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Interview no. 14

Vincent Ravel, M.D.

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INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Vincent Ravel, M.D.

INTERVIEWER: Archives Staff, University Library

PROJECT: El Paso Medical Community

DATE OF INTERVIEW: _____

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO: 14

TRANSCRIPT NO: 14

TRANSCRIBER: Amy Bené

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Longtime El Paso physician; board certified radiologist; born in 1914; son of Lithuanian immigrants; attended Lamar School; Bailey School, Morehead School, and El Paso High School; served in U.S. Navy; graduate of University of Pennsylvania; interned at Albert Einstein Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Recounts immigration of family from Lithuania to U.S.; briefly sketches history of Jewish community in El Paso; father's role in founding of Congregation of Mena Zion; arranged marriage of parents; opening of pawn shop in South El Paso, City Loan and Jewelry, by father and cousin, Sam Ravel; shootings in El Paso at turn of century; purchase of ammunition, guns, and pistols by Pancho Villa; Columbus Raid; Pershing Expedition to Mexico; El Paso's red light district on Ninth Street in 1930s; physical examinations of prostitutes; comments on El Paso's recognition as health center for tuberculosis patients; recounts tuberculosis sanitoriums in El Paso, including Southwestern General Hospital; neuro-dermatitis patients' move to El Paso; economic struggles during the Depression; advent of sulfas in 1937; availability of antibiotics and penicillin in WW II; incidence of leprosy in El Paso; mentions experience as physician for Texas Wrestling Commission.

Length of Interview: 1 hour, 15 min. Length of Transcript 37 pages
(15/16 Tape Speed)

This is an interview with Vincent Ravel, MD
by Ms. Corn in El Paso, Texas.

(Tape begins in conversation)

A -- which means a small village. And these were synagogue oriented Jewish communities. And everything was centered about the synagogue.

My father's father was a furrier, and my mother's father ran an inn, a hostelry.

Q Your mother's family and your father's family were both from --

A Lithuania.

Q Lithuania.

A My mother's maiden name is Hurwitz. H-U-R-W-I-T-Z.

Q Did your parents meet and marry before they --

A No, no. This is kind of interesting. They both grew up in the same community, but my father came to Texas around the turn of the century, and had an occasion to visit New York.

And as Jews usually do, they look up relatives. And he found some relatives who knew that my mother had come from the same community. And they met after an interval of, I don't know, 10 or 12 years. And then they were married in New York City. But they knew each other as children.

Q I see. How old was your father when he came to America?

A Oh, I guess he was in his late teens.

Q And was he with his family at that time?

A He went to live with a bother in La Mesa, New Mexico.

Q Oh. How had the brother ended up in La Mesa, New Mexico?

A The brother ended up, because he married the sister of Joe H. Goodman.

Q Ah. This is getting complicated, but how did he happen to meet Ms. Goodman?

A How did the brother?

Q Uh-huh.

A Well they knew each other from the old country, also.

Q Ah, I see. So what brought the Goodmans to this area, also?

A Well, Joe Goodman -- well now, I think you can get more of that information more accurately from Joe Goodman's son, Mr. I. V. Goodman, who lives over on Baltimore Street, and he can tell you that information. And if you want, I shall be glad to call "Pick" as they call him.

Q Wonderful. I'd like very much to talk to him.

A Because Pick Goodman was the first Jewish youngster to graduate from college in El Paso. He graduated, I think it was Syracuse University.

Q Uh-huh. I would love to talk to him. I've encountered his name before.

A Well, you can talk -- he can give you more information about the early El Paso history, as far as the Jewish community is concerned.

His father was the one that founded the congregation *Mena Zion. And my father was also one of the

founders of the conservative congregation.

The first rabbi that they had was a man by the name of Schechter. S-C-H-E-C-H-T-E-R. Schechter. And then he was followed by a Rabbi Blumenthal. And then Rabbi Blumenthal was succeeded by a Rabbi Joseph M. Roth, who was with the congregation approximately 30 years, I guess, until his death.

And Rabbi Roth was also -- he was a Ph.D., and he taught Greek, and Latin, and psychology, and philosophy within the College of Mines -- and metallurgy. He was a professor of classics.

Q A marvelous man person to have.

A A fabulous man, just terrific! He had a great character, and he influenced more of the young people of this community, Gentile as well as Jewish, than any other person whom I know, as far as the classics were concerned.

Q He's not still living? is he?

A No. He died, yes, 10, 12 years ago.

Q Why did your family leave Russia?

A Well, to avoid persecution, and to, you know, have a future.

Q There was none.

A They wanted to come over here.

There was a tremendous wave of emmigration starting in the 1880s.

Q Uh-huh.

A And at that time there were what are commonly referred to

Pogroms

among the Jews as ~~Programs~~. F-R-O-G-R-A-M-S, which meant going in and killing the Jews, and robbing from them, and raping their women. And this was the -- one of the reasons.

