JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Arthur Sarnoff
Interviewed By
Jennifer Kinniff
On
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JK: This is Jenny Kinniff. Today is Friday, March 29th—27th. I’m here in New York City interviewing Arthur Sarnoff for the Hopkins Retrospective Oral History Program. Thank you for talking with me today. Could we start by you telling me where you were born and a little bit about your family?

AS: I was born in Brooklyn and I moved to this apartment when I was three years of age and, therefore, lived in the same apartment that you’re in now for 81 years.

JK: Wow.

AS: Because when my mother and dad died they gave me the apartment and Joan and I quickly said thank you and moved in.

JK: Mm-hm. And for the record we’re at 151–

AS: Central Park West–

JK: There you go.

AS: —on 75th Street. We raised our children here, of course.

JK: And can you tell me about your family? What your father and mother–?

AS: Yes, I can. My mother was born here in the United States and her father went west to join in the Gold Rush, but when he got to Denver they told
him that’s not a nice place for a Jewish man to be. Stay here in Denver. So he called for the family and brought the family, my mother and her two sisters, to Denver. He went back to close his business and died of the flu or whatever the disease was. They stayed in Denver a while and then moved back to New York.

JK: What sort of business was he in?

AS: I don’t know. Maybe men’s clothing or something. Small store. Then my grandmother, his wife, had three daughters. She raised them and earned the money by going door-to-door and selling New York Life Insurance and when the people said to her, “Mrs. Ganz, this is a very not nice thing for a woman to be doing.” My grandmother said “You’re absolutely right and if my husband had insurance I wouldn’t have to do it.”

JK: Wow.

AS: She then stayed with New York Life for some 70 years and was taken care of out of the Bronx office. By that time she was taking care of three generations. Do you want more history on her?

JK: Well, sure.

AS: All right. They had a contest. And my grandmother was one of the 25 and they said, “Mrs. Ganz, we’ve arranged with the home office for you to get the money. You don’t have to go up to Maine for a week.” She said, “I want to.” I have a picture in the album of these 19 young people, maybe 25, and my grandmother in the middle of it. She was a widow and she went.

JK: Aw. That’s great.

AS: So that was my mother’s side of the family. My dad’s side of the family, his brother was, again, the president of RCA and NBC. Another brother founded TV Guide and was part of Warner Communications, but before he did all those things he was fighting Pancho Villa down in the army in Mexico. I have uncles with very different…Another one was with an insurance company and then there was one sister. She married a man who was in the chemical business.

JK: I see.
AS: So a very large variety. Then on my mother’s side of the family one sister didn’t marry and one did marry. Then there were all the cousins and everything. We didn’t have to look too far. If we wanted to do something, we just put the family together. We had a big party.

JK: Yeah. And did most people live here in New York?

AS: Yes. Nobody lived out of the way. They all lived here. One of my cousins was moving to California and the family was so upset that my uncle offered him a piece of the business, I think the candy concessions in the music hall or something if he’d stay. He said, “No, I’m going to be a writer for TV.” And he was. Very successful.

JK: Hm. He had to go his own way.

AS: But that was the first member of the family to leave. Nobody could believe it.

[doorbell rings]

JK: Oh, do you want to pause?

AS: Can you hold it for a moment?

JK: Yeah, sure. That would be fine.

I was asking you about where you went to school growing up in New York.

AS: I went to the Fieldston School in Riverdale. I went there. First I went to a school called Bentley, which I don’t think exists anymore, from first to fifth grade. Then I started at Ethical in sixth grade and graduated from there. I can say to you right now I’m still on the board. I’m 25 years older than anybody else on the board. The reason they keep me is because they get all their facts mixed up of what happened. So I really don’t add much for the school. I just keep them on a straight and narrow path when they begin to say things that weren’t so.

JK: That’s funny. You’re their historical memory.

AS: That’s exactly what I’m there for. Now I’m losing my own memory so I better be careful, but I remember the past better than the present.
JK: So in going there, I’m curious about how you, growing up in New York and having your whole family here, why you decided to go to Hopkins. Can you talk about that decision?

AS: Yes, I can. I was very late in applying to school. I was the last one in the class and the principal of Fieldston said, “I’ve never had a student like this. You haven’t applied to college.” So I go, “I don’t know. My parents didn’t go to college and I don’t know where to go.” I said, “Where’d you go?” I didn’t mean to be rude. I said, “Well I’ll apply there.” He said, “Why don’t you go back home and have a discussion with your parents?” Well, they don’t know anything about it. They didn’t go to college.

JK: So he went to Hopkins?

AS: No, he didn’t. He went some other place. When I got back my parents went on a cruise for five or six days and my father came back, he said, “I’ve arranged for you to have an interview at Johns Hopkins.” I said, “Okay. What’s that?” He said, “Well, I was on the cruise and three people on the cruise said you have to go to Hopkins.” They were the heads of the major department stores and businesses in Baltimore. Three or four of the outstanding Jewish families.

So I arranged an interview and I went down to Johns Hopkins and surprisingly they accepted me, which I look back on and probably said they had to. I don’t know. But that’s how I got to Johns Hopkins. I had a wonderful time when I was there.

JK: Did you know what you wanted to study going in or you were just going to college because it was what you were supposed to do?

AS: That’s right. No idea. When I left I couldn’t really swear to what I majored in, but I did well. I enjoyed it and I was made president of the class, which I did not know at the time when you’re made president of the class as senior it’s permanent. For all of these years I’ve been the –

JK: You’re still the president.

