

Yetta Chaiken [0:00] [We are] taping, doing an oral history of Nisson Finkelstein on May 16, 1988.

Nisson Finkelstein [0:35] Well, I was born on June 11, 1925, in Milton, Massachusetts. It's a town just outside of the city of Boston. My parents moved from Milton for a short period in which we lived in Brookline, Massachusetts, also just outside of Boston, and then moved back to Milton. So, I spent most of my 25 years that I lived in the Boston area, almost all of it in Milton and went to school in Milton. As for my parents, they were both born in Boston. And their parents, my grandparents, came over to this country sometime around the Civil War years. My paternal grandfather, the one for whom I'm named, came from Lithuania from a city called Pren, P-R-E-N, which was outside of Kovno. So, he came from which the rich Litvak tradition, Lithuanian Jewish tradition, his wife, my paternal grandmother, was from Manchester, England. And I guess it originally entered the United States in New York City named Levenson. And lived with my grandfather, of course, and in Boston, all their lives. My other two grandparents, my maternal grandparents were also born in Europe came to this country sometime, I think, a little later than my paternal grandparents, but again, in the late 1860s, I believe maybe, maybe, even as late as 1870. And my maternal grandfather was from Poland, and my maternal grandmother was from Germany. In fact Her name was Ruth, and my grandmother's name, maternal grandmother, and Rona and I think that probably was a family name taken from a German town called \_\_\_\_\_ my maternal grandfather's name was in Kadetsky.

Yetta Chaiken [2:02] And your parents, what, what occupation did your father have?

Nisson Finkelstein [3:12] My father [Benjamin] was a salesman, virtually all his life. I guess in his early years before I was born, he was a credit collector because he had wonderful stories about going around and a horse and buggy trying to collect delinquent payments and having flat irons thrown at him being thrown down stairs. But that was only \_\_\_ for a short number of years, I guess. And then he became a salesman, always in dry goods. And he traveled in the New England area when my mother and father were first married. And even when my sister and I were young, but all the period when I really was old enough to know what was going on. He sold retail stores small department stores in the like in the Boston area. Ladies silk hosiery, and later on, some men's clothes, really

Yetta Chaiken [4:14] Did he make a good living?

Nisson Finkelstein [4:16] Well, you know, all of us have a hard time remembering whether we were middle class, upper middle class, lower middle class, and I guess we always thought of ourselves, I always thought of myself and my family, as middle class, whatever that means. It was good enough, so we weren't hungry, and so we had clothing, and a place to live. And my father needed an automobile to do

business, of course, and so we always had that but it was never luxurious. And so I have a feeling we were lower middle income, probably, I always remember having everything I needed, though not everything I wanted. If you want to put it that way. And I remember my mother and father. [inaudible], well, oh, he's fairly modest in their expenditures and in their, what they would spend on clothes and furniture and things of that nature. But of course, this was also masked by the fact that those years I was growing up were the years of Great Depression. And so that didn't help any. They were of modest means, I guess would be the best way to

Yetta Chaiken [5:31] What, what influence would you say your parents have had on you?

Nisson Finkelstein [5:36] Well, as I remarked you, like when you first asked me about doing this oral history, the, the things that are important about determining my life, the kind of person, are four-fold, really four elements, my mother, my father, my wife, and my identity as a Jew. And so my mother and father were extremely critical and pivotal in determining who I am, and what I am. I think the problem we always have in this is that the theme of a play or the theme of a book is usually apparent, from early in the book, and from the reviews, you read of it, of the book or the play, but theme of a life only becomes apparent to us when we're well into it, or maybe on the way out of it. And things that we thought were important, in the early years, come to assume very, very low levels of significance later and so I can say at this point, clearly, that they were two of the four most important things in my, in my life. And if you'd like I can tell you why.

Yetta Chaiken [7:08] Yes, I would.

Nisson Finkelstein [7:08] I, my father, of blessed memory, was never, as I indicated a wealthy man, he was never, what you would call a worldly success. He was always my pretty much in the same job of a salesman. But he was a remarkable man in so many ways. And there's so much that I learned from him that I didn't realize I'd learned until many, many, many, many, many years later, back some of it till after he died. He died in 1971.

