

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: MAYOR STEVE CAPPIELLO

INTERVIEWER: HANK FORREST

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SIDE ONE

HF: Here we are on Monday, June 16th.

So Steve, I thought maybe I'd start with the election last week. I was wondering if there were any surprises.

SC: None whatever, really. None whatever. We anticipated that Anthony Russo would be in the run-off, because of his familiarity in the town, the popularity that he did have, and that he did lose, eventually. We knew he was a combatant. He fights a tough fight. He won his place in the run-off. However, he didn't do the running away that we thought he would do, you see. So we were kind of pleased with the outcome.

HF: Now did you think his running for that council seat -- that he was taking after you? Because I know you, after being mayor, you came back and became councilman from the third ward. Did you think he was kind of following in your footsteps? Or taking his lead from you in any way?

SC: Not really. I think I did that just to finish, and have something to say, with some projects that I had begun while I was mayor. Anthony has another goal in mind. He and some of his friends have told me he thinks he's going all the way. He's going to run for mayor in two years. So that was information I had gotten from some of his friends.

HF: I was curious -- Are elections very different now than they were when you first got into politics?

SC: Yes. The press and the public relations people pay a bigger part in the elections today than we did. Most of my electioneering was basically door-to-door; street-corners; putting up microphones on a busy street-corner; gathering the crowd; getting your own friends to

begin the nucleus of a crowd; and having your information spread that way. In those days it might cost you, oh, maybe a couple thousand dollars to run a campaign.

HF: And how was the money spent?

SC: Basically, in gathering people; having beer parties and kaffee klatches. Stuff like that. Today you've got to hire a public relations firm. You spend money on advertising like crazy, as you might well have seen in this last campaign -- all the signage that was out there; all the mail that was put out. Things like that. That's the difference between my time coming up, and the kids of this era, right now.

HF: Is it possible to say that elections are won the day of the election, or are they won the week before? Or do you think people's minds are made up already?

SC: No. A lot of people's minds are made up, but usually not enough. You've got to go out there, and your election starts the minute you announce for the fight. Sometimes it may be a month, two months before the election that you start, and that's when you really get involved.

Then you've really got to be on your toes. You've got to be out there. You've got to be visible to the public. That's where it's done. Of course, election day is another animal. It's having all the work you've done in the past month or two months ready to come out for you on election day. That's the big part of the job -- getting the people out that you have had listen to you.

HF: I guess election day, in a lot of respects, is no different than it was back then. Because then the fliers don't do you any good.

SC: Right. Absolutely.

HF: Then it's being on the street.

SC: Then it's all you've done, meeting people; going from door-to-door; knocking on houses; in bars; standing where newsstands might be, as people pick up their newspaper. You introduce yourself, or whatever. That's the process that had to be used in my time.

HF: Now when was your first run for public office? Was it when you ran for City Council?

SC: In 1963. The first time I ran for City Council I was successful. That came as a result of my being involved with the Police Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, and being a member of the pay-raise committee. I had been quite active, socially, in my area of the town, the church, Little Leagues, clubs, and things like that. So that I had some kind of standing when I first got involved.

HF: What was your area of town?

SC: My area was Anthony Russo's area -- third ward -- which usually was where the heaviest fighting took place.

HF: And where were you living then?

SC: Right down at Sixth and Adam, where I am today.

HF: Were you always there?

SC: No, I was born around the corner.

HF: Which corner.

SC: Jefferson Street. I was born at 514 Jefferson Street, and except for the three years I served in the Navy, in World War II, I've never lived out of Hoboken, at all.

HF: Because I'm at 518 Jefferson.

SC: Right.

HF: When did you move out of 514?

SC: When I got married, in 1952. I always lived in the town. I had an apartment at 6th and Park from '52 to about '55. I'm sorry -- I got married in '52. Yes. In about '55 or '56, I bought 6th and Adam, and I've been there ever since.

HF: So you grew up at 514 Jefferson.

SC: My teens --

HF: When you were born, were you -- ?

SC: I was born at home, at 514, yes. In those days, you were born at home.

HF: Right. So you went into the Army --

SC: Navy.

HF: Oh. You were in the Navy.

SC: Yes.

HF: I thought you told the kids you were in the Army. Because you wanted to go into the Air Force.

SC: Right. I wanted to fly. I spent two summers in Fort Dix in 1938 and 1939.. [Interruption] --

HF: Okay. So you wanted to fly.

SC: Yes. I spent two summers at Fort Dix, in what they call the Citizens Military Training Corps. While we were in high school, you know, the Army came around, trying to get people to join different services of

the army. I would have liked to have been a flier. I wanted to join the Air Corps.

HF: Did you end up finishing high school?

SC: Oh, sure. Yes. Well, no, that was a summer program, through high school. It was only for the summer. I liked doing it, but when I took the final exam they told me I had a deviated septum and flying would be very difficult for me. They said, "Unless you want to be a slow-flying operator, like blimps and dirigibles." So I just waited until I could go into the Navy.

HF: And when did you get out of the Navy?

SC: In 1945.

HF: Then you came back to Hoboken?

SC: To where I lived. Yes.

HF: I think one of your parents had passed away, before that?

SC: Yes. Oh, a long time, yes. My father died when I was ten years old.

HF: Your mother was still alive when you came back?

SC: Yes.

HF: And she was at 514?

SC: Yes.

HF: So when you came out of the Navy, where did you go then?

SC: Well, when I came out of the Navy I took my time trying to decide what I wanted to do. Finally, there was an operation in the city where they were trying to do some cleanup of police signs and traffic situations. So they advertised for someone, and I took the job of working in the police garage, so to speak, working on signs, trying to replace all the signs in town. At that time, one-way streets were becoming more and more necessary, so there was a lot in that area. I worked with

the police department until finally, in 1950, I got tired of that. It slowed down, so I took the test for the police department, uniformed service, and that's when I became a policeman. From there I got involved with police organizers in 1953, so people would be able to help by homes, or do whatever was necessary to keep them going, because Hoboken was a red-line district in those days.

HF: What does that mean?

SC: A red-line district, basically, is an area where the banks would not go near that area because it wasn't very healthy, financially, that is.

HF: Because Hoboken was on its decline, after --

SC: Hoboken was not in good shape financially, so that you couldn't get a mortgage. Like when I bought the house on Adams Street, it was purchased with myself, a brother of mine, and a friend. We all put some money together and bought that house.