AS: That’s it. But I’m not well enough now to even go to the reunion myself. Most of my class is dispersed and deceased.

JK: So you came to Hopkins as a freshman in 1949. What do you remember? Can you tell me about when you first got there and what your first year was like?
AS: Yes, I can. The day I left for college I ended up in the hospital. Had a very serious operation. They had to cut me open all the way from chest all the way down because they didn’t know what was happening. Turns out I was reversed insides and I’d had a burst appendix, but everything was on the other side. So they took everything out, cleaned it off and put it all back.

JK: Oh my goodness. That was your first day of--?

AS: No. That was the hospital, three weeks – that was the first day of Hopkins. So I didn’t get to Hopkins until about maybe three or four weeks late. They first said I should wait for next year. I said, “No, all my friends will be--” I thought that’d be the worst I could do.

JK: Were you in Baltimore when that happened?

AS: No, I was here.

JK: You were still here.

AS: I was getting into the car to go to Hopkins when I got this terrible pain and ended up--

JK: Wow.

AS: So by the time I got to Hopkins I couldn’t even go up the steps. Unfortunately some senior had been hurt so they gave me his single room on the first floor. That’s how I could maneuver. They told me I had to take three courses only and one in the summer. So I did that because I didn’t want to be behind in the classes.

JK: Do you remember which dorm you lived in?

AS: Yes, I do. Very clearly. There was only one dorm at the time and I was in CN3 on the second floor when I was well enough to go there. The reason I remember it so clearly, it seemed to me the floor that they put most of the Jewish boys on. There were others there. I felt no anti-Semitism from the others on the floor, but it was very clear to me that a large part of the Jewish class had been put there. You have to remember at that time I think 50 percent of all the students came from Baltimore.
JK: One thing I wanted to ask about was, so at that time the GI Bill had been around for a few years, but it was starting to trail off. Do you remember having a lot of veterans in your class? People who had come back from the war who were going to college?

AS: Yes. They had been in the service, but I think by the time I got there most of them were seniors at the time. That’s my memory. They weren’t in my class.

JK: They were in upper classes.

AS: But they were in other activities. Boy, were they a tough bunch. I could tell you some stories about those.

JK: If you think they’re appropriate—if you can repeat them on tape, sure.

AS: They decided one day that they didn’t like the food. We all ate in the same cafeteria. Then they told us we were to go through the line and nobody was to dare to take a single thing to eat. They were older, they had been vets—so we all went through and they were left with all the food. I’m not quite sure what the purpose was, but I think the dietician left. Then another time without notifying us or anything, somebody fell off their chair and lay on the floor. They ran and got the stretcher that was always in the lobby, carried the person out. A few minutes later somebody else fell off their chair and they carried that one out. Clearly, they carried nine or ten people out. By that time they’d created an emergency. They were doing it because they all said they got food poisoning. Just one of their things to get them crazy there. Then another time they told us to all go in our rooms and get the hoses on the floor and told us which windows we had because they had gone to Maryland a few days before and stole the great big turtle. I guess you know about that.

JK: Yes, mm-hmm.

AS: And brought that back. Maryland now was coming. So they got some barbed wire, which they put up and then they had us all man the hoses from the different six entries and two or three floors and everything to wash them back and keep them away.

JK: Did you do it? Did you actually spray them when they came--?
AS: Oh yeah. We put the hose through somebody else’s room. We didn’t know how to handle it so his room got soaked and he was furious. I don’t know. It’s just where the hose was.

JK: That’s really funny. Wow. It sounds like they were quite the leaders on campus in terms of pranks and things.

AS: Yeah. It was not an easy thing. Remember, I was three, four weeks late to school and then I had to stay on the first floor. So this all had to take place later on when I was moved upstairs to the second floor.

JK: Do you remember--I was looking through the yearbooks and I saw something about how your freshman class president who was elected was then drafted. The Korean War was starting up and he actually was drafted into service for the sophomore year. Do you remember the Korean War being something that people talked about or were nervous about? The students being drafted again to go into service?


JK: Is when you started and I guess this particular student was drafted over the summer in 1950.

AS: I don’t remember many being drafted. I don’t know. I’m just trying to recall what war was there in 1949.

JK: Well they were starting to enter into the Korean War, but it would have come a little bit later than that.

AS: I think one of my friends, very close friends, went into the Air Force and when it was time to get out he was flying a private Navy plane and crashed, but that I remember, but then I remember others going into, the older ones were going into the military. And they, most were coming back, but some were not.

JK: So while you were there you were a history major, I saw. Do you remember much about classes, or was that not a big part of your life there?

AS: I just kept taking different courses and different things. So really I can’t say I came out as a scientist or a mathematician or anything. It was probably a little easier in those years. You can just select things and I guess maybe you have to have enough credits in the department that you were going to graduate in, which I don’t remember even.
JK: Were you a good student?

AS: Most of the time, yeah, except in language because they taught me French in six weeks in the summer. I didn’t know a word of French. I got a C- or a C+. The next year I came into school, I was in French class with high school people who had had two years of high school French. That was ridiculous. I had no idea what was happening. One time they said they have a special smaller class. I went into that in addition. They asked me something and I got so befuddled I answered it in Yiddish, which several people in the class including one of the teachers broke up laughing. I don’t know how--don’t ask me how I got through it. I just did.

I was terrible in language. Having that six weeks of French compared to people in two years made it even more impossible. Somehow or another I spent enough time on it and made it through it, but the marks I had were B’s. It was all right, but that language thing was a disaster.