And what did I learn from him? I learned really, not by lectures he gave by written notes or anything, but by the by what he did, by the way he acted learned, what it was to be a husband, what it was to be a father, what it was to be a member of a family, a member of a community. There are things about him that have kept coming back so strongly over the years that I have thought of, when certain questions came up, certain decisions I had to make of which way to go, and one thing or another. That made me realize what a tremendous influence he had, in setting that pattern of, what I guess is best described by the Yiddish word, *menschlichkeit*, it's, ah, being... I guess another source I said, as

they say in \_\_\_\_, where no men, be a man. And that since he was a, he was a real man a real mensch.

Yetta Chaiken [9:09] So that have a significant influence on...

Nisson Finkelstein [9:12] Oh, a tremendous influence. Just one, just to give one example, two examples, maybe. He never had a night out for the boys. His greatest pleasure in life was being with my mother, and with my sister and me. He never was in bowling leagues, he never, when he had to go to meetings without her, he, it was really always a burden, and never did anything socially without her. And his whole focus of affect and whole focus of concentration was on his, on his family, and it moved out from there, in a traditional Jewish way, where you know, the topic-- We should first be responsible to ourselves for ourselves and then for our immediate family and then for our greater family and then for the community. And move outward. He when, he was that way. I remember as a boy that whenever there was a crisis, in either his family or my mother's family, any sort of crisis, medical crisis, financial crisis, any kind of a problem or crisis, he was always the one that they called. And he was always ready to go, leap into the fray and do what had to be done. Usually something unpleasant, they usually called him when there was something unpleasant to be done.

And he did the same thing in the community when, I remember he was the main drive in starting the first synagogue in the town of Milton. And it was started and built under conditions of anti-Semitism in the '30s, early 1940s. That, that we don't know today.

And I can remember so well, that was my freshman year at Harvard, coming home to be at a town meeting. Milton was running a town meeting system. The old New England way of running the town, at which the question came up of granting zoning approval for building this new synagogue, in which there were all sorts of thinly veiled and even not so thinly veiled, anti-Semitic remarks. And he stood before all these people, many of whom, if not most of whom, were against the project. And calmly and gentlemanly, but firmly, and with great dignity, answered the questions and eventually obtained the zoning for the head of the synagogue was built. He was the US president for the first maybe six years.

Yetta Chaiken [11:57] Well, that's, that's a wonderful role model for you.

Nisson Finkelstein [11:59] Oh, he certainly was! He was a man that I will, and I say this not in false modesty, but one I will never equal.

Yetta Chaiken [12:10] What kind of Jewish education did you get? And as much as this was an important part of his life?

Nisson Finkelstein [12:19] Yes. Well, an interesting twist of fate led to my receiving what I think was very good, Jewish education. My father was very committed. On the religious side of Judaism, my mother more on the Zionist side. And if you asked me about her, maybe I'll get into this, but she was a very ardent member of Hadassah back in the years when it wasn't popular to be a member of Hadassah.

But both of them wanted me to have a good Jewish education. And there was no synagogue, obviously, when I was a kid, because, as I explained, the first one was built at the time I was, I was in college. And we used to go to a synagogue that was a fair distance from the place we lived. And so the problem was how to get a good Jewish education and not only preparation for bar mitzvah. But to get more than that. And this was in the '30s, in the midst of the depression, because you can see, I was born in 1925. I said at the time when I was eight, nine years old in 1933, '34, was a terrible time. And my father insisted on getting a teacher, a rather wonderful man by the name of Hy Koren, Hyman Koren, later became assistant to Abram Sachar, when he started Brandeis University. But Hy Koren was then I think, assistant professor, young assistant professor, associate professor of sociology at Boston University. And he was very knowledgeable man in Judaica. Again a Litvak, with much more emphasis on the intellectual side of things than on the religious side, but a wonderful tutor. And my father brought him in as a tutor for me, was Tuesdays and Thursdays, twice a week. And he charged the exorbitant amount of \$1 each time. In the '30s it was a lot of money. And I think it was one of the one of the early indications to me of how important my family felt Jewish education was because they would spend \$1 each time, twice a week to do this, this has to be important. Because during, we're talking about a time when a loaf of bread was 10 cents. And that was the source of my Jewish education. I started at eight or nine and really kept on with him I wanted to keep on after the bar mitzvah. And my father encouraged me to do it. My mother, too. And so I kept on really until I ended Harvard.

