

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACOB JOSLYN PRESSER
FOR THE VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEWED BY
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G. KURT PIEHLER: This begins an interview with Jacob Joslyn Presser on March 5th, 2004 at his home on Cherokee Boulevard, in Knoxville, Tennessee, with Kurt Piehler and...

LESHUAN OLIVER: Leshuan Oliver.

PIEHLER: And let me begin by asking a little bit about your parents. Um, do you know why your parents came ... to the United States from Russia?

JACOB PRESSER: Um, they came about the time about the Russian Pogroms, and they came to the states independently, um, to escape the pogroms. I guess they met in Providence, and as far as I know were married in Providence, and established a family.

PIEHLER: Do you ... know what port they ... entered in? Did they enter through New York, or did they enter through another port?

PRESSER: I believe, I have no evidence for it, but I believe it was New York. We visited Ellis Island, and at that time you had to have all kinds of information. Um, I understand now is much easier, but, uh, I was not able to dig up any information at that time. I put whatever information I could into the program and I came up with some German farmer, which I know is not our family.

PIEHLER: (Laugh) I see.

PRESSER: So, that's the best I can tell you on that.

PIEHLER: Did they come over as a family, or just as ...

PRESSER: Oh, I think individually.

PIEHLER: Individually. Well, um, before I ... started the interview I said—did you—we were to start with your grandparents. I mean, what do you know about your grandparents, do you know anything?

PRESSER: Very, very little. Uh, they died when I was just a toddler. I have a vague, recollection, uh, of the funeral of one of them, and it was from the home, which was the custom at that time, and I was a tyke. That's all I remember about that.

PIEHLER: (Laugh) ... Your grandparents—had they come over after the kids got settled—as your mother and father got settled?

PRESSER: I think so, I do not know. I do not know.

PIEHLER: Do you know how your parents actually met?

PRESSER: No, I don't

PIEHLER: They never told you stories about...

PRESSER: No, no

PIEHLER: Do you know when they were married, roughly?

PRESSER: Well, let's see. I say roughly ninety-five years ago. I had my oldest sister, who was ten years older than I am. I presume she was born shortly after they were married. And that's all I can say about that.

PIEHLER: So, ninety-five years, your sister is ten years older, and you're eighty-five. So, ninety-five, that's ... around 19-, I guess, 1909, 1910.

PRESSER: About '09.

PIEHLER: Yeah, about 1909.

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You were born in 1918.

PRESSER: Correct!

PIEHLER: In Providence?

PRESSER: Right!

PIEHLER: Do you know why ... they picked Providence?

PRESSER: Uh, this is my assumption, because I know my father originally work in the jewelry trade, and he worked for a distant relative. Now, whether that relative played apart in their settling in Providence, that I don't know, either. But he ... worked in the jewelry trade, and my mother worked for another family as a seamstress. And that's all I call tell you about their original ... coming [to America].

PIEHLER: Had your father—do you know whether he—did he have the skill before coming, in the jewelry trade, before coming to America? Or did he ...

PRESSER: Did he what?

PIEHLER: Was he skilled ... in the jewelry trade before coming to America, or?

PRESSER: No, I doubt that very, very much.

PIEHLER: Now, did he actually work with jewelry as a craftsman?

PRESSER: Who, my father?

PIEHLER: Yeah!

PRESSER: I don't think so. I mean, I don't know what he did in the jewelry process.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So he was a salesman? Yeah?

PRESSER: I don't think so.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PRESSER: No, he later opened a grocery store.

PIEHLER: Mm hmm. I see.

PRESSER: And he had that for a while, and then he started to take in work stuff, like work gloves and that sort of thing. And he realized that there was a much better profit in that type of material, than groceries. And he expanded that. Then at the time of the Depression, in the '28, '29 Depression, he—by that time, the grocery was completely gone. He had a dry goods store. He had work clothes, new and used, and uh, he sold saddles—sports saddles. Because his store was in a heavy Portuguese area, and most of them came from the Cape Verde Islands. So, they used to—once a year a ship came to Providence and that ship went back to the Cape Verde Island. All the people with connections to the Cape Verde Island would stock-up. He'll stock up the trunks and sale them all the stuff to go into the trunks and then they ship it back on that boat. And that was a big thing. That's about it on that end of it.

PIEHLER: How did your family fair during the Great Depression?

PRESSER: I'm sorry; I'll change this battery. (Points to his hearing aid)

PIEHLER: Depression—how did the Great Depression affect your family? You mentioned going out of the grocery business to dry goods.

PRESSER: Oh, yeah, well I was a pre-teenager about that time, and I don't think we fared too badly. There was one episode. My father did not write nor read English. So, he, he would take this stuff home—the check book and the checks and the bills—on Saturday night and Sunday. First, my older sister took care of it, then my younger sister, Sylvia. When they were both married and out of the house, it fell on me. So, we would write all the checks etc. And I remember one episode were I thought we were in pretty rough shape. Because, I guess my father fell a little bit behind, and he said to my mother something about borrowing \$300 and to me 'God Almighty'. But that's the only thing I remember. We didn't do without much. We didn't have any bicycles or stuff like that. I guess they were considered pretty dangerous cause we lived on a very steep hill. But we

had roller skates and a scooters and that type of thing, but maybe more sane. I don't know exactly.

PIEHLER: (Laugh) Where in Providence did you live roughly? Did you say what neighborhood ... was your house in?

PRESSER: I guess you'd call it the eastside of Providence. It was on Jenks Street, which was a steep hill.

PIEHLER: And, and what about your neighbors? How many were Jews and other ethnicities?

PRESSER: Almost all Jews.

PIEHLER: So all Jews?

PRESSER: I lived in a three family house. And there were always Jews living there. Here and there and the neighbors, maybe the corner house was not Jewish. Basically it was, lets say at least eight-five, ninety percent Jewish.

OLIVER: You had said during your pre-interview that your parents weren't well educated. But from what you're telling me, did your father have a great work ethic?

PRESSER: He did alright. When he passed away he owned seven pieces of property. Probably did not have any lavish stuff like some kids did, but we survived in relative comfort. We never went hungry, we always had food on the table. Plenty of it! Not much variety, but plenty of food! (Laughs)

OLIVER: I notice you were—on your pre-interview survey you are still a member of Temple Bethel of Providence. Is that the temple you went to growing up?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: No.

PRESSER: Now, I was brought up in an orthodox home. Attended an orthodox Bethel congregation. Then when I was first married, we joined this reformed Temple in Bethel. Then when Marilyn and I married she was not very happy with the reform setup. So we joined the conservative. She was already a member of one down here, so we came here and automatically came to the conservative one.

PIEHLER: Seems as...

PRESSER: But, deep in my heart, I think I prefer the reform.

PIEHLER: Do you remember what, what shule you were in when you were an orthodox in Providence?

PRESSER: What shule?

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PRESSER: Ahavth—A-H-A-V-T-H—Shalom Congregation.

PIEHLER: Is that congregation still in existence in Providence? Do you know?

PRESSER: Not in its original location. But, there is a smaller version still in existence to the best of my knowledge.

PIEHLER: When you were growing up how big was the congregation?

PRESSER: That I can't say. It was a good size congregation, but that goes back to the 20s, 30s. That was a good time ago.

Piehler: How, your father sounds likes he had to work on Saturdays.

PRESSER: Oh yeah. Yeah, but for the high holy days he attended the services. After services he went to the store. Matter of fact, Saturdays he worked especially late. He didn't come home until 11:00 at night.

PIEHLER: That is late.

PRESSER: On Saturday. The rest of the nights—the rest of the week he was home about 8:00.

PIEHLER: At what time would he get to the store?

PRESSER: I would guess 7:00, 8:00.

PIEHLER: So, so he worked long days?

PRESSER: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. He was a hard worker.

PIEHLER: How, how observant was your family growing up?

PRESSER: Quite! Oh, definitely! Definitely! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: ... Growing up, what are your memories of what you did for fun? You mention some of the things you did for fun. What, what do you remember about growing up for fun in terms of Providence. Things like movies and...

PRESSER: Well, movies, that was a Saturday morning tradition. We would get fifteen cents each Saturday morning. And we walk down town and we use ten cents for the movie which would give us two feature movies and five acts of bore-go. And the other five cents we spend at Woolworth's for candy to take to the movie. That was Saturday morning.