Plus the other fact that when a Jew was inducted into the Czar's army, the term of duty was 20 years. And interestingly enough, many of them left primarily to get away from this forced induction.

Q What about the term of duty for a Gentile? Was it less?

A Oh, yes. Much less. As a matter of fact, so far as I know, maybe a year or two.

Q So your father came then -- went to New York, then came to Texas?

A No, he came directly to Texas.

Q Directly to Texas.

A Yeah. He landed at Galveston.

Q Oh, I see.

A And then my mother landed in New York.

Q I see.

A And they had -- my father had knowledge of these people from Lithuania, and looked them up, and found that my mother was there, and a wedding was arranged. I mean, it was not unusual, for example, for a matchmaking to occur among the Jews.

Q Uh-huh.

A And this was considered a rather honorable profession, except that sometimes the matchmakers got carried away with

deals about dowries and their percentage for arranging the weddings between families of *tropical status.

And, at one time, for example, marriages were arranged when the children -- when the betrothed couples were three, four, five years old. And one of the reasons for that was that a father might have at that time enough of a dowry to contribute to the wedding.

And so, what he would do is, he would make arrangements with his friend, and say, "Look, my daughter will be betrothed to your son, and here's X number of rubles or dollars. And this wedding will occur when these children are mature enough to consummate the marriage."

Q Uh-huh.

A Incidentally, there's no word for marriage in Hebrew.

Q Really?

A That's right. There's no word for charity in Hebrew, and there's no word for religion in Hebrew. Once you think about it a little bit, you'll understand why.

The word that they use for marriage is called a *Kittuchenetza; sanctification, a holy estate.

The word for charity is *Seducco, and that means justice, so that the recipient is not beholden to the donor. This is what's coming to him.

Q That's wonderful.

A And religion, just like you don't think of breathing, this is the way you're supposed to live. You don't separate

A Oh, she thought it was barren, and bleak, and almost impossible, and it was insufferably hot.

Q And then you were born in 1915?

A 1914.

Q 1914. Let's see. And then by 1920 you should have been old enough to remember things and have stories.

A Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

Q What are some of your early memories?

A Well, I knew -- I remember -- believe it or not, I remember things -- I remember when the Armistice was declared in November of 1918. And they had a bonfire at the El Paso High School, and a parade. And my father got us out, my brother and I. And we were in this parade. He had a convertible, a sedan that the top rolled down. And it was quite a celebration in 1918.

Q Four years old.

A Yeah. This was quite impressive to me, because I really had no cognizance of a war going on. You know, it was just, all of a sudden people were jubilant, and they had to be -- and it was exciting. People were thankful, and it was a joyous occasion.

At that time, I was in a private kindergarten that I remember, run by Mrs. Zahn that lived on Nevada Street, about the 1300 block. And she had this kindergarten in her basement.

Q What sort of a lady was Mrs. Zahn?

religion from your secular life among the Jews.

Q Oh.

A So they don't need a word.

Q I see, yes. As all-permeating as the air.

A The first time that the Judaism came into the vocabulary was when the Greeks had conquered the Jews and they were put into exile. And they separate Judaism from Hellenism.

But still, Judaism isn't a religion, it just signified a different background.

Q I don't know of any other culture, would you say, that has this --

A No. This ethical concept.

Q I don't know of any others.

A The Jews were the first monotheists.

Q That, I knew. But what about the *Zolarastrians? Weren't they --

A They had minor gods along with them, as I understand it.

Q Oh, did they?

A Yes. They had Ishtar, if you'll recall, the queen.

The goddess of love was part of *Zolarastrism.

Q So they were not monotheists?

A No. They had minor goddesses and gods along with Zolarastrius, if I recall correctly.

I may be wrong. I'm not a student.

Q I'm not either.

A Comparative religions. But it wouldn't be very difficult to

find out.

Q Your father was how old in 1900 when he first came to Texas?

A I think he was maybe 18, 16, 17; somewhere around in there.

And he went to New Mexico. He didn't go to Texas.

Q Do you recall his impressions of the region? Did he ever tell you what he thought about this place?

He landed at Galveston, so, rather than seeing the East, he plunged right into the West.

A That's correct. And he went to work on a farm. And he was paid \$2.00 a week. And at the end of three years, I think he had \$200. And I asked him what happened to the other \$400, and he said, well, he sent that back to Lithuania.

He got his room and board, and that was his salary; \$2.00 a week, \$104 dollars a year.

And then he and a nephew opened up a pawnshop in south El Paso.

Q What was the name of the pawnshop?

A It was called the City Loan and Jewelry.

Q Do you know the name of the nephew?

A Sam. Sam Ravel.

Q Sam Ravel?

A And Sam died in 1937.

Q What sort of a person was Sam Ravel?