HF: So you couldn't get a mortgage.

SC: No, you couldn't get a mortgage in those days --

HF: Wow.

SC: -- unless you had somebody in the family who was willing to sponsor you, or help you out.

HF: Was that true for the whole county?

SC: No. No. Certain areas of Hoboken. It was the Willow area boundary. The Willow area, to the hill, was all the poor -- old homes -- whereas the other part of Hoboken was, as you can see, homes that were built of stone and brick, etc. We were wood-framers, downtown.

HF: I moved into town in '87, and at that point, the first time I went to a realtor they only showed us apartments east of Willow. They said, "You don't want to live west of Willow." I didn't really understand that, but since then I've heard that. You hear it less and less now; you hardly hear it at all anymore.

SC: Right. No, you can buy anywhere now.

HF: But I was always curious as to where that dividing line came from, or how that -- You say it existed back -- and the banks --

SC: The banks wouldn't go out there.

HF: So the banks would give a mortgage --

SC: -- up this way, sure. The other side. And, of course, the property down below was a lot cheaper than it was on this side of Willow Avenue.

HF: That's interesting.

I wanted to go back to something you said before. So all the streets weren't one-way, after the war, at that point?

SC: When I was a youngster, no. There were no cars, per se. There were maybe as many horse-and-wagons as there were cars, in my day, when I was a child. In fact, the streets were our playground. I've seen that transfer from those days to today.

HF: When you came back from the Navy, did the town look any different to you at that point? Or did it still seem like the same place?

SC: No. The only thing I would say I noticed was that a lot of the areas in town that were kind of dead were alive with manufacturing, of one sort or the other. A lot of clothing manufacturing developed during the war and after the war, for some time.

HF: Was that any particular part of town?

SC: All different areas. They were referred to as "sweatshops," and there were quite a few of them. A lot of the people made money doing that, doing those jobs.

HF: Now when you came out of the Navy, McFeely -- Well, I guess when you went in [Bernard] McFeely was mayor, and when you came out, McFeely was mayor.

SC: He was mayor, right.

HF: I guess you had never voted before you went away, in the service.

SC: No.

HF: So the first time you voted was --

SC: -- was in 1947.

HF: Forty-seven was a big election.

SC: Yes. That's the election that unseated McFeely. I was quite active in that one, as a youngster.

HF: Active in what sense?

SC: With the group down there, that opposed him. It was Mayor[Fred] De Sapio, Commissioner Borelli, [Stephen] Mongiello, [John] Grogan, and [George] Fitzpatrick. Those were the five people, and they were also basically anti-McFeely.

HF: Was the city run on the same Mayor/City Council --

SC: No, it was not. In those days, five commissioners were selected to run --

HF: The way Union City is today.

SC: Right. From the five they selected the mayor. So if three of them could get together (which became an inside, political fight), immediately after they won, they selected the man who would be called the mayor. Basically, they all had departments. There were five major departments at the time, and that was the beginning of more in-fighting amongst themselves. One guy wanted to be the mayor, another guy wanted to be the mayor, and finally De Sapio was able to convince them that he should be the mayor. But that didn't go over very well with Fitzpatrick and Grogan.

HF: So what led you to join them? What were the issues at the time? What was driving the election, as far as the voters were concerned?

SC: Well, at the time McFeely had been in for some time, and the fact that people began to know about

his business enterprises -- which were basically connected with the town, and in which he could call the shots on how much things would cost for the business -- they knew he was doing a number on the city. McFeely had the garbage contract, which was big in those days, especially since a good part of your garbage that was picked up by garbage people was ashes. Most of the homes in those days had coal stoves, and with coal stoves you had a product, at the end of the coal being burned. A lot of that was picked up by horse and wagon, and these were heavy -- I remember as a kid I used to see these guys picking up that barrel, having to put it on their shoulders and hoisting it up to a big, wooden, open truck, with two horses in front.

HF: I remember that as a kid, too. I was in Brooklyn. We had an apartment house that burned coal. I didn't think about it, but I remember that the garbage cans were always filled with ashes that were meteorite-looking.

SC: Yes, and they were heavy. A lot of that stuff was dumped right in back of the city, way back there.

HF: You mean they would dump it back there?

SC: Way back there, and basically it was used as fill. If you go down that way, you can dig a hole, you can dig a pile, rather, maybe seventy-eighty-ninety feet, where, if you look at an old map of Hoboken, you could go by water from 15th or 16th Street, around toward the Palisades, over to Jersey City somewhere -- whether it was a creek, or whatever the hell it was.

HF: So the end of town was really like Monroe or something? Because the housing projects were there.

SC: Yes, the housing projects were built in their time, the first commissioners. Yes.

HF: So everybody was onto McFeely.

SC: Yes.

HF: Was that the first secret election? The election format -- was it any different in '47 than it was before that?

SC: No, the format was the five commissioners.

HF: When you actually cast your ballot --

SC: -- you cast for five.

HF: How did you actually cast your vote?

SC: You cast for each one. You had five votes, and you cast for -- you could pick three from one and two from the other, and so on. What became a problem on that election day is that people uptown voted for -- Grogan and Fitzpatrick came out very heavy, and the three people downtown -- De Sapio, Borelli and Mongiello -- they were cut. So it was that kind of election. That's what resulted in De Sapio taking over as Mayor. Grogan and Fitzpatrick, they played a game. In other words, "Just vote for me, don't worry about that." Fortunately, that downtown area was a crowded area -- big families, like my family, families down there had seven, eight, nine people in the family -- whereas the more sophisticated people had two, three children, maybe, at the most. That gave them the weight to overtake those two people.

HF: So the uptown-downtown thing -- Uptown is the eastern, more Irish part of town --

SC: Right. Irish and German.

HF: And west of Willow was more Italian, is that right? It was divided somewhat ethnically?

SC: Italian, black. We had quite a few black people then, too. But they kind of shared similar goals downtown.

HF: So with De Sapio becoming Mayor -- that was the first Italian mayor in town?

SC: Right.

HF: That must have been a big change.

SC: That was a big change, yes.

HF: Now what about Depascale? When does he -- ?

SC: [Louis] Depascale became Mayor -- let's see -- in 1963.