PIEHLER: Do you remember the theatres you went to in Providence? Do any of them stick out? Any of the names?

PRESSER: Fay's Theatre, that the one with the vaudeville. There was the Strand theatre and the Victory Theatre, the Lowes Theatre, and the Martin Theatre. And there were quite a few.

PIEHLER: What else did you do? Did you play any sports growing up?

PRESSER: Not any organized. Sandlot stuff, yeah. I owned the catcher's mitt, so I was the catcher.

PIEHLER: (Laughter) So, what about football? Did you play sandlot?

PRESSER: Just around the neighborhood.

OLIVER: Do you recall your high—grade school to high school years?

PRESSER: High school?

OLIVER: Yes, sir. You recall...

PRESSER: Yeah. The thing that stands out about high school. I was a very well behaved individual regardless of what anyone else would say.

OLIVER: (Laughter)

PRESSER: And I went to school every single day I was supposed to go. And the last week of my senior year in high school, this buddy of mine convinced me to take off, so we took the last week off. And then we, at the end of the week went back to school. We didn't know if we were graduating or not, so we went to graduation and did exercises and our names were called, so we were graduating. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, that was your one wild week. What did you and your buddy do on your week off?

PRESSER: Oh, touring around the city. He had the car. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Growing up how much traveling did you do before going to college? Or even before the war, how far had you traveled outside of Providence?

PRESSER: Well, we had relatives in New York, and every so often we would drive to New York. That was a distance then of about 200 some odd miles. And my dad would get home the store around mid-night. And he would have a bite to eat, then we would load in the car, then we would drive to New York. And we're in New York something like eight in the morning. And during those days they would stop you on the roads. They would ask, do you have and vegetables on you? Do you have any corn? They were controlling the beetles and bugs. And then when I was old enough to drive my dad had some cousins, I think in Waterbury, Connecticut, and I would drive him to Waterbury periodically. That was about the extent of the travel. We did have a summer home and summers were taken up at the summer home. We didn't do much during this time except enjoy the ocean and all of that.

PIEHLER: Where was your summer home?

PRESSER: In an area called Cocumcussoc. That something for you to look up.

PIEHLER: (laugh)

OLIVER: Cocumcussoc.

PIEHLER: I've heard of it before. I'm trying to place it in my head.

PRESSER: It's about ten miles outside of Providence.

PIEHLER: And it was a summer cottage?

PRESSER: It was a duplex, and we occupied the front half. Each summer we rent out the other half.

PIEHLER: And would you—those summers when you would go to the summer place, would your mother and sister go out and your father join you on weekends? Or was he able to ...

PRESSER: No, he was at home every night.

PIEHLER: So, he would travel from the store?

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: ... It sounds like you had a lot of family that made it to America, 'cause you mention relatives in New York and cousins, and your grandparents did make it over. Is that a fair characterization?

PRESSER: Yeah! I would say so.

PIEHLER: Were you, did you ever go to camp growing up, or [join the] Boy Scouts?

PRESSER: My first trip to camp was as a councilor. Other than that I never went to camp as a camper.

PIEHLER: Where were you a councilor?

PRESSER: If I ever think of the name of the thing. It was sponsored by the Jewish Humanity Center. The name slips me.

PIEHLER: Was it in Rhode Island?

PRESSER: It was in Rhode Island, in the outskirts.

OLIVER: I was wondering, during this time education was very important for immigrants who came over—for their children. How much did your parents stress education for you and your siblings?

PRESSER: Well, my oldest sister graduated from college, and I did. My youngest sister—younger, she was still older than me—but my other sister, she chose not to go to college. So the two of us graduated from college, and the third one did not. That was by choice.

PIEHLER: How were you able to pay for college? Did your...

PRESSER: I went to a state college. It cost me fifteen dollars for four years.

OLIVER: Wow! (laugh)

PRESSER: And my sister, I think didn't cost anything. She went to St. Helen's.

PIEHLER: Before asking about college, one thing I'm curious about is growing up in the '30s. What did, what did your family think about Zionism at the time? Or do you ever remember any discussions about Zionism?

PRESSER: I don't think there was any. My dad subscribed to the Jewish version of *The Forward*. And it would be delivered to his store, and he'd bring it home and after his dinner sort of speak he and my mother would sit at the table. And he would read the column, "The Ben-Tal Brief." And he read it and my mother face was full of tears running down on her face. And as far as Zionism goes, it wasn't much of that.

PIEHLER: So, you, it sounds like you distinctive remember "The Ben-Tal Brief," which is sort of the, for those who read the transcripts it is sort of like the "Dear Abby letters" of *The Forward*, which ...

PRESSER: Yeah, yeah!

PIEHLER: Your mother was a seamstress. After your parents were married ... did she work outside the home at all?

PRESSER: No, not that I know of, no. When my sisters needed a dress or anything like that, they'd go shopping. They would go to the department stores and look at all the stuff and my mother would take it all in. And then when they get home, using old newspapers, she would cut out a pattern. Then she would sew it all together, and then they had their clothes. And I was put out because she never made anything for me.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) So, your clothes were always brought?

PRESSER: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: And, so you would have like to have something made? (Laughs)

PRESSER: The neighbor who lived above us, she used to make shirts for her some, but my mother never made shirts for me. Maybe its better she didn't. I don't know.

PIEHLER: Growing up, what was the language in the house?

PRESSER: Yiddish, they spoke to us in Yiddish, and basically it was Yiddish.

PIEHLER: And you said your father never learn how to write in English and...

PRESSER: He started to go to night school—this is the way I got the story, I was not there. He started to go to night school and he went to the third class and the third time he went they showed him a picture of a cat, C-A-T, cat, dog, D-O-G, dog and that stuff. But, this I got to go to school, so he never went back. (Laughter) So, anything he accomplished, he more or less did it on his own. And I think for someone not having any educational background, he did quite well.

PIEHLER: It sounds like he was very dependent on you and your sisters to do the bookkeeping. You mentioned that you would do the...

PRESSER: It wasn't bookkeeping. The extent of the bookkeeping if there was a plus balance in the checkbook, then everything was alright.

PIEHLER: Yeah. As you said your father had a head about business.

PRESSER: I would say so, yeah.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Well, cause you also mentioned—it sounds like you owned your homes, and you had a car.

PRESSER: Yeah. We always had a car. It started with the Model-T's.

PIEHLER: And a telephone you...

PRESSER: Well, a telephone in the house, yeah. In the store, no, and one of the buildings he owned, once removed from his store, there was an undertaker and he had a phone. So, in need or ... for any emergency or anything very important, we'd call the undertaker, and he would deliver the message to my father. He did not have a phone in the store until many years later. But we always had a car; we started off with a Model-T. Then we had a Maxwell touring car. Then we had a Pontiac sedan, then a Plymouth something or another and that was the last car that he owned.

PIEHLER: How long did your father have the store? How long did before he gave up the store in retirement or...?

PRESSER: No, when he passed away, he still had the store.

PIEHLER: Yeah, so how—when did your father pass away?

PRESSER: In the '60s.

PIEHLER: So, he had the store in the '60s?

PRESSER: Oh, yeah!

PIEHLER: Did the store continue after he died?

PRESSER: I ran it for a short while, but I ran the store during the daytime. Then at about that time there was a severe shortage of teachers. So, I called the school department and they spoke with me—the superintendent. And I went in, and after an interview they hired me as a teacher. So, I taught school during the daytime and then ran the store after school. And after that I had to take some additional courses to renew my teaching certificate. The weekends I was at the store and eventually I just thought it was too much.

PIEHLER: It sounds that it was a busy schedule. (Laughter)

OLIVER: I was wondering a little bit more about your siblings and your mother. You haven't really spoken much about them. Can you recall your mother and the type of lady she was and also growing up with your siblings?

PRESSER: My mother? When it came time for discipline, my mother as I recall, waited until father came home. So, I was in bed before my father came home. As far as my sisters go, I don't know. They had their world, I had mine and, I don't recall anything special. One thing I pride myself, as adults, even after my folks had gone, we never, never, never had any situation where this one didn't talk to that one, that one didn't talk

to the other one. Never, and I'm quite proud of that. They're both gone now, unfortunately.

