INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA EILBERG

INTERVIEWER: We are here, this is January 29th [1996]. This is Mike Martin speaking. I'm with Josh Eilberg, and the first thing we need to get on tape is your consent to do this interview. It's supposed to be on tape.

JOSHUA EILBERG: You have my consent.

INT: The other matter of business, I guess we should start with your birth date.

EILBERG: 2/12/21.

INT: Okay. And you grew up where?

EILBERG: Basically in North Philadelphia around Seventh and Parrish Streets.

INT: And were your parents immigrants?

EILBERG: My parents were both born in the United States. My mother was born in 1896. My father was born in 1900.

INT: They belonged to a Conservative synagogue, is that right?

EILBERG: Yes, they did. And my mother was the more active one in that regard.

INT: What was that called?

EILBERG: Sons of Halberstam.

INT: Now was that neighborhood where you grew up almost exclusively a Jewish one?

EILBERG: It was largely Jewish. This represented an advance for some people. Much of the Jewish community that I came from resided in South Philadelphia, and as the Jewish neighborhood expanded, this was one area to which the Jewish community moved, that is, North Philadelphia between Girard Avenue and Spring Garden Street.

INT: Was there any particular reason why there were Jews in that area? Was there any work that attracted them to that area?
EILBERG: I suppose a dominant factor in that community was there was a very popular shopping area in that community on Marshall Street between Poplar and Girard which was very well known to the Jewish community. It had Jewish butchers and pushcarts, and almost a foreign atmosphere, which was attractive to Jewish people.

INT: Let's talk just a minute about your grandparents as we proceed on chronologically. Your dad's side of the family was from where?

EILBERG: From Lithuania.

INT: And it was his parents who came here, correct?

EILBERG: No, it was my mother's parents. My paternal grandparents died at a very early age. I scarcely remember my paternal grandparents. I do remember my maternal grandparents who were strong figures in their own right. My maternal grandmother was a family type person and very, very strong figure maintaining the family. My grandfather was a strong figure, also. Very religious. Very devoted to making a living and providing for his large family.

INT: How big was his family?

EILBERG: I think there were about nine children, boys and girls. And they lived in a big house, which accommodated various members of the family from time to time.

INT: Did your mom come from a big family as well?

EILBERG: That's the family.

INT: That was your mother's family, I'm sorry. Your dad's family?

EILBERG: He came from a large family also, but would be, my father's parents going at an early age, early in terms of my chronological being. I did not have as close ties to my father's side as to my mother's side.

INT: I see. Who were you closest to in her family, besides her? In terms of her relatives?

EILBERG: She had, my mother had a younger sister named Molly who was
very interested in me and provided me with many opportunities. For example, she introduced me to classical music. I remember she gave me a couple tickets one time to see and hear an opera at the Academy. And another influence was a cousin of mine who was raised as an uncle in the Jaspan family, which was my mother's family. A leader type, and had some influence on me as I was growing up.

INT: How so?

EILBERG: Well, he was interested in what schools I went to and what my activities were, and what clubs, if any, that I belonged to. I remember him very kindly. He occasionally would give me small gifts of money.

INT: What clubs were you belonging [to]?

EILBERG: Well, a little later one that stands out most in my mind was the Boy Scouts. The Boy Scouts had a great influence on me, coming as I did from a family where I was the only child, and I almost needed that training and independence.

INT: Just for the record, what was his name, the uncle you referred to?


INT: Oh, I'm sorry. He was your cousin.

EILBERG: And an uncle figure. His mother died at an early age, and he lived with my maternal grandparents.

INT: What did your parents do, and you are an only child, correct? Your dad worked in what capacity?

EILBERG: Well, in the early part of the Depression he was a life insurance agent for the Metropolitan Insurance Company. Getting into the Depression, he became unemployed and drifted from one job to another. Now, his problem in terms of the employability was that he had been a major breadwinner in his own parents' eyes, as his family was growing up. So he lacked training, and life was more difficult for him as a result. I had the opportunity later, when I was in the state legislature, of being able to secure a job for him as a non-teaching assistant in the public school system, and ...
EILBERG: Yes.

INT: And before then, though, he was, in the 1920's an insurance agent?

EILBERG: 20's, 30's.

INT: And the 30's. I see.

EILBERG: He tried various things, and later in life, perhaps late in life, he tried to make up on his own for his lack of formal education, and he read a great deal, and was very proud of his reading.

INT: And your mother?

EILBERG: My mother was a deeply religious woman. She frequently read the siddur, the Jewish Bible [sic – prayer book]. She had an intelligence, though. She went to business school rather than high school, and learned bookkeeping, and grew to know the federal income tax system. Federal income tax. And developed a little business from a very early point, very early time, filling out income tax returns. That continued for a long time.

INT: Okay. So you grew up essentially during the Depression.

EILBERG: Yes. In addition to what I said, it had a profound influence, in that I learned the value of the dollar, and there was never a lot of money around. We ate and had the minimum essentials. But it was a struggle, a struggle for my parents.

INT: Did you move from Seventh and Parrish once, and then back?

EILBERG: Yes. We moved further north to the area of Roosevelt Boulevard. I went to junior high school there.

INT: Roosevelt and Broad around what would be called Logan?

EILBERG: Logan, yeah.

INT: And you did junior high there.

EILBERG: Yeah. But that was during the Depression, and we just couldn’t make it financially, so we moved back to the old neighborhood, and into the home of my grandparents.
INT: I see.

EILBERG: And then after that period we stayed in that neighborhood, moving into another small property.

INT: So did you live with your grandparents? Did they share the residence with you?

EILBERG: Yeah.

INT: I see. So...

EILBERG: We had a small apartment in their home.

INT: I see. So then you went to Central High. And...

EILBERG: That was a good experience.

INT: What was that like?

EILBERG: This was an extraordinary high school, which stands out in my mind as probably superior to my college experience, in terms of the quality of teaching staff. I remember this was in my senior year, my English teacher being a specialist in Shakespeare, and he would act out roles in the classroom, which was quite exciting. There were classes on art appreciation, music appreciation. This was and is still a famous school, equal, and we're very proud of Central High.

INT: Were there other kids from your neighborhood going there as well?

EILBERG: Yes, there were. The school was about one mile from where I resided.

INT: How did you get there and back?

EILBERG: Generally walked. Occasionally we had a trolley car, but a mile was not that significant.

INT: Did you have close friends who you traveled back and forth with every day, or spent time with at the high school that you remember well?

EILBERG: Yes, I guess there were. Yeah.
INT: Were you involved in activities other than academics, like clubs or any sort of sports, or anything like that?

EILBERG: No, not really. As far as sports is concerned, my mother had ... with her emphasis on education, had encouraged me to skip a grade, which I did twice. But I was therefore younger than many if not most of my classmates, and physically smaller. So I was not good in terms of high school sports, although I played ball on the street corners. So sports was not a major activity in the early years.

INT: What are your memories of the summers like? How did you spend most of that time? Did you work?

EILBERG: No. It was still very much the Depression. It was very hard to get anything. I went back to the Boy Scout movement, and went to summer camp, as a Boy Scouts. I became a leader in the Boy Scouts.

INT: And you said that that influenced you greatly. In what way in particular, thinking back on it?

EILBERG: Well, to learn more about depending upon oneself. That the world was larger than my immediate community. To learn new things. Generally it was a learning experience. Things that I learned in the Boy Scout movement, they later helped me while I was in the Navy. For example, in the Boy Scout movement one learns to use semaphore code, you know, the movement of the arms, and that was useful in the Navy.

INT: You mentioned that you had, your mom was very religious, and did you have an older gentleman in the neighborhood who tried to get you to become educated? Taught you Yiddish and the Bar Mitzvah?

EILBERG: Well, my mother performed that role. And for a couple of years before I was thirteen years old, she placed me in a neighborhood religious school under the tutelage of a learned man. I trained for Bar Mitzvah, and then learned how to write Yiddish.

INT: Was he a rabbi of that synagogue?

EILBERG: He was trained as a rabbi. He was not the rabbi of the synagogue that I mentioned. He was in the immediate neighborhood, and one paid him so much a week, and he was the instructor. And he had a room in his house which he used as a study room. He would have four or five students,
each at different levels. It was individual instruction.

INT: Did this training have much influence on you?