A Well, Sam Ravel was a very jocular, obese, highly religious person. He never missed a Friday night in the synagogue.

He opened a general store in Columbus, New Mexico.

And there's a classic story of the southwest that Bill McGaw recognized -- I don't know if you know Bill McGaw or not, but he's a historian of the southwest in general. And the riddle sort of goes, "Who discovered America?" And they said, "Columbus discovered America. And they said, "Who discovered Columbus?" And they said, "Sam Ravel," (Laughter) "discovered Columbus."

Q That's wonderful. Do you know the name of the farm your father worked on?

A Well, it was in La Mesa, and it was, I'm sure, owned by Joe Goodman.

Q Uh-huh.

A I don't know that it had a name, particularly. It was just --

Q But he did work for Mr. Goodman?

A Yes.

Q What do you think -- do you remember what he thought of the deserts, the flatness, the immensity of the country, that kind of thing?

A Oh, nothing. He just accepted it and was grateful to be in the United States, where he could have some measure of freedom. I mean, he was grateful that he was permitted to live in this country, and he felt that it was a privilege, and that a lot of the Americans didn't appreciate their liberties, that they took too many things for granted.

You know, there's a French saying that the healthy

know not of their health, but only the sick. And in America, people are -- in the United States, they're not aware of their health. Only when their privileges are removed do they become aware of how healthy they were.

Q When he opened the pawnshop with his nephew --

A Yes.

Q -- about what year was that?

A I think it was in 1904 or 1905 on South El Paso Street.

Q Has he told you what El Paso was like then?

A Yes. It was rough and it was tough, and there were shootings, and robberies, and murders, and it wasn't what you would call a most -- it was a frontier town.

Q Has he told you stories about some of the shootings around (unintelligible)?

A Well, just in a vague way. He told me one time that a Mexican walked into his pawnshop and bought some guns and pistols and some ammunition.

And while he was waiting on this Mexican, a crowd gathered in front of the store. And my father left the customer, and he went outside, and looked around, and couldn't understand what was going on, but he went back and finished selling this man the rest of his stock. And when the man -- the man paid him in cash and left.

And then the Secret Service came in and wanted to know what the transaction was, you know, what had happened. And my father told them.

And they said, "Do you know who that was?" And he said, "No." "Well, that was Pancho Villa." He left him waiting at the counter while he went outside to investigate what the crowd was all about! (Laughter)

He knew Pancho Villa, and had further business dealings with him, all of which were recorded through the federal authorities.

Q What did he think of Pancho Villa as a man?

A Well, he didn't know him that intimately, except as a good customer.

Q How did --

A But he joked with him, and didn't really feel that -- well, his impression was that it was another customer who was trying to help the people of Mexico against the "aristocracy," of Mexico, but that was the extent of his dealings with him.

Q Has your father told you about the strip of saloons and gambling houses that existed in those days?

A Well, he mentioned them. That's where these shootings occurred.

Q Did he go to them?

A No. My father was not a gambler.

Q Not a gambler?

A No. He was -- he didn't have a chance. (Laughter) He was not a gambler.

Q Probably, he encountered people in his pawnshop who might

have gambled too much.

A Oh, yes. Yes.

Q Has he told you stories about people coming in, having cleaned themselves out?

A Well, not particularly.

Q What I'm after when I asked you about the stories is that many of these interviews will end up providing material for biographies, and perhaps even historical novels, and so colorful --

A Uh-huh. No, I remember, he had -- there were a number of rivals here in El Paso.

We were a relatively large family, and all of them filtered away, and I'm sort of the last of the Mohicans. But my father had two brothers that lived here, as well as a -- he had two brothers. There was E. Ravel, and Max Ravel, And then the three nephews; Louis, and Sam, and Arthur.

Sam and Arthur now live in Albuquerque. They were involved in the raid that Pancho Villa had on Columbus.

Q Oh, really? Tell me about that.

A Well, all I know was that you might go interview Arthur up in Albuquerque. He was there.

The story as I recall, was that Arthur was about 16 or 17 years old at the time, and was picked up and marched down the street with two other cowboys, both of whom were killed, and Arthur fell down in the dust, and was left for dead, and remained motionless until the next morning

when the reporter from the Times, Julius Schepps, who's from the Schepps family in Dallas, rode to Columbus. He'd heard about this raid, and he found that Arthur was alive.

Louis had hidden in the store, the general store, under a pile of hides. And they two -- I mean, the two of them, survived.

The interesting thing about this was that this raid occurred, I think, in 1915; 1915 or 1916. And that was when General Pershing was sent down to -- this expedition to try and abduct or capture Pancho Villa.

And Woodrow Wilson at that time caused a -- had a big mobilization thing going with this raid on Villa -- the Villa raid on Columbus as an excuse to mobilize the United States Army to enter World War I. It was a -- I mean, this was a -- well, just that. It was an excuse.