PIEHLER: Before we sort of go to college, anything sticks out about elementary school? Do you remember what elementary school you went at?

PRESSER: It already—you asked that question. We lived here. (Points to a map) This is that hill I was talking about. This is the street and the school. The primary school was right over there, one block over. I never went to school, so they would drag me from the house to the school and once we got into the school and my parents left, I walked out in back of them. Never would stay in school, until an uncle of mine, also of the Jewish Forwards, brought a picture over to the house and showed me this kid in jail because he wouldn't go to school. And it showed the bars and everything. (Laughs) What it actually was, was this kid making a deposit at the teller window at the bank. They had the bars, so after that I started going to school. (Laughter) As fate would have it I wound up as a schoolteacher.

PIEHLER: But, initially you did not want to go.

PRESSER: I did not want to go to school. Oh, also, in those days they had policemen walking on feet. They didn't have police cars and they just started to come into existence. When I was out of school, illegally, I was in my yard and could see the policeman coming. I scooted into the house and I hid some place in the house behind the couch we had in the kitchen, and when I figured it was time enough for him to go by the house, then I went outside again.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) Do any of your teachers stick out in memory that you had in elementary school and high school?

PRESSER: Well, I say one art teacher I had in junior high school. No matter what I did she'd come over and look at the work and say that's fine. Everything was fine, but there was always a But. Why do you do this, why don't you do that. Her name was Ms. Wilprint. And that's the big thing. Well ...

PIEHLER: In high school, how active were you in any clubs or ...

PRESSER: Well, I was the stage manager of the senior play.

PIEHLER: Do you remember what the play was?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: (Laughs) You were the class of '36?

PRESSER: High school?

PIEHLER: High school. What high school did you go to?

PRESSER: Classical High School.

PIEHLER: Classical High School. And you were in college prep.

PRESSER: Yeah, Classical High School is a school for college [prep] course.

PIEHLER: So, you had you Latin, um...

PRESSER: Oh, yeah!

PIEHLER: Did you have your Greek too?

PRESSER: No, I had German. Latin and German. And picking German as an elective was the worse thing I could have done. I picked it because it was similar to Yiddish, I was like hey, this is going to be a snap, but it was so similar it was confusing. But, I eventually passed because I graduated.

PIEHLER: I've heard of the reputation of Classical High School. There's this physician up in Harvard I've interviewed, Hermes Grillo, who recalled he went a little bit later than you to Classical High School, but it's male, all boys, wasn't it?

PRESSER: No, Co-ed.

PIEHLER: No, Co-ed. What about, the school dance and other, did you go to Junior Prom and ...

PRESSER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: What did you and your family think about Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

PRESSER: He was a great guy.

PIEHLER: So, you...

PRESSER: I don't remember, it was during his regime or not, but when my father earned enough money to pay income taxes, he was the happiest man on this earth.

PIEHLER: Really? That was for him a point of a ...

PRESSER: Yeah, that was an accomplishment.

OLIVER: Wow!

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like you very vividly remember that payment.

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Do you remember roughly what year that was when he?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: No, was it before the war when he?

PRESSER: Oh, yeah.

PIEHLER: So that was a big accomplishment?

PRESSER: Oh, yes.

PIEHLER: Because various, I mean people read this transcript, and most people think people didn't pay income taxes in that ...

PRESSER: Our first radio was in a big cabinet. We got it the day that Herbert Hoover was inaugurated.

PIEHLER: So, 1929?

PRESSER: Yep, that's when we got it.

PIEHLER: It sound like you even remember vaguely Hoover's inauguration, because that was the first thing you listened to on the radio.

PRESSER: That's when we got it.

PIEHLER: What radio program did you listen to growing up, or do you remember?

PRESSER: Jack Benny—you mean as an adult?

PIEHLER: No, as a kid. Do you have any favorites?

PRESSER: Jack Benny Texaco hour. That's all I remember.

PIEHLER: Did you always expect to go to college when you were—was that something that ...

PRESSER: I would say yes.

PIEHLER: And why Rhode Island College? Had you thought about other schools?

PRESSER: Well, I never thought of Harvard, or Brown, or any of those Ivy League places because I knew what the financial situation was. I applied to Rhode Island State College. I was accepted, and I was going to go there and I had paid \$50 ROTC [fee] or something like that, but then right after that I was accepted to Rhode Island College of Education. And that cost nothing, so I went there. And there I lived at home. I walked back and forth to school each day, whereas if I had went to URI, I'd have to live on campus with room and board and all of that other stuff. So, I—first two years of college education cost me nothing. Then the third year they inaugurated a student tax of \$10. So, that cost me \$10. The following year they raised it to an addition \$5, so it was \$15. So it cost me \$25 for four years.

PIEHLER: So that sounds like something you could afford?

PRESSER: Whether we could or couldn't no one ever said, but I went. (Laughter)

OLIVER: Do they still charge \$25 dollars today?

PRESSER: What was that?

OLIVER: I was wondering if they still charged that much today? (Laughs)

PIEHLER: But, it sounds like, by going to the school you want to be a school—did you want to be a school teacher growing up?

PRESSER: Ah, it was alright by me, yeah. In junior high school we took the aptitude test, and my result told me I should be an architect, but I had no more interest in architecture then the man in the moon. So I didn't pay any attention to that.

PIEHLER: Anything—you walk to school literally?

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Any memory's about college in terms of professors or subjects?

PRESSER: Oh, that's a different story! How much time we got? We had one professor, when ever you came to class, first words out of his mouth, "What shall we discuss today?" And whatever the topic was that's what we discuss. He never discussed anything that he was supposed too. I forgot what the class was called. Philosophy, Psychology, I don't know. We never did.

PIEHLER: Was this current events or whatever?

PRESSER: Whatever any kid brought up that was it.

PIEHLER: So you could bring up like let's talk about baseball and that...

PRESSER: I guess so, I guess so. We had a bunch of professors. Each one of them was particular character.

PIEHLER: What was a particularly good professor did you have? Did any stick out or uh?

PRESSER: I had a Professor Lunt who taught science--general science—and each person was on his own. And he helped and guided you. I had made—I don't know if you are familiar with it or not—a daguerreotype. Do you know what that is?

PIEHLER: Uh huh! (Answers affirmatively)

PRESSER: (Looks at Oliver) Do you know what it is?

OLIVER: No, sir.

PRESSER: Well, it started off with a copper plate. It was the first stages of the film that we are using in cameras today.

OLIVER: Oh, okay, okay.

PRESSER: It started off with a copper plate and we had to sensitize it. And expose it to whatever energy you wanted on there, and it developed into the image. That was a project. One thing I remember vividly. I had to use liquid bromine, which is a chemical. And it started to drip, and to protect the laboratory I stuck my hand under there. I had burns, maybe three of the fingers, and it was a mess. It took quite a while to heal. But fortunately it came out okay. And we had a Dr. Donavon in literature. He was very good. He later became part-time president of the college. Then we had another one boring, kind of odd, it was Etheia. Oh, we had one guy, he use to teach economics and he always talked with his jaws closed. And that was a hell of a thing, day in and day out, to sit in that class and try to make out what he was saying. And he just lectures on and on and on and on. Then I had an Italian professor teaching Italian. And, I can't think of his name. I don't know.

PIEHLER: Your core—you were being prepared to teach what kind of ... High school, elementary school?

PRESSER: Well, it varied according to your choices. I was certified in secondary education. Now of day you're certified in, I understand a pacific subject. Like science and math, but uh, my studies were basically science and math. And after I graduated I went into the Army and after the Army I got home and I sold liquor for a short while. Then I took over my dad's place and then I ... (Mrs. Presser interrupted with an offer of something to drink for all of us)

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PIEHLER: Actually you were in the middle of; you were saying how things had changed, but you were a certified...

PRESSER: Oh, I was certified in secondary math. And when I did go back to teaching many, many years, well twenty some odd years after my degree, I stuck with math because to catch up with the new stuff in science that was another few years of work. So, I stuck with the math.

PIEHLER: Was your major in Education then or could you have majored in a science..?

PRESSER: Yeah! Yeah! Education, yeah!

PIEHLER: Yeah, education.

OLIVER: I was wondering, um, if you had met your first wife. Was this around, along, around the time of your college years? Was this around the time you met your first wife?

