that you would normally have in this twenty page, twenty-four whatever it is, “multiple of four page” expensive report. It will have everything that we think ought to be said, except it will be on newsprint. Not only that, I’m going to go to the Daily News and the Philadelphia Tribune, the African-American paper. See if the Daily News will a-produce it for me on their presses and b-stuff it in the Daily News, which has a certain constituency. A lot of it is African-American. And I said I will also go the Philadelphia Tribune and say will you take an overrun from the Daily News and stuff it in the Tribune as well? He said, let’s go. We distributed 300,000 of these. This is the whole program. This is the whole program (shows him the papers) of this organization with what the program is, what schools it’s operating in, who’s giving the money, how much money is being
budgeted this year, thanks to all the contributors, a picture of some beneficiary, Q and A on what we’re all about from the executive director, in a sense a mission statement, who runs the show, our board members, financial highlights. A couple of more pictures. So the Daily News circulation, 150,000 in Philadelphia. We cut out totally the suburban to save a little money. 125,000 to the Tribune and the balance we gave out on a school by school basis to every school employee because they’re involved. All of these things are related to schools in which they operate. And now it’s being used—people write in and say, what are you all about, we have something to send them that tells them everything, because this isn’t only an annual report. It really basically tells what we’re all about it generally, not just what we did last year. So that was my first mission here, innovation, how to make your mark. One of the things that I learned in my work life is when you go into an organization, look around for the most insoluble problem and try to solve it as your first mission, and that way everybody—you’re gain respect if you do it. Sometimes you can’t do it. Sometimes they won’t let you do it. Sometimes they’re afraid. But the first thing to do is to go in and at Temple I got them on the College Bowl. I got to PE, the lights were off. First thing I told my bosses was I’m going to turn on those lights before the end of the year, and here they wanted an annual report and they complained nobody knows anything about us. Not that everybody’s going to read this. But I think the character of my work life has been that I’ve always tried to push the envelope beyond its borders. I’ve always looked for the difficult problems and tried to find ways to solve them that maybe other people hadn’t thought of or thought of and rejected, that maybe needed some modification and basically to use whatever implied powers were given me by my bosses, to use that power to benefit both my organization and the constituency that we served. That was important as well, to try to benefit people. Nobody ever believes ultimately in the total sincerity of that. When I was working for the electric company, you know, everybody would say, oh, your helping screw all the customers, the electric customers. I would say, you should only know, because I was really the customer’s advocate when I was at the electric company because I recognized in the long run that benefits the company. So it’s been very interesting and I try to keep it up, try to still look and will continue to look around. I have about three or four proposals out for additional consulting work with people who desperately need me but don’t know it, and I’m having great trouble persuading them. And I mean it sincerely. They desperately need what I can tell them or even just the most simplistic concepts that would be helpful to them tomorrow.

INT: I’d like to talk to you a little about politics back in the ’70’s, if we can. You decided to run Longstreth’s mayoral campaign?

CLIFF: I didn’t decide. Nobody had asked me to. I was a Democrat.

INT: How did that happen? How did that come about?