Yetta Chaiken [15:12] What was? Did your sister get a Jewish education?

Nisson Finkelstein [15:17] Yes, but of a lesser intensity. There was a program at a community school, which was about five miles away from the house. It had to be driven to or you had to take what were in those days, streetcars. In Boston have to walk about a mile now depends where they take the streetcar there. And she used to do that or my dad's drive her. And that was the source of her education. But unfortunately, in those days, the attitude was that women did not make intensity of education that men did. And so hers was a was a general Jewish education that, I suspect, however, was quite comparable to what ...

Yetta Chaiken [16:11] Women getting other places?

Nisson Finkelstein [16:13] Well, not only that, I was going to be even a little stronger. And I'm trying to think of a tactful way to say it quite comparable to that, which is taught in the synagogues today. But the advantage of the one-on-one tutorial, that I had, which was just, I didn't realize it then but in retrospect, was a fantastic opportunity that I had this for, what, about seven or eight years. That she didn't have?

Yetta Chaiken [16:43] What about your secular education?

Nisson Finkelstein [16:45] That was that the Milton public schools. Which began, as I look back at them, in the perspective of what I see now in the school systems around us, was quite good. It was a classical, what I call English-oriented college education program. What I mean by English-oriented, is a tremendous amount of composition, a tremendous amount of memorization. We had, I remember it was a it was an elective I took, a course in declamation. I don't think probably people don't even know a declamation was, but, is, but we used to, used to declaim on subjects. And that was a great emphasis in that school system, in the college preparatory side of it anyway, in learning to speak, to write, tremendous amount of reading, as I said, and memorization. And then a classic emphasis on mathematics, Latin, which I had four years of Latin, French, History, a significant amount of history. It was what the good public schools used to do back in those days, and particularly in the Boston area. I think the, while Milton was nothing of the caliber of Boston Latin School, Boston Latin School did set a pattern for the better schools in the Boston area.

Yetta Chaiken [18:13] When did you go to Boston Latin School?

Nisson Finkelstein [18:15] I never did. I never did. And Boston, Latin was really far superior to anything in the Boston area.

Yetta Chaiken [18:24] And then from Milton, you had a scholarship to Harvard?

Nisson Finkelstein [18:28] Yes, that's, in fact, that's sort of an amusing thing. By the time I was, oh, maybe, 10 years old, it was the conclusion of all the family, my mother's family, my father's family, and all the aunts and uncles that my mother and father was that I was going to go to Harvard. Of course, nobody in the family had ever gone to Harvard and my mother and father hadn't gone to college. And who would think of college in those days? It was enough to, really, get by and make a living. But they, somehow, everybody's concluded I was going to go to Harvard. And because I did well in school, I did have a record my father was always, was always very proud of, I always had all A's. And everybody felt that I was going to go to Harvard. And Milton did send a fare sprinkling, perhaps two, three, four graduates each year to Harvard. But nobody ever, ever really had in funds to do it with, and so, the, the hurdle of getting into Harvard was sort of dismissed as

well, you know, somehow I would get into it. And the hurdle of how I would get through it economically. I just accepted that I would have to win scholarships and that I would have to work, in order to pay for room and board, if I was going to stay there. And the remarkable thing is that everything happened ...

Yetta Chaiken [19:59] As planned.

Nisson Finkelstein [20:00] As planned. I, each year, I have to win a scholarship. And if you think of how upset kids get now today, it's really hard for me to remember back, but I don't remember being very upset. But I remember every year I'd look through the scholarship catalog at Harvard and see which ones I would I would apply for. Because I knew that if I didn't win a scholarship for the, for the succeeding year, I'd be out. In addition to that I worked in various jobs. Some of them not so pleasant. I worked in a foundry. [unintelligible] on a florist truck, did all sorts of things to,

Yetta Chaiken [20:36] While you were at Harvard.