PRESSER: No, I met my wife right after I got out of the Army. We were married in I think it was '46? Yeah, it was '46. Then she passed away in '75.

PIEHLER: At the college were there any politically active students?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: There were not?

PRESSER: Not, like you got today.

PIEHLER: Yeah. So you had no groups that were say, pro-war or peace groups? How aware were you of sort of the debates? Let's say in 1940s when you graduated from college, how aware were you to the debates over America's involvement in the war?

PRESSER: I paid attention to them, but I wasn't actively involved. When it came time to register the conscripts, I volunteered to help with that.

PIEHLER: This is in 1940, the peace time?

PRESSER: Yeah. Rather than wait for me to be drafted I enlisted. I figured I do my year of service then I'm done. That one year of service turned out to be five years then I came back from Europe.

PIEHLER: Actually, let me, so you ... You entered the service on March 24th, 1941 so..?

PRESSER: Well, the 17th is when I enlisted. (Laughs)

OLIVER: So, you enrolled before Pearl Harbor?

PRESSER: I was ready to come out before Pearl Harbor, and then Pearl Harbor was attacked, so I got out four years later.

PIEHLER: You thought you'd get your year over?

PRESSER: Yeah, that was my intent.

PIEHLER: Now, had you worked at all before joining the Army in '41? You graduated in '40.

PRESSER: No, I graduated in '40 and at that time—I don't know if it is still this way or not. As an incoming teacher in Providence you had to do what they called city training. You spent one whole year with a school department with no pay, and after that you maybe get a job as a teacher. So I was in the midst of that year when I enlisted, then I enlisted and was inducted on the 24th.

PIEHLER: Inducted—so, enlisted on the 17th so you had that...

PRESSER: That was St. Patrick's Day.

OLIVER: Yes, sir.

PIEHLER: And at that the time and your parent home was at 3 Janckes Street, J-A-N-C-K-E-S.

PRESSER: Right.

PIEHLER: And when you were enlisted, you were sworn in at Providence?

PRESSER: Right.

PIEHLER: And what happened after you were sworn in?

PRESSER: After I was sworn in, we left the building and got into a bus. And as I'm sitting in the bus I glance at the side window and there's my dad. He closed the store; he closed the store to see me off, which is something he'd never, never, done before. Then from there we went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. And it was in a very short time, I think we shipped out for Fort Bragg. And there I was to become a communication specialist. I don't know what was listed there. But, we were suppose to string the wires of the telephones and the radio and all of that jazz. So, a call came down from battalion headquarters: "Can anybody type?" (Laughs) So, I had had a course in junior high school as a student. I said I can type. So I became a clerk at battalion headquarters. Then from there I went to corps headquarters, there I was station at Camp Beauregard Louisiana. And then from there I went to First Army headquarters in Tacoma, Washington, at Fort Bragg. And then from there I went to Adjutant General School in

Maryland a few times. The last time I went to that school, First Army pulled out. They attached me to an infantry division. I think it was in Fort Ord, Oregon [Ed. – Fort Ord was in California]. And eventually we work our way back to the east coast and shipped for Europe.

PIEHLER: Was this the 20th Division?

PRESSER: Uh, no that was, when I went to—from Fort Bragg. I skipped a step. I went to Fort Blanding, Florida. I went to Fort Blanding, Florida, and there I think it was the 103rd Artillery Regiment—part of the 20th division.

PIEHLER: ... It lists on your discharge that you were Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 276th Infantry Regiment. Was that?

PRESSER: That was...

PIEHLER: Don't you separate?

PRESSER: That was at the end.

PIEHLER: That was at the end, okay. What—you were called out because you could type. Had you already—had you completed Basic Training? Was that during Basic Training?

PRESSER: That must have happened at Camp Blanding, so I'd say yes.

PIEHLER: So, is Camp Blanding were you did your Basic or was it at Bragg? 'Cause you mentioned...

PRESSER: Bragg. I did the Basic at Bragg.

PIEHLER: And then you went to Blanding for... What do you remember about Basic Training?

PRESSER: The telephone poles.

PIEHLER: So you learned how to climb up the telephone poles?

PRESSER: I don't remember climbing up any of them now that I think of it. I don't recall that.

PIEHLER: But, you remember ... (Laughs) What do you remember about the people in your squad in your barracks in Basic?

PRESSER: Oh, so many cases. One guy, he was apart of the cavalry at one of the camps. I don't think there was a square inch of his body that was not tattooed. And he

was always in trouble. I think the highest rank he got was PFC, and no sooner than he get it then he do something so they bust him. Then there was another guy, also I think a draftee. He had some kind of problem and everyone thought he was faking it and they beat the hell out of him. I think he wound up in the hospital. And, uh, just had a problem but no one paid attention to him. And I met a few people there that I try to find after I got out of the service. Some passed away, some I could locate. Yeah, I was in contact with some of them afterwards. That about it in a nutshell—about military service.

PIEHLER: What do you remember about your first sergeant in Basic?

PRESSER: Well, they all tried to put on a tough show I would say. But, as far as anything, getting out there for, what was it? Revelry is at night what do they, “Taps” at night?

PIEHLER: “Taps” at night, “Revelry” in the morning.

PRESSER: Well, getting out for “Revelry” six in the morning was not my cup of tea.

PIEHLER: You had been raised in a kosher household. What was it like eating Army food and Army stuff?

PRESSER: Oh, by that time I was pretty well adjusted to non-kosher things.

PIEHLER: So, you didn’t—you weren’t shocked by?

PRESSER: No, I remember the first time I ever bit into a non-kosher sandwich. I was waiting for something to happen. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You were learning to, you had went to all these different, because you had mentioned after Blanding, Camp Blanding you had went to fort, Camp Beauregard in Louisiana. How long were you in Beauregard?

PRESSER: Oh, I don’t know. Is it—don’t they listed it there?

PIEHLER: Let me just make sure it not.

PRESSER: What’s that yellow sheet?

PIEHLER: That’s the sheet I sent you.

PRESSER: Oh!

PIEHLER: No, I—that the sheet I sent you and surprisingly they don’t...

PRESSER: I thought they had it.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I was sort of surprised 'cause all they list ...

PRESSER: The entry and the ending.

PIEHLER: They have three months private basic 521 as your specialty, then fourteen months corporal classification specialist and then seventeen months, uh, T-4 personnel technician specialty 290, and then they have you eight months first sergeant administrative N.C.O. at a 502. And they list you and they state: Personnel Technician assisted in the classification of the assignment of enlisted men and supervised classification, personnel, and the maintenance of officers of enlisted men qualification guard. The requisition of personnel replacements, selection of qualified enlisted men for special school training and the preparation of correspondence and report pertaining to personnel classification and assignments. (Laughs) So, there must be more to that than they wrote down. So, what would you say of Camp Beauregard?

PRESSER: Well, the...that was, now that you read it...

PIEHLER: It sounds fancier than it was. (Laughs)

PRESSER: I'm trying think. I know at the time I was doing that work, it was—they were using a system that used the computer. They had the punch cards and all of that jazz. But, after I got to the other administrative jobs, it was just like regular clerk jobs. So, that must have been, I don't know were that was. I know I was classified as a personnel technician. But I don't remember the rest of all of that description.

PIEHLER: Did you ever at some point sort of get new recruits and determine where they would go? Uh, no. You never did that with the... So, you were very much in the office in a sense. It sounds like you were in the office doing, in a sense, dealing with personnel records.

PRESSER: Yeah, until the time I went overseas. Then I went over in the infantry regiment and then I was in the infantry, up at Battalion headquarters still doing administrative work. But it was the gravy jobs like I had in the states.

PIEHLER: Did you realize you had gravy jobs when you were in the states?

PRESSER: Oh, yeah! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: I should have known because you were smiling a little on that. And how much of this was just luck, that because just you knew how to type?

PRESSER: Well, that was the start of it. I said what do I need this stuff for. I can type, I go into the office. And I did get that job. And after that, I don't remember. I guess word got around the office that these vacancies existed, so I spoke up and took advantage of it.

PIEHLER: So, you're moving from let say Beauregard and then to Tacoma and then I think you said, Maryland, several times to Adjutant School.

PRESSER: Adjutant General School, yeah!