JK: Do you have any professors or classes that were particularly memorable for you?

AS: The teacher who taught history came from Canada, Dr. Spring. I don’t remember. I said Spring. He used to give a little quiz on probably a lecture the week before or something. So first day I’m there he says, “I finally got an answer to a question that is intelligently written.” He read mine. He said, “I asked a simple question here and this person answers it in a simple paragraph and some of you are filling up a blue book.” He read mine. He didn’t mention my name, thank God.

JK: That must have felt good, though.

AS: Well, I was flabbergasted because at that time I think a big part of the school had not been to prep schools. They went to the local public schools where they were. I guess when we went to English class the first time and he said write a free composition, 15 minutes into it 4 or 5 kids raised their hand and said, “We don’t know what to write.” He says, “They’re free. You can write anything.” “What should we write about?” He said, “Have you never been asked to write a free composition?” The answer was no. They just couldn’t get the concept that they weren’t being told to write on a particular subject. That I remember very clearly.

JK: That’s interesting.
AS: That was my freshman year. We had very nice teachers. I remember the teachers being very nice, available to us and we could speak with them and see them. That was good. At my age of 84 and I’ve been quite ill for about 15 months, I have lost a lot of my memory.

JK: I think you’re doing pretty well.

AS: Well, I’m better with the old—if you ask me about yesterday, I have more trouble.

JK: So one thing that I saw when I was looking through the old yearbooks and things is that you were very involved in activities on campus. It seemed like every activity I looked at, your face was in the picture.

AS: Yes, I think I was busier with that than I was with my subjects.

JK: Well, it’s a different kind of learning, I guess. I saw that you were on the Student Council. You were on the Cotillion Board. You were on the Student Activities Commission.

AS: I eventually became permanent president of the class, which I didn’t know that word; co-president. Then I stayed that. Then I was on the board of the university and I’ve stayed active. I guess up to maybe a couple months ago, it’s impossible for me to travel.

JK: Gotcha. So what made you decide to get so involved at that young age, as a freshman or a sophomore?

AS: It seemed more interesting. I learned more. It didn’t seem to interfere since I wasn’t going out for football or anything like that, this was my extracurricular activity. I found it very interesting. People I worked with and the directions that the school was taking. So I felt it was more worthwhile than my trying to go out for some – I actually went out for track. We had an honor system at Hopkins. The coach said, “Where were you Saturday?” I said, ”Well, the people that own the racetrack asked me to come sit in the box with them for the big horse race.” He said, “Good. You like those races better than ours. Turn your thing in.” He threw me off the team.

JK: Wow.
AS: That was my last approach with the—I was very careful with that honor system after that. I figured there were things you had to be a little bit more careful what you said.

JK: Maybe not tell the truth so directly.

AS: Yeah. I could have said I had a headache or something.

JK: That’s funny. So when you were on the student council did you feel like you were a part of making decisions at Hopkins? Was the student council talking to the university administration and things like that?

AS: Not too much. I don’t know what others have said, but I didn’t think it was that big a part of the school. If you were on the yearbook or some specific thing like on a commission, there were things on which you really spend time. But I don’t remember the student council being that important.

JK: It seemed like maybe you were an expert event planner. I saw that you organized a lot of the spring dances and things like that.

AS: I did. Socially I was doing fine.

JK: Well, tell me about that.

AS: Well they didn’t have a course in soc—. I don’t know. In those days you couldn’t drink whiskey on campus and you couldn’t drink whiskey anywhere. So we would have the parties in the gym, which led to mayhem because you had a long table that 8 of you would sit at. Everybody bought their own whiskey and you couldn’t buy it.

I guess through the cotillion thing I managed to run the concessions, which consisted of selling popcorn or peanuts or especially the soda that goes with the drinks, with the booze. It could get pretty drunken in there because if everybody bought a bottle of cheap stuff, when you sat down to see somebody at another table, “Oh, have a drink.” So people were drinking.

It’d have been much better off in a hotel where the cost would have limited them to a drink for themself and their date than everybody having a full bottle of whiskey. They didn’t know what they were drinking. I don’t drink anyhow. They probably were mixing the scotch and the rye. If they went around somebody, “Can I have a drink?” So, fairly chaotic.
JK: Where were you? So you mentioned the students would be bringing dates to the dance. Where were the students meeting the women in Baltimore? Were they from Goucher College, mostly?

AS: Well, from Goucher and some from the country club, which I will tell you about how I joined. There were dates. I married a girl from Goucher, but I didn’t date her then. I didn’t know her then. I didn’t know her until she came to New York.

JK: Oh really. That’s funny. I guess you had something in common then, having both gone to college in Baltimore.

AS: Right.

JK: So you were also a member of a fraternity, right?


JK: Can you tell me about that? Did you pledge as a freshman? Did you join for your sophomore year?

AS: I pledged as a freshman and joined as a freshman. It was interesting because the rooms, half of the rooms were occupied by the veterans.

JK: Of the fraternity house.

AS: The veterans from the war. They were still there. My goodness, they sure had a different outlook than us freshmen that were so naïve. We didn’t even know what was up and what was down really.

JK: Were the veterans members of the fraternity?

AS: Yes. They were members and they occupied a lot of the rooms because the freshmen were in the dorms and the older ones were up there. I’ll give you one example. At these meetings we were voting on things and the older ones wanted to get new furniture for the living room. I guess the rest of us didn’t want to lay out the money. So when we came back from class that day they had chopped up all the furniture in the living room with an axe. There was just a pile of broken—we had to buy new furniture.

