# Transcript of an audio oral history interview with Alfred Blumstein, April 5, 1999

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: This is the National Council of Jewish Women. It is April 5, 1999. We are sitting in the living room of Dr. Alfred Blumstein. This is Judy Rubinstein.

HOWARD BRAUN: And Howard Braun.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Interviewing Dr. Blumstein.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: This Al Blumstein, I'm delighted you're here,

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Thank you. Could you tell us about your early life, when you were born, and so forth.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: OK. I was born in 1930.

HOWARD BRAUN: The date.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Pardon.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: The date.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: June 3, 1930. My parents were Samuel Blumstein and Shirley Blumstein. Shirley Yellen Blumstein.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Where were they born?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: My mother came from Bialystok, Poland. What's now Poland, what was then Russia. I think my father came from Minsk, but I'm not sure.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Tell us first about your mother's family and about how far back you might be able to remember or that they told you.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Let's see. My mother came here in about 1920, right after World War I. Most of her family came here before the war, but her sister, who lived in Kharkov was having a baby at the time. And so she had to go and help her sister who was having the baby. And then she got caught up in the whole transition of the Russian Revolution and all that happened thereby. But she finally came here in about 1920. I know my mother much better because my parents were married in '29. I was born in '30 and by '31 or '32, they had separated. And so I grew up basically as an only child with a single mother.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Excuse me just a minute. Did they talk about the Russian Revolution and how it affected them?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not terribly much. Because most folks were here before then. And it was her sister who was the-- all of her other relatives, she had one brother and three sisters, two of whom were here, and one of whom was left in Russia through the Holocaust. I think her father had a grocery store in Bialystok. I had an intriguing experience that I'll talk about later that I happened to be going to Prague last summer. And here was a chance to go back to Bialystok and see where my mother grew up. In fact, all of her relatives were eliminated in the Holocaust, except for one cousin of mine, a cousin named Genia.

HOWARD BRAUN: What was her name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Genia, G-E-N-I-A.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And her last name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Her original name was Zasman. She was married. And her name is, married name was Hextor. So I told Genia that I was going to take a side trip to the Bialystok, and she gave me the address of the house that my mother lived in.

She knew it very well. It was number one Washingtonia, named after Washington. So I went to Bialystok. I thought it was sort of a dinky little town. It was somewhat of an industrial town, which had a major garment industry before the war. And apparently before the war, it was about 50% Jewish.

So I looked up the place. I thought it would be sort of, my image on my way was that of a [INAUDIBLE], but it was much more of a city, probably in the context of Poland, something comparable to Pittsburgh in size compared to the big cities. It was one of the maybe half dozen largest cities of Poland, fairly nondescript. We looked up Washingtonia and indeed, it was right next to what was somewhat of a palace of an industrialist, not a royal palace, but an industrialist's palace. It had a park about a square mile or so. And his home was converted into a med school.

And right across the street from that was the Washingtonia street. The house my mother grew up in was gone, replaced by a playground, but it was a rather moving experience, to get to the place that my mother was in. Took a bunch of pictures, and have been meaning to share them with my cousin when I get to see her. And she'll know what was left over. Very little was left over from pre-war period.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What did your grandparents do?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I think my grandfather had a grocery store in Bialystok. I know nothing about my father's family. And he came over in about 1910, I think. My father's worked in real estate in Newark, New Jersey.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: How did they get to Newark?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: How did he get to Newark? I have no idea. And my mother started, I think, in the Lower East Side, moved up to Prospect Avenue in the Bronx. And when she and my

father split, which was when I was about two or so, we moved in with my grandmother. We had an apartment with my grandmother and my mother and myself.

My mother started working in a bakery. Her sister's family, her sister Libby's family had been in the bakery business. And so, they gave her a job. And we stayed with my grandmother, who was my caregiver and my grandmother spoke no English. And so as a young child, I spoke Yiddish to her. I was somewhat bilingual, I guess. Never really picked up on it after she died.