PIEHLER: Some of that was because you had applied for these openings.

PRESSER: In a sense, yeah.

PIEHLER: Could you talk a little bit about--you hadn't traveled out of New England and New York growing up. What was it like going to these different parts of the country? What do you remember?

PRESSER: Under the circumstances I considered it as a routine thing.

PIEHLER: How did you like living in the South? Particularly how did you like Louisiana?

PRESSER: Uh, it didn't faze me that much. When I was at Beauregard we were not far from New Orleans. I can't tell you how far, I don't know. We used to go into New Orleans and go to the movies there and what not. But there wasn't anything impressive or different. It was all military life.

OLIVER: What was, um, most memorable to you during that time? Uh, what was something that very, just stands out to you doing that time?

PRESSER: What was that?

OLIVER: What was something that was real memorable during this experience?

PRESSER: During that time?

OLIVER: Yes, sir, during military life and Basic Training.

PRESSER: Well, I guess when I entered the Army I caught a fatalistic attitude. Then I was in, I think it was Camp Shelby, Mississippi. This is on a track eastward. I was laying in a bunk one afternoon, and it came to me that I had two cousins who came through World War I. And I said, gee they made it so what am I so upset about. In that moment my whole attitude changed. So, that I say is the most impressive experience. And the time of Pearl Harbor attack I was on my way to the commissary for some reason or another when news came of the attack. Then the first thing I thought of was, there goes my discharge. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So, that was the first thought?

PRESSER: We went over on some ocean liner. We did not go in a convoy. A separate ship, we landed in Brest, France. The ship could not get into the harbor to tie up. So we had to go over the side of the ship, into these, I guess they were called landing barges. I don't remember. And as the ship went up the barges went down, vice versa, with all of our gear on our back it was hell, finally we get there. Then they brought us to shore and we were in like a bivouac area for two weeks. And I knew I had relatives in France, Zut I thought they were in Paris. So, I said well, if I get the opportunity to get to Paris, I'll get the address of these relatives and I'll contact them. So, when I did get to Paris and did get the address it happened to be in Marseilles, France, where I killed two weeks doing absolutely nothing. But after the war, I didn't get to see any of those relatives. But after the war they came to the states to visit us. And, uh, I met them then. We're still friendly with the daughter—a cousin, the daughter of these people. As a matter of fact she called here just yesterday.

PIEHLER: I'm curious on the two, on the relative. What had happened to them during the war?

PRESSER: Well, that's an interesting question. This cousin and her brother were flown out to some non-Jewish family out in the sticks, some place in France, and they lived there. When the war was over they came back to Marseilles to live with the family. If they had not been out in the country, who knows what would have happened. The mother and father came through okay. The mother is quite ill right now, but as far as the war and policy, they came through okay.

PIEHLER: They weren't put in a camp?

PRESSER: No, not that I know of...

OLIVER: They lived so far out.

PIEHLER: So, it was the whole family then, that was moved out unto the countryside?

PRESSER: No, just the two children.

PIEHLER: But, the mother and father also made it through?

PRESSER: Yes, yeah.

PIEHLER: When you were sent overseas, how did you—you had said you had had some good assignments. How did you feel about having to go overseas?

PRESSER: What choice did I have! (Laughter) I just accepted it.

PIEHLER: The job you had when you were sent overseas, did a women replace you? Did a WAC replace you?

PRESSER: No, not that I knew of.

PIEHLER: Not that you knew of. Now that you were going into a combat unit how did your job sort of change or not change because of..?

PRESSER: Well, as far as duties go, it didn't change that much. It just had to be more on guard and you had to be much more careful. One raid we were in this house we took over as headquarters and then the rounds kept coming in. And the commanding officer said, that's the artillery practicing. That was his opinion. That was an actual attack. So, he scooted out of the building and ran across the street down into the basement—the cellar of the building. And we laid there on the floor, ground, until we thought it was over. Meanwhile we heard this gurgling and oh, my God, is it a bomb? What is it? When it was all over we found out that they were making sour pickles or sauerkraut and the stuff was fermenting. That was the gurgling.

PIEHLER: What was your closest call? Did you have any close calls, particularly close calls when you were overseas?

PRESSER: Nothing that I would say was any of—oh, yes! Yes, we were moving from one point to another and it was late at night and we were told to dig in, so we dug our trenches. And I got down into my trench and I must of conked out immediately. And the next thing I knew it seemed to me that I heard someone coming around yelling, "Presser, Presser!" only not that gently. So, then I woke up. The outfit had already moved out and I was behind there. I was left behind. But, I didn't wake up and then they realized I wasn't there so they sent a party back to find me. That I say was the closest call.

PIEHLER: Were they moving forward or were they moving backward?

PRESSER: Forward.

PIEHLER: Oh, forward. Did you ever—how often did you fire your weapon when you were deployed overseas?

PRESSER: The last time I fired a weapon was at target practice.

PIEHLER: So, you were far enough behind the lines that you were not in [combat] as Battalion Headquarters.

PRESSER: Well, no, we were pretty close. We were pretty close. I remember after one raid, uh, when things calmed down, I went out and look around. One of the poor guys got it, got hit and his arms and legs—just the position they were in while he was running and collapsed. He was still in that position. Now we were pretty close to some of the fighting.

PIEHLER: You were still a personnel officer?

PRESSER: According to that.

PIEHLER: According to that. I mean what was your job, when you were deployed overseas what was your job, I meant when you were in actually combat.

PRESSER: Taking care of the clerical work, but not that classification stuff.

PIEHLER: What kind of clerical work would you take care of while you, when you were deployed overseas? What was like the type of things you would?

PRESSER: Correspondence. Keeping track of the changes in the regulations. Uh, clerical work.

PIEHLER: What about sort of notification of dealing with losses, wounded in combat? You didn't deal with that?

PRESSER: Not me.

PIEHLER: What about the sort of, you know the reports—were you responsible for any of the standard Army reports that had to be done?

PRESSER: Not that I recall.

OLIVER: You gave a description of one guy that was blown up I guess.

PRESSER: He was hit.

OLIVER: Were there many occasion were you saw this?

PRESSER: Yeah. There was a situation. It was a small village, and it was a very narrow pass under some railroad tracks. And the only way the enemy could move was through the pass. So, daytime on, let's say my outfit had control. At night the enemy had control. It switched back and forth. So, finally it was taken over and that was it.

PIEHLER: Where did you join your regiment? Where did you start combat? Was it France or Germany itself?

PRESSER: Well we landed in France. We landed in Brest. We were brought over there as replacements for the Battle of the Bulge. So, that I believe was what Germany?

PIEHLER: Well, Belgium, and Luxemburg, and Germany, yeah.

PRESSER: So, that's were we started.

PIEHLER: So, that's were you started. So, you were in the area of the Bulge.

OLIVER: You visited a lot of cities I see here from this sheet...

PIEHLER: What sort of, during the combat stage, do any particular town or events stick out? You mentioned one time when you noticed some casualty that was really badly hit.

PRESSER: There was a town called Forbach. F-O-R-B-A-C-H. Now I don't recall whether that episode of that raid was in Forbach or some other place, but Forbach stands out in my mind. There was another place we were. There was a church there with a tremendously tall spire and they had white sheets hanging from the spire. They had surrendered.

PIEHLER: You had studied German. Um, you also knew Yiddish, you spoke very well. Did you use your German at all when you were...?

PRESSER: Yes.

PIEHLER: And what ways did you use your German?

PRESSER: There was one situation where we were with a group of German civilians and they started preaching Nazism and I chimed in to refute what they were saying. I don't know if they had understood me or not, but between the German that I had learned and the Yiddish I had gotten at home, I hope I had put my point across.

PIEHLER: When was this? Was this after the war or?

PRESSER: Yeah, it must have been after.

PIEHLER: Were you ever used as an interpreter at all?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: No. You never...

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: How often did you encounter displaced persons or did you remember refugee or escaped ...

PRESSER: I don't think we ever did.

PIEHLER: You never, never... What did you—it's sort of a simple question, but what did you think of the enemy?

PRESSER: I didn't like them. I don't know, when those guys started to talk about Nazism and all the great things, I chimed in.

PIEHLER: Were you surprised? I mean in some ways it strikes me, that was pretty arrogant after just losing a war that you would ...