CLIFF: Well, Longstreth got the Republican nomination quite early, but his campaign was in great disarray. Probably got in too early, and so the thing sort of got organized like Topsy. Longstreth was trying to manage it himself, which is always a mistake on the part of the candidate. And the other dimension, probably more important dimension, was that there was a
significant liberal defection from Frank Rizzo, who was, by the way, was and continued all along till his death to be a friend. We were friends all along. But he had a lot of liberal defection in the Democratic Party. Bill Meehan, who is a very, very smart guy, recognized that an opportunity existed and that was that if you could coalesce that defection you might be able to make a race out of it. The Republicans hadn’t been making races out of many campaigns. So we’re now coming up from February and the campaign is in pretty big disarray. They had rented a headquarters and people without leadership falling all over themselves, not understanding what they were supposed to be doing, fighting with one another and whatnot. They needed a manager and the campaign needed a manager, but a special type, someone who knew the people who were defecting from the Democratic Party because he was not one of them at the time. He was one of the people that thought that Rizzo was a bad idea for the city and so I got a call from someone close to Bill Meehan who asked, would you come over and talk with Billy. I had known Meehan from my School District days, dealt with him on some of the government relations things in areas where he did have power. Maybe not too much in the city, but state government and so on. So I’d come to know him. And I went over and he said, we’d like you to come over and be manager of the campaign, but not just be the manager. Not only do the traditional management of a political campaign for Thacher, but also organize, in a way that you see best, to try to capitalize on all this defection. So I accepted and proceeded to organize a parallel group to the Republican organization, but particularly in the areas where I felt, where everybody else felt, the opportunity to collect votes in large numbers was very significant. One was in the Northeast, three or four principle Jewish wards centering around the Oxford Circle, in the Northwest, in the liberal Protestant wards as well as the West Oak Lane-East Oak Lane Jewish wards up there, the 50th ward as well as the old 22nd and 9th ward and so on, the old blue blood, silk stocking, Clark-Dilworth wards. And in Center City. Also, in all of the heavy concentrations of black voters in West Philadelphia and North Philadelphia. That was my second job. There had been three opponents of Rizzo in the Democratic primary, Bill Green, David Cohen, the councilman, not David Cohen the lawyer, and Hardy Williams, who is now a state senator. I knew each of them. And I went out and talked to them about the people who had worked in their primary campaign. I recruited about fifteen of those people as volunteers. I paid them expenses. I think they just wanted a piece of the action. I don’t think I paid them until the end of the campaign. I got seventy-five thousand dollars from Bill Meehan for street money in all of those places where you didn’t have effective Republican representation at the time. And the rest of the city we left for the Republican organization, which was not terribly good. But that’s where they were at least were dominant and we didn’t have much of a chance of pulling other kinds of votes there. Well, we lost by forty-eight thousand votes, which represented a turn-around of twenty-five thousand votes. We all felt that if there hadn’t been a huge downpour for two hours in the morning from about the opening of the polls for two hours to two hours before up till the closing of the polls. The late one was bad because in the black wards they were all lined up outside the polls around the block, and the rain just dispersed the lines. We ran a pretty good campaign, I would say. I was very proud of the campaign. I don’t think we left anything undone. We were well funded, in addition to Republican money, Bill Meehan gave me $75,000 for this ad hoc organization, which I gave to all our field workers, distributed for election day, but I think the rain hurt us. In retrospect, we probably went overboard in terms of our public commentary to appeal to black Philadelphia. I
think we probably went too far overboard to the point where we frightened a significant part of the Jewish community. We had Cecil Morer out there, working in the black community, but, you know, when a newspaper prints, everybody reads it. You don’t say anything without it getting back, so he was very inflammatory and he had been known, (though he’s been lionized even by the Jewish community since as a great Democrat he had been known as having a tinge of anti-Semitic types of tendencies. I think probably cultural.) I got along with Cecil pretty well. I know his daughter, an editorial board writer for the Inquirer now. But I think it cost us probably a turnaround of maybe 10,000 votes in Northeast Philadelphia probably, predominantly in the non-cultural, liberal part of the Jewish community.

INT: Are we back on the record?

CLIFF: Yes. I’ll take my hand off the microphone. There’s no question in my mind and I didn’t try to stop it. I thought it was a calculated risk and I didn’t try to stop it. I think that the average conservative Jew living in a row house in Northeast Philadelphia probably figured these guys are going to turn the city over to the “schvartzes.” I know my people up and down the line, the whole panorama of them, and I know row house in Northeast Philadelphia. I grew up in neighborhoods like it. Anyway, there was a campaign of which generally speaking I was very proud of. We had done the maximum. An illustration of what I’ve just told you, we took eighty-five percent of the black vote in Philadelphia for the Republican candidate. I don’t think we took it entirely for the whole ticket, but Longstreth got eighty-five percent. The whole section of black wards coming down the spine of Broad Street and also the spine of Market Street in the west, west of the river, we took every black ward, and nobody has ever done it nor are they likely to do it again unless some similar type of phenomenon. I think Rizzo did a lot to ameliorate his image in later years, and probably would have done much better in the black community had he not died in this last election, and he probably did better when he ran against Wilson Goode and lost, but at that time he was viewed and the media did not help that image as a racist and the mission that was given to me at that time, to capitalize on that, I think we did as effectively as we could. A lot of published sentiment was for Rizzo at that time and the media really did not take Longstreth as seriously as they should have. Part of it was his fault. I don’t mind saying it on the record. As a minority councilman, as one of three Republican councilmen, when he served in the Council before he resigned to run for mayor, he was too quiescent. He did not raise enough hell. He did not tell people the kind of mayor he was going to be if he was elected while he was in council for three and a third years, and that, not the rain, not the lack of money (there was no lack of money,) not the rain-the rain hurt but basically he came into the campaign with an unclear image of what he would do as mayor, whereas Rizzo, as police commissioner, presented a very definite image of what he would be as mayor, tough on crime. He’d be tough on excesses, alleged excesses in the minority community and so on. His very comment, “Rizzo means business.” It was a very double meaning type of comment. So that was the basic thing. In my view, as I look at the campaign in retrospect, the major difficulty was that Longstreth had not really given a significantly clear picture of what he would do as mayor, and so I think that lost it for him. He had everything else. A lot of guts. He was a very hard worker, although a certain amount of public perception of him today is that he’s sort of a clown. Actually the clown thing is really a manifestation of his desire to
be helpful to a whole panoply of organizations which use his name and his reputation and his sort of clownishness to get crowds and get media attention for their organization, so it's very noble work actually. But he had a lot of good attributes. He would have, had he been elected as mayor, probably surrounded himself with a lot of high achieving, independent people and that would have been good, but it was not to be.