HF: So when you ran for council, he ran for mayor. And was he involved with -- De Sapio was '47 to '53, I think. Six years?

SC: Six years, right. Then there was a change in the government, in 1953. There was a charter study in which the government changed, through the "Presson/Faulkner Act," mayor and council -- which today costs a hell of a lot more money to administer the city than five commissioners would have. Much more.

HF: How did that come about?

SC: It was an effort by Grogan and Fitzpatrick -- and a dissident commissioner aligned with De Sapio -- to have enough power to put this before the public. This was voted on, it wasn't something they could administer by resolution. It had to be a referendum, and it passed. At that time Grogan and Fitzpatrick aligned, and they were able to get Mongiello and enough of the people

from downtown, and it won. Because they were able to prove that the new form of government was more representative. We would have six councilmen from six wards, three at large and the mayor. Believe me, today it's so god-damned expensive. It's really an expensive form of government.

HF: Were the elections always in the spring? Even back when it was --

SC: Yes. They were all in May.

HF: So Grogan -- I see. So the government format changed, and then Grogan ended up becoming Mayor --

SC: Right.

HF: -- out of that, in '53.

SC: That was the objective. I don't think they cared about the costs or anything like that.

HF: So Grogan, De Sapio and --

SC: Right.

HF: I guess Depascale came in later?

SC: Yes, Depascale came -- in the change, he became a councilman at large. He was basically Grogan's "intelligence," so to speak. He was the guy outside in the street, singing the phrases and letting people know about what a good administration they were and so on. Grogan stayed for eight years, until 1961, and Louise Depascale became Mayor, in '61. He lasted for eight years.

HF: Now you were active in that '47 election. Were you active in elections after that?

SC: Always.

HF: All right. So you were interested --

SC: I've always been involved in the elections, yes.

HF: When did you first think you might want to run for office?

SC: Oh, back in 1963 is when I first got involved, and I got involved because at the time I was one of the members of the police pay-raise committee. We were trying to get a pay raise, and when we had meetings with the administration and they just pushed us aside and said no. The final time, they told the committee, "Look, if you don't like what's happening, go out and get yourself elected," to the officer. So at a meeting they all decided, "Well, let's see. They're threatening us, so let's show them that we're going to try. All right. Who wants to run?"

I didn't care about running, really. I didn't really care. I liked being a police officer. That was my first love. So they said, "Steve is popular downtown. He belongs to the social clubs. He's here, he's active in the church, and he's from a big family, a widespread family, married. How about you, Steve?" "Well, I don't really want to do it, but if there's nobody else, and this will help us get ahead, we'll do it."

So I had an army of policemen as people supporting me, and I won overwhelmingly against the old-guard, so to speak.

HF: Who did you run against? Do you remember?

SC: A fellow called Frank Caprio, who was Louis Depascale's man in the third ward.

HF: So you and Depascale were often on opposite sides of the fence?

SC: Off and on, yes. We were friends. Louis and I had different outlooks on life. He loved the racetrack and things like that. That wasn't my speed. I basically enjoyed being on baseball teams, supporting the kids with Little League, and so on.

HF: Just to get back to McFeely a second -- I guess McFeely also had a relative who was the head of the police? The police chief?

SC: Yes. He left almost immediately.

HF: So in other words, when McFeely left, all his family left with him.

SC: Yes.

HF: So by the time you got into the police department, it was a new group.

SC: Oh, yes.

HF: And who was chief then, when you -- Do you remember?

SC: When I became -- I believe it was John Reynolds, Chief Reynolds was the chief.

HF: Police chiefs, sometimes, you don't hear about. They're not in the news quite as much. But today, typically, they hang on for ten years or something?

SC: Oh, yeah. They hang on for a while. You don't get rid of them that easy.

HF: Reynolds was chief when you started?

SC: Reynolds was chief for a while.

HF: Was he still chief when you ran for office, at that point?

SC: I don't know. I don't think so.

HF: Because George Crimmons --

SC: No, George Crimmons came later.

HF: Much later.

SC: Because Chief Reynolds committed suicide. He drove out to the cemetery, where maybe he buried his wife -- He went out there, and killed himself in his car. Yes. After Chief Reynolds, I believe there were a couple acting chiefs, but no real chief. There was Bill Christy, who became chief for a while. Then Ambrose Ryn, for a while. Then it started progressing, up the years, until Ed Sheehy and George Crimmons. George Crimmons became chief.

HF: When was that? Were you mayor at that point?

SC: Oh, no. No. He became chief back, maybe, in, I would say, around '68-'69-'70. Somewhere around there. He became chief.

HF: So it sounds like when they changed the city government format, and Grogan became mayor, in the '50s, that's when you're saying this redlining -- and you couldn't get mortgages for the houses, in the downtown part of town.

SC: Right. You couldn't get mortgages for the houses until after World War II. There was some kind of change that took place then, after the war. It became a different kind of thing. There was one old man who owned the Bank at Fourth and Washington Street -- which is now Pamrapo Bank -- but he basically would lend people money on his own, an old man who made a lot of money. He'd go downtown and he'd give mortgages out. Of course, he's since gone. I'm trying to think of his name. He was a nice old man.

HF: So when you bought your house, that must have been -- You were the first one in your family, maybe, to own your own property?

SC: Right.

HF: Because renting was -- most people rented.

SC: Yes. I was the first one. My oldest brother and I, he had a family -- he had five kids, I had no children at the time. I had one. My daughter, my oldest daughter.

HF: Did you ever work on the docks, or anything like that?

SC: I used to shape the docks as a youngster, but they didn't want young kids there, at the time.

HF: So, I would assume a lot of kids would just hang around the docks.

SC: Maybe. Go up there and hang around. You'd get thrown out of your house and go look for a job, or something like that. So you went up to the docks.

HF: When you were a policeman, did you walk the beat?

SC: Yes. In fact, that's where I gained my popularity, I would say. I walked a beat that ran from Willow Avenue to Bloomfield Street, from Fifth to about 11th, all family homes, you know. I would walk the beat, and I was always talking to the kids and talking to the people. I got to be very known in that area, which is now the sixth ward, and I did real well when I ran, later. Because I would talk to people. I was very sociable and very glad to talk to people, unlike a lot of boys who don uniforms. Sometimes you've got to let them remember that they're people. Some of them get that gun and that badge, they don't use it the right way -- they want to become heavyweights -- but I enjoyed the social part of being a policeman.