PRESSER: What he was talking about I disagreed with.

PIEHLER: So, you never, during the combat you never encounter any smaller slave labor camps or any?

PRESSER: We had some prisoner camps. We had some prison personnel working around our area. As a matter of fact one of them stole a little brownie camera from me.

PIEHLER: These were German prisoner?

PRESSER: Yeah, German prisoners. And I think I brought back from Europe a service record from a German soldier that was killed. And I took all of my souvenir stuff. I didn't bring guns back or anything like that. Many guys did. I took all of my service stuff, my uniform and what not and donated all of that stuff to the Rhode Island Holocaust Museum. That's where they all are.

PIEHLER: That's where it is. When did you donate it?

PRESSER: Oh, many years ago. Except my medals. My grandson has them.

PIEHLER: When you were overseas, did you ever go to services at all?

PRESSER: Yes, I attend a service some place in Belgium, and boy I think if I had attended a Greek service I'd got more out of it. This service, like I didn't know a single thing that was happening. But, it was still a regular service.

PIEHLER: How led it? Was it an Army chaplain or was it?

PRESSER: No, it was a civilian.

PIEHLER: Civilian.

PRESSER: We did have a Passover singer at one time overseas and then guys came in from all over the area.

PIEHLER: Did you have a rabbi as a chaplain?

PRESSER: Not overseas as I remember, but in the states there was one guy, I can picture his face, I think his name was Kaplin. He was chaplain. That's the only one that stands out.

PIEHLER: Did you ever, particularly when you were in different part of the country, ever in the Army, did you ever encounter anti-Semitism? That you remember?

PRESSER: I can honestly say no. I'm going to explain that. To me I say no. But, I have a friend, if he was sitting here and I was sitting here and we both partook of the same discussion. He labeled it anti-Semitism and I'd look at him like he's crazy. So, that why I say to me no.

PIEHLER: You were never called names? Even kidding ways in the barracks?

PRESSER: No. I'm still trying to think. No.

PIEHLER: And you didn't meet Southern boys who—you know, I once interviewed a Naval officer and he had an all-Southern crew, and they were convinced that all Jews had horns. And ... you never had any of those sort of encounters?

PRESSER: No, not that I recall.

PIEHLER: Is there—do you remember V-E Day at all? Do you remember where you were?

PRESSER: I was in Europe. Uh, I don't remember specifically where I was, but at that time I think that the point system was already in existence. I'm not so sure about that, but any way the first thoughts that came to my mind was that I was eligible. I had enough points—I think I had like seventy-two--and I was like one of the first ones out.

PIEHLER: Because you were separated very early compared to a lot of other people.

PRESSER: I went in early.

PIEHLER: Yes, you went in early and, now, but you were separated the 25th of October 1945. Did you think there was a possibility of going into Japan or did you have enough points?

PRESSER: ... As we were getting ready to leave Europe we were in the staging area in Belgium—I think it was in Antwerp. And by that time Japan had also quit and we're there in limbo and they didn't know what to do with us. They would give us any pay or any money and we were suppose to come back to the states for thirty day and then go on to Japan, but instead of a enough time elapse they boarded us onto the ships and then paid us and then took us back to the states and then we were discharged.

PIEHLER: It sounds like, you smile a little bit about getting paid and getting on board the ships. It sounds like there was lot of card game on that ship.

PRESSER: Not card games, crap games. (Laugh)

PIEHLER: Did you take part in any?

PRESSER: Nah.

PIEHLER: I have this image of lots of crap games with high stakes, are they did you..?

PRESSER: I didn't take part in them. I'm not a gambler.

OLIVER: Did you, can you recall Franklin Delano Roosevelt's death during this time? Can you remember how you felt?

PRESSER: I can recall the dirt that was flying around at this time. I think he died at, what that camp that they all go to?

PIEHLER: Warm Springs. He was in Georgia at the Polio Physicality at Warm Springs.

PRESSER: Well, anyway he was supposedly having this affair with this woman. Right or wrong I don't know, but it was quite a shock. Then Truman took over and things went on from there.

OLIVER: What did you think of Truman and his decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan?

PRESSER: You mean was I in favor or against it?

OLIVER: Yes, sir, what was your opinion on that?

PRESSER: I figure if it hadn't of been done we would have lost so many more thousands of lives. So, rather than lose the lives of our people, better to lose the lives of the other people. Maybe it a rude attitude, I don't know, but that the way I truly feel.

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Jacob Joslyn Presser on March 5th 2004 at his home on Cherokee Blvd in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and...

OLIVER: Leshuan Oliver.

PIEHLER: You had taken quite a bit of science in college, did you know what the atomic bomb was when heard, first, when you first heard about it?

PRESSER: I knew, anything in that day with atomic or associated with it was pretty serious. That's all I knew.

PIEHLER: That's all you knew? Um, when you were a... did you encounter, did you um, see any of the concentration camps before you came back to the states? Um, did you visit any of them before actually being deployed back home?

PRESSER: I can't I actually did. But, in my travel since then we have.

PIEHLER: Um, uh. You mentioned this one instance in Germany when you got into an argument—How much contact would you have with citizens, when you were overseas?

PRESSER: Reasonable amount, yeah, some areas they'd do our laundry and they were satisfied to just keep the soap that they used and we have contact with them than and the other time we'd have contact with them, uh, is out in the farm lands I guess. They had this barn and they had pigs in the barn and that barn was the cleanest place you ever wanted to visit. They had tile wall and wash them down with a hose and that was really something unusual.

PIEHLER: Did you have a nice sleep there, this barn? Because it was so clean, was that why you were still in combat?

PRESSER: Yeah, yeah!

PIEHLER: How often did you write home, um?

PRESSER: They had no e-mail. (Laughs) I don't remember.

PIEHLER: What about your parents? Do you remember them writing to you?

PRESSER: Not my parents, no.

PIEHLER: No, they did even write you in Yiddish, or..?

PRESSER: I don't think they could, no.

PIEHLER: What about you sisters, did they?

PRESSER: I must have heard from them.

OLIVER: Would that have been important to you, to receive letters?

PRESSER: I haven't given it a thought. I know that my mother use to send me packages.

OLIVER: Yes, sir.

PRESSER: She would make this holly, different then what we have here. I get a package about this wide and that thick. And it was all in little loaves and you just tore them off and that was the bread. And they us to send me cigars and was all.

PIEHLER: So, you smoke cigars then?

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What about cigarettes?

PRESSER: Never smoked cigarettes to speak of. I, also I did smoke.

PIEHLER: You mentioned that some of the civilians did your wash, um, for the soap. Was there any other trading? Particularly since you didn't use your cigarettes, um, you didn't?

PRESSER: In Answorth while we were in the staging area without money, we would draw stuff from a canteen and would trade it on the black market in town, that's all.

PIEHLER: Had you given any thought to staying in the Army?

PRESSER: Not that I remember. My sister said that I was ready to reenlist, but I don't ever remember that.

PIEHLER: What were your sisters doing during the war?

PRESSER: They were both married during that time. One did not work and the other was working. Yeah, they were both married during that time.

PIEHLER: Was there anyone else in your family, uh, in the opps... (Mrs. Presser cut us off to remind Mr. Presser of his sister involvements during WWII.)

PIEHLER: Did your sisters do any volunteer work?

PRESSER: Oh, the sister she's referring to.

PIEHLER: So, your sister Silvia, that your wife just referred to off the tape ...

PRESSER: Right, she was very active with the Red Cross, the VA Hospital, and, uh, at that time the organization was called the—I think—the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association out west. They changed the name so often; I don't know what the name is now. But, she was active in that and my sister Sadie, I don't remember what she did, but she must have done something. Yeah, they were both reasonably active.

PIEHLER: In terms of your father and the store. Its interesting that you mentioned he had closed the store when you had went off to service and that was ...

PRESSER: That was quite an event.

PIEHLER: How did the war affect the store? Uh, particularly rationing?

PRESSER: Oh, that was a pain in the neck. As I recall, he had to take inventory of everything in the store. And figure what percent was cotton and what percent was this and percent was that and so on. And it was a tough, tough job. Why they needed that information, I don't know to this day, but that was a tough job.

PIEHLER: So, he remembered the regulation the wartime things?