She died when I was about five. And so we then moved in with--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What was your grandmother's name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Minnie. Minnie Yellen. And her husband's name was Priam Yellen. And I don't know that he ever had a job here. But I've seen some writings about him that suggest that he was a very kind, gentle man, and sort of a senior member of his community. And I don't know anything beyond my grandparents.

He died about the time I was born, so I never really got to know him, other than a man who typically had a yarmulke on and a rather large, not long, reasonably trim, but a white beard. So when I was five, we ended up moving in with my mother's sister's family, my aunt's family, my aunt Libby.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What was her name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Libby Brown. Libby Brown. Her husband and two of her sons were in the bakery business. And they kept buying and selling bakeries. And so we ended up moving every six months to a year. And I kept changing schools until I was about 10. That was in 1940. And at that point, my mother decided that I was big enough that we could be off on our own.

So we moved off into an apartment right around the corner from a bakery she happened to be working in at the time. And that was in the East Bronx section of the Bronx in New York. Her bakery was on Hunts Point Avenue. And our little apartment was around the corner on Gilbert Place. And I was there till I went off to college. And so I guess I was about 17 at the time.

So having hopped from school to school for the first four or five years of my education, I ended up in PS 47 in the Bronx, which was pretty good. And then was there through high school. I went to high school at the Bronx High School of Science for four years.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Can we backtrack to your earlier years. First of all, you said your parents were divorced. Was that unusual for--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Oh, it was very unusual. It was very unusual. And my mother always talked about it as being separated, rather than divorced. There was, I guess, enough of a stigma of divorce that she never really talked about it as divorce, but as separation. But I subsequently found papers of a divorce. But their relationship was a very interesting one. And probably more characteristic of the times. He was from Newark. She was from New York.

I'm not sure how they met, but I don't think she ever really knew him. He wrote very flowery letters, but was a very awkward man in any kind of social situation. She was a very outgoing woman. She was the epitome, as far as I can tell, of the stereotypical Jewish mother, very much devoted to her child. And so I grew up with this enormous devotion from this woman who worked very hard to make ends meet. But by god, was determined to do so, was going to do all she had to do to make that her kid grew OK.

She apparently had dated a number of men after the divorce, and viewed each of them in the context of what kind of father he would be. And, I think, found most of them wanting. And ended up not getting married until I was clearly ensconced somewhere else. And then ended up getting married to a man she was married to the rest of her life.

My father, for a person in real estate, for an individual who had great difficulty in social situations, was somewhat of a Catch 22. He was certainly not a real estate tycoon. And indeed, he was having trouble making ends meet. This was the start of the Depression, who was having trouble making ends meet. And my mother was being put into all kinds of uncomfortable circumstances of being told to live with his sister and a variety of living arrangements that she found unpleasant and so wanted out ultimately. And I think, found herself very disillusioned by the individual she ended up marrying.

HOWARD BRAUN: Did he contribute to your upkeep?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Minimally.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you interact with him much over the years?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Every so often I would get a letter from him asking to meet me somewhere in New York. I mean, this was during my school years, asking to meet me somewhere in New York. And usually the place we would meet was at the Paramount Theater, which was downtown, 42nd Street and Broadway, I guess. And I'd say at least half the time, he ended up not showing because of something that came up. And we didn't do this all that often anyway.

So, as you can appreciate, the relationship was rather distant. And so, every so often, I guess, every two, three years, over Christmas, he would take me out to Newark, and I would meet with his family.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did he remarry?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No, he never remarried. Apparently, from all I can gather, he continued to have a crush on my mother. But she just would not, I think, she was sufficiently disillusioned by him that it never picked up again. And I think, ultimately, had lots of hostility to him.

Howard's question about his support, there was very little support, so it was basically she provided all my support as a kid.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did he remember your birthdays, even with a card?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not that I can recall. He may well have, but if he did, it was probably sporadic. I think he was an individual who had enough trouble keeping his own act together. He had this little storefront real estate office that I went to visit on occasion. And he in 1967, he had a stroke and so, as his only child, I had a call. And so ended up getting to his office in Newark.