EILBERG: It strengthened my identity as a Jew. After Bar Mitzvah I did not practice my religion very much. One of the major reasons was that there was no attempt to train me in an understanding of what I was reading. One read Hebrew, but no translation. And I was expected to go to synagogue and pray, but generally I was more anxious to get out of there. The atmosphere where praying was taking place, and the congregation was standing up and sitting down, and I didn't understand what was going on. So this experience, I think, was very frequent in my generation of Jewish people coming from crowded neighborhoods.

INT: But did both of your parents observe weekly?

EILBERG: My mother did.

INT: Oh.

EILBERG: My mother read at home. My father was probably brought up in the same kind of environment that I was, religiously speaking. My father was, his father was a very religious man, but I believe did very little to inculcate religious training. (Pause)

INT: Were there any holidays or festivals that you can remember, Jewish or otherwise, in those years, in your high school years?

EILBERG: The observance of Passover in my grandparents' family was a festival time of the year. We had the Passover Seders, and the thing that I remember most vividly now is that my uncles and aunts who participated in that Seder under my grandfather's leadership, had good voices, and it was fascinating to hear them sing with such vigor. It was really a very happy experience, at the time, having gotten together, the kids, would be talking to one another and so forth.

INT: Was that exceptional to be in settings where there were a lot of people, particularly relatives, for you? Was that an exceptional experience, out of the ordinary?

EILBERG: It was a high point of the year, religiously speaking, yeah. Of course, the solemn occasions were Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, but those
were not fun times. The Passover Seder was a festival in our family.

INT: Okay.

EILBERG: What's interesting, also, not that I'm a specialist in music, but many of our Jewish songs have different melodies, depending upon where they're played, I mean, within the same community. So today I remember some of the strains of my grandfather's Seder performed, and they are the most enjoyable.

INT: So you graduated high school in 1937, correct? And after which...

EILBERG: I should add perhaps, let me say that I can't emphasize too much the pleasurable feeling I feel about Central High School, having gone there. (Pause) After Central?

INT: Yeah. Okay. After Central what did you do?

EILBERG: At that time I had an uncle, my mother's brother, H. Jerome Jaspan, who was a State Senator. And I received a State Senatorial scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania. At Penn, and entered the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. The typical course at the Wharton School was a five hour a week course, with four hours broken down into sections, and for the most part I would have a graduate student as the section leader. Or teacher. And one hour a week would be with the department head perhaps, or the professor who would lecture on the subject. And all the sections would be brought together for that master's lecture.

It was not a happy time for me. I felt that I was a number and scarcely a participant in the learning process. It was also not a happy time because we were still in the Depression, and very much in the Depression, and the Wharton School then was attracting kids from all over, because of its educational attractiveness. People wanted to go to the Wharton School. And a lot of these kids were rich, and I was not. So while I joined a fraternity, there was a difference. It was apparent, sometimes, which was not a happy thing.

I was encouraged -- I had a B+ average at the Wharton School, which was pretty good -- I was encouraged by my one particular teacher that I had in a law course, an undergraduate course, to go to law school and become a lawyer. His name was Dr. Calendar. And he was just about the only
teacher that took interest in me. That may be an exaggeration, but that's all I can remember. I was very much imbued with the idea that if I ever had a son, that I would do whatever I could to see that he went to a smaller school and get the benefit of a real education. And that opportunity came, and my son went to Swarthmore College, one of the finest small schools in the country, and it was of enormous value to him.

INT: Did you live at home while you were at Wharton?

EILBERG: I lived at home, and belonged to a fraternity. It was a very unusual thing not to live in a fraternity house.

INT: Did you do that for financial reasons?

EILBERG: Yes.

INT: So you graduated from Wharton in 1941. And what did you do next?

EILBERG: I applied for admission to law school at Penn for a year. But during the middle of that year was Pearl Harbor day, and by the end of that year, the law school had been completely emptied out. Everyone was getting inducted into the service.

INT: So you went into what branch of the service?

EILBERG: The U.S. Navy. I was fortunate, in active duty. I was very fortunate in obtaining a reserve commission, so that I entered the Navy as an ensign, although after succeeding years I left the service as a lieutenant (senior grade).

INT: What are your memories of that time? You were there for three years? Three years in the Navy?

EILBERG: It was more like four years. Three and a half years.

INT: And where were you stationed?

EILBERG: I was assigned to communications, and after indoctrination at Cornell University. (pause) I stayed at Cornell for a couple months for, to being learning the communications that were necessary for the Navy. Then I was transferred to a location at a training school at Harvard. So we had classes in the Law School at Harvard, which also had vacated because of
its students going into the service.

I then went to the naval air station at Norfolk where I was assistant communication officer of a fleet air wing, which was largely a training wing for pilots who were learning how to fly sea planes. I got married while I was at Norfolk, and so—that was a happy time. There were opportunities. While we lived in Norfolk, Virginia, we could go to Baltimore, which was a fun city. We could go home to Philadelphia. And I don’t know a better place to live. It was a Navy town overrun with, it was a great sea port, and there were a lot of Naval personnel, sometimes rowdy, but by and large it was a very happy time.

INT: How did you meet your wife?

EILBERG: I met her while I was going to Penn Law School. She was an undergraduate at Penn. And we saw one another, and while I was stationed at Norfolk, I was frequently able to come home to Philadelphia for weekends, and we would date. So that was that. She graduated from Penn. After we married she got a job as a social worker in Arundel County, Maryland. And after the war she went to social work school and obtained a master's in social work from the Pennsylvania School of Social Work which later became part of the University of Pennsylvania.

INT: So when were you married?

EILBERG: January 2, 1944. And after being stationed at Norfolk I was transferred to the Naval Academy, and we lived, my wife and I, on the grounds of the Naval Academy while I received a year's training in a course called "Applied Communications," which I learned more about radar and counter-espionage. And living at the Naval Academy was interesting and fun also. Wonderful, beautiful surroundings.

INT: Where was that?

EILBERG: Annapolis.

INT: Annapolis, okay: So I'm confused about when you moved from Norfolk or you were shifted from Norfolk to Annapolis.

EILBERG: (Pause) Went into the Navy in '42. '44.

INT: But they moved you so that you could have this additional training. It
was important.

EILBERG: And then after that, the war was over. Armistice Day came in the European theater, and they were still in the Pacific theater, so that when I went over, I was trained to be assistant communications officer of the organization called Fleet Airwing I, which consisted of a number of ships and aircraft which were...

INT: Where was that?

EILBERG: That was in the Pacific, in the China Sea. So I was headquartered in Okinawa. I went to Okinawa, and then aboard the flag ship which was a ship called the sea plane Tender, a large ship, called the Norton Sound, and we patrolled the China coast, and I actually spent some time in China, which was quite interesting.

INT: You weren't there for too long.

EILBERG: No, just a few months.

INT: Was that the time when the atomic bombs were dropped?

EILBERG: It was just after.

INT: Just after. You were sent just after that happened. Oh, okay, so the war was over. Okay.

EILBERG: I arrived in Okinawa when the war was over and there were still some Japanese holed up in caves in Okinawa. That was a gruesome place. I mean, we had necessarily bombed that place into smithereens, and I remember seeing it from the air and it was just like a desert, full of debris. A terrible sight, actually. The natives were in rags. It was quite sad.

INT: So you arrived back after a couple of months. Came straight back to Philadelphia?

EILBERG: Yeah.

INT: Was released of active duty?

EILBERG: Correct.
INT: And what did you do? Looked for a job?

EILBERG: I applied for readmission to the law school. And unhappily learned that if you'd been away for four years it was quite, quite difficult to adjust to studying quickly again. And I resumed my education after a very brief time at Penn, at Temple Law School, where I graduated, let's see.

INT: 1948?


INT: Oh, wow. You actually spent a little time at Penn Law School?

EILBERG: Yeah. I tried it out for a month or so, and they were accelerating courses to try to make up for lost time. I was not happy in that hellishly crowded atmosphere.

INT: Was Temple's Law School not quite so big?

EILBERG: Correct.

INT: How did the experience, you said you weren't as used to studying for long periods of time when you came back. This indicates maybe you had a change in sort of your habits, from the time in the military. What specifically was it that changed you?

EILBERG: Well, I found that I was not concentrating. My attention was not focused on what I was hearing, and I did not feel that I was absorbing enough.