PRESSER: Yeah! He sure did.

PIEHLER: What about the black market? You mentioned the black market in Belgium. What about the black market, lets say in Providence? You were in the states a lot during a lot of the war, um, do you remember any other sort of black market activities in the states.

PRESSER: Now, I don't know the details, but I know gas was rationed and, uh, there were all kinds of shenanigans to get gas. A salesman would use his car; he had one type of rationing. And the ordinary guy had a different type and so on. And, uh, I know there was a lot of talk about gas rationing.

PIEHLER: You never knew any... You never knew specifically of an angle or a ...

PRESSER: I had no need for it, because I had no car, I didn't use a car.

OLIVER: Do you remember, um, your friend, the friends you had? After the military you talked about looking up some buddy's. Do you remember times with your friends while you were in Europe?

PRESSER: Not, while I was in Europe, because most of them was during basic training or regular duties during here in the states. But, as far as any remembering any overseas, no.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of using the G.I. Bill?

PRESSER: I did. I did when I bought my first house. I used it to guarantee the mortgage. My first house cost me, I think, \$9,500.

PIEHLER: And that was in Providence?

PRESSER: That was outside of Providence in Warren, next to the... two cities over. It cost me \$9500 and I think the mortgage rate was 4%, 4 ½ % or something like that. And they guaranteed like 3% of it, some deal, I don't remember the details of it. Uh, I bought my second house, I think I had to pay a 5% rate and boy that was crazy. I don't what it is now, but...

PIEHLER: Actually, you can now get it for about 4.6, I, but yeah.

PRESSER: I should re buy it.

PIEHLER: You mentioned... Uh, did you join any veterans' organizations when you got home?

PRESSER: Jews War Veterans. I was the first commander of our local post.

PIEHLER: And this was up in Providence? Was it a new post or had it been one from WWI?

PRESSER: They had others, but this post was a new one.

PIEHLER: A new one for WWII veterans.

PRESSER: Well, anyone could join, but it was Post 369. We had a Post 23, think been active since WWI. Oh, there was another post up in Pawtucket.

PIEHLER: How active were you—it sound like you were fairly active with the Jewish War Veterans.

PRESSER: Yeah, I was the first commander of that post and I was active was until it dissipated.

PIEHLER: When did it start dissipating?

PRESSER: Not too many years after it had started.

PIEHLER: So there was an initial rush of enthusiasm. Would you say it lasted until the '50s?

PRESSER: Yeah, I would say the '50s.

PIEHLER: I mean it didn't make it into the '60s?

PRESSER: No, I don't think so.

PIEHLER: What did you do as a post?

PRESSER: What do you mean, "what did I do?"

PIEHLER: What kind of activities did your post do? What were—did you, for example, get a headquarters for the post? Where did you meet?

PRESSER: We meet at the Jewish Community Center. As far as activities go, we took part in Memorial Day and that sort of stuff. Nothing really special.

PIEHLER: How did the war—did you take a greater interest in Zionism after the war? Do you remember any involvement there?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: How did you get your first job out of the service? You mentioned being a liquor salesman briefly.

PRESSER: I don't know how I got wind of it, but I was hired as a liquor salesman briefly to sale to the liquor stores wholesale, but, uh, it was for strictly commission. And you didn't get any commission until the merchandize was delivered and paid for. And the only thing you had available to sale was beer—no liquor. So, that didn't last very long. Maybe earn enough to buy a few boxes of Cracker Jacks or something. And than from that, I think I was in the jewelry manufactory. I spent a few years there in a few different places. Then I took over the store and then went back into teaching.

PIEHLER: I'm curious—had you thought of going into teaching right after coming out of the service?

PRESSER: Not really, but when I saw the way the store was going and the need for teachers, I go, "Uh, let me take a crack." When I came here to stay permanently from Rhode Island I figure well I'll get involved with a little substitute teaching. But, I never went through with that because first of all, substitute teaching is the drags of the industry. And secondly not being familiar with the general area ... I never applied. I never did it.

PIEHLER: When did you settle permanently in Knoxville?

PRESSER: I think it was in '90 or '93. I think it was '93. Up until that time from '76 until we settled here, we practically commuted from here...

PIEHLER: Between here and Providence?

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Had you thought of going to graduate school on the G.I. Bill of rights?

PRESSER: I did go to school, but not through the G.I. Bill.

PIEHLER: This was later in the 1960s when you ...

PRESSER: When I had to get those extra points to renew my certificate. I think at that time the G.I. Bill—I could be mistaken—you had to be a full-time student.

PIEHLER: Yeah, I think so. I'm not positive on that. You didn't want to go back full time.

PRESSER: No, there was no need for it.

PIEHLER: In the jewelry business you said you were in two firms. What did you do in those two firms?

PRESSER: Well, in first place, the first shop I was a solderer and then I went to the second place. I was foreman of a department and then later foreman of a plant.

PIEHLER: And these plants were over in Providence?

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: You had been trained as a teacher, but had come back many years after finishing college. What was it like to go into the classroom having sort of—a lot of teacher go right from college into the classroom. You had been in the Army, you had worked in several different places. Could you talk a little bit about your first experience as a teacher?

PRESSER: Well, first of all I basically am not a union man. So, when I went back to teaching right off the bat the union negotiated a \$100 raise for each teacher. Hey that's pretty good, so I joined the union. And I still belong. I have a retired chapter now which I take part in, but going back into the classroom was another place. Yeah I enjoyed it, very much.

PIEHLER: And you taught math on the high school level?

PRESSER: Junior high.

PIEHLER: Junior high. And what school did you teach at?

PRESSER: One around the corner from where we were living, Nathan Bishop. First it was Junior High, now its Nathan Bishop Middle School.

PIEHLER: And this is in...

PRESSER: Providence.

PIEHLER: Providence. And how long did you keep teaching?

PRESSER: When I retired I had twenty-four years of credit. I retired a bit early and ...

PIEHLER: What year did you retire, do you remember?

PRESSER: I think it was in 1982. And that's about right.

PIEHLER: And you entered about the 1960s, so you had a real second career in terms of number of years.

PRESSER: The school I taught at, I use to be a student there too.

PIEHLER: How had the school changed since you were a student there in term of the student body?

PRESSER: I don't know if the school changed, but I certainly had changed from the students that going there. (Laughs)

PIEHLER: Well, when you were going there, it was a lot of Jewish students...

PRESSER: There still were. It's, uh, what we call an intercity school. Some of the kids were characters. There was one little kid who I felt had capabilities but never produced anything. So, I had him come back after school one afternoon and I had a talk with him. And he said, "I don't need math." And I said, "How come you don't need math." He said, "I going to be a professional athlete, and I'm going to have a manager." And I said "That's all well and good and I'm glad to hear that, but without math how are you going to know if the manager is ripping you off?" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: He had a sort of look of—he had a little epiphany it sounds like.

PRESSER: We use to have Parents' Day in school. The kid weren't there. The parents would come to the school to meet the teachers. This kid's mother came, and I spent some time with her and she was anti-me from the word go. I said--let's call him Billy, I don't remember his name—"Did Billy tell you what my marking system was? Did Billy tell you this? Did Billy tell you that?" She said, "No, no." So, I explain to her. So, I was on the good side and the kid, he was in the doghouse.

OLIVER: Is there any student that you remember to this day that stood out?

PRESSER: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had one little oriental girl. She was involved in everything: violin playing, schoolwork, everything. She excelled in each one. I had her going through the math course on her own. And she was quite something. I had a lot good students.

PIEHLER: A lot of people—if you were to say they taught in an inner-city school system—would conjure up all kinds of horrible images, but you seem to give a sense that it was a pretty positive experience. You had some good students and it was—I mean can you talk a little bit about that cause I think people would have very, very...