Nisson Finkelstein [20:36] To make money to get through. But I don't look back on it as a bad time.

Yetta Chaiken [20:43] What was your major?

Nisson Finkelstein [20:45] I majored in physics and minored in philosophy, which today seems strange, but at Harvard then, wasn't strange at all.

Yetta Chaiken [20:54] And then you went on from Harvard, you went to MIT?

Nisson Finkelstein [20:58] And that was a year in between there that was tied up in, in World War number Two, what people of my generation called "The War". In which I did work worked in the Navy radar program.

Yetta Chaiken [21:19] And then you went to MIT and got a PhD in physics.

Nisson Finkelstein [21:28] Physics with a minor in electrical engineering.

Yetta Chaiken [21:33] Did you work while you were at MIT also?

Nisson Finkelstein [21:35] Oh, yes. That was sort of have to be assumed. I, see, I had teaching fellowships, part of the time, teaching fellowship, those days paid \$70 a month, plus all your tuition and fees. So the \$70 a month was to live on, believe it or not. Which was a very good way to lose weight. And the, ah, I also was at a later point a research assistant, which paid a little more. I forget how much. I think it was \$110 a month, and then a research associate, which was really quite liberal at \$140 or \$150 a month. And I also graded papers, did other odds and ends there. But that was, that was easier than the funds at Harvard, it was easier to find jobs

Yetta Chaiken [22:31] Graduate, work while you were in graduate school.

Nisson Finkelstein [22:33] Yes. Related to your work.

Right. And when you finished there, then you are ready for your first job. So, what I'd like you to do now is to begin with the jobs that you had, and carry through to where you are today, in terms of where you went from place to place.

It's really not very, very important. But I'll do it if you'd like. Can I digress for something?

Yetta Chaiken [23:05] Sure.

Nisson Finkelstein [23:06] Because really, these things which I worked so very hard to get through, to obtain, like the education at Harvard, education at MIT, various jobs, that I'll run through quickly, presidencies of companies and their various other things that sound so impressive, and was so impressive to me at the time, and that I worked so very hard to get, as I look back at them, in retrospect, not just now, but really, even 10 years ago, were... How can I put it? That all, that is really like tinsel like little all these little shiny pieces of paper that glitter and catch your eye. But when you get close to them, you see that all are is thin little slips of shiny paper, and you can take a whole wall of it and crush it together, it makes just a little ball of almost nothing, that that those things really, that I worked tremendously hard to get, and to obtain and to reach the top on. Really, in the perspective of a lifetime, are meaningless. And I think I started to say something at the beginning of this interview that I think of now that in contrast with a book or a movie, where we know the theme when we start because of the reviews we read, in a lifetime, you really don't see what's important till you get well into it and as I indicated even toward toward the end of it, because, they're really, they're really the least important things about my life. And I say this not to be not to be self-effacing or put on a pose of false modesty or anything like that, but because they really are important. And I think one of the tragedies of our society today is that we bite and work so hard to get these things that have so little meaning. But having given that preamble, that it doesn't all amount to more than a little ball of crushed up tinsel.

Yetta Chaiken [25:34] At one part in your life, it wasn't for

Nisson Finkelstein [25:36] Oh, was tremendously meaningful.

Yetta Chaiken [25:38] And so that's what I want to go back to that part just to bring us to where you are today.

Nisson Finkelstein [25:44] It was tremendously meaningful. Embarrassingly so. All right. Let's go through it. When I, when I, that's the end of my PhD work, I have been doted upon, for reasons I'm not sure I really understand, by a wonderful man who was

the Dean of science at MIT, George Harrison, who took a liking to me, was my sponsor, and so many things. And when I, when he asked me what I wanted to do next, I said, I wanted to spend the rest of my life teaching and doing research. He said, "Well, if you're going to spend the rest of your life teaching and doing research, I want to stay here at MIT and do it." He said, "If you're going to do that, you ought to spend at least a year in industry." And I remember arguing with him so vociferously, I didn't want to go into industry, that industry was, since this is a tape that that may be heard by younger people, I can't use the word that I that I used with with him, but ...

Yetta Chaiken [26:52] Yes, you can. You definitely can.