INT: Was there a lot of partying and hanging out with the guys and drinking and that sort of thing?

EILBERG: No, it wasn't that. It was just the intense, very intense competitive atmosphere, and I went to Okinawa, and I was other places I had been, and that accelerated a program was not for many people who had been diverted for four years.

INT: So after you graduated from Temple Law School, you had to look for a job, correct?

EILBERG: Yeah. And I got a job at a small office. And then went out on my
own for a couple years. I became active politically, as I told you, and ...

INT: It would be good to give us a detailed account of how you actually became interested in politics and became involved.

EILBERG: All right. (pause) I became interested in politics long before this time, because I had witnessed and observed many political activities of my uncle, Senator Jaspan, who I referred to earlier. I would see him see constituents, I would see him give campaign speeches. There was an excitement about it. I became strongly interested as a youngster in politics as a result of watching his activity, and felt that I would probably like to do that if I had the opportunity.

At the time that I was married, if not before, I became interested in liberal activity. I used to read a newspaper called "PM." My wife read it also. We are of the same political mind. This was the liberal press. One of the principal writers was Max Lerner.

INT: Isn’t he a judge, a justice?

EILBERG: No.

INT: He wasn’t a legal scholar at all?

EILBERG: No.

INT: I’m getting him mixed up with somebody else.

EILBERG: I began to read that magazine religiously. Daily newspaper, actually. It came out of New York. And putting these activities together, it occurred to me that if I could try to follow the liberal causes, and engage in the kind of activity that I had seen my uncle involved with, and at the same time earn a living from the contacts that I made, that that would be a wonderful thing.

INT: What were some of the efforts that your uncle undertook which you believe might have...?

EILBERG: It was the process at the time. It wasn’t the issues that he addressed that stand out. I was interested in the things that he did, the kinds of contacts that he made. The way he handled people, the way he spoke on a platform. He was a State Senator for twelve years, so that I had some
opportunity to see him in action. The issues part of it came later.

And so after the service, we lived briefly in Germantown, in an apartment in Germantown. Politically I was interested then, but the Democratic Party was miniscule in Germantown. It was heavily Republican, and I wanted to grow in the Democratic Party. So we moved, when we moved to the Northeast part of the city...

INT: Which was when?

EILBERG: (Pause)

INT: It was before 1952, wasn't it?

EILBERG: Yeah. It was '49.

INT: Okay.

EILBERG: I started attending Democratic Party meetings and listened to the activities. One thing I recognized, that became important, was that there were not many Jewish people in the meetings that I attended. The party was heavily Irish Catholic in the Northeast. So I soon realized that there was an opportunity for someone of the Jewish faith. And began to ring door bells and encourage others to, as they moved into the neighborhoods of the Northeast to register Democratic. And became very good at it, very successful at that activity. So that soon after I was in the Northeast, living in the Northeast, the Democrats won the city, and the District Attorney's office, Richardson Dilworth, I applied for and secured a job as an assistant district attorney under Dilworth, and served in the D.A.'s office from '52 to '54.

INT: So you particularly admired Dilworth?

EILBERG: And Joseph Clark. Later Senator Clark. These were important voices at the time. The city had been Republican for a long time, and according to the press, it was "corrupt and content," was a popular phrase that was used. And so I don't necessarily agree with that. It was run down. It needed a new force. And Clark and Dilworth represented a new force, and people that they attracted, which included me. I was one of the...what developed into an army of supporters under their leadership.

INT: As an early campaign worker, people in neighborhoods in the Northeast got to know you, because you would knock on their door. But you weren't
anybody's representative at the time. You were just involved in the Democratic [Party].

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

INT: Okay, we're back, we're on the second side of the first tape, and we were talking about the early involvement in the Democratic Party, after having moved to the Northeast. In 1952 you got that job as an assistant district attorney.

EILBERG: Correct.

INT: And what are your memories from that time? You were there for a total of what, about two years?

EILBERG: Two and a half years.

INT: Did you feel like your move as a private lawyer to public service was something you wanted to do for a long time and you liked it?

EILBERG: It was important for a lawyer who was interested in a period in court to go through that exercise with a kind of training period. And I found that I got some good results, and was advanced during my period in the D.A.'s office. I started as an assistant assigned to preliminary hearings, and by the time I left, I was involved in some homicide cases, and also some racket cases. I worked on a couple of cases with Dilworth himself personally, which was a great thrill, because he was at that time already a famous trial lawyer. It was a good time, also, because Dilworth supported his staff, and although many of us were not highly trained, and may have made some errors or oversights, he encouraged us all and never criticized us severely. He was a good boss.

INT: Were you one of the only Jews in the office?

EILBERG: No, there were several others. To mention a few, Leon Katz, Charles Wiener.

INT: Were they Democrats, too?
EILBERG: Yes, they were, I believe, all Democrats. Let me say that of the original staff of 28 or 29, I think there were three holdovers and there were at least three Republicans. But for the most part these were Democrats. Although affiliation with the Party was not necessarily a criterion for getting a job as an assistant D.A.

INT: But it tended to be.

EILBERG: Yes.

INT: Did you feel that you were given the job partly because of your work for the party?

EILBERG: Well, I sought and obtained the endorsement of my Democratic leader. I don't think it was a reward in any way for my work in the party. It was just another identification.

INT: So you remember that time as how? Exciting? It sounds like a lot of new things.

EILBERG: Yeah, it was very exciting. I had not been in a criminal courtroom before being in the D.A.'s office, and it was exotic to say the least to see another way of life, and how it was dealt with. And the criminal process.

INT: After 1954 you became a member of the Pennsylvania House. Can you describe how it came to be that you became a Pennsylvania representative?

EILBERG: I became known to the Democratic Party leadership in the Northeast because of my activity, and successful activity, I had been very helpful in securing large numbers of people to register Democratic. I was active in the community, and ... the leadership felt it would be politically good to balance the ticket. So they endorsed me as the Jewish candidate in an area where there had not been one before. My work in the D.A.'s office had given me some prominence at that time, so that I had an advantage over other people who were interested.

INT: Can you explain a little better how the situation of Jewish candidate in that area, and how that was worked out and the party leaders, what was going through their minds?

EILBERG: The population had increased substantially following the post-World
War II population explosion. Many thousands of people had moved into an area that was previously farmland. Because of the legislative reapportionment, new boundary lines were drawn, and I lived in what had become a three-member district. It was three members for the first time. Up to approximately this time, the registration was predominantly Irish Catholic, but now with the population explosion, it was pretty evident that to balance the ticket, there should be a Jewish member that should run, that should be endorsed for the Democratic party and run. So that in this three member district, three members that were endorsed were Katherine Pashley, Catholic, Leo McKeever, Catholic, and Josh Eilberg, Jewish. So I was selected, and was backed as representative of the population, and having a name that was recognizable, or becoming recognizable.

INT: Was your neighborhood in the Northeast a Jewish one?

EILBERG: Yes.

INT: When you moved there, and then it grew?

EILBERG: When I moved there we were in relatively beginning stages of the move-ins or the expansion of the population. So the expansion was largely Jewish.

INT: I see. What were your duties, what duties were given to you your first few terms, which were memorable for you at that time?

EILBERG: One of the activities that stands out at that time, was the city of Philadelphia had a legislative program. As long as the legislature was in session, the city tries to advance its interests through informing the legislature, so that the principal activity in those early years was for me personally, as well as part of the group, to take the city legislative program and try to advance it as best as possible. That meant learning the details of the legislative program, and speaking to committee chairmen and attending committee meetings, participating in floor debate. And I did this with some energy to the extent that as time went by my activities were noticed, and I started a rise in leadership. At one point I became Democratic Whip of the house. And later by '65, '66, I became the majority floor leader. I personally aspired to becoming speaker, but the state-wide leaders at that time felt that I would be more effective managing the house and the floor rather than in the speaker's chair, so I never did get a shot at being speaker. But I had a great, great, very exciting time as majority floor leader.
INT: You seemed to work your way up pretty fast. Was your elevation to this position as majority leader considered pretty fast?

EILBERG: Yeah. I did things that were not being asked. The city had a legislative program; I would apply myself to it without somebody pushing me. I took the program and ran with it. Needless to say I was regular as a party man, so I could be relied upon to try to protect the interests of the Democratic Party. I realize that today party regularity is not such a big thing. But I guess what I'm saying, what I did was typical of the times.