JK: Wow.
AS: Nobody had ever explained it that way to us. These are vets. There was one man who had graduated many years before and he and his whole group had gotten infantile paralysis during those years. I don’t know if you – terrible. They went to camp. People were getting infantile paralysis. He was really very wounded from it. I think braces all the way. I guess in other words, he used to come to the fraternity house all the time. He was a member of the fraternity, but he was now much older. He would come. I remember him coming all the time and bringing some older friends. So it was fine. I never lived in the fraternity house. I ate my meals there one year; maybe two years, but I certainly took one look at it. I said, “I’m not living in this thing.”

JK: So where did you live after your freshman year?

AS: That’s a story into itself. I think the first two years I lived in the dorm. I got a single room the second year. Then came the third year, they were building a very beautiful apartment house right across – back of the university right across from the campus. I immediately applied to get a room there.

As the semester continued the (unintelligible), I heard a lot of the other boys were getting their rooms. So I called up and I said, “Well, why am I not getting my room? It’s $75.00 a month. I can pay a year in advance. I don’t understand this.” “Would you go down and meet the gentleman who’s head of this. He’d like to see you in his office.” It’s all a true story. I went downtown over to meet him in his office and he seated me. He was very polite. He said, “Now we have a problem. This is a restricted area. We’re only allowed to have three apartments for Jewish people and it would be a shame to give it to a student because next year it could be somebody else and then you’d only end up with two.” I said, “Well I’m not very happy over it, but there’s nothing much I can do about it.” He referred to a note.

JK: Do you remember what that apartment building was called? I’m curious about which one it was. You said it was on University right across from the Hopkins campus.

AS: Yeah. I don’t remember the name.

JK: That’s okay.

AS: But I do know that I came down and he was polite telling me and I didn’t say very much. I went downstairs in the lobby and called no one. Just sat
there and got my thoughts together. About 20 minutes later I went back
and he invited me in his office. We sat down again and I told him that I’m
sure he would understand, I called my father and he was wiring me
$100,000 to hire a lawyer. Already been hired. I contacted the law firm
where the partners had been very well known lawyers in the town. I told
him I spoke to the head of the Anti-Defamation League and they promised
to help me, and I told him NBC where my uncle was the head of, was
ready to run a new lead on the 6 pm news. I said, “I think you’ll
understand all those things.” And I walked out.

JK: Were those things true?

AS: No. There wasn’t a word of truth. I hadn’t called anybody.

JK: It had only been 20 minutes.

AS: I just knew the names. The next day in the middle of French class, a
bonded messenger came in and asked for me by name right in the middle
of the class and handed me my lease. I never told him that my roommate
was Christian.

JK: That’s funny. So you did end up living there.

AS: I ended up living up there. Not only did I end up living there, but I made
sure that a promise was kept that whoever gave up the apartment made
sure that another Jewish person, another Jewish student would be in there.
I followed it through for five years including the time I was over in Japan.
By that time I lost—I think maybe the building had given up some of
those things.

JK: Well you know, I read that around 1956 Hopkins, the president of Hopkins
actually put out a notice to the local landlords saying that the university
wouldn’t list them as places for students to live if they didn’t get rid of
their discriminat–

AS: That’s ’56 already.

JK: Yeah. So I mean, it technically happened then, but I don’t know—these
things can happen without being official policy.

AS: I’m not sure that the prior presidents would have taken that position.

JK: I don’t think they would have, nope.
AS: Matter of fact, they’d have gone the other way.

JK: Mm-hm, that’s true. Well, this is getting into a topic that I want to talk with you about, which is about your experiences as a Jewish student in Baltimore and at Hopkins. Are there other things that you want to tell me about that?

AS: Yeah. Well, the first thing that I did notice, none of this really affected me as much while it was taking place as it did after I thought about it because I was very happy at the school. People were nice and even though certain things were clearly unpleasant, they didn’t seem to make me hate the school or anything like that. Maybe I was just in the era where you were used to it. First, Hopkins had one dorm building for all the freshmen. The dorms consisted of six entries, each three stories, but the first story I think was for a dining room and stuff like that. Then the top two were for students. Almost all the Jewish boys were together in entry C on the second floor where I was. There were some scattered, but for the most part, we were all...

I didn’t notice any particular anti-Semitism from the others that were there. Matter of fact, two of the Catholic boys were having a tremendous fight. One of them was very famous. I won’t give the name. He said that he has to eat fish on Friday. The other one said to him, “What are you talking about? You don’t have to eat fish. You can’t eat meat.” “No, my family, they said the reason, on Friday you have to eat fish.” The two of them got in this – that was one of the first things I noticed, but I wasn’t involved in that one at all. Believe me. I didn’t notice from any of the people there any particular anti-Semitism. When I finally moved up I was sharing a room with the assistant to the woman who was heading the dorms. He didn’t like her, but it had nothing to do – are we all right?

JK: Yeah, I’m just adjusting a little bit. Okay.

AS: So other than the experience of most of us being put in the same thing. I thought that was kind of strange, but...

JK: So at the time you didn’t think that it was discriminatory?

AS: Well, I did, but I didn’t understand—I mean I didn’t—it wasn’t ruining my college life because I was more interested in that I had moved up to that floor because I now could walk up the stairs and I was now physically able to get around the campus.
I was being rushed by a fraternity and all the other nice things that were taking place.