HF: Did they purposely put you in a different area from where you lived? Or was it just circumstances?

SC: No, but that's a good point. They would like not to have you in your own area, because in those days everybody was out. You could easily hide for a couple hours, in your own home, you know? But, if you had good superiors working, it wasn't easy. We had call boxes in a lot of places, on poles, so that you'd call in every so often.

HF: Do you remember how many call boxes would be on your beat?

SC: Oh, I had maybe four, about four or five that I knew about, so they'd be located -- spread out, see -- so it kind of forced you to walk from here to there. So you called every hour.

HF: So it was kind of like the fire boxes that every so often --

SC: Yes. You were able to pick up Cappiello at point so and so, and that's it.

HF: Would kids use those boxes?

SC: No. They had a key. They had a special key, you know.

HF: The area you lived in, back on Adams -- Like I notice now, when you walk along Adams, there's a lot of what look like they used to be storefronts and things like that, that have all been converted.

SC: Yes.

HF: I'm assuming that, back then, everybody did their shopping on the block.

SC: In the neighborhoods. Right. Exactly.

HF: It seems that Fifth and Adams, now, still has some collection of stores there.

SC: Yes. There were stores there, too. There was a chicken market where that new house is being fixed, on Fifth Street. That was a chicken market. You probably don't remember that. And a fish store on the corner. I don't think you remember that.

HF: No.

SC: Right on the very corner, where the tailor is, there was a fish store.

HF: Now was that always kind of a commercial center, around there?

SC: Yes. And there was a store on the other side of the street, which is now a condo -- a couple of stores there which have been condoed, like everything else in town.

HF: Did trolleys go up and down Fifth Street? Were there any trolleys -- ?

SC: Second Street.

HF: Only Second. Because I noticed -- I guess all the streets were cobblestone --

SC: In the old days, they were.

HF: -- because you still see some of them,
coming up.

SC: Right.

HF: So you were walking the beat up in
what's the sixth ward. So that was more Grogan's territory,
I guess --

SC: Yes.

HF: -- that you were up there. So it gave
you a chance to get to know --

SC: Oh, no, those people very well. And you
know what? I had blonde hair. My hair was blonde -- and I
had hair. Of course, having married a girl with the name of
Barry, with the name of Barry -- "Well, he's married to an
Irish lady; married to one of ours."

HF: But Walter and Joe Barry were from out
of town. They weren't Hoboken --

SC: Oh, they didn't come on until later.

HF: Much later.

So when you were getting involved in all these elections, were there people you were trying to emulate, whom you took as kind of mentors, in a way? Who were teaching you about how things were?

SC: Not really, no. I don't think I cared to become the mayor. I was very happy as a police officer, really. I really loved the job. It was so nice to be able to help people, and I guess I developed a lot of friends in the town. Some guys out on the street don't want to be bothered: "Go to headquarters if you want to find out." I'd always make it my business to know, if there was something that could be done to help somebody in the neighborhood, and I would do it.

HF: Were there tougher parts of town back then?

SC: Yes.

HF: What were the tougher parts of town?

SC: Well, the tough part of town was always down in the western section, where you had the mix of the Puerto Ricans and the blacks, and they didn't always agree. And, of course, up around 14th Street. One of the first developments of Joe Barry -- I was the mayor, then -- but there were a lot of PRs living in that area of the town, when I was a police officer, because there are a lot of vacancies up there, people who moved out. They just loaded them up with the Tootsie Roll Company, which was at 14th and Willow Avenue -- I don't know if you know that --

HF: Right.

SC: Okay. They were a big manufacturer. They hired a lot of people. They were brought over right from Puerto Rico. They would bring them in, set them up in these apartments, and they'd go to work.

HF: And that was when? In the '60s?

SC: Yes. They became a big number at that time, and they caused all gangs problems.

HF: But in the '50s, I guess you really didn't have too many people moving into town, did you?

SC: No.

HF: In the '50s -- I know the town was very crowded around World War I, and then I guess by the time you were born --

SC: World War I was probably when you saw the highest number of people in town.

HF: So by the '50s, was the town reasonably stable at that point? Did things start to get -- or were they still kind of tough.

SC: No, I think at that time -- Yes, they were still tough, because people started to move their operations -- like the sweatshops kind of slowed down a little bit. But only the big guys were surviving, the big sweatshops, and some of these people just gave up, because the big guys were able to take their work, ship it down south and get it done cheaper than they could here.

HF: I guess the '50s was when *On the Waterfront* was filmed here. Was that a big deal, them coming in and --

SC: Yes.

HF: -- and doing that.

SC: Yes. Everybody wanted to be an actor. They had quite a few people doing shots in that movie. If I were watch the movie again, I would see a lot of people I know.

HF: From what you remember of the movie, was that an accurate depiction of what the town was like -- the way it looked, personalities and so forth?

SC: Yes, pretty much so. They did a good job on that. Of course, some of the people in there were local people, who were able to do the part. What you saw is basically what went on. The waterfront was exaggerated. I forget the name they used for the hero in the picture, who was --

HF: The Brando character?

SC: Yes. He was Tony Mike, a downtown fella, who fought the big guys on the piers.

HF: So about the '60s, when a lot of people started coming from Puerto Rico, they would move back in the western -- like Madison and --

SC: Yes, yes --

HF: -- uptown, near Willow?

SC: Uptown and Willow. Right.

HF: Further up. Now I remember references to -- Of course, we never had riots here like in Jersey City or Newark, but there were riots in Hoboken in '71. Is that when it was? Actually, that took place around what? Around First Street?

SC: Yes.

HF: Was it over the course of a few days?
What actually happened? That was out of your beat, I guess.

SC: Well, more than a few days. They had been planning this. There were a couple of ring-leaders who weren't getting what they thought they should be getting out of the government, and so on. I was a councilman then, and I took quite an active part in the riots -- having my police background -- and I got quite involved in going after them. I think this made me probably get my most acclaim on the way to being the mayor. I took a leadership role against the riots, and some of the riots -- I don't know if you know who they are --

HF: No, I never --

SC: Have you heard of Frank Duroy?

HF: Ed Duroy, I guess.