INT: Did you have a role in making Temple a state-related institution at the time?

EILBERG: Yes, indeed I did. I was very interested in education, and in addition to that, the city was very badly in need of help. We developed the idea, Temple needed, in addition to funds, always in need of funds, it had the need for additional buildings and the money to pay for those buildings. We met with Millard Gladfelter, who was I believe president of the university at that time -- he died recently, by the way -- and discussed the program. We felt we could not get the votes if we tried to do it for Temple alone, because that would not directly benefit other parts of the state, although obviously many students from outside of Philadelphia could go to Temple, and did go to Temple. But in order to get legislative support we had to do something to create a state-related system, so we conceived the idea of Temple, Pitt and Penn State becoming state related. And you didn't know that?

INT: I didn't know that that was when it originated. That's fascinating.

EILBERG: Needless to say, Gladfelter was fascinated with the idea. I don't remember whether the idea was his. One of our people in Philadelphia came up with this idea. I had the pleasure to help work it out. The idea was to try to reduce the tuitions that were paid by Temple students, and the original idea, and the idea that we had when the legislation was adopted, was that we would move towards eliminating tuitions entirely. Like City College. That never came about. In fact, tuition has gone up in those years.

INT: Did you ...

EILBERG: The other aspects of the program went on. Was to have a board of directors that was partially public in its appointment. Some appointed by the Governor, some by the legislature. At one time I was a member of the
board of trustees. When I was majority leader, in fact, I became a member of the board of trustees. And the other part of the program was that the state would pay for the construction of new buildings. And a number of buildings were built totally at state expense. I don’t remember the names of the buildings, but I walked around with the President of Temple University as this building came about, because of the program.

INT: When you were at Temple Law School, was part of your experience that tuition was a little bit high, and you wanted to bring it down now that you were in the House? Was that part of your thinking, or was it something that came from the way things were developing?

EILBERG: No, it was not related to my attending Temple, because as a veteran, my tuition was paid. I didn’t have that problem.

INT: I see. Philadelphia was changing at the time. There seemed to be newspaper reports, and some of the scholarly work that’s been done showed how increasing numbers of people living in the suburbs and a lot of business was moving out there, a lot of consumer spending was moving to the suburbs. Did you feel that, and as someone who lived in the Northeast, and represented that part of the city, were there fears at that time that the city was losing ground to the suburbs?

EILBERG: We were more alert to the fact that the suburbs were resentful of Philadelphia. Any program that we wanted for Philadelphia, or involved Philadelphia institutions, frequently caused resentment or negative votes by upstate legislators. We were, of course, aware that people were moving out. The situation is more dreadful now than it was at that time. But it was important to build Temple, and Community College came into being at that time, also. That was a very exciting development. I mean, for me to be able to say that I participated as leader when Temple became state-related is breathless beyond words. You didn’t know any part of this, I guess.

INT: So the high point of your time was obviously the last two years when you were majority leader.

EILBERG: Yes. I’m not sure of the year of the adoption of the state relatedness. It might have been during the two years before, but I think it was while I was majority Leader. I was minority whip, and then I was majority leader. I don’t remember the year of adoption of the legislation.

INT: Were you the top Democrat in the state at the time, since the Governor
EILBERG: Yes. There were other elected positions, like Auditor General of the State of Pennsylvania. This year, for example, we'll be voting for Auditor General. Secretary of the Commonwealth, Genevieve Blatt, Auditor General was Tom Reinhart. These were elected officials. But they had really little to do with the exercise of political decisions or political power. The best example, I guess, to expand a bit on what I've just said, there was an agency called the General State Authority, which was the construction wing of the State government. It was under the auspices of the General State Authority that Temple built these buildings under the relatedness program that I just mentioned. Now there was a board which included the Auditor General, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Democratic leader of the Senate, and myself. And this board met once a month with the Governor, with Governor Scranton. Now I was the spokesman for the Democrats on the General State Authority. So it was my job to lead in the questioning of every meeting of the General State Authority. Why are we doing this, why are we doing that? How much money does it cost, and are the people reliable. It was a great opportunity to engage with Governor Scranton and his thinking. He was a very smart and cagey man, however, so there were no embarrassing moments that I can recall. That gives you some idea of the politics of how it worked. The majority leader, therefore, was sort of the operative head of the party of the state. Under those circumstances, the Senate was Republican, and the Governor Republican.

INT: You mentioned education as a major interest while you were in the Pennsylvania House. Were you also involved with mental health issues?

EILBERG: Yeah. Before that one bit of expansion on education, the state school subsidy was constantly not enough to satisfy the meetings of the Philadelphia School System, so that a major item in the education field was trying to revise the formula or the method used to determine how much state aid should be given to the Philadelphia School District. So I was involved in that, and that was quite a problem. We had some success with that. I don't mean to say I did all these things myself. I mean, it's part of the group of which I was leader, or the leader.

And what was your question?

INT: The mental health issues.

EILBERG: I was disturbed, as were others, and it became a scandal that was
recorded in the newspapers, about the Byberry State Hospital, and how people were, on Roosevelt Boulevard, people were put there as patients, and literally forgotten, so that there were people who were there twenty years, thirty years, dreadful pit. So I became interested, and the idea was to get people out of the hospitals. We learned that through the use of medications and use of medications that many people could be at home rather than in a state hospital, could live with their families, and could be productive, economically productive. So we pushed for reforms in that area, and that resulted in a state mental health act, which caused a thorough re-examination of what the practice had been with substantial reforms.

In my legislative district, I was just outside the district, but it was while I was majority leader, there was an institution on the grounds of the Friends Hospital -- Friends Hospital being for mentally ill people -- a movement which I was very much one of the leaders, to develop an out patient mental health facility. That became known as the Northeast Community Mental Health/Mentally Retarded Association. I was able to get some money through the state legislature for that institution. And assisted also in Northeast Mental Health Center, getting matching money under the Community Mental Health Act, which I helped to put through. And so I was well-known to this organization, and they gave me what is an annual award when they give it out, a Kennedy Award, which was a reward for the efforts I had made on behalf of the institution.

INT: Were there any other issues that you remember, besides these: education, mental health? Anything else come to mind from those years in the Pennsylvania House?

EILBERG: (Pause) It's hard to remember.

INT: What about your social life, or your family life at this time? Were your children born?

EILBERG: I have a son and a daughter. William, who now is a patent lawyer, and Amy who now is a Conservative rabbi. They were born in the early fifties, and were going to school certainly during all the time that I was in the State legislature. My wife was home with them, looking after the children and the home.

INT: Was she working at the time, I mean, maybe just after their birth?

EILBERG: No, she stayed home. She was also very helpful in my political
activities, and this activity increased substantially over the years. She would ring door bells with me. She would work at the polls at election time. She'd make speeches, she'd raise money. She has been a great partner, in terms of my career at a time when she was not as interested quite as I was.

INT: Did you have your own law firm even while you were Representative?

EILBERG: Yes, I did. Except for the last two years when I was majority leader, it was not a full-time job. So there was time to devote. Also you didn't, you don't and you didn't, get rich as a State Representative. It's an important job, but few people know about it, relatively few people. So it was desirable to develop additional sources of income.

INT: Did your partners at the time who were good friends, who you had met, or you made, or were your partners, did you have a couple of partners at the time?

EILBERG: Yes.

INT: Were they, how did you get to know them?

EILBERG: I don't remember specifically. The legal community at that time was not a particularly large one, so you get to know all the lawyers very easily.

INT: I'm just trying to cover everything before we get into your days as Congressman. I guess that's just about it, unless there's something else you can think about.

(Discussion of whether the interview should continue today or not)

INT: Alright, well then, let's forge ahead. 1966, you win the election to the U.S. Representative from the Northeast. How did that happen?