Nisson Finkelstein [26:55] I can, I will tell you, I told him that the industry was a whore house. And, and I really felt when I finally did go into a company, because he pushed me so hard to do it, that I really felt as if I was going from a convent into a bordello, really. But George Harrison, whom I had great confidence in and was very fond of and looked up to so much, as only somebody who has been a lowly graduate student can look up to, not only a professor of, not only department head, but the dean and science of the whole of MIT. I did of course, what he said I should do. What he said, "Well, what sort of industry would like to go to what part of the country?" And I said, "I don't want to go anywhere. And so if you want me to go, you need to tell me where and I'll go there." So it turned out he had a relationship of some sort, he was either on the board of Bausch and Lomb the optical scientific company in Rochester, New York, or consulting to them or both, and so, so through him I was hired as a research physicist at Bausch and Lomb. And this was in 1950. I started there in March of 1950. Between the time I received my PhD and then, I received my PhD in '49, I, I taught. Back while I was working for the PhD, I taught and that was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed it. But I went to Rochester, New York, in I think it was March, 1950, and was a research physicist at Bausch and Lomb. What I didn't realize at the time, was that I was that first generation of Jewish scientists that broke the religion bar, if you will, in in American industry. I found I was the only Jew in Bausch and Lomb, which, in addition to everything else, had a reputation for having collaborated with the Germans in the First World War, and maybe even in the second, a setting was supposed to be anti-semitic, which I never experienced. But I was certainly the first and only Jew in Bausch and Lomb. And it was true, of course, at that time companies like Monsanto, like DuPont, and Bell Telephone, oh, none of these places had Jews until after the Second World War. I guess they needed the technical people enough so they couldn't afford the luxury of anti-semitism. So the doors were opened, and we were the first, those of us who went to these places and now 1950, were the first Jews to get into, into these companies. So that's where I went. And it was important very important, to me not because of

Bausch and Lomb, though I learned a little there, too, but because it was was in Rochester, New York that I met, that I met Rona, my wife and the that, I think, only about a month or so after I arrived to report for work we were engaged. It we met I think in April 1950. We were engaged in June; we were married in September.

Yetta Chaiken [30:22] So that was, it was serendipitous, that you...

Nisson Finkelstein [30:26] Well, I won't call it serendipitous. I think it was a great blessing, the, the four great blessings in my life have been my mother, my father, my wife and my being a Jew. And they're blessings that, as I grow older, I more and more wonder at my merit in receiving. What did I, what was my zechut, what was my merit in receiving these blessings?

Well, when you were, how long did you stay at Bausch and Lomb?

I stayed there. Let's see till 1959. And, not, I found not only did I not want to leave immediately, but I even enjoyed it. And not only did I enjoy doing Industrial Research, but, horror of horrors, I became interested in management and I ended up responsible for Research and Engineering at Bausch and Lomb in about 1950, oh '56, I think, something like that. I guess I was 31 years old at the time.

Yetta Chaiken [31:47] And so you when you left, you decided though to leave Bausch and Lomb.

Nisson Finkelstein [31:52] Yes. It is certainly another exciting thing during that period, was along the way I had responsibility for a program called CinemaScope. 20th Century Fox wanted to develop a wide angle screen presentation for motion pictures. That, that particular one was known as CinemaScope, which spread the picture out in a very wide screen and produced what for those days was wonderful stereophonic sound system. And they came to Bausch and Lomb with essentially a blank check. I remember seeing the blank check in the president's office when Spyros Skouras

, the then chairman of Twentieth Century Fox came in with a blank check. Put it down on the table of the president of Bausch and Lomb and said, "You fill in the amount. We want you to develop this, this complete optical system for something called CinemaScope." In fact I remember, a bit of a digression, an amusing incident, Spyros Skouras was Greek, you know, he was a very strong-willed man, and he wrote down this word, CinemaScope. And he wrote it in script continuously, not as two words, but there was a capital C and a capital S in it. And still being the somewhat cocky, the Harvard graduate at heart, and Bostonian at heart, I, because I was in charge of Research and Engineering by that point, I said, "Mr. Skouras, some I note you have a capital S, is that two words?" He said, "No, it's one word." And I said, "Well, how can you have a capital letter in the middle of the word?" And he said, with his heavy Greek

accent, he said, "Look, big shot. If I want a capital letter in the middle of the word, I'll have a capital letter in the middle of the word." We became good friends, and he always called me Pigshot after that. It was not a B, it was a P.