SC: Ed Duroy. No. Well, I think Frank, his older brother, was a little bit of -- he was a sophisticate who put out the "barbs" for these guys to --

HF: So Frank was Ed's older brother?

SC: Yes.

HF: I see.

SC: But a fellow who works for Joe Barry0
now was one of the ring-leaders.

HF: Louie -- Lopez?

SC: Louie Lopez. You remember Louie? Do you
know Louie?

HF: Yes.

SC: He was one of the ring-leaders of this
thing. He was one of the intelligent -- You know, whatever
they wanted -- I remember when we were trying to effect
peace -- They took over an apartment, 5th and Adams, in a
house, and we tried to talk some sense into these guys. So
we went up to have a meeting in this apartment -- They just
went into a building and took over, and people were afraid
to say, "Get out." So we went up there, and in there they

had pictures of Che Guevara, the Cuban leadership that took over Cuba, and I said, "Oh, God. I just want some outside force here, trying to put this stuff together." Then they got a little wild. They went out and started going around breaking things up and doing damage.

HF: Did they have demands? What were -- they just wanted -- ?

SC: Oh, they wanted a place in government, they wanted --

HF: -- more representation?

SC: Right. They wanted housing. Finally, when they got that, there, they started -- Some of our friends on the waterfront -- We were able to get them to leave work. They all left work. That's when First Street became the battleground. They ran down First Street, chasing after them, and I think they realized that they'd gone too far, and now people were coming after them with bats and hooks. The longshoremen had hooks, scaring the hell out of them. These guys were tough, on the waterfront. They did hard work, and they were probably well-shaped to

go after these guys. That kind of settled down, I think, right there.

Yes, one of the other guys who was involved was what's-his-name? He's involved with the whole waterfront -- he's on the waterfront committee. You know his name, I'm sure. I just can't think of his name right now. He fights Joe Barry, he --

HF: Ron Hine?

SC: Ron Hine. Ron Hine was involved.

HF: This is what? Nineteen-seventy-one?

SC: No. Ron Hine was involved.

HF: Really?

SC: Maybe you should talk to Ron. Have you ever talked with him about this?

HF: No.

SC: You know him well, right?

HF: Yes.

SC: Ask him about when he was in the store, hiding, as they ran away. Somebody threw some kind of a bomb in the store, in that area, and he ducked out of the way. He might be a good man to talk to about it. He has, probably, more of a recollection of that, since he was involved with them.

HF: Now being councilman has always been -- officially, it's a part-time job?

SC: Yes.

HF: So back then, were you still a policeman, walking the beat?

SC: No. You could not exercise both. I had to take a leave of absence from the police department.

SIDE TWO

HF: -- your activity with the events leading up to the riots was all in your city council role, not as a policeman.

SC: Yes. Basically, yes.

HF: Now before that -- where was DePascale? I guess he was -- ?

SC: He was the mayor up until '73.

HF: It sounded like things had gotten fairly tense in town, in terms of all the people from Puerto Rico coming in --

SC: Oh, yes.

HF: -- and I assume there were a lot of old-time residents, still. The town must have been split in some ways, maybe the way it is now; what is called the born-and-breds and the yuppies. Then was it the born-and-breds and --

SC: Yes. The B&Rs -- born and raised.

HF: So what was the town like then? I assume most people were not working in New York. It wasn't anything like now.

SC: No. Most of the activity was in the town, here, for whatever there was. People were concerned about jobs, being able to get a job. I think that was the biggest problem we had. There wasn't work for them. Then welfare went through the roof, welfare costs.

HF: So I guess the Model Cities thing started around -- I guess at least applications were made, and so forth.

SC: Oh, yes. Model Cities started in Louie D's time, I'd say, just before, maybe.

HF: And did that get much attention? Was that looked at --

SC: Yes, it was looked at as a possible means of redevelopment, improvement in facilities, things like that. To some extent, Model Cities was a big help. The

money that came from the feds was well used. If you look around, if you took a ride around, you'd see things that were done in -- City Hall was revamped, the health center was built --

HF: The health center -- you mean the multi-service center?

SC: The multi-service center. All these trees along Washington Street -- I put them in, as a scenic program. Many of the streets were redeveloped and put in; the garages on Hudson Street. Some big things happened during my time, but it wasn't my doing, it was the doing of the time, moving forward with the need. Anybody else would have had to do the same thing.

HF: So in Grogan's time -- After the war, there wouldn't have been much building, or anything.

SC: No. The slow era --

HF: I guess even when you were growing up, the town was already built, in some ways. Was there much construction or --

SC: No. Very rare.

HF: So that whole time you grew up until the '60s -- things were kind of static, except for the occasional -- I guess some of the housing projects were built in the '50s?

SC: Yes.

HF: Up on Jefferson and Eighth? I guess those were --

SC: They were all done between '47 and '53. They did a big part of the housing.

HF: So when you ran for city council -- The first time you ran, you won?

SC: Yes.

HF: When were the wards set up? Were the wards always in place?

SC: The wards were set up in '53, with the change of that government --

HF: There must have been some sort of wards before.

SC: There were five wards before, then they mapped it out to six wards because they wanted a councilman from each ward, and three at large. So with five, it would make it difficult to have one from each, and two or three, so they made it even.

HF: I see. So who was the third-ward council persons that you took over from?

SC: Frank. They called him "the gink." He was a longshoreman.

HF: Is that who you ran against?

SC: Yeah, I ran against him.

HF: And how long was he councilman for?

SC: He had been councilman just for four years before that, with Louis DePascale. I broke in during Louie's time, and took away his council seat.

HF: I see. And who was city council president at that point? Do you remember?

SC: I'll try to think. Helen Macri was in. Bob Ranieri was an active councilman. See, when [Interruption] --

HF: Okay. So you said Bob Ranieri was on the council?

SC: Bob was on the council, too. Sure.

HF: He was on the council when I moved to town.

SC: See, when Louie was the mayor, he used to be the council president [Interruption] --

HF: You were saying when DePascale was mayor --

SC: No, before DePascale became mayor, during Grogan's time, he was always the council president. Then when he became mayor, he had his own choice, because he still had control of the council. I was just one councilman, a renegade. That all I was on the council. I constantly was an eight-to-one vote.

HF: Oh, was that the situation?

SC: Yeah.