PRESSER: Well, I gave the kids as many incentives as I could. I used to use flash card in some of the classes. Just for the four operations, and if they—you know, we went through all four operation and if they got everything correct then I treated them to an ice cream bar. My marking system, I used a regular F, D, E, C, B, A, and if a kid got less

than an eighty, I let them take the test over. If you got a better grade then you got the better grade. And all little things like that. So, I did what I felt I could to help these kids. I had another kid also never accomplish any damn thing. (Laughs) Tape recorders were becoming popular in the classroom, and I had this set of tape, it poised a mathematical problem, you solve them. So, I set him down in the corner of the classroom and put him to work with the tape recorder and at the end of class I went back and checked every single answer, he had absolutely correct. I said, this is not the work of this guy. So, as I dab into it, maybe the fault on my part, if you waited long enough the tape would give you the answer. So, he discovered that he waited for the answers and then he'd recorded it. (Laughter)

OLIVER: He pulled one over you. (Laughter)

PRESSER: Not for long! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: What about discipline? Did you have any discipline problems? That the, I mean all teachers below college have some discipline problems, but how would you characterize?

PRESSER: Nothing terribly major.

PIEHLER: You also sounds like you had a good union. I mean, you said you weren't a union man, but you remained active, you even returned.

PRESSER: They did a good job. We use to get increments each year. Negotiated a new contract about every three years. Yeah, it was all right. Now that I can say that there's a retirement chapter, which I contribute to. I don't know what good that money does them, but I give it to them.

OLIVER: I was just curious. I remember in high school we had a professor who was in the Army as well and when he first came in the rumor was he was a drill sergeant and he was real mean. Were there any rumors that the students might have had of you, as a former Army guy saying that this guy might be mean, that you laugh at now thinking back to it?

PRESSER: I don't think they knew about my Army career. You talk about the world being a small world. Marilyn's daughter Lisa was visiting in Florida and we were in Rhode Island. And she was with a gang of friends and they got to gabbing about this, that, and the other and, uh, they were talking about school and the name Mr. Presser came up. And one kid pipes up, what? You mean old man Presser from Nathan Bishop that teaches math. She says yeah. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Had she been a student of yours that, that?

PRESSER: Whomever, that guy? No, yeah, he was a student.

PIEHLER: Yeah, he was a student of yours. (Laugh)

PRESSER: You fellows excuse me for a second I am going to... (Mr. Presser takes a break)

PIEHLER: I'm curious who... you mentioned being active with the Jewish War Veterans and that seemed to—by the time you were teaching were you involved with them at all?

PRESSER: No, I don't think so.

PIEHLER: How many people knew you were a veteran?

PRESSER: You mean in school?

PIEHLER: Yes, in school.

PRESSER: I don't know. We didn't make an issue of it.

PIEHLER: What, uh, is there any film or any novel that sort of reflect your kind of war you went through when you look at?

PRESSER: Not that I recall.

PIEHLER: Yeah.

PRESSER: I know, I think, Abbot & Castillo had a movie, "Brother Rat", or something named similar to that, which had to do with the Army and of course it was completely different picture of what the Army was actually was, but after having seen that movie that was sort of an influence for me to enlist.

PIEHLER: Really, so Abbot & Castillo film, was—and it sound as if some of it didn't go as expected?

PRESSER: I enjoyed it.

PIEHLER: What did—you said that you enjoyed it. What did you enjoy about Army life? When you look back, when you were in the Army, I mean, what part did you enjoy?

PRESSER: When I was in the Army I didn't enjoy any of it! (Laughs)

PIEHLER: How did you meet your first wife? You mentioned meeting her after the war.

PRESSER: Well, I had a buddy, who had already come home from the service and I was trying to make contact with him and I found out that he had already married. So, I did locate him and I visited with him and found out he had a sister-in-law and one thing led

to another and we hit it off and eventually got married. I must have met her. I think I meet her early November right after I got out of the service. We were married the following May. My mother passed away early November right after I had come home. So I married in May and we were married for about thirty years and she passed away. Yep, that's life.

PIEHLER: How did you meet Marilyn?

PRESSER: Marilyn had come to Providence on the invitation of some aunts. There were two Bar Mitzvahs on successive weekends. And her aunt was a friend of my sister, and this was after my wife had passed away. So, her aunt had asked my sister if I be interested in meeting anyone. So, I said, yeah, I figure go out have great supper or whatever. So, finally 10:00 one evening I made contact. And we went out, and we had a drink, by that time everything else was closed up, so, uh, I think we went to my house and one thing led to another and we were married in '76, October 23rd.

PIEHLER: I guess it is safe to say that Marilyn is the one who brought you to Knoxville.

PRESSER: Yes!

PIEHLER: That you might have just retired in Providence and...

PRESSER: Yeah, that's true.

PIEHLER: What do you like about Knoxville and what do you miss about Providence?

PRESSER: Well, living in both places, as I have said so many times, is pretty much the same, different sets of friends. Now, most of my friends in Providence are gone, and here they are dropping like flies also, so basically there are very little differences in the two places.

OLIVER: ... Looking back ... would you say that WWII has like been a significant point in your life?

PRESSER: Oh, I would have to say yes, definitely.

OLIVER: And I was wondering also your opinion on today's military.

PRESSER: Today's military? To be honest with you I read the newspaper, but I don't pay that much attention to it. I hope it all winds up real fast. I have a grandson who might be drawn into this if it doesn't end soon. And, uh—that's me? (Referring to a beeping noise that goes off) First of all, I think the present war is a crazy, unnecessary thing. And, uh, I wait day by day to see what develops, and hopefully it will end real fast.

PIEHLER: You had three children from your first wife and none of them served in the military. Did you, would you have wanted them to serve or ...

PRESSER: Being as uncertain as it is, I say no. I mean if it came to a point were its just military training, that's a different story. But, with all of this crazy combat junk of today, I prefer not.

PIEHLER: You had expressed some skepticism about the current war. How did you feel about Vietnam? At the time or do you remember?

PRESSER: Also I think it was a bit unnecessary.

PIEHLER: Would you have been considered a dove back in say the '60s or ...

PRESSER: I don't have any wings. (Laughter) I don't know what I would be.

PIEHLER: Yeah. Are you, you are not involved in any veteran's organization now are you a member of...?

PRESSER: Well, I am member of the Jewish War Veterans, I pay the national dues and on Memorial Day I pay the contribution to the, uh, department in Rhode Island. Other than that, no.

PIEHLER: And you mentioned trying to stay in touch with some of the people when you first got back from Basic. Are you in touch with anyone you served with?

PRESSER: No. The one fellow I used to be [in touch with] passed away.

PIEHLER: How long were you in touch with him? The one, you mentioned ...

PRESSER: From the day of discharge until he passed away.

PIEHLER: Was he from Providence?

PRESSER: No.

PIEHLER: Where was he from?

PRESSER: Philadelphia. I met him in the Army.

PIEHLER: Well, I just would make an observation about you children. Uh, your one son Robert Presser is just--you said was just shy of a doctorate at Penn State.

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Your daughter Ann Franklin got a doctorate from Colgate, and your other Sheldon got a B.A. from the University of Rhode Island. So, your children did quite well in school it strikes me.

PRESSER: Yeah.

PIEHLER: Is that a fair statement?

PRESSER: Yeah, it a fair statement.

PIEHLER: What do you children do now, in terms of...

PRESSER: Bob—Robert—is in charge of the computer department in one of the local banks.

PIEHLER: In?

PRESSER: In Providence. Sheldon, the youngest one, works with some company in Massachusetts. It has to do with credit. That all I can say, because that's all I know about it. (Laughter) And Ann, she has her own practice, in Somerset, Mass. [Massachusetts], which is in the next state over. She lives in Providence.

PIEHLER: Is she a psychologist?

PRESSER: Yeah. She spent three years in Columbia after graduating from Brown University, and in those three years she has three masters and a doctorate. What she needs them for I don't know, but that's what she got.

PIEHLER: Is there anything that we forgot to ask you?

PRESSER: You know my name, my address. Social security number you don't need.

PIEHLER: I don't, we don't need that.

PRESSER: Okay, well if that's it I'll go about the rest of the day.

PIEHLER: Well, we thank you. We want to thank you very much, and it was a real pleasure.

PRESSER: Well, I hope I was of some help to you.

PIEHLER: And I think you kids will probably at one point when we finally get this transcript done, they'll enjoy reading it. Well, thank you again. And I should ... I want to thank Marilyn Presser, for her refreshments.

PRESSER: (Indicating an item on the table) You know this is definitely a copy. I'm wondering where the original is? I don't know. It might be hidden in the vaults.

OLIVER: I was just wondering if there's any advice you could give young people for today?

PRESSER: Keep your noses clean! (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, thanks again!