EILBERG: There was an incumbent who was very ill. His name was Herman Toll. He had become handicapped, in fact. And chose not to run again. It was legislative reapportionment, as a result of which the new area, most of which he did not represent, was a new congressional district. In other words, the area that Herman Toll represented was only a fraction of this new area. And this was a part of the general movement as a result of population reductions in Philadelphia. Philadelphia steadily lost representatives, legislative districts, congressional districts.
I enjoyed Harrisburg. But I felt that the activities there were limiting in terms of numbers and kinds of activities in which I might be engaged. And the obvious is that State legislature has nothing to do with foreign affairs -- not that that became a specialty of mine, but there were so many things one could do as a Congressman, than as a State Representative. A lot of people don't know the difference between a State Representative and a Federal Congressman. So it was very interesting, the prospect was very interesting. Plus the respect that is normally given to a Congressman. So the opening was there, and I applied for endorsement of the Democratic Party. By this time my activities were fairly well-known, and I was endorsed by the area leaders, and I don't remember whether it was a primary fight or not, but I was nominated, and there was a vigorous election campaign. My opponent was a lawyer named Robert Baer Cohen. Robert Baer, B-a-e-r, I think.

INT: Was he Jewish, too?

EILBERG: Yeah, Jewish, too. Now of course the congressional district was much larger than the legislative district. The legislative district had a population of about 50,000. The congressional district had a population of about 450,000. And I might say that as the years went by when I was in Congress, I appealed more and more to the total district, so that I was carrying Catholic strongholds very well by the latter years. So basically the same thing in terms of ringing door bells, community activity,

INT: What was the breakdown in that 450,000 person district at the time, when you first ran? In terms of ethnic background?

EILBERG: It was about 40% Catholic, about 1/3 Jewish, and the balance Protestant and other denominations. Very white, predominantly white area. It's interesting that some of this sounds ego-oriented, but I hope you don't feel that that is, I don't mean it that way. But we took a basically a non-Jewish area and created Democratic majorities out of it.

INT: By virtue of your efforts, knocking at doors.

EILBERG: Yeah. And the conclusion was that while I was, certainly during the latter years of my tenure, I had an influence on the other candidates who were running, State Representatives, State Senators and so forth. Because we were winning Democratic seats all over. And after I left the result was the contrary, so for the most part, today, eventually all those legislative seats are Republican, my influence not being there any longer.
INT: And you mentioned to me once that going from majority leader to a lowly freshman, bottom of the rung, even though it was in the U.S. House represented a...

EILBERG: Drop in prestige.

INT: A drop. How was that particularly felt?

EILBERG: Well, I missed the trappings and the ability to personally see through projects and activities which I could do with the help of others, and it was much harder to get sometimes the support of other people. And when I was in Washington, because I was a small cog in a big wheel. It was something for me to get used to. But I thought it was worthwhile.

INT: Were you in contact with other prominent people in Philadelphia politics, like the Mayor and various council people, representatives, even when you were in Harrisburg? Was that a regular part of your job?

EILBERG: It wasn't regular, but it was frequent. As legislative projects would develop. This brings up another point which I think is interesting. People have said to me over the years, "I don't vote straight party. And I vote for the man." And that's, on principle that sounds fine, but I tell you it's advantageous to have people of the same party up and down the line, at city, state and federal level, so that I can have easy, one can have easy communication with the others. There is frequently a party barrier which comes up when the official at the next level up or below is in another party, because that official frequently is thinking of a course of action that might be helpful to that individual politically. So I say, I would most often say, if you're voting for me, vote for the party because you will enable me to bring back more legislative progress for you.

INT: Were there members of the Philadelphia political community who you remember well from speaking to them, between 1954 and say 1970? Besides Dilworth and Clark, you mentioned.

EILBERG: Well, Jim Tate was one who comes to mind. Mayor Rizzo comes to mind. I was not of the, on the same political wavelength as Mayor Rizzo. But he was a Democratic office holder.

INT: What do you mean by that, by not being on the political wavelength as Frank Rizzo?
EILBERG: He was not a liberal.

INT: How was that manifested? What is your memory of your key differences?

EILBERG: I didn't have differences as such. It was not, one tolerated one another as office holders. He was a big law and order man, and ...

INT: You liked to work things out, you liked to talk things out more than he did. Is that kind of what you're saying?

EILBERG: Yeah.

INT: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

EILBERG: It's hard to identify specific things at this point. But we worked together at certain times.

INT: Okay. I have here that your primary areas of concern while you were in the U.S. House were the consumer, senior citizens, immigrants, and veterans. Do you want to take one of those and discuss maybe some of your duties as an advocate of, maybe we should get into your, maybe this is the most important thing for this project would be your role in helping Soviet Jews get out and your time going after Nazis. Could you talk about that a little bit? Nazi war criminals.

EILBERG: Coming to Washington, I was aware that an issue that had not been attended to was that of Nazi war criminals in the United States. Their entry into the United States. Now this was appropriate for me, because as the chairman of the immigration subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, it was appropriate for me to look into. And as you know, Congress has oversight powers over the other branches and that means that as part of our responsibility, not always carried out, to see what the legislative programs are, and how they're being carried out, and how the money is appropriated, or being spent. None of the other function, it was easily open for investigation. The issue of admission to the United States, since we had oversight into the immigration program in the United States.

We conducted legislative hearings, which I chaired, bringing in scholars and experts, or whatever information they had, and members of the executive branch, to explain or try to explain the size of the problem and how it came about, and what we might do about it.
To make a long story short, or shorter, we discovered over the resistance of the executive branch, the executive branch did not want to talk about this, but the problem was that during the time of the Cold War particularly with Russia, the Soviet Union, our intelligence agencies were so intent upon admitting or learning what was happening behind the Iron Curtain that we were admitting virtually anyone who said that he had knowledge of what was happening. And this included a lot of Nazi war criminals. We never did get an admission from the ...

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

INT: We're on the second tape now, first side. We're in the middle of a conversation about Nazi war criminals and the attempt to understand just how a number of these people ended up in the United States after the war. Okay. Here we go.

EILBERG: To go back very briefly, there were many people in the displaced persons camps following World War II, and as we liberated them, we did not know these people, and they would be questioned, sometimes very quickly and not thoroughly, and they might say anything as to who they were and where they came from, and what they knew. But a lot of these people who were in the displaced persons camps were admitted to the United States simply on their assertion of special knowledge. And we don't know the numbers, we don't know the extent of it, but this came through more and more as we looked at individual cases that were brought to our attention.

There was an office in the Attorney General's office that looked into individual cases, but it had limited power and did not do very much. As a result of our efforts and the publicity that was attended to it, we helped create the atmosphere that there should be a more structured agency, to look into individual cases and denaturalize and deport individuals as they came to the attention of the Attorney General's department. So following my departure the next legislature did create such an agency, and it exists today, and a number of people have been denaturalized and deported, but each year it becomes more difficult because so many of these people have died through natural causes, because of age and so forth. That was an activity of which I'm very proud, and which many people know me today for my role in that issue.

INT: Can you remember a couple of the explanations given as to why these people claimed special status?
EILBERG: Well, they claimed special status to enable them to short circuit problems in being admitted to this country. And it became somewhat ridiculous, an application, because I remember one case where someone in a displaced person camp said he knew something about farming techniques in the Soviet Union, and he was admitted to this country because he said he had special knowledge of farming, and that's how anxious our authorities were to try to get people with knowledge.

INT: Now there was the issue of Soviet Jews.

EILBERG: That is a poignant issue. The Soviets were unwilling to have a drain of those people to the United States or to Israel. And did everything in its power to keep those desirable elements within the country. And used all kinds of excuses as barriers to letting the Jews go, such as these people, many of them engineers and technically trained, having "state secrets." It was only an excuse, but they used it repeatedly as a reason for not letting Jewish people go. Saying that we don't want our state secrets to be revealed to the outside world. Well, we were getting more and more requests for help from Jews in the Soviet Union who were brave enough to protest under threat of long prison terms for being disloyal to their country. And there was a rising objection from the domestic Jewish community.

In 1975 I led a congressional group on a visit to the Soviet Union to explore the needs of these Jewish people. By this time we had some reason to believe that the Soviet government was relaxing its barriers, so this group included Hamilton and Elizabeth Holtzman, Christopher Dodd, Ed Medzvinsky. We went to Stalingrad, to Moscow and Kiev. And we were permitted, I would say, to visit with refuseniks, or those who had lived as Jews in the various cities that we went to. And we heard from Russians directly in their homes or near their homes what their problems were in trying unsuccessfully to get out. As a result of that trip we put pressure on the Soviet officials, and we were able to get some individual Soviets out. That was a very exciting congressional visit. And illustrates what can be done by putting the glare of publicity on the governmental activities. People talk about congressional trips as being a waste of the taxpayers' money, I think of that trip and feel that it was very useful.