But that was very exciting, because it gave me the chance to go in and out of Hollywood. And that was a whole new experience for me because I was involved in, in the all the equipment we made for them to shoot some of these early \_\_\_ pictures like Marilyn Monroe's "How to Marry a Millionaire" and [unintelligible] about the life of Jesus.

Yetta Chaiken [34:21] And they were using that film that you had said...

Nisson Finkelstein [34:24] Well, we didn't develop the film. It was just regular film, but we developed all the optics, the camera lenses, and the projection lenses and all these special effects lenses for this wide-angle screen. And it was such an exciting thing for someone from mostly from the academic world of Harvard and MIT to get out into what was, even then in the '50s, the still very romantic life of 20th Century Fox lot, which was a huge city in itself. It exists no more.

Yetta Chaiken [35:00] Well, and then you took, you took to industry, and

Nisson Finkelstein [35:05] In a way that I would have considered completely shameless and despicable not too many years before.

Yetta Chaiken [35:12] And as you would even of later, but meanwhile

Nisson Finkelstein [35:15] Yes, yes. As I do, now.

Yetta Chaiken [35:17] But meanwhile, were you were on the road to success and what was your next venture? And why did you leave Bausch and Lomb?

Nisson Finkelstein [35:25] Well, as often happens in the rough jungle of the corporate world, I got into disagreements with some of the top management about where to go. Some of them were rather interesting. One of them was that I felt that the future of the optical industry would require making ties to produce, in Japan or some other place of low cost, and at that time, which was, after all, only a decade after the end of the Second World War, this was, this was just something that was explosive as a concept. And I think I was proved right by what happened later, because all the binoculars and other consumer items, that Bausch and Lomb made, of course, are now Japanese, but there were some differences in approach concerning technical directions and developments of the business. And also Bausch and Lomb was a very conservative company, and I was introduced to an opportunity to get into, what was at that time, the most exciting company, you could imagine -- a company called General Dynamics, which had recently been formed. And there was an article in Fortune magazine

called General Dynamics versus the USSR, sort of a naive thing, as we look at it now. But at that point, General Dynamics was making the Atlas missile and making the V-58. It was making virtually all of the major armament systems that were protecting the country vis-a-vis, the Soviet Union. And this rather, dewy-eyed article in Fortune magazine caught my eye and it was at about that time, that a head-hunter, one of these executive search people, came to me and said there was interest, at the top management level, at General Dynamics to get me to come there. And so I went to New York, and that was Frank Pace, who was the boy wonder, who was director of the federal budget, Bureau of the Budget when he was 28, and Secretary of the Army when he was something like 32, 33. At that point, he was chairman of the board of General Dynamics, which you know, made submarines at the electric boat division and missiles out at Convair and commercial aircraft at Convair. All sorts of other military and civilian hardware. And as a result of that, I ended up going in 1959, to General Dynamics as Vice President for, well originally director of research in the electronics division, and then vice president of Research and then vice president of Research and Engineering and then for a period ran the division, the electronics division, which was about half in Rochester, and about half in San Diego.

Yetta Chaiken [38:35] And so you were Rochester.

Nisson Finkelstein [38:37] Still in Rochester, though a lot of time and an aeroplane on way back and forth to San Diego and New York.

Yetta Chaiken [38:42] And did you find that satisfying?

Nisson Finkelstein [38:45] Yes. In its time. Yes, it was, it was very exciting. It was very different. General Dynamics was a very different company from Bausch and Lomb. Bausch and Lomb was very conservative company at the time I was there. It was already over 100 years old. General Dynamics was brand new. At Bausch and Lomb the only office that was the air conditioned in the company was the chairman of the board's office, and that was with a room air conditioner. He shared a secretary with the president of the company. At General Dynamics, by contrast, really, it's division in the same city, the whole place was air conditioned. And the secretaries all over the place and the first week I moved there an interior decorator came in to ask me what drapes and carpets I wanted on the floor. And I said, "There already are drapes and carpets on the floor." And he said, "Oh well, you have an allowance to replace all this stuff. So it was a completely different company, that

Yetta Chaiken [39:48] Different mindset...