Apparently, the administration had already decided that they were going to go into Europe. But they had to train soldiers, and they needed an excuse. And this little diversionary raid on a small village was used to mobilize the entire United States Army.

Q That's wonderful. Clever of Wilson.

A Yeah.

Q Uh-huh.

A But he had already made -- Wilson had already made up his mind that the United States had to involve itself in the European affairs, because the Kaiser at that time was

winning.

And then, of course, came the Russian revolution, and we went into Russia disastrously.

Q When your father was in business around the turn of the century, did he ever tell you about the fall of *Floris, when there was a huge battle? Did he witness that?

A He witnessed it, but he didn't mention too much about it. My father was not a very communicative person.

Q Uh-huh. Wasn't really an anecdote man, then?

A No.

Q And your mother had not yet come to this area?

A Well, my mother came here in 1912.

Q 1912?

A When she got married.

Q Well, one more question about that part of town in around the turn of the century, around 1904, 1905. I have been told by other people I've interviewed that there was a red light district on Utah Street. Did he ever mention that to you?

A No. But there was a red light district in the 1930s.

Q Oh, there was?

A Yeah. Oh, I think it was 9th Street.

Q An actual district?

A Yeah.

Q Now, this is the first indication I've had that there was a district after the Utah Street era.

A Oh, yeah. And there was a house, as I recall, on South Stanton that's been torn down.

Come in, Kenny. I'd like to have you meet my son-in-law, Mr. Temple. This is Ms. Corn.

Q Hello.

A I'm being interviewed.

K Oh.

A Kenny is a native El Pasoan.

Q Oh.

A And his father probably can tell you a lot about El Paso, because his father just recently retired from the Custom Service on the bridge.

Q Oh, my goodness. His name? What is his name?

A His name is John Temple, and I'm sure he has lots more dramatic stories than I can give you.

Q Good.

A Have some coffee. Do you want some coffee or some breakfast?

K No, I'll get it. I'll go in there and grab a bite of something.

Q I'm glad to have met you.

A He's a graduate student at *Rensolere, RPI.

Q Oh? What's his --

A Aeronautical engineering.

He was just drafted, and now he's going to get out on an erroneous induction procedure. He shouldn't have been

drafted to begin with. But, in the meantime, it certainly disrupted his orderly sequence.

Q I'll bet it did.

A I want him to go on and get his Ph.D.

I'm supporting two married women.

Q Oh, my gosh! No wonder you want him to get his Ph.D.

Well, let's see. Oh, the red light district in the 1930s.

A Yes. There was one in the 1930s.

Q What can you tell me about it?

A Well, I didn't patronize it, let me put it that way.

(Laughter)

But it was there, and the mayor was getting -- apparently, the mayor was getting paid off.

Q Apparently.

A Somebody had to be paid off.

Well, I remember that there was a character in this town that kept harassing the mayor about this particular situation, although he couldn't prove anything.

Q Do you know who the character was?

A I think I might be able to remember his name, but I can't recall it right now.

But I know him, because Texas -- there's a law where (if) a person acts in good faith, he can request a psychiatric examination on another citizen. And that was what happened to this fellow that was harassing the mayor.

and they would request mental examinations. They'd bring him into the county hospital, and I used to do spinal taps on him, and all the --

Q And the mayor requested the examinations?

A Yeah, that's right. He kept saying this man was off his rocker. And after about three or four of those procedures, the man got discouraged and gave up. (Laughter)

And there's no recourse. In other words, I could say --

Q You mean, if I requested a psychiatric examination of you --

A -- just, they would have to. All you do is you go down to the county judge and say, "I think Dr. Ravel is off his rocker. I want him examined."

Now, as long as you do this in good faith.

Q How do you test one's good faith?

A Well, you have to have some reason.

Q I see. I see.

A And this leads to an interesting little sideline that I have just -- that has just happened to me in the past year or so with an Internal Revenue agent that I think is psychotic. I'll show you the correspondence on it.

And he was transferred the next day. He was -- his boss sent him out of the city to Waco.

Q Did you request a psychiatric evaluation?

A Yes. I was ready. I'll show you the correspondence.

Q I see. That's very interesting.

A Well, anyway, this fellow kept harassing the mayor about the pay-offs and the chief of police at that time.

Q Who was mayor?

A I think it was Harmon.

Q And do you recall who was chief of police?

A No, I really don't.

Q Okay. Go ahead.

A But anyway, there apparently was some pay-off.

And then, of course, the Juarez authorities got interested in it, because they didn't want competition from El Paso, (Laughter) and the place was eventually closed.

Q About how large was this district?

A Oh, as I recall, it was about two blocks; two or three blocks. Just tenements.

Q Was it blatant where everyone knew?

A Yeah.

Q Ladies on the street?