Back home, by this time, our immigration laws were such that we could not admit unlimited numbers of people to enter this country and there was a principle developed, well-developed that if the numbers were not available that an exception could be made, and a good exercise of what is called parole. So that when large numbers of Russians began to become desirous
of coming here, Congress did not have the time to take up every individual request or every group of requests, and so representatives of the executive branch and the two chambers would, when they would agree, the parole would be exercised. On the House side, because I was Chairman of the Immigration Sub-committee, I was the House Leader in terms of exercising parole, and these numbers would be checked and verified by our staff people to see if they were realistic, and then we would have these discussions. Ted Kennedy was in charge of immigration and hence parole on the Senate side, but he was so busy with all of his senatorial activities that he just physically could not put in the time that I was able to put in on this issue.

The administration was well aware of my being Jewish, and being interested in Jewish people, among others. And we had two big problems at the time: the Russian Jews and the Vietnamese boat people. I remember one occasion when someone representing the administration in the State Department said we want to parole, I don’t remember the number, it might have been 10,000, Vietnamese boat people and so we are agreeable to the parole of 10,000 Soviet Jews. They were kind of pulling my leg, but I kind of liked that. That was a good way of approaching that problem in terms of trying to get agreement. We exercised parole a number of times when large numbers accumulated. I might say going back to the congressional trip, there was a brave man, Natan Scharansky, who is around today, lives in Israel, who was their leader on so many of the visits that we made, and who later ended in jail for seven years, Soviet jail, for basically showing us around, and introducing us to the refuseniks. That was an important part of my work, and one which I feel really very good about.

INT: Had you been there once previously?

EILBERG: Yes. We were there in 1969.

INT: "We," being...

EILBERG: My wife and I. That visit was a sentimental journey, because my wife was born in the Ukraine, and I was very desirous of seeing where she was born. And this was relatively in the hinterlands, south of Kiev in the Ukraine. The Soviets are not happy about our visit. They suspected Americans of anything and everything. This was 1969. They told us that if we wanted to leave Kiev, you really can’t go south because it’s snowing and there’s snow on the ground and so forth. And this was some local authority that was giving me this. I said, "We’re going anyway." And there was no snow. But
the things that we observed that they were not proud of perhaps was the dirt roads, the thatched roofs of houses, the outhouses. No gasoline stations, but occasional trucks on the road from which they dispensed gasoline to cars. These were not a modern society and they knew it. These were the things that they were concerned with that we not see. The roads, these rural roads that we saw were busy with military vehicles going north and south, covered with tarpaulins. They didn't want us to see that stuff. I remember during the trip visiting different synagogues in the area, and these synagogues were led by Jewish people who had become supporters of the Communist system, and at each synagogue, it was almost an automatic thing. The synagogue president would speak to my wife in Yiddish and say, "What is the Congressman really doing here? This doesn't concern any of his activity. Why should you be here?" And they simply would not accept the statement that I wanted to see my wife's birthplace. (laughs) Actually, she did not recognize anything except a lake where the family had visited on weekends and where she had gone swimming as a little girl. So that was my sentimental journey in '69.

INT: Were you debriefed after that time?

EILBERG: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow they have had -- I don't know that they have now -- real security problems. For example, sometime before that visit the ambassador was speaking into a hidden microphone on his desk, which they discovered afterwards, so that everything he said was being taken by the Soviets. They had in the embassy -- this is a fixture, so there's nothing really new about this, I mean, no secret about it, I guess -- a glass suspended room. It's suspended by some device from the ceiling so that theoretically it's immune to any invasion with wire or anyone listening. So I was taken into the glass room and debriefed as to what if anything I had seen, or not seen anything of security interest. But we were very cautious.

One concern that I had on that trip, our embassy people I thought were not doing a good enough job. Not so much the ambassadors, but the consular officers. In other countries, our people would go out with the population and make some, come back with information as to what was happening socially, economically, politically. Labor, anti-labor. And the Soviet Union, I found that of course, they were under heavy pressure from the Soviet government, but too often our people were just reading magazines, Soviet magazines, and not going out and doing anything, so at that time I questioned the effectiveness of our people, our embassy people. Of course, they're not supposed to be spies, but I think part of their job was to learn the
communities in which they’re living.

INT: Were you in contact with Israeli officials?

EILBERG: Yes. During most of the time that I was in Congress, Israel was having all kinds of problems, economically and security and militarily. And during much of that time, there were thirteen members, thirteen Jewish members, of which I was one. I became very friendly with the Israeli ambassadors and the personnel of the Israel embassy. Was a frequent guest, together with my wife, at the Israeli embassy, got to know these people and their families pretty well. I’ve watched the legislation that affected Israel on the floor of the House, and had frequent discussions with the Israelis as to the meaning and effect of this legislation and what their needs were. I frequently, there was nothing confidential. I was not part of the intelligence committee of the House. I frequently exchanged information with the Israelis to learn their concerns and I’d like to say something. I’d try to do that. And we had several visits to the State of Israel. And I’m very proud, we were very proud that our children have been very interested in the State of Israel and speak Hebrew fluently. At one time at the Israeli embassy, one of the officials told me that my son spoke flawless Hebrew without an accent.

INT: These frequent trips to Israel, how many can you think of?

EILBERG: Three, four.

INT: And your children learned Hebrew how? Going to school here?

EILBERG: Yeah. My daughter also lived in Israel for a couple of years.

INT: We didn’t cover this earlier, but I guess we could go into it a little bit. Your children and you mentioned your son went to Swarthmore, and then he went on to where?

EILBERG: Harvard Law School.

INT: And he became a lawyer almost immediately after that and has been since?

EILBERG: Yes.

INT: Your daughter, you mentioned, was a Conservative rabbi, or is a
Conservative rabbi now, but where did she do her education?

EILBERG: She went to Brandeis. She also went to Smith College where she got a master's degree in social work.

INT: Did they attend a private or public high school here?


INT: Was there an incident when you were a member the House involving another member of the House who wanted to help you get an amendment onto a bill having to do with aid to Israel?

EILBERG: Yes. There was a Congressman named Jonathan Bingham, from New York State. And on one occasion I, there was a bill affecting Israel coming up, and I discussed an idea with the Israelis at the Embassy, Israeli Embassy, and they were appreciative. We both understood tacitly that it would not do for me to offer the amendment, because this would be a Jewish member attempting to play favorites with the Jewish State. And so I did not offer the amendment. I'm sitting on the floor of the House at the end of the day, during the amendment process, and Bingham comes to the floor and offers the amendment, and I'm startled, because this was the amendment that I had proposed. I should interrupt by saying there's an institution in Judaism where a synagogue's work is not performed on Saturday, so that a non-Jewish person sometimes may be permitted to turn on lights and do menial tasks on the Sabbath. This person is called a "Shabbas goy." Well, the amendment that Bingham offered was adopted, and with that he walks up the aisle and stops where I'm sitting on the aisle and says, "Josh, I'm your Shabbas goy." And that was highly entertaining.

INT: Okay. We covered a lot. Let's see. I think it would be good to talk a little bit about how your district compared to others in Philadelphia, and the differences, ethnic related and otherwise, to your district.

EILBERG: Can we go back to one item; you're interested in the ethnic makeup of the district, and I said before there was about a 40% Catholic, Irish Catholic for the most part. This brought about an interest in 1977 to visit Northern Ireland. I was interested in this because this was in my opinion a suppressed people, suppressed element, and I didn't like some of the activities of the British government, and I knew that this was an interest shared by the Catholic community in my district. Now one of the items that concerned me from a oversight point of view was in connection with visiting
or immigration to this country. And our government had developed a policy for restricting Catholic visitors from Northern Ireland, purely on suspicion that the individuals were part of the IRA and were really visiting the United States to stimulate funds for the IRA. And I learned that these charges or beliefs were not substantial in many cases, and prejudices were easily formed against these visitors, sometimes political visitors, sometimes scholars from Northern Ireland, and decided that a useful thing for me to look into would be that, and to visit Northern Ireland. And that was one of the subjects that we investigated.