There is one interesting experience. The school itself had a ten percent Jewish quota. There were 416 total students in my class and 41 were Jews. It was exact. My friend, Gene Sekulow and I and our – maybe it was the beginning of our sophomore year, maybe the end of our freshman year, he was a Baltimore person. We went to see the dean. In those days that meant you got an appointment two weeks off and then you waited on a bench for a half hour. Later when you wanted to see the dean you burst into the office, knocked all the furniture and told the dean to get out and you ran the school. That’s what was going on in the rest of the country, but this was a different period.

And we—I think we discussed with the dean the Jewish quota. “We have absolutely no Jewish quota,” he said—the dean. “We don’t object to the Jewish quota.” “We have no quota.” "Dean, stop that,” we said. “We’re here to discuss the quota. We want to know why there were 416 or 417 and we only got 41. Why didn’t we get the other 7/10 of a percent?” We turned our backs and walked out of the office. We then dealt with that dean. My friend becoming the head of the honor commission and myself, we dealt with him for the rest of the time we were there. We were all very pleasant and it never came up again.

JK: Was this Dean Shaffer?

AS: Yeah.

JK: Dean Shaffer.

AS: So we were kind of bold, what we did.

JK: That is bold. So he never really directly responded to you except to say that there was no quota –

AS: He couldn’t. We were finished. We turned our back and walked out. We said, “We don’t care about the quota. We want to know why we didn’t get the other 7/10 of a person.” Just crazy kids.

JK: That’s funny.
In the dorm there was a Christian boy who I became friendly with. Someone put up a sign on their door that he by name and his Jewish friend are not welcome in this room. So that was the first time. This wasn’t my dorm. This was another entry to the dorm. That was the first time I really saw anybody do something like that. It was taken down in a few days I guess. Someone told him to take it down.

Did he respond to that or did you talk about it with him? Do you remember? Your friend.

Well, we just paid no attention to it, but it was embarrassing for him. It was embarrassing for me. Then the school, I have something I didn’t really know about until I was leaving. In order to qualify for some kind of state or federal funds, they had to have black students. So they had one black student every four years. That qualified them for the money. That sort of shook me because there wasn’t another black anywhere. That sort of appeared to me to be a—at least they could have gone to a few, but they went to the same one for four years. Then there was something in the fourth year they were accusing him of something and they wanted…terrible. I never knew what the answer was.

So that was not at all what you expected coming from New York and things like—

No. We had plenty of problems here, but not like that. Then there was a—the fraternities began rushing. One of the things that I learned was that there were three Jewish fraternities, but some of the Christian fraternities were willing to take the top two Jewish…well known or big athletes or something like that. It was up to the Jewish and some Christians to explain to those students that they would be in a situation where they were the only one or two Jews in that fraternity. When it came to discussing who they should take in they would be hearing, “We don’t want any more Jews.” And how can you possibly do that to the Jewish community. Tell them to take the top six people in the class and then the Jewish fraternities would be without some good leaders. So we persuaded as many as we could. It didn’t take much to persuade me.

So you were trying to keep the Jewish students in the Jewish fraternities.

Yeah.

As a group you had decided that.
AS: Yeah. Because if they want one or two, they took the best, soon some of the best Jewish students would be elsewhere and the Jewish fraternities would be weaker. Then those people would be not realizing what was going to happen when they were talking about who they were going to take in the future. I guess there were a few who changed their name and wanted to move in, but for the most of us we stayed in the – it wasn’t really open to the best of my knowledge. Jewish fraternities were going and going long after I left.

JK: Were you someone that the Christian fraternities tried to recruit?

AS: We never found out –

JK: You never made it that far.

AS: No, because I was late to school and then two people from Phi Gam to “Look we’re the brother fraternity and don’t make a mistake. You’re not going to be happy in this.” They then took me down. It was off bounds because two of the fraternities, they took me there one night when it was late and showed—not the Jewish, but the two from—showed me the fraternity house and everything and that’s where I just said Phi Ep is where I decided to join.

JK: So when you’re talking about Christian fraternities and Jewish fraternities, did you find that you mostly socialized with people in your fraternity or other Jewish fraternities or was it much more open than that in terms of campus social life?

AS: We had a lot of our parties with the Christian fraternities. So that was fine. I guess I ate there. So that was social, but I certainly didn’t sleep in the house. I wanted better quarters than the fraternity house. They’d go crazy. There’d be noise and everything. I didn’t want that. So I had, I guess, a lot of friends in the Christian fraternities.

JK: Did your fraternity keep a kosher kitchen?

AS: No.

JK: Because there was, I know, I think it was around 1955 that a kosher dining hall opened at Hopkins, but that was after your time there.

AS: Yeah. No, I wasn’t—was before that. I understood that the – what’s the Jewish house on campus, was called.
JK: Hillel?

AS: What?

JK: The Hillel house?

AS: Yeah, the Hillel house was not kosher. When they lifted the ten percent quotas all over the country, Hopkins' Jewish population fell below ten percent. Didn’t go up. It turned out that the orthodox Jews who were very anxious to come to Hopkins, when they found out there was no kosher kitchen, they didn’t go. So finally the Hillel house went kosher. Then the percentage of the Jewish students going to Hopkins increased.

JK: That’s interesting.

AS: But this was after I had left.

JK: Yeah. One of the people I interviewed so far actually was your classmate Moan Margolis.

AS: Oh sure.

JK: I know he’s a good friend of yours.

AS: Very good.

JK: I think he was actually kind of in charge of—he was the house manager of the fraternity house, right?