A Yeah. Right there in the -- you could see them. They had the doors open, or the windows open, and anyone that wanted to -- they were patronized, mainly, and I'm sure as they are in Juarez, by the military personnel.

Q Uh-huh.

A When it's payday, and they all go over to Juarez. Not they all, but, I mean, this is their big night.

Q Uh-huh. You know, I've been told by other people I've

interviewed that the Utah Street district around the turn of the century was inhabited by lovely, well-dressed ladies. In other words, it was very classy. The madams and the girls were very well-dressed, very well-behaved, et cetera, et cetera, for this district in the 1930s. Would you have said that about was the case?

A I drove through there once or twice.

Q You must have been a teenager.

A Yeah. And I didn't -- I would not call them well-dressed, elegant gals.

Q It was, you said, tenements a few minutes ago.

A Yeah, uh-huh. That's right. No, I would not call them elegant.

Q I was told that during the Utah Street era, around the turn of the century, that the girls were regularly examined, and that health standards were kept up. Do you know anything about this?

A Well, yeah. I can tell you a little bit about that, because, in the 1930s, when I first went into practice, I got a call. I was in general practice. I got a call one night to go down to a hotel on South Stanton that was the center of prostitution. And this man was sick. He had fever and he said he couldn't get a doctor. So I went down and I took care of him.

And then he came to me -- to my office. He said, "Look," he said, "We've got to have these girls examined.

Would you examine them?" And I said, "Sure. I'll examine them. That's fine."

So I examined -- he brought three of them up, and one of them had gonorrhea. And so I reported it, and he said -- he didn't like that, because this was already taking away a source of his income. He had a stable of these gals.

And then the next day he brought up another four or five and I examined them, and I found one with syphilis and one with gonorrhea, and I reported it.

And that was the end of it. He didn't bring -- he said, "How come you find stuff, and the other doctor that we've been going to for months and months and months never found any positive venereal diseases?"

I said, "I don't know what the other doctor does. That's not my problem. My problem is; you asked me to examine them, I did smears on them, and *washamens. And if they're positive, they're positive. I can't help that. And I'm not going to give someone a clean bill of health when they're venereally infected."

So that lasted about five cases or six cases, and he paid me, I think it was \$2.00 a case, and that was the end of that. (Laughter)

Q Do you recall his name? Would you want to give it?

A Well, I have the records, but I don't remember his name. I was just a -- 25 years ago.

Q I was thinking it would be so exciting if one could actually

locate someone who was in that business and get them to reminisce.

A I think I have records somewhere, but this was 30 years ago, actually.

Q Okay. All right, now. Do you recall anything else interesting about the red light district, or have we pretty well exhausted that subject?

A Well, my knowledge of that, as I say, is quite meager, but it did exist in the 1930s.

As I recall, there was a house reputed to be involved in this on Franklin Street.

Q What block? What address?

A It's between Oregon and Mesa, whatever block that is. That's -- this was, again, I don't know about it, but it was reputedly so.

There was also -- I had an Uncle, Max, who was in the fur business here. He was a furrier, taking after -- I'm sure, took after his father, my grandfather. And he had a office or a shop in the -- oh, I don't remember the name of the building, but it was on the corner of Oregon and San Francisco, across from the Payless Drugs. The Blumenthal Building, it was called.

And one night he was robbed. These thieves came in and stole all the furs that he was storing for people. They broke in, and his loss would have been tremendous. I don't know whether he was insured or not.

But my father had a connection with one of these underground characters. His name was Pully Carpio. I remember that name. And my father went to Pully Carpio, and he says, "You've got to get those furs back."

And they did. They paid off, you know. Instead of black marketing them, well, my uncle paid off and got the furs back.

So that there was some sort of connection between these thieves. And that was quite a story.

Q Yes. Pully Carpio.

A Uh-huh.

Q It would be interesting to see if he were still around.

A I don't think he's still alive.

Q What about Chinatown?

A I have no -- the only thing I know about Chinatown was the fact that there were some Chinese groceries down there.

Q Uh-huh. No real memories of Chinatown?

A No.

Well, I remember we had a Chinese that had a vegetable wagon, and he used to pull right around, and sell vegetables, produce, to the homes.

Q Do you recall his name?

A No, I don't recall his name.

Q Okay. Let's see, now. Your mother came in 1912. Did she ever tell you what she thought of this country when she first came?

A Well, as I recall, she was, you know, a rather gentle, benign character. Someone that was kind of interested in children.

Q Who were some of the other children who went to school?

A Well, the one that I remember that went with me was William Kayser, Edgar William Kayser. They called him Kasey.

Q Do you remember him as a little boy?

A Oh, yeah. We grew up together, and we're still very good friends. And he lives over here on Piedmont. And I'm sure he can tell you a lot of things. K-A-Y-S-E-R.

Q K-A-Y?