Now part of the responsibility of our Consul in a foreign government is in this area to pass on the bonafides of the proposed visitor to this country what he’s going to do or she’s going to do here. And turn down the visa if the consulate feels that the purpose is not a proper one. It’s entirely discretionary. Well, we learned on the spot that our chief Consul in Belfast, Northern Ireland was not making these decisions, any of them. But any time an applicant came in which they were compelled to take, there would be a wire to immigration service, State Department in the U.S. asking for Washington’s opinion as to whether this visa should be granted or not, and Washington would indicate what to do. Now this was entirely inappropriate. Our chief Consul was under the law supposed to make these decisions himself, and not have Washington decide it. Well, we raised hell. That was one of the things.

It was a whirlwind visit, several days, during which I interviewed the leaders of all the principal parties, including Ian Paisley, fascinating, bitter man. And walked around Belfast and visited the prisons where if you were the least bit boisterous, I’ll say, you’d be thrown in prison and be kept incommunicado. There were all kinds of political parties involved by this occupation by the British government. And for two days at least I was in constant communication with the various leaders of the various parties. And it was non-partisan visit, although I formed opinions which I’ve already expressed to you. But I did what you are now doing, with the, what do you call this, the tape recorder. I was taping conversations and developed a series of interviews with Catholic and Protestant leaders of Northern Ireland. The report became a fixture in the Catholic community in my district.

Now how did that compare with other districts? It had a larger Jewish population of any other district. By this time there was a Jewish exodus from the city of Philadelphia. Which has become more intense over the years. The district to the west of the Northeast district had a much higher percentage of Black population. What can I say?
INT: Where were the Jews staying in the city, Mt. Airy?

EILBERG: Mt. Airy.

INT: Were a lot moving out of your district?

EILBERG: Not at that time. I would say the movement roughly, -- now this is not scientific -- roughly began around the mid-seventies, and increased since then. The neighborhood in which I was particularly located, Oxford Circle and Castor Avenue, you may not know them, there was a constant exodus out of that area. And what is happening in that area is that small families, new families just starting out are moving in just as we did many years ago. And these houses today cost less as a new home, as a residence. For example, a house in Oxford Circle might cost only $50,000 today, which is low, considering the inflation and what not.

INT: Did you feel that the Northeast was kind of a, was almost like a suburb within the city in some respects?

EILBERG: Yes. Oh, yes. Many people in the Northeast never went into town, and scarcely had any contact with other parts of the city.

(PAUSE)

INT: This is Mike Martin speaking. I'm here with Josh Eilberg, resuming this interview. It is now January 31st, [1996] and we're going to now resume. I guess we should probably say, you should provide consent again.

EILBERG: Yes, I do consent.

INT: Okay. Do you want to talk about your time as Executive Director of Brith Sholom?

EILBERG: Yes. I'll say a few words about that. Brith Sholom is a multi-faceted organization with social and political aspirations, as well as a strong, charitable arm. Also it's a brotherhood. Brith Sholom, along with many other Jewish organizations of its type probably reached a zenith in the early forties, and this type of organization generally has been contracting, so that what was once a national organization is now reduced to members in Pennsylvania, and New York, and New Jersey. Regarding its social and political polls, the ideology is predominantly right-wing, Likud by nature. So that there were activities that embraced those political positions. I might say
that after I left the militarism was somewhat reduced as a matter of policy. That is not to say that I produced all the militarism, but I was part of it.

The predominant areas of concern were Israel and Soviet Jewry, and whenever an appropriate opportunity came up, we would express ourselves, either in a parade, or by picketing, or some visible activity. For example, I remember being in New York one time with some of our brothers from Brith Shalom and picketing the Soviet Embassy because of the treatment that they were giving Soviet Jews. The charitable wing was impressive, and continued to be impressive throughout my time. And there were occasional speakers, for example, I remember having the leadership of Aish Ha Torah, a religious organization based in Israel, and they came in and told us what they were doing with basically working with Jewish teenage boys, teaching religion in the State of Israel, and apparently they were doing this with some success. And there was great interest in this by our people, and we had a crowd of about 500 persons at this particular event. I remember also engaging a speaker (Dr. Baruch Blumberg), who was Jewish from the cancer hospital who had received a Nobel Prize in medicine. He spoke about his achievement before a large audience.

Another charitable event -- and these charitable events were very often identified with the titular leader of Brith Sholom, Alex Stanton. He was very much interested in an institution called Bet Halochem, which was located in Israel and Brith Sholom participated in funding this institution to a major extent. In the minds of many it was identified with Brith Sholom only, and we had occasion to visit Bet Halochem, or a new branch that was constructed in Haifa in addition to the one already existing in Tel Aviv. It was a moving sight to see a place where veterans wounded, permanently wounded veterans of the State of Israel had a place to call home, and where they could receive therapy, and this was a permanent home for them. Their injuries were permanent. It was not a hospital. That's a brief outline of my activities there.

INT: Did you spend a lot of time fundraising?

EILBERG: Yes, I did. There was hardly an event where we did not have a component of contributions. Very commonly the contributions were made by the individual lodges. There were chapters, or lodges, and each would sometimes vie with one another in terms of making larger contributions. It was a good exercise, I mean, a good activity.

INT: Now, for the record, you were there from when to when and for how
EILBERG: Well, we just visited. In visiting the State of Israel we arranged at one time a visit with Brith Shalom and another time just the family visited. There were numerous visits, which I can't specifically remember, to Israel, if that's what you mean.

INT: I was thinking about when you became involved with Brith Sholom, and then when you left.


INT: Have you continued to stay in contact with some of the people there, or was that a permanent break?

EILBERG: It wasn't a permanent break, but my interests developed elsewhere.

INT: And you mentioned that after you stopped serving the public, you went into private practice.

EILBERG: Yes. By the way, at Brith Sholom I was a paid executive director. It was not a large sum, but I was paid. I wanted to make that clear.

INT: Maybe you should also say, just for listeners who don't know about Brith Sholom, how would you define it? A fraternal organization?

EILBERG: I would define it as a fraternal organization.

INT: Fraternal, men and Jewish men.

EILBERG: That's right. There's a women's component, or auxiliary.

INT: And where was your chief meeting place, and were the activities largely social?

EILBERG: The activities were largely social, but we used the Brith Sholom House, which was the senior citizen residence, for people who chose to reside in the senior citizens home. We used that as a meeting room frequently.

INT: Where was that?
EILBERG: That was in West Philadelphia on the edge of Fairmount Park. I don't remember the street name.

INT: Great. Okay. You, after leaving public service in 1978 became a private lawyer. Was this, is this a law firm that you had maintained over your years?

EILBERG: No. I went into business for myself, and one area of the law that has interested me for a long time is the matter of criminal defense. You will remember, perhaps, that I was in the D.A.'s office under Dilworth, and developed an interest in criminal law in practice at that time. And went back into that and still do some of that, but it's winding down now, obviously.

INT: What type of work, what did that involve, you were working for the prosecutor's office, is that correct?

EILBERG: No, we were working for indigent defendants.

INT: I see.

EILBERG: That too, was on a very modest pay scale.

INT: Have you maintained an involvement in politics, in the Democratic Party?

EILBERG: Yes, I have. That has excited me for a long time, as we have already discussed. And so I live in Jenkintown now with my wife, and am somewhat active with the local Democratic Party. At this time I'm completing a nomination petition for a local Democratic candidate for State Representative, whose name is Larry Curry.

INT: Do you want to say anything about the Hahnemann Hospital incident?

EILBERG: Yeah, I want to do that.

(END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO)
INT: Second side, tape number two. Question was: would you like to say anything about the Hahnemann Hospital case?