AS: Yes. He really earned his money. In other words, he needed that. He did the buying of the food and everything for the–he had a full time job there and he was always a straight A student. Always studying and always on the athletic…but he was an outstanding person. He still is and we still talk back and forth on the phone. He’s been a little bit injured now this last year. I can’t believe it. I say “Moan, I’m lucky if I can walk around the block!” But he was a great athlete, had a wonderful wife and was an excellent student, superb. Then he went to medical school there and then his last years he was head of the Hopkins medical newspaper that went out. So he was really an outstanding student.

JK: It’s interesting to compare your experiences. He told me that he did pledge the Jewish fraternity, but other than that he didn’t remember being
Jewish as a big part of his Hopkins experience. Maybe because he was so busy with sports and all these other things, you know, or I don’t know if he just couldn’t remember it, but he didn’t have as many memories to share about it.

AS: Well, first I think he was such a good athlete, that he immediately became friendly with the other athletic players. And he studied. He was so busy at the fraternity house running it and studying. You’d go there at ten o’clock at night, he was still studying. He was very bright, but he had to study. We had another young friend who got all D’s in his first freshman year. He was a couple classes behind us, but I knew him. The school didn’t kick him out. They said, “You’re brilliant and you’re being ridiculous.” Moan Margolis got hold of him and lectured him. He said, “What are you doing there? What is that problem you’re working on?” Moan said, “How long you been on it? Let me see it. Here.” Moan would really…He’d solve it within ten minutes and he would’ve been working on it over an hour. So he was very brilliant. They did keep him and eventually he and his wife became teachers at Brown University, which they never had a husband/wife team. They made an exception. So he was a total genius, but he just didn’t want to be bothered with what they were teaching, but the school saw something there and they kept him. I’m sure anybody else getting two D’s would have been thrown out. So that I remember.

JK: Can you tell me the story you told before we turned the tape on, about your classmate from Denver? His perceptions of Jewish people.

AS: Yeah. This was, we were in the same dorm the second year. I had a private room because I’d asked for it. It didn’t cost any more. They were there. We were very friendly. He came in one night. He said, “Can I close the door and talk to you?” I said, “Of course.” He said, “I’m from Denver.” I said, “Well, that’s interesting because my mother lived there for a while.” He said, “When I left home they said be careful of the Jewish boys. They have horns. They actually have horns.” He said, “I’ve got to ask you, what are they talking about?” I said, “It’s just something that’s been carried down. It’s very anti-Semitic. It’s like we’re the devil with horns or something and you can see for yourself without me doing anything that it’s just nonsense. I don’t know why they would tell you that. They’ve never seen anybody. Maybe they’ve never seen any Jewish people and they know you were going to meet some Jewish people. They’re telling you be careful. Some of them have horns. It’s just as silly as you think it is.” We stayed friends all the time, but he was really—he just couldn’t understand it. He said, “I’ve been friendly with you. We’ve
been friends and everything and I've got to tell you what I was told by my parents.”

JK: What an experience for you to have to be explaining that to someone.

AS: It was pretty easy to explain. I didn’t have horns!

JK: I know, yeah…

AS: This was quite an interesting thing. After graduation I came back for some wedding or something and I came down four days ahead of time and spent it with my family. I’d been very friendly with a gentile family; three brothers. They’d come up to New York, we were friendly the whole time.

We went and they said, “Well do you have a bathing suit?” I said, “Yeah.” They said, “Come on. We’ll go out and go swimming.” When I got out there I said, “I don’t feel well. I think I’ll just sit here.” When we left I said, “Would you stop the car for a moment? I feel fine. I just want you to notice something. There’s a sign there that said no Jews allowed.”

JK: So is that one of the Baltimore pools?

AS: It was a swimming hole. I don’t know. I said, “I didn’t want to say anything to you. I just figured I’m not allowed. I’m not going swimming in there. Maybe there’s some poison in the water. I don’t know.” They said, “Well, we don’t remember noticing it.” I said, “Well, I know we’ve been very good friends for years and I’m going to assume that you just forgot about it; didn’t notice it. But it made me feel bad.”

JK: I can imagine.

AS: We stayed friends for years. Then he was eventually in the Air Force and he was very near his end, maybe a couple of months to go. He was flying a plane and it crashed. So we lost him.

JK: You said you might have some stuff to say about discrimination in Baltimore in general during that time.

AS: I think I mentioned to you…did I mention to you the country club?

JK: You mentioned it and you said you’d come back to it.
AS: There was anti-black, anti-Jewish, and I’m sorry to say, anti within the Jewish community. Two country clubs. Did I mention that earlier? No. One was for the German Jews. One was for the other. It was very clear, but I also remember a country club here in New York where my uncle was taken in as one of the first Russian Jews. All Germans in that club, which I now belong to because I don’t think they have that rule anymore. I was always at the German club because that’s where my friends were, but I sure didn’t—I wasn’t paying any attention to Russian—I didn’t know anything about it. Finally someone said, “You know Arthur, you’re here all the time and you can’t even buy a Coke for yourself. You have to ask somebody to buy it for you. We would never allow an adult to come here. You can come sometimes, but you can’t come—So we’ve decided that your friend Bud Grant, we’re going to call his number, whatever, was A and yours B. Then the two of you can work it out, but as long as you’re here at Hopkins, you can use the club, but you’ll be charged for it, but it’ll all go to Bud and it’ll be separate. If you want a Coke ask somebody to buy you a Coke.”

JK: So they wouldn’t let you join, but you were allowed to order on your own…

AS: I couldn’t join. A kid couldn’t join.