A Uh-huh. His wife was Peggy Ramsey. The Ramsey family has been here for years. And her brother owns the Ramsey Steel down there by the (unintelligible) Sanitary.

Q Well, what about boyhood memories?

A Well, I went to Bailey School, and Lamar School, Morehead School, and I had quite an interest in -- I was quite interested in Scouting.

Q Did you ever by any chance, study math under Anne Kelley?

A I sure did!

Q What kind of a lady --

A Algebra. She was fabulous! Very tiny gal. And, yeah, that was El Paso High School that I had algebra under her.

Q Did you like her as a teacher?

A Yeah, I thought she was very nice. She was.

But the one that was really remarkable was Mrs.

*Hamen Crupp. And her name was Rebecca Goldsmith before she got married. And she was rough and she was tough as a teacher. I mean, she took no nonsense and she emphasized on scholarliness and real work.

Q What did she look like?

A She was a rather heavyset person. I wouldn't call her obese.

She had a very commonly flawless semitic features. Dark-complected, black hair.

But basically, a strict person. Rather humorless.

Q Was she ever too strict to suit you?

A No. No, really. I mean, when you look back, it was just a time I thought, "Well, boy, this is rough."

But I tell you, you can talk to Eli Crupp. He knew her. That's her nephew-in-law. You know Eli G. Crupp?

Q I've heard the name.

A He is one of the town's greatest philanthropists.

Here, I got his biography here.

You ought to talk to him. He can tell you a lot about El Paso.

Q I'll have a look.

A Well, this is a collection of individuals who have contributed to the Jewish community.

Q What's the name of that book? Let me tell the recorder.

A The American Isreal Honorarium.

Q The American Isreal Honorarium. Where would one get a copy?

A From the Isreali Publishing Institute, I guess.

But this deals with Jews all over the United States, you know, the Americas; Mexico, South America.

Here he is. He's out of the children's business now.

Q Good heavens! He's done a great many things.

A He sure has!

Q It's amazing. I would like to talk to him.

Wow! 1966 Man of the Year.

A Right.

Q Member of Hall of Fame.

A I'll introduce you to him.

Q I'd love to meet him.

A Yeah. He'll talk to you, and he's a really fine gentleman.

Q Oh, he sounds like, really, someone I'd like very much to talk to. Wonderful. Thank you. I'd love to meet him.

A All right. Just name the day, and I'll see that you -- that this is arranged.

Q In September, just as soon I get back.

A Anytime.

Q Am I --

A It's sort of a hiatus in my position in El Paso, because I went off to school in 1928.

Q Uh-huh.

A And I really didn't come back until 19 -- you know, for any significant amount of time, until 1948.

I was -- I interned here, which again kept me out of the mainstream, because you go on duty at 7:00 in the morning, and you'd be on call -- you'd be on duty until 5:00 the following afternoon, and then you'd be off at 5:00, and start again at 7:00 the next morning.

Q Well, now, by the way, I'd be very interested in just talking about your medical experiences within the hospital, because someone's going to write about medical men in El Paso.

A Right. Sure.

Q Am I taking too much time this morning? I can come back another time, you know.

A No, no. Whatever you want to do.

Q I don't want to wear out my welcome, you know.

A You won't wear out your welcome.

Q Make it short interviews, you know.

A That's quite a story; the medical community of El Paso.

Q I want, you know, very much --

A We have a rather unique situation in that El Paso at one time was recognized as a health center.

Q Tell me about that.

A For tuberculosis. And there were any number of tuberculosis sanatoriums in El Paso.

Right offhand, Southwestern General Hospital was a home and sanatorium. And they treated only tuberculosis.

And I remember as a youngster that a day didn't

pass that someone didn't get off at the Union Depot on a stretcher that came to El Paso to die of tuberculosis. And they would (unintelligible) with care.

And then they couldn't wait until they got back to where they came from; the mid-west, the east, the north; it didn't make any difference.

And then they would go back home after they'd been here two or three years and finally become arrested, and they'd stay home about two or three months, and then they came back to El Paso to make this their permanent home.

And many of the physicians that came here for cures stayed on and practiced. And there were some outstanding medical surgical physicians that lived here as a result of their originally breaking down with tuberculosis. They moved here for that.

And then there's another unique situation that we call "skinners." Skinners is a -- what they mean by that is people that have neurodermatitis.

And at the Mount Sinai Hospital, if you go to the dermatology division with neurodermatitis, the chief of dermatology writes, "RX; El Paso, Texas."

And these people come down there. There are over 300 of them in El Paso that have achieved what they call a socio-economic remission. In other words, they aren't cured, but they can function. They can work, and they can go out in society.

And these people are above average in intelligence. They are accountants, attorneys, physicians, insurance men. And they look out after each other. They're cabinetmakers.