EILBERG: I remember when I became active in politics thinking and realizing that my political career could not be considered secure and in fact I had had an uncle who was a State Senator before me who lost an election, and that terminated his political career. My thinking on that subject was that if that happened to me that I would have a place, the law, just to hang my hat. At least that. So I maintained a practice, although it was hardly personally practicing, because I was just too busy in public office. However, I had partners who minded the store, and I tried on occasion to bring some business to the law firm. And so I was well into my congressional career when I secured the opportunity to represent Hahnemann Hospital, a major corporation in Philadelphia. My law firm was small, although growing, and not well-equipped manpower-wise to handle such a big client, but we undertook to do so. Unfortunately for Hahnemann, it was financially in difficulty at the time that we took over, and was borderline insolvent, and could have been bankrupt. So it required careful resourcefulness to pay bills and continue with the daily activities of the hospital. Of course as I said I was not personally able to handle the legal affairs of the hospital, but the hospital was satisfied with the relationship and arrangement. There was a period of time when, of about nine months, getting down to the area involved, when they simply were not able to pay some bills and among that group were bills to the lawyers' office. And so after some progress was made, at one point they paid a sum which embraced about eight months in bills at one time, responding to a list of clients and amounts that were due to the lawyers. And all these sums had been earned, there was no question about the propriety of the billings or the time spent, or the amounts charged. Unfortunately for me there was one subject which was reviewed too quickly by my associates, and in fact not reviewed at all by me, but for which I was nevertheless responsible as a partner. Remember that I was a congressman lawyer at this time.

The pay involved was from an agency which bore the name Philadelphia on it and should have been noticed as a government agency. That is important because under federal law a Congressman, a U.S. Congressman, may not participate as a lawyer in the income of a law firm resulting from appearing before a city, state or federal agency. And the outfit involved was a city related agency. Now I don’t know the exact amount, but I know that I learned afterwards, I say afterwards, I did not know and did not intend to take as part of the odd portion or fraction as a partner in the total proceeds and did not and perhaps should have looked over that list more closely.
As a Congressman, I was a Democratic Whip, and it was part of my job that with the coming in of the Carter Administration to participate in identifying holdovers in the outgoing Republican administration and to inquire and pressure where appropriate to secure Democratic replacements. And I say naturally, from the city of Philadelphia, there were calls and contacts to identifying holdovers and for me as a senior member to do what I could to secure replacements. One of our targets was the U.S. District Attorney, David Marsden, who was a holdover. It was not a question of whether or not he was competent, it was a matter of practice since time immemorial to replace incoming administration people with the older people. Now Marsden was trying to do his job as he saw it and was pursuing Democrats, prominent Democrats, while we were pursuing him. And he apparently sort of investigated many prominent Democrats and decided to look into my background, and it was he who discovered that I had received a small sum of money in the neighborhood of $500 to $2500. I had no more information other than that broad receipt. And it was sort of like a tug of war. We were pulling at one another, and he proceeded and found this, I think, relatively obscure situation, which I had scarcely, which law I had scarcely heard of before and there had been no prior prosecutions under that law, none at all.

One incident that became particularly damaging to me was on one occasion since the people in the administration were moving very slowly in making replacements, I called and received a call back from the President himself, President Carter, and I gave him the problem, told him it was important to the Democratic Party in Philadelphia. He said he would see what he could do. But some reporter picked up his diary, or daily log, and saw the call to me, and this created a storm that I was calling the President for a partisan political purpose. Carter should not have called me, but he was being criticized by many administration people for not having sufficient contact or communication with Democratic members. So with that background, and in order to terminate what was an ugly experience publicity wise, I decided to plead guilty and get the matter behind me. I could hardly plead not guilty, even though I did not have the intent, the law did not require the intent. The mere receipt of the proceeds was sufficient to convict.

Well, all of this made big press, and I was indicted just before the '78 election, a couple of weeks before, which was a party touch, I believe, from Mr. Marsden so as to assure my defeat in the coming election, which is exactly what happened. And some reporters feel that what I did was dastardly and
not to be forgiven. And (they) seemed never to forget. For me, life goes on, and I and my family continued to try to live in hopefully the best possible circumstances. That's about it.

INT: That was great.

EILBERG: I admit it doesn't sound great, but it's an explanation.

INT: It was very detailed. It should help people who want to investigate the issue, to hear your perspective. As I said, the newspaper reports at the time don't seem to bear out your views. Obviously since you had a legal case involved, you weren't talking very much. Now, since it's almost 20 years ago, at least you can provide historians with information about what was going on from your perspective.

Was there something about impeachment, you were very prominent, being a member of the House Judiciary Committee during the time when the impeachment of Nixon was considered. And you came to the attention of a lot of people, as did many members on that committee. You came to the attention of the country at that time. Is there anything really memorable to you about that, about those proceedings?

EILBERG: It was a very deep subject, by that I mean there was a lot to read and to know. And my recollection now is that it was very hard, very hard at the time to absorb all the strains of the problem, and still conduct my daily business as a U.S. Congressman. There was no surcease of activity on the Congressional side as opposed to the investigative side, because the investigative side was more than a full-time job in itself.

Committee was interesting. The make of the committee, in addition to the usual division of Democrats and Republicans, with a majority of Democrats, we were all committee because we had a Democratic majority, there were different levels of thinking among Democrats, there were conservative Democrats, southern Democrats, liberal Democrats. Among Republicans, there were moderate Republicans, conservative Republicans. Very interesting to bring this amalgamation together and remain civil with one another. Sometimes it was not very easy.

Just quickly jumping to the conclusion of the committee, it's remarkable as I think about it, that that committee with many bright, very bright people on it, all lawyers, was able to agree on any set of principles or charges. The proceeding began with a large variety of things allegedly done wrong, but
ended up with several, where most of the elements that are described, were agreed that charges should be brought on the floor of the House. It was at this point exactly when the charges were personalized, and before they got to the House, that President Nixon saw the inevitability of the indictment on the floor and trial in the Senate, at which point he decided to resign.

Now many of the things that he did or apparently did were foolish and thoughtless, and not well thought out. For us it was a live experience, because we were frequently listening to tapes, all of us listening to tapes. Or reading documents, or being informed by very competent counsel by officials who were frequently administration officials who were appearing for the first time. This was a live, very live investigation. It was not a matter of reading a report, although there were many reports that had to be read.

It was a difficult for me to restrain myself after I got involved, and made up my mind before the investigation was over that Nixon had committed the things of which he was charged. And said so. And said so sometimes on national television. The committee room, the judiciary committee room was a circus. There were members of the public were allowed, but the room wasn't large enough for that purpose, and the majority of the space was taken by the news media and cameras. And so forth. When it was over, I donated my Nixon papers to Temple Law School.

INT: Did you believe at the time that Nixon recorded over parts of the tape so that he would not, it would not have been as obvious as it was from the tapes that he had done something?

EILBERG: I don’t remember being able to conclude that. We found the long gap and so forth, but it was not possible, as I remember, to identify who did it or what the circumstances were.

INT: Whose testimony was the most powerful, that you remember?

EILBERG: It's difficult to remember now. That was fifteen, twenty years ago.

INT: Did you have duties, like given to you by the chair of the committee? Were there aspects of the case broken down that each member had to investigate, or was it just a sort of free for all, and any member could investigate any part of it?

EILBERG: There were no assignments that I can remember. We had independent staff, outside staff that was brought in for this purpose, and they
were extremely competent, and the large staff developed, including Hilary Clinton by the way, in one of the rooms that we used for the committee. Can you imagine, and I don’t remember meeting her or seeing her work, as being identified as such.

Each day almost as soon as they were made up, there were exhibit books presented to all of the members of the judiciary committee by legal staff which contained summaries of materials that were being reviewed so that each day we had sort of an assignment, and as I remember now, the book would be given to each member for his personal use, at the end of each day, so that you had overnight to do your homework and come in and be ready.

Being ready involved in an orderly way speaking with one’s reactions to what was being considered, so that I was sixth or seventh in line after the chairman. Sixth in line. I would speak seventh, therefore, on most occasions. That is not to say that it was so rigid that you couldn’t speak. You had something very pressing, you would usually be recognized, but by and large the progressive method of calling upon people existed.

INT: You really had a sense of the historical importance of the moment, even before Nixon announced his resignation, or was it only at that point that you realized that the proceedings had been so important?

EILBERG: I think we were pretty much aware of it from the beginning, and my sense was sort of being allowed to participate, being in the White House, and feeling at times that I was eavesdropping in the White House. It was very close.

INT: I think I’m done.

EILBERG: Okay. Did you have anything else that you wanted to...?

INT: That’s it. That’s all I have, unless there’s something that you can think about that maybe we overlooked.

EILBERG: It’s pretty hard. I think...

INT: We’ve covered a lot. I want to thank you.

EILBERG: That’s okay. That’s a pleasure.
INT: Well, thank you. It's been very illuminating.

EILBERG: I've enjoyed your participation. You facilitate that.

INT: Thank you.

(END OF INTERVIEW)