INT: The following year you got involved in Richard Nixon's presidential financial campaign. Can you tell me a little bit about how that came about?

CLIFF: The nationally known Detroit-based industrialist, Max Fisher, was probably the most influential link between the Jewish community organizationally and the Republican party, and the concept had arisen at that time that the Republican party conceded too much of the Jewish vote and conversely, the Democratic party took the Jewish vote for granted and in fact was garnering somewhere in the neighborhood of eighty to ninety percent of the Jewish vote in national elections. Also, various significant pieces of that in statewide elections and cities of heavy Jewish concentration like Philadelphia, like New York and so on, were all going to the Democratic Party at that time. So they determined to do something about it, and within the framework of the Committee to Reelect the President, the so-called CREEP, they determined to do something. They were counseled and heeded the counsel to organize it outside of the CREEP. And in fact, I told them—they came to me, the local people came to me, Ed Rosen, Herb Fogel and Leonard Goldfine came to me. Arlen Specter was the local chairman of CREEP and Herman Bloom was its executive director. They had a headquarters, an actual physical headquarters, and I was working in my agency at that time. They came to me and asked me just to organize, do whatever I could with a limited budget, and they would pay me a ridiculously small fee, it was not much of anything. Now right about the same time, I don’t remember the precise timing of the election year, but George McGovern was the candidate already, I think, and he had two operatives, one of whom was Gary Hart and the other was a guy named Sterns, and both of them signed an Arab-American ad which protested the affinity of the United States for Israel. McGovern himself had made a number of very equivocal statements about what his relationship would be like with Israel. McGovern was very much an ultra-liberal. At that time, you were starting to come out of the euphoria of the Six-Day War. It was five, six years later and problems were beginning to emerge. So I didn’t like what I was hearing and I was experienced enough listening to politicians to know what he was saying, and I didn’t like directly what two of his principle assistants, people who would be very likely to be significant figures were saying Gary Hart was no small potatoes. He was not a senator yet. Sterns was a well-known activist. All this has happened about the time that Herb Fogel, Ed Rosen and Leonard Goldfine came to me and asked whether I would be willing to do it. There was another very significant reason. Because I had run the campaign, (I didn’t realize this at the time), but because I had run the campaign against Rizzo the year before, the three people who were going for the Democratic nomination for president, Muskie, McGovern and Humphrey had all formed organizations in Philadelphia, and all were courting Rizzo for their candidate. I would have gone to work for any one of those three Democratic organizations, probably more than most Humphrey. I was pretty much a centrist Democrat so I would have gone for Humphrey, but I would have probably gone, at that time, in the early days, this was the pre-
primaries, somebody from Muskie had come or McGovern and said would you like to handle PR
and other things for our primary campaign, I would have said yes if they had come first and had
some money down on the table and so on. Probably Humphrey more than most. My secretary, my
previous secretary, was working already for the Humphrey campaign, Marilyn Young.