Nisson Finkelstein [39:48] Different mindset and very flamboyant, exciting, in that sense. And so I learned a fair amount there. But then something else exciting happened later

on. Which I will tell you about if you'd like. John Kennedy in '61, I believe that was, made his famous speech about putting the man on the moon. That, as the youngsters would say today, lit my fire. I thought that was a fantastic concept of having a man walk on the moon. And I tried in every way possible to get the operations I was in into the lunar program. And we were in them, in some ways. We made tracking systems for them with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, but I still had an idea it would be great to get involved with the very guts of this idea of walking on the moon. Which seemed to me to be a fantastic concept.

Nisson Finkelstein

And as the world spins around and strange things happen, a, another management search organization contacted me about a very mysterious job, um, that they wanted me to come to New York and interview for. And they wouldn't tell me much about it, but the president of the company wanted to speak to me. And I said, "What's the company?" And they said it was International Latex Corporation. So I looked up in Standard and Poor's and something else like that, Dun and Bradstreet, to see what International Latex made and I found they made ladies' brassieres and girdles and things of that nature. Unmentionable things. And here coming from a technical background I had and the companies I worked in this was a pretty impossible thing to go to. So I told them I was absolutely not interested. And so there was nothing to do with that. Actually, nothing to do. And this went on for about, well over a year. Until he said, "Well, next time you're in New York for a meeting with General Dynamics headquarters, would you meet with the president of International Latex, whose name was Walter O. Heinz, Wally Heinz. And I did meet with Wally Heinz, who was probably the best salesman I've ever seen. He could, he could talk, I think he could talk anybody into anything. And, to make a long story short, he presented to me this exciting idea of a group of people in International Latex's operation in Dover, Delaware. I had no idea where Dover was and no idea where Delaware was. But it was, they had some bright ideas and we thought this could be developed, and they thought it could be developed into a spacesuit to go to the moon. And I told him that I was sure they were bright people and I respected his judgement but I really felt they were not in a position to judge what it would take to get a man to the moon. I mean it was preposterous, for people from that background to think of it. But, I did, in the course of time, skipping over some of the gory details, go down to Dover, Delaware, met with some of these people who were very bright, and had some very exciting ideas. And I then went down to meet with Bob Gilruth who was, Dr. Gilruth was director of the Manned Spacecraft Center at NASA in Houston. I'd known him through General Dynamics. And asked him about the spacesuit program and what was needed to do it and got rather excited about it. And, to make a long story short, I ended up

starting with a group of, a very small group of maybe 30 people or something, in Dover, which eventually,

Yetta Chaiken Were you there from the beginning?

Nisson Finkelstein Yes, well. From the beginning, really, before any of the contracts with the Space Administration. They had no money from anywhere.

Yetta Chaiken But they had developed, they had

Nisson Finkelstein They had developed some of the basic concepts, so I had, I can claim no credit for any of the, despite some of the news articles that have given it to me, I had no technical accomplishment in the spacesuit program at all. My accomplishments, such as it was, was getting the management of it and getting of the contract from NASA and the administration of it. And I'd like to think that,

Yetta Chaiken And making it work.

Nisson Finkelstein Yes, I'd like to think I had something to do with making it all work. But, it drew on some 1500, 1600 people.

Yetta Chaiken So how long did you live in Dover, Delaware?

Nisson Finkelstein We lived in Dover, Delaware from '64 to '71. Which I must tell you was a shocker. When I moved from Boston to Rochester, I felt I was moving to the boondocks, because Rochester, New York, was such a step down from Boston, in terms of the variety of cultural, intellectual opportunities, but going from Rochester to Dover, let me tell you, was even bigger of a step than from Rochester. We were shocked.

Yetta Chaiken But there must have been other compensations.

Nisson Finkelstein Oh, it was very exciting for me. I, I loved every minute of it and I even loved living there. I think it was harder on Rona than it was on me.