HF: So they were all with --

SC: -- all with DePascale. Yes.

HF: Well, Grogan, I guess. No. You came in with DePascale.

SC: With DePascale, yes.

HF: So when DePascale came in, he had the support of almost everybody on the council, then?

SC: Right.

HF: So when you got elected -- Oh, I see. So when you got elected, you were the only one, still. Did that eventually change, or did it not change until you ran for mayor?

SC: It started to change probably a year, year and a half, before it was time to run for mayor, in '73. So at that time some of the councilmen began to become concerned about what I was doing. I was starting to get a little scary to them.

HF: How come?

SC: Well, I would bring issues up that would sometimes borderline whether it was criminal or not, you know?

HF: Their activities?

SC: Yes. So I would bring out things in public. Why do we buy enough grass seed to cover the whole city of Hoboken, and when you go look for grass seed,

there's none around? Why do we buy so many rounds of ammunition? I would go check on prices and so on. It reached a point when I felt these guys are going to jump all over me for what I'm doing, but I felt it was my duty to reveal these things. It was a way of these guys making extra money or whatever. However they did it, I don't want to know. People buy something in the city, and it would wind up in their home. You probably read that today. It still goes on. In North Bergen, you've seen it on several occasions. They've gotten indicted for it. They kind of stopped that practice, and that's when a couple of the council started coming my way.

HF: So when you ran for mayor, it sounds like you called into question the integrity of a some of those people.

SC: Right.

HF: It sounds like the riots were still fresh in some people's minds --

SC: Yes.

HF: -- but the tension in town, between the born-and-breds and the Puerto Ricans, or whoever was moving to town -- It sounds like that was still pretty high.

SC: No, that was dying out.

HF: That was dying out?

SC: Yes.

HF: So at the end of the riots, none of the people involved in it ever ran -- they never took a political route or anything? They never fielded a candidate in the elections?

SC: No. The Duroy boy -- Frank had left a mark, and then left town. So Eddie was here, as a schoolteacher. I embraced Eddie --

HF: -- after you were mayor, though.

SC: Yes, well, we tried to get him to run for county clerk, on the county-wide ticket. Because Puerto Ricans were making their moves in different parts of the

county. So I kind of pushed Eddie forward and gave him some notoriety. It worked. It helped him, anyway.

HF: How involved was the county, in terms of what was going on?

SC: Well, the county -- I wasn't in good stead with the county because I opposed the mayor, and the mayor was basically in the county's web, so to speak.

HF: And the county's web was --

SC: -- Jersey City, Weehawken, Hoboken, Union City.

HF: So you had alliances among the towns that were formed, just like today.

SC: Right.

HF: So when you ran for mayor did you have a whole ticket? Did you have at-large people, who ran with you?

SC: Yes.

HF: Who ran with you? Do you remember?

SC: There was Bob Ranieri --

HF: -- who was already on the council,
right?

SC: I don't know. I'm not sure. I might
have said that, but I'm not sure of that. Bob Ranieri was
on my ticket, as was Bernard Scrivani and Francis Leahy.
Yes.

HF: Did you all win?

SC: Yes. We all won.

HF: All four of you came in.

SC: We won. We took the town.

HF: But you didn't have the majority of the
council then, or --

SC: Yes.

HF: You won over enough of the supporters
to --

SC: I won over enough -- The fact of the
matter, by that time a couple of the councilmen supported
me, also.

HF: When you think back on your time as
mayor, do you think of the three separate terms as separate
times, or is it all kind of one --

SC: No, it's very difficult to --

HF: It all kind of blurs together.

SC: Yes. It's very difficult.

HF: So through the '70s, I guess, the Model
Cities program kicked in more.

HF: Were there any other issues, in terms of what was going on in the town?

SC: Oh, big issues. The waterfront, I believe, was the biggest item I would say I focused on -- getting the waterfront done. It took me a lot of work, going back and forth to Trenton and to Washington, to get the piers back. It wasn't easy, because there were a couple congressmen who had similar situations in their areas of the country, kind of putting a block on it unless they were included. But we, with the help of the Port Authority (their muscle came into play), we were able to get back the piers from the government.

HF: That was a long process, wasn't it?

SC: Yes. It was a very long process. It took a lot of trips to Trenton. I had trouble with the City of Newark. They were doing the same thing that the congressmen from other parts of the country were doing. "Well, if Hoboken's going to get this support and this support, we want this out at the airport. We want this, this and this," so they could benefit. It's part of the

political gain. You've got to help me, if you're helping him.

HF: I guess the '80s was all condo conversions.

SC: Yes.

HF: That's when things took off. And I guess the fires were --

SC: I would say more the '90s, on the condo conversions. In the '80s I had problems -- in the late '70s and the '80s -- with fires. Tremendous problems.

HF: Yes, there were a whole string of fires, in a short period of time --

SC: Right.

HF: Just reading the papers -- they said there was strong evidence that arson was involved, but nobody was ever --

SC: In some of them there was arson. I would not say in all of them. The worst one was on Clinton Street, which was not arson. There were like twenty-five people living on one floor there, with a bunch of little kids. How they got in there -- I guess they were able to. They came from Guyana. It's a shame, the number of people who were lost in that thing. But the kids were playing with fire, on the top floor of that building.

HF: There were fires -- You were living in the west part of town, where there were a lot of wood buildings. I assume fires were something that you, to some extent, grew up with?

SC: No, we didn't have them in the west as much as we had them in areas where some landlords just ran away and didn't want to take care. In those days, if you didn't pay your taxes the city would come in and glom your property. They were the toughest days of my career, the fires, because I got blamed for a lot of them, you know -- my fault. And having all the housing taken care of, etc., etc.

HF: But there was still not that much new construction going on in town, really.

SC: No. Thank God, because people would say, "Hey, they're burning places up to get new construction." And they still thought that.

HF: So now the city council -- Did you have opposition to you when you became mayor, at the beginning? Or at the beginning, did you have good support?

SC: No, I pretty much had a free ride.

HF: So there must have been some point where all of a sudden people would start to accuse you the way --

SC: Yeah. Tom Vezetti [former mayor and councilman].

HF: Is that where it began? When Vezetti came along?

SC: Yes. Lucky Tom.

HF: Now he was in Walter Cramer's area,
right?

SC: Right.