INT: June 6, 1997, Andrew Harrison with Mr. Cliff Brenner

CLIFF: So I found out through the grapevine, that all of them were interested in me, but
independently, not even talking with one another, had all rejected the idea of my coming to work
because they were afraid that this would inhibit their ability to get Rizzo interested in their
particular candidate. Look, Rizzo was mayor of Philadelphia, so I don't blame them for wanting
his support in the campaign. He had a big constituency. I didn't blame them, but the fact that my
friends in the Democratic party from the days when I first got into politics were scattered
throughout these three campaigns, and all three concluded that my presence in their campaign
would jeopardize their chances with Rizzo, which was not true, by the way. But Rizzo always
told me, "When you were in the mayor's office and I was a captain, you were the one person that
I always regarded as my friend, because I knew your boss didn't like me." (Dilworth didn't like
him at all.) So he had always told me that. When he was mayor, I always had the courtesy of the
office. He used to invite me to his box at the Eagles game almost every week. So people just
didn't know, by misjudgment, and I was furious, and I in effect said, when I was evaluating
whether I would go to Nixon to take part in the next campaign, I thought about this and I said,
"F--- them, I'm going to take the Nixon assignment. I'm my own man." My mother was furious at
me. My late mother was furious at me. She was a left-wing socialist and she was furious. But I
organized a pretty good campaign. I got about fifteen, twenty people of some ability to be a
Speaker's Bureau. We circulated notice of their availability to speak either at debates or
independently, or to share platforms, and they were all busy. Good people in the community. I
do n't remember too much who they were. I know Steve Harmelin, one of the partners at
Dilworth. I had people who could speak. I spoke. I had a very good pat speech which I'll tell you
about. So I had a speaker's bureau. I collected pieces of literature from columnists who wrote on
the Israel thing from the Jewish press and from other places. I developed a mailing list of Jewish
organizations and I circulated that. I had a big coffee—a major coffee in the Northeast of Jewish
committeemen of both parties. I had—I don't even remember who I had to speak but he was pretty
good. I forget. We turned around, to a significant extent. We changed a good many votes in the
Jewish wards.

INT: So people were responsive.

CLIFF: People were responsive, and it wasn't a major campaign. I had no billboards. I think I
printed a bunch of bumper stickers and gave them at that big coffee. I had a couple of hundred
Jewish committeemen. I figured that would help. I ran the speaker's bureau. I had a mailing every
week. I got in trouble because the CREEP people, Herman Blum particularly, who was a friend,
and we finally wound up being angry at one another. Specter stayed out of it fortunately. But I
also stayed out of the bad publicity that came out of that office and Heshy Bloom went to prison
on some of the election law violations in that office.

INT: Were you aware at all of any of the stuff that was going on?

CLIFF: No. I stayed out of there. I never went into the office at all. They tried to get me to come to meetings and I wouldn’t go.

INT: Why was that?

CLIFF: I just didn’t want to associate with the general Nixon effort. I wanted to do my thing for Israel. That was the main reason. People asked me, why are you doing this, and I said, “I cannot contemplate letting George McGovern in the White House under any circumstances.” There were sort of a lot of fishy stories about what Kissinger did and what Nixon did during the Yom Kippur war, but I accept the idea that McGovern would have had it in the U.N. and Israel would have been screwed. I wouldn’t agonize it even if I couldn’t rationalize it. I wouldn’t agonize it later. I made my decision and I delivered what I was supposed to deliver. But also at that time, as a result of my work in the Longstreth campaign, Bill Meehan and I got very close and I changed my registration to Republican, so I’ve been a Republican basically coming not from the Nixon thing as much as the Longstreth campaign. But the Nixon thing contributed to a large extent to my being rejected by the people who were then taking over the Democratic Party. Rizzo. Pete Camile, who didn’t like me too much. Tate didn’t like me too much, all because of my association with Dilworth, not so much because of the Longstreth thing but because of Dilworth things. So nobody was ever willing to ask me to do anything or offer me anything. I’ve never asked for anything. I probably could have run for an office or something, and maybe I would have been a good office holder for them. They all knew me and to a certain extent respected me and to a certain extent they liked me, but they didn’t like my politics. I had a feeling of independence. I don’t mean I spit on everybody. I’m in a reasonable way an organization person. I am a team player. In that context, I’m an organization person. I’m not an organization person to do blindly what people want me to and not exercise some kind of judgment on what people were asking me to do or say, but I am a team player. Once I’ve agreed to something I play with the team. So I stayed a Republican and I’ve been active in Republican campaigns ever since. Anything else you want to ask?