They find out -- what they do, they meet the train or the plane, and the first thing they do is they take all their medicines and their salves and their ointments, and they throw them away. Then they take them over to Saint Joseph's Sanitarium, is their base of operation. And they put them up on top, and they undress them, and they expose them to the sunlight.

And then, when the weeping and the eczema and the rash and all this stuff is in a state of remission, then they go out and find them a job.

Q How wonderful!

A And they are so considerate of each other, and they're really fellow sufferers.

And, most -- Dr. *Edenouf, you know the famous one that killed Ted Anders? he was a skinner. That's the way he got down to El Paso.

Q Dr. Edenouf, wow!

A Yeah. And what they do is, then they go into their particular professions and they start working and they -- there's one real fine physician that came to El Paso for a cure.

And the interesting thing is the way these people

found El Paso. They left the East, went down to Florida, crossed over the gulf to Mexico. They went up to west coast to San Diego and Los Angeles, and then they started their trek back to the east. And when they hit El Paso, they suddenly became markedly improved. And the word spread.

Q You mean a group of them, then, who were looking for a place to improve?

A Yeah. So that their environment would -- that they could tolerate their illness.

And there were five or six of them. This was over 20 years ago. And they became well here. That is, what you call a -- they're not completely well.

But one of them that I know rather well got improved to the point where he said, "Well, now I'm going back to New York City." And he'd get as far as Texarkana and he'd break out, and he'd come back to El Paso and he'd get well. And he went back the second time. Texarkana was the limit of his excursions, and he'd break out again, and he came back.

And after four or five attempts -- they're really prisoners without bars. They have to live in this environment.

And they do very well here. They're successful economically. They are not burdens to the community. They contribute their talents and their efforts, and El Paso is really a better place because of these particular 300 or 400

people.

Q You said a few minutes ago that these people were intelligent people.

A Yes.

Q The disease strikes intelligent people?

A Well, apparently, there's some -- well, no one really knows the ideology. No one knows why someone gets neurodermatitis.

Q And you don't know whether it's communicable or not?

A It's not communicable. No, it is not communicable. It's a psychosomatic type of thing.

Q Oh.

A And they just -- they do well here. They thrive here.

Q Do you know what here makes them thrive?

A Apparently it's a combination of the altitude and the dryness and the sunshine.

They're here. There's a colony from Chicago here, there's one from Boston, there's one from New York, and all these people are -- I guess they have emotional problems somewhere down the line that produced this (unintelligible) of events that causes their skin to -- this is their shock organ, if you understand what I'm -- I belong to a school of medicine that believes that everybody has a shock organ. Some people it's their joints, some people it's their coronary, some people it's their lungs. They get asthma. Some people it's their stomach. They get ulcers. And this

isn't proven by any manner or means, but this is just a belief that I have after observing people over a period of 30 years since I've been practicing medicine.

And they are certain types. And you can sort of classify them. They're ulcer types, they're coronary types, they're glaucoma types, they're nervous types, they're skin types. And I think that -- this is an unsupported theory, but it's just as a result of my observation.

Now, I happen to have had three coronary occlusions and I'm what I'd call a coronary type.

Q You came back -- you went away to medical school, came back as a young intern?

A That's correct. And I practiced at general practice until 1940 when I was called to active duty in the Navy. And I was six years on active duty.

Then I went to the University of Pennsylvania for graduate training, and had my residency at what is now the Albert Einstein Center in Philadelphia.

Q Uh-huh.

A And then when I finished my training, I took my boards, my specialty boards.

I was certified as a radiologist, and I came back and went into practice.

Q Tell me about your years of general practice right after you were out of medical school.

A Well, that was when I ran into this character that I told

you about, that had this stable of girls who was unhappy.

I was the only doctor that would go see him. He tried and tried. Nobody would go down in that part of town.

Q What was the hotel, do you remember?

A I think it was the Alabama Hotel, but I'm not -- as I recall. It was on South Stanton someplace. Not a very elegant (Laughter) situation.

But he wanted to throw some practice my way, as long as it didn't interfere with his working his girls.

And this I would not collaborate with. (If) I found infection, why I reported it as an infection. I had to sign a letter for the public health office, for the county public health officer, and I wasn't about to compromise on my findings.

And I needed the money, believe me. I was having a photo finish with the bank every month. (Laughter) It was just -- I really struggled, you know, in 1937 in El Paso was still the Depression.

Q Could your patients afford to pay you all the time?

A No. No, I used to do house calls for a dollar if I could get it. I mean, it was just -- times were that bad.

I used to give anesthetics for surgeons, and get five dollars for anesthetic when the patient could pay it.

Q Who were some of the surgeons that you knew in town at that time?

A Oh, there was Felix Miller, and Armstead, and Frank Goodwin

was the orthopedic surgeon. Dr. Multof was there. He was chief of staff when I was in training. And then there were two Rodgers brothers. And then there was a Dr. Hardy, Dr. Jameson, the old Dr. Homan. His nephew and son are still here. That was the Homan Sanitarium.