JK: I see.

AS: Of course I was dating the girls. We were really using the club. We played tennis there. We did all sorts of nice things, but it really got to the point where they said we have to make you an unofficial member because nobody objects to it, we’ve asked, but it’s not right. So they gave me a temporary membership for the four years, which I thought was very nice.

JK: Was this the country club that was German Jews or was this the other one?

AS: Well this was the German Jews, which I wasn’t.

JK: So they were making an exception for you on two fronts.

AS: Yeah. Part of it could have been because of the fame with the family name. I’m not totally stupid, but I knew. I’m making friends with all the people, all the adults, everything. I could go to the other club as a guest. Matter of fact I dated a girl from there, for a while, but I was more interested in being with my friends over here. Rather than whether this club was this and this was this, I paid very little attention. I really only did
it because I was paying. It was embarrassing. If I wanted a hot dog or a Coca-Cola, I had to ask somebody to buy it. That was the country club situation, but that was the Jews segregating the Jews. I think those are the most of the situations that I remember. I don’t remember any major outbursts of anti-Semitism while I was there. It was clear that the fraternities were not open to Jews. It was clear that the university had a ten percent Jewish quota and it was clear that at one point they put the majority of the Jews into one floor. However, I didn’t notice it. In going to class I didn’t notice it. The teachers are extremely friendly; nice.

So I can’t really say that other than observing the town, the city and the basic things that it was – the anti-Semitism seemed to me to fit in with the Russian Jews versus the German Jews and who could get into an apartment house. Things were—it just seemed to me after a while that it was something we were living with. The stories I heard from my family indicated these were very mild compared to what was happening around the world. In New York City we really weren’t aware—I went to the Fieldston Ethical Culture School. I’m still on the board. I told you. One of the things that infuriated me was a meeting they had. I think now one-third of the class is black, which is a typical thing in the private schools today. They had a meeting. Maybe three, four hundred people showed up for it. The head of the school was talking and he was talking about Felix Adler, the founder of the school. This great big portrait of him.

Finally I raised my hand. He says, “Yes, Arthur.” He always knew trouble was coming if I raised my hand. I said, “You’re talking about the founder of the school and the wonderful person he was. Are you aware that there wasn’t a single black allowed in the school?” I said, “Now Felix Adler was a great man because he opened up the school to poor people and he convinced them not to take their children to the sweatshops, but to leave them with him and so on and so forth, but when it came to taking blacks in the school, we had Paul Robeson, Jr. in one class. Then we had each year maybe one or two very well-known black families, but they didn’t take black students into the school. Here you’re addressing…” I said, “Twenty of these families. Not one of you came over to me and said to me, ‘Thank you Arthur, for telling this because it’s better to know the history than it is to fool yourself. The school is wonderful, we love it, it’s fine.’”

JK: So do you want to talk a little bit about – I’m curious about how you stayed connected with Hopkins after you graduated. How long was it until you joined the board?
AS: Well, very interesting. Morris Offit, who was president, came to me with the next president. Who’s the head of, um, the mayor?

JK: Bloomberg.

AS: It was Mike Bloomberg and asked me to join the board. I said, “No, no, I’ve got enough headaches.” Well, Morris came back. Very persuasive. So I said, “Okay.” So the first board I served on, it was Mike Bloomberg who was heading the board. And believe me, they can get you involved, those two guys. I’ve stayed friends with Mike Bloomberg forever. Joanie’s cousin is his personal lawyer and company lawyer. So we were very close with Mike Bloomberg. That’s I guess how I got involved, but those two guys, and I stayed very involved with the university, attending all the meetings and going to all the things and making suggestions and stuff. I was very impressed with it. Only in the last couple of years maybe since I’ve been—I find it very difficult to make the trip down to Baltimore. I either drive or take the train down because the board meetings are usually in the morning for two or three hours. Then there’s usually a party at night. It’s just very difficult.

I have my own home in Charleston, South Carolina and I haven’t been to it in months. All my other cousins and everybody are staying there. I had a home here in Yorktown Heights, which we just sold three days ago. The traveling that I do, my son-in-law has access to a private plane. So if there’s something that we’re all doing, then I go along with that. Unfortunately it’s been to a couple of funerals and stuff, but I guess that would be an answer.

JK: Were there any particular initiatives that you remember working on as a trustee member? Big things that came up when you were an active board member?

AS: Seemed to me they were all important to me. All the time that they were trying to improve things and it was very constructive. The board was interesting because it was very large, 110 people, but they had all the top brass from the school so that any question you would ask there was no such thing as "We don’t know the answer." Somebody in that room knew. If they were going to vote on things, it usually was unanimous, but sometimes somebody would raise something and they couldn’t answer it. They were very good. They said, “We’ll postpone this till the next meeting because we really have to think about that question because we really don’t know the answer to it.” So it was very good from that standpoint. And then the rest was social. Well, no, I guess—you were on
different committees and you’d go to it, but the rest was social. Dinner at
night and so on, but I haven’t been going because it’s just too difficult for
me to make the trip. You’ve got elevators and staircases and cars.

JK: I know.

AS: It’s hard to do, but I was very active in it. I guess being permanent
president of the class I could report what was going on. We were very
constructive in that period of time. No one, there wasn’t anybody angry at
things that were taking place, it was usually how to go about raising more
money, attracting more students was all. So we weren’t clashing.

JK: Well that’s good. What do you think, from your perspective, what do you
think makes Hopkins special as an institution?