INT: One final question. What’s the climate for Jews right now in Philadelphia? Is it still restrictive? Have Jews gone into the mainstream?

CLIFF: Well, politically you have a Jewish mayor, a Jewish district attorney, a Jewish controller. You had—where else? You have a Jewish senator from Philadelphia. You have a certain number of Jews in the State legislature, the State senate, Allison Schwartz. I think politically there is significant, if not proportionate, representation. There is certainly no lack of Jews being heard politically. The Jewish community has a Jewish coalition which functions in Harrisburg. I know the Jewish community has been active in this but I think also on their own motion, a number of the officers and key people in business and industry, that there’s much more acceptance of people
in the Jewish community, coming from the Jewish community. I think in a number of the
traditional businesses, Jewish businesses, there’s certainly no lack of Jews running those
businesses or have an influence in them. Take something like three of our four sports teams. The
Sixers and the Eagles and the Flyers, all of them are significantly controlled by Jewish
entrepreneurs. Communications business. Here, likewise, our communicators. You have—I think
there are a lot of Jewish figures in the community. It would be hard for me to tell you, because the
change for me has been very imperceptible. I personally have never felt oppressed by anti-
Semitism. I know it exists and I don’t deny its existence, but I’m talking about me personally,
since I left the Army. I thought in the Army I saw a lot of it, I experienced a lot of it personally.
Since returning to Philadelphia, certainly vocationally, I never felt it. Three of the key jobs that
were given to me in my career at Temple by Millard Gladfelter in the mayor’s office by
Richardson Dilworth, at the Evening Bulletin by Earl Selby, at the electric company by Bob
Gilkeson and Lee Everett and John Austin. I’ve had Jewish colleagues in all of those places, not
to any great extent at the electric company, but I never behaved at the electric company as if I
were a token Jew. Whenever I was asked to give a blessing at a dinner or a luncheon where I was
more or less presiding, I always explained to them that I was going to give the blessing in Hebrew
and I would give Hamotzi and then translate it for them in English, not to flaunt it but to show
them that I came from a different culture and that this is the way we do it, but that I was also
delivering it in English, which essentially is what everybody says. Hamotzi is what everybody says.
And I was known, you know, and I let it be known throughout the length and breadth of the
company, I have never made a single attempt to conceal it, so I feel that that’s what you have to
do. You have to not wear it on your sleeve but certainly not conceal it, and use whatever
opportunities you have for your interactions with other cultures and other religions to express
yourself and express the similarities and differences, the uniqueness and so on, and I think that’s
happening more and more. You have a Jewish president in the University of Pennsylvania, the
second one in a row, and Temple, I guess, has missed—had a Jewish president for a time and no
longer does, but hell, they never had a Greek president before either. Who am I trying to think of,
the Jewish president at Temple? Liacouras’ predecessor. He’s chancellor now or something.
Marvin Wachman. Look, what can I say? I don’t feel uncomfortable and I feel progress is always
being made and I think it will always be made if things are approached in the right way and with
courage and with conviction and pride in our origins. So come back if you like. If you feel you
have more questions, I’ll always be happy to schedule another session.

INT: Well, thank you so much for taking part. It was a pleasure.
The following is posted on behalf of the Task Force on the impact of technology on teaching and learning (of which Maureen Pastine is a co-chair). All library staff are encouraged to attend the following upcoming session.

Faculty Town Meetings on the impact of technology on teaching and learning
Where: Kiva Auditorium
When: April 9, 1999 from 9 a.m. to Noon, or from 1 to 4 p.m.

The format will be informal. Sessions will be the same in the morning and afternoon, your choice as to which to participate in, and will include: distance education, copyright and intellectual property, electronic access to information, campus plans for the Tuttleman Learning Center, and a proposed high tech facility, training, and information/instructional technologies development, IMAARC, and Internet II.

Everyone is invited to participate. Your ideas and the discussion will help shape the future of technology at Temple! See the web site at: nimbus.temple.edu/schifter/town_meeting

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