Q If you had been planning to have surgery at that time, or a member of your family had, who would you have gone to if you had your choice of all of them? Who was the best surgeon in your opinion?

A I don't think there was any best surgeon. We had a number of very competent surgeons.

The difference, you know, when I got out of medical school, we had quinine for malaria, and *liber for pernicious anemia, and 606 for syphilis, and insulin for diabetes. And that was the gambit of specific therapy.

We didn't have any antibiotics, didn't have any sulfas, we didn't have -- I mean, you treated them with laxatives, and aspirin, and narcotics to relieve pain, and hypnotics to put them to sleep, sedatives, and everything was more or less empiric.

So, unless you came up with diabetes, or pernicious anemia, or malaria, or syphilis, the rest of it was all symptomatic treatment. You'd treat the symptoms and not the disease, because we didn't have any specific --

(Tape interruption)

A And then suddenly in 1937, the sulfas came out. And that

sort of revolutionized things.

And then in World War II, the antibiotics, penicillin, was made available. And it was so precious, what they would do is they would recover the penicillin from the urine of patients, and then reuse it.

Q Really?

A Yeah. That's how effective it was. And it changed the whole course of therapy.

Q Prior to sulfa antibiotics, I suppose that when an epidemic started there was very little to do. Did you have experience with any epidemics?

A Well, not epidemics. I mean, we would see the usual contagious diseases, like measles.

Q What about, say, an influenza epidemic; something like that?

A Well, the -- we had Asian Flu, but I really never encountered that when I was in practice, because most of my practice has been in the field of x-ray. And my experiences with contagious diseases are really limited.

Now, I remember -- leprosy is endemic in El Paso, or was.

We used to see typhoid fever in El Paso.

As far as -- I remember when I was an intern, the priest brought in a man, a Latin American. He said, "We think this guy's got leprosy." And he did. They picked him up on the street. (Laughter)

Q Good heavens!

A That was, of course, first cousin to tuberculosis.

Q Is it really?

A Uh-huh. The very same genes, that bacteria. They're first cousins. They look alike under the microscope, except it's much easier to find the lepra bacillus, leprosy germ, than it is the tuberculosis germ.

The tuberculosis is far more common, and it's rampant in El Paso. I think we have the highest rate of tuberculosis in the country.

Q Is this because of all the tuberculars coming in, or is this because it --

A No. It's a disease of poverty. People that are malnourished are more susceptible. Their resistance is lowered.

And this causes me a great deal of chagrin, because a week doesn't go by that I don't see a new case of active pulmonary tuberculosis, frequently far advanced. And that means people aren't eating.

Q All right. Tell me this; are the cases usually from, say, poor areas?

A You bet! Inevitably, because I spend 95% of my time at R. E. Thomason Hospital, and I feel that these people really need attention.

And I have the department at Providence, and I could spend all of my time at Providence with the wealthier class of patients, where you don't see active pulmonary

tuberculosis very often.

Q Now, tuberculosis is contagious, right?

A It's contagious.

Q But if someone is well-fed and (unintelligible)

A They all get -- oh, I'm sure if we did TB test on you, a time test or a patch test, you would show that you at one time had tuberculosis, and had spontaneously recovered from it and had an immunity.

Q I see.

A I would say that 99% of the people in El Paso have at one time contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, but have overcome it. And the immunity is such that they're arrested.

And I can look at a chest, and I can show examination after examination that shows stable, arrested, pulmonary tuberculosis that's inactive.

Q But the people who are not well-fed; south El Paso, I suppose?

A Right, right.

Q This is where it's going on?

A Yeah.

Q I see.

What about leprosy? Do you encounter that very often?

A Not very often.

Q In the past did you encounter it more?

A Oh, we would see maybe one case every two years at the most.

Leprosy isn't as highly contagious as tuberculosis, but it is contagious.

Q Uh-huh.

A I've been in leper colonies, like in Carville, Louisiana, and New Caledonia.

It's more prevalent in the Far East than it is here.

But they've got antibiotics and chemotherapy for lepers now, which was unthinkable 30 years ago.

Q Why would El Paso be particularly prone to leprosy, rather than, let's say, Springfield, Illinois?

A Because they were exposed to some leper probably from Mexico, from Juarez.

Q I see. I see. Okay, that answers my question.

A And in Springfield you don't have any lepers.

You've got -- in order to get leprosy, you have to be exposed to a leper, and over a long period of time.

Q Oh.

A In other words, you don't get leprosy from one exposure, usually.

Q It's more like living in the same house, sharing the same plate.

A That's right.

Q I see. Now, I feel I should ask you some questions about the medical profession in El Paso.

I hardly know where to start.