AS: Well, I think one of the things that makes it so special is it is into so many
different things. I know a lot of other colleges are getting into it now, but
Hopkins has been all over the world. The one we have in China. Nobody
else even was thinking about that. Locations in Europe. The hospitals
that we have and they’re now enlarging the number of them that are
associated with Hopkins. The different schools all over the place in
Baltimore. If Hopkins ever moved out of there there’d be no Baltimore
left. The most recent one I went to was the one that was built by Mike
Bloomberg and the gentleman from I guess some–I forget where.

JK: The School of Public Health?

AS: No. The new hospital they were building.

JK: Oh, okay.

AS: He was from one of the Arab nations.

JK: Oh yes.

AS: It was funny that Mike Bloomberg and he shared the two different towers,
but they had it. That I thought was wonderful. That new hospital that
went up. I was also on the board of the hospitals here in New York City,
which are now joined. We’ve all become one. I guess between being in
the Johns Hopkins and watching their side, and the way we were operating
our smaller hospitals was very interesting. Even though I wasn’t on the
board of the Hopkins hospital, I was now on the board of the hospitals in
New York.
So you could see the differences between them.

But I thought those years on the board were very informative to me. I thought the school was always going forward. I never felt them going backwards. They were saying they were sorry they did this, that or the other thing. And I found the—what was the thing they have in Washington?

The School of Advanced International Studies?

No. The one that has all the secret stuff.

Oh. The Applied Physics Laboratory?

Yeah. I was invited down there one day. I went in and they put me in a room where the admiral would be of the ship. They explained what they could do and how if there was something happening how they would be able to call the planes, how they knew the shorelines, where to go in. Most important, all the things to avoid. You don’t want to blow people’s churches up and other things. That was a very interesting day I spent down there.

Yeah. Probably not many people get to see that.

No. I’ve also spent, when I went down and they dedicated the hospital I was extremely interested in that because being on the boards of the hospitals up here, I’d never seen nor had anybody else, the rooms that they had. Every room was a single room. Every room had a window and every room had a bed in it for somebody to stay. That certainly was not the hospitals of the past as most of you, of us who have ever been in a hospital know that wasn’t it. It was amazing. And there, for me with the operating rooms I was very, very interested in the little things that they had done, such as making the table a person lies on narrower so that the doctors don’t have to bend over and the patient 90 percent of the time is knocked out anyway.

Then having been a patient and had gone through a lot of surgeries I found it interesting that the TV in the room was always one place so doctors were turning their head. Twist it this way to look over or something. So Hopkins put TV sets so matter where you were around the operating table you could see the TV and just, nothing on the floor. No wires, no things. Most operating rooms had so many cables you wondered how they didn’t
fall on their face because they were all done in one cable. So it was really interesting. And the fact that I was on Hopkins’ board, even though I wasn’t on their hospital board, I was on the hospital boards here in the city.

JK: So were you able to bring ideas back to that board from things you had seen?

AS: Yeah, sure. So it was interesting. I understood what they were dealing with, but they were all over the world and we were in three different hospitals, four different locations here in New York. Now we’re joined and we’re one of the largest and I’m still on the boards there. My wife is now taking my place on the new board, which when they put all the hospitals together, they form one. I said, “I just can’t do it.” So she probably even knows more about the hospitals than I do because she’s been much more active. She’s now on the board. So that’s good. So we’re still active with it. Still active with the school. I guess it’s been a big part of my life since we closed down the company. Kept me busy.

JK: That’s good. Is there anything else you want to add that I haven’t asked you about yet?

AS: I stayed very friendly with a lot of the people in the class all the way up till recently when people like myself unable to travel or passing on. We’re all 83-84 years, 85 years of age and at that point we used to jump around and go back and forth. You slow down a little bit. A lot of them have passed on. It’s sad, but it’s the way it’s written. I didn’t write the script.

JK: Well it’s nice you’ve stayed connected for so long. I think that’s pretty impressive.

AS: I still am very active in the schools here, private schools and now that my wife is so–she’s on so many committees at this hospital it’s unbelievable. I was never on that many committees because I was still running a business. Interestingly enough, the business is now I think 130 years old, but when I die it gets dissolved. Right now I can’t dissolve it before I die because it financially wouldn’t make sense, but it is funny. I went down to the, at one point, the head of the Chase Rockefeller came to my office. The next, the new president came. I was flabbergasted. I said, “I think,” to the secretary, “you probably want my uncle, David Sarnoff.” “No, no. I’ll see you.” He said, “You’re our oldest customer and we want to make the trip and visit with you and see.”
JK: Oh, that’s amazing.

AS: It was wonderful. We had nothing in common. We’ve never eaten in the same restaurant. We’ve never gone to the same (unintelligible), but he was very nice. We talked and so on. So that was the culmination of the end of the business. Today it’s just the name only. My company, I was active with that till the end, but the one carrying the Bruno name just waits to be buried with me when I…

So that’s about the extent of my life. I was an adamant football – I used to go to all the football games and hockey games. When Madison Square Garden opened I had four tickets to every event and kept them for years and years and years. Now my son-in-law’s taken it over. I love to go to the Garden and watch all those games, but now it’s just to get in and out of the Garden for me is just too much.

JK: That can be crazy.

AS: So I think that’s about the extent of it. Anything else?

JK: I think I’ve got what I need. Okay, well, just to wrap up, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. I think you’ve given me stories that I couldn’t have gotten from anyone else, so it’s really wonderful.

AS: Okay. My pleasure.

[End of Audio]