HF: His ward. Cramer -- did he first get
elected after you became mayor?

SC: Yes, he came on later. The second ward.
I believe he came on about '81. Somewhere around that time.
Of course, Tom Vezetti was always on my back.

HF: From the time you became mayor?

SC: No. No, later on. I know Tom as long as
I've been around. I knew him as a policeman. Well,
unfortunately, Tom had a problem with life. He went to
college for about twenty-five years and never got a degree.
He owned the Madison [Bar], on 14th, which, incidentally,
today I'm part owner of -- Dave Roberts [current mayor] and
I -- but it's a shame that Tom could never be properly
guided. A couple people got a hold of him, who didn't like

what I was doing. They were more sophisticated than Tom, much more, and they used him very well.

HF: And what didn't they like about what you were doing?

SC: Well, I guess I didn't cater to their "finesse." I'm a street man. I like the street. They were sophisticated, educated people. I just took the most common road that I could take to do things.

HF: You mentioned social clubs before -- that you were involved with the social clubs?

SC: Yes.

HF: I remember when I moved to town there was a building on Jefferson that had a "Steve Cappiello Association" sign on it.

SC: Right. That was my headquarters for some time.

HF: When did that come about? Did that come about after you were mayor, or before you were mayor?

SC: When I became mayor, almost immediately, it came about. We figured we'd need a place to meet, and that's what it became; it became our headquarters.

HF: And was that typical then? That a mayor would have -- like, did DePascale have one of those, in his time?

SC: He used Grogan's club.

HF: Oh. And where was Grogan's club?

SC: They had a fifth-ward club on Willow Avenue someplace, around 7th or 8th and Willow.

HF: And what were the social clubs you referred to?

SC: Well, there were the Troys. They called them different names. There was the Cat's Meow. There were

the Turks. There was the Merry Boys Club. These were clubs -- In my day, as a youngster, clubs were basically a living room. We were living in three rooms -- two bedrooms and a kitchen. I was the eleventh boy in my family, so you can understand -- I was the baby. So you can understand the older brothers -- who's working nights? Who's out here doing -- ? So there were cots, a couple of big beds. This is how we were born and raised. There was a tub in the kitchen and you had ten minutes to take a bath. There was a big open [?] -- The toilet was in the hall.

So the club rooms were places where these kinds of families, the younger fellas, would go, and maybe have a pool table, play cards, things like that.

HF: So it might have been a basement room, or a storefront --

SC: Oh, yeah. Storefronts. Basically storefronts. Because they were cheap.

HF: Was that because a lot of the stores were closing out at that point, because of economics or whatever.

SC: Exactly.

HF: So -- what? You paid a small amount of dues or something?

SC: Yes. Right.

HF: Just for refreshments or whatever. And it was common that people would belong to a number of social clubs?

SC: Yes. You could belong to one club here, one club there. If you didn't like the card game they had here, you could go to another card game, where you'd fit in.

HF: Were there political clubs, as well?

SC: A political club was usually named after somebody, like Louie Francone always had a club. He owned the house that he lived in. There was a store, and then it became the Louie Francone Association.

HF: And Francone -- he was in the fourth ward?

SC: Yes.

HF: Was he there when the projects were built?

SC: Yes, he was there.

HF: Now in my time here, the third and fourth wards always seemed to have the biggest numbers election time.

SC: Right.

HF: Was that always true?

SC: Yes.

HF: Because they were populated wards.

SC: Right.

HF: So when Vezetti came along, did Vezetti belong to a club?

SC: No. He had his place up there that wasn't used at all. He destroyed it. His father had one of the biggest businesses going.

HF: The Madison.

SC: Yes. Where the Madison was? He sold the most beer. At the time the beer company said he was the biggest seller in the country. Because the shipyards were all over the place, and the seamen coming in -- There was a ship on every pier in the city at the time.

HF: So Vezetti came in to -- so he got busier and busier at City Hall, it sounds like --

SC: Yes, he used to come -- he wanted to become a critic. He would criticize everything. To me he was a lot of fun. I liked him. He was unfortunate. I think he had some kind of medical case, whatever it was. I could tell you some things without this tape that weren't very nice, but --

HF: But I guess Cramer was the guy he kind of ended up latching onto.

SC: Well, Cramer basically lost the election. He gave it up. His wife moved out of town, which became the issue. Of course, he lived with his wife and kids. She moved down to the shore somewhere. Cramer's wife had money, see, so she could do that. I think they had a connection to the *Jersey Journal*, or something like that.

HF: So Tom got a hold of that and --

SC: Tom used it well. He had people guiding him, and, of course, the same people who guided him, killed him. They literally killed him.

HF: In what sense? Just working him -- ?

SC: It reached a point where they told him there were certain things he couldn't do. They didn't want him to go to council meetings anymore. "Stay in your office, we'll tell you what to do. Go to a show. Do anything." This one time they had a meeting and they said,

"Look, the time's coming up -- there's an election coming up. Tom can't win. He can't win, so we have to decide on who's going to run." They hadn't told him, so -- they sent him to a show -- When they decided someone else should run -- that afternoon they said, "Go to a show," and he walked over to Jersey City. He walked; went to a show, came home, met the people, and they told him: "Tom, you're not going to be able to run this time." He became very flustered and said, "What are you trying to do to me? Are you crazy?" He ran all the way home. I think they said he was crying, somebody said. So he ran all the way home, climbed up to his top-floor apartment, five floors up, and just keeled over and died.

I know the group. They wanted -- and, coincidentally, they all shared in his will -- the same people who sent him there. There could be a good story that I will maybe write some day. But, be that what it may -- and that's where I put my life.

HF: So when he started to run for mayor, I assume that not many people could take him very seriously.

SC: I took him lightly, too. I took him light. In fact, I didn't do any campaigning, or anything.

HF: How badly did you want to be re-elected? Or had you kind of had it?

SC: I'd had it.

HF: You did what you wanted to do.

SC: Yes.

HF: And were there other -- well, I guess Tom Newman was on the council at that point.

SC: Tom Newman, yes. As an independent.

HF: Did you still have the support of most of the council, except for Vezetti and maybe Tom -- at that point?

SC: Yes.

HF: So when Vezetti got elected, it had to be a shock, in terms of --

SC: Yes.

HF: How did you -- ?

SC: I knew my day would come someday.

HF: Right.

SC: To be honest with you, I took him lightly. I was lazy. I was lazy. Even my friends told me, "Well, you didn't do any campaigning." Well, I thought the people knew he didn't have all his marbles. But, so be it.

HF: So at that point -- that was '85, right?

SC: Yes.

HF: And what? Two years later, in '87, you ran for council?

SC: No. My man, Simelli, who was a councilman with me, had come from the third ward. He said, "I've had enough," so I took his place on the council. They

appointed me back. And I just had some fun with Vezetti.

That's all I did. Of course, everything went smooth. Nobody would dare do anything, because he had some of these people with him who were running the city. Tom didn't run the city at all.

HF: Right. So there was Laurie Fabiano --

SC: Laurie and Patty [Pat] Pasculli [former mayor and councilman] was with him, yes.

HF: Now Patty was already on the council, right?

SC: Yes.

HF: Now all these people -- did you help draft these people into politics --

SC: No.

HF: -- or did they pretty much come on their own?

SC: Yes.

HF: During your time in office, who else came into city politics, and was kind of with you there? Was there anybody who walked around this building? How many would say you brought them in?

SC: Around the building? Oh, there are still many people here I brought in as employees or whatever. But I kind of shy away now. I'm here. I got involved with David [Roberts] because I almost was going to run against Russo and David. There were people pushing me forward, and David pleading with me, "Don't do it, Steve. We're partners." I said, "Yes, but David, you haven't shown any balls on the council. You haven't shown any fortitude on the council." He pleaded with me -- we were business partners. "All right." He said, "Okay, Steve. I want you to sit with me, in the office, in the mayor's office. If you get elected, we'll work it out." And we did. We won the election. We beat Russo, and he's up there.

HF: Russo had won four times before he won, for council? He had run a number of times, hadn't he,

before he finally won? And he was always, I guess, running as an independent. He never --

SC: Yes.

HF: Now did you ever serve as a freeholder?

SC: Yes. Two terms.

HF: How influential are the freeholders in what goes on in Hoboken?

SC: Basically, being up on the freeholders is -- your main job is to try to get back out of that county as much as you can for Hoboken. I didn't have a very happy time up there, because it seems like Jersey City and Bayonne, together, could do anything they wanted. So all the other communities, you try to work with them -- I tried, as a freeholder, to go up and organize those. Now up in Union City I did well. I could organize them. But North Bergen, their politics up there were not the best. Weehawken was Republican. Secaucus wanted to be on their own. We couldn't organize against them, so Hoboken had to take what they had to give us. But Jersey City and Bayonne

made all the top jobs. When you can make some top jobs, you can get some key people in your town to be an organizer for you, here, while he's on the payroll there. That's part of the political game.

HF: Right. Now in Trenton -- Now Bernie [State Senator Kenny] started around in your time, right?

SC: I gave him his first job.

HF: And his father was involved.

SC: His father was a builder, and an architect.

HF: He had, I guess, Marine View. Was that a project that his father put together?

SC: Yes. The company was Kenny & "Comparetto." They were engineers and architects.

HF: So you got him his first job, as what -- in terms of -- ?

SC: He was in the Law Department.

HF: Oh, here in town.

SC: In Hoboken.

HF: So in terms of the county and state level, you do what you can to work with them?

SC: Right.

HF: What about [U.S. Representative Bob] Menendez? Did you ever work with him?

SC: No. No, Menendez, who was more or less born and raised into politics by Bill Musto -- They had some kind of split. I was always a friend of Bill Musto, and I guess Menendez kind of shied away from me for that reason. So I didn't bond, because I had no reason to anymore.

HF: I see. I was thinking, when you were talking about David and so forth -- Now he became council

person while you were mayor? I was thinking if he had come in -- or was he the last council person? In '85 he came in?

SC: No, no, he wasn't -- [?] --

HF: Okay. So I guess, looking back on your time as mayor, the waterfront -- If you look back, in terms of the legacy of your --

SC: Yes, I would have to say that's what I focused on mostly. It took a lot of time, a lot of work, and I see it's paying off, but it's not exactly what I wanted. I didn't want to see a whole wall. There was a time when I was criticized, because I said, "If we could have just that one building, between here and the Holland America Line, about fifty stories high, with plenty of grass, and plenty of parking under the building, that they would build -- that it would give recognition to Hoboken." We would be seen from anywhere in New York. That's when I got killed with the do-gooders. Ron Hine was one of them.

HF: I guess the waterfront really didn't go anywhere when Vezetti was mayor.

SC: No.

HF: Then when Patty came in, he almost got things going. Then the crush came in --

SC: Well, I helped Patty, but he went with Vezetti. I helped him on more than one occasion, but that's how things go. He took that path.

HF: And the referendums that went on? That must have been a real -- It buried his time in office, those two referendums just stopped everything at City Hall, don't you think?

SC: Maybe. He came to me --

HF: Is there anything he could have done around those? Looking back, do you think there were any other routes that could have been gotten to avoid the referendums, or to get public opinion -- ?

SC: I don't know. I don't know. Patty shied away from me, you know, for whatever reason. I didn't get

involved. I just stayed back, so to speak. I didn't do the work. He was the mayor.

HF: So the waterfront, you think, at this point, if it was less buildings but taller --

SC: I wanted one building, one huge building, and keep the open space there, so people in our town could look over, see the river, see New York City.

HF: Do you go down there much at all? Now, down there?

SC: Oh, I love the water. I live on the water, down at the shore, at my summer home. My summer home's on a lagoon. I love it.

HF: So the way the waterfront is now -- what do you think now? Looking at the --

SC: Oh, the waterfront is nice, on the other side of what Congressman Guarini said is "the wall." He said, "You're building a wall, Steve." I said, "Frank,

I'm not doing it." Because he was quite instrumental in helping me get the waterfront.

HF: So, working with the Port Authority, and --

SC: Right. He was in Congress at the time. He said, "Jesus, Steve, one building after the other. What are you going to have? A wall?" He was giving me the needle. "Because I didn't think that was what we envisioned, is it?" I said, "No. You know we talked about that." But, be that as it may, it didn't turn out that way.

HF: Right. Sounds like Ron Hine.

Okay. Thank you.

SC: Is that it?

HF: Yes.