We happened to be in Montreal at the time, at the Expo. I was there with my family. And so we stopped off there. He was in the hospital at the time. And ended up with a stroke and aphasia and everything coming apart. And he ended up living for 10 years in a wheelchair with aphasia. Which must have been very maddening. And I did see him a few times, but not that many times during that 10 year period.

But apparently, he had a number of properties in the slum part of Newark. And it was very interesting. I went around to a number of those places. And he got a living that way. He had sales contracts with the people who lived there. And apparently, the people who lived there, that was a setting that-- this was a predominantly black section of Newark.

And he would come in and feel comfortable, relaxed, sometimes chat, sometimes fall asleep. So it the one occasion when I had a sense that here was a setting where he was at ease.

HOWARD BRAUN: Did he ever leave you anything?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No. I mean, he was essentially incompetent at the time that he had the stroke. And so I took over trying to manage his properties. At the time, I'd made a quick assessment of the value of the properties optimistically at $75,000. During the ten years he was alive, the properties deteriorated, the city closed them down as happened in many places, boarded them up. And then I had somebody managing the properties. And that individual ended up collecting rent but sending me bills for repairs, essentially equal to the amount of the revenue.

HOWARD BRAUN: No legacy.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No legacy.

HOWARD BRAUN: That was my question.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No legacy at all. And my mother-- so he was a rather remote figure in my life. My mother, of course, was a very close figure in my life.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: When you lived with your Aunt Libby, and what was her husband's name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Nathan.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did they have any other children?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yes. They had, while we were living there, she had three sons, all of whom were married, and two daughters, both of them were unmarried when we moved in when I was about five. One of them got married before I left. And the other one got married some years after. But it was clear to me that there was a sense of being a poor relative in someone else's home.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did this affect you psychologically?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Undoubtedly Undoubtedly. But I'm not sure I could articulate how. But I think, if anything, it was. I'll show them kind of feeling.

HOWARD BRAUN: How long did your mother live?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: My mother? She died in 1986.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: So, your very early years, then, once you moved out with your mother, you were about five years old?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: My grandmother died when I was about five. Then we lived with my Aunt Libby until I was about 10. And then we moved on our own. When I was about 10.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: So your grandmother was very nurturing and she was--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I think so, but it's tough to know because that goes back to the pre-five period. I remember her kindly. And I think I have rather clear memories of the day she died. And I was sort of shielded from her death and so on. But she died, and then we had to figure out how we were going to manage next.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: So your years from five to ten were not particularly happy?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not particularly happy, but I remember they worked OK. But there was a lot of trouble dealing with my cousins, my Aunt Libby's kids. One was about six or seven years older than me. And the other was perhaps 10 years older than me. One thing I remember of that period was we would take a ride on the Fifth Avenue bus at night, my mother and I. If I was unhappy that day, she'd take me for a ride on the bus. And that was kind of fun.

By the time I started school, shortly after that, I do remember an interesting-- I was supposed to start kindergarten, and my Aunt Libby said, don't send him to kindergarten because people pick up diseases in kindergarten. So if you don't send him to kindergarten, they won't pick up the disease. So, I think my mother decided, in her wisdom that if he doesn't pick it up in kindergarten, he'll pick it up in first grade. So you might as well send him to kindergarten where it matters less.

And I think I picked up measles and chicken pox and all the other childhood diseases of the time.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Was kindergarten unusual then in those years though?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not particularly. I think it was voluntary. But I don't think it was that unusual. Also I spent my summers at camp.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Where was camp?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: The first camp I remember going to, and I suspect I may have been six or so, was a Workman's Circle camp.

HOWARD BRAUN: I can't remember if your father was-

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: What?

HOWARD BRAUN: Who was the member?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I don't know. I have no idea. Somehow-- I thought a requirement was--

HOWARD BRAUN: I don't know. My father was a member.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Did you get away [INAUDIBLE]?

HOWARD BRAUN: No, I didn't. I don't think he could afford the $7 or whatever it took. But anyway, you don't know who was the family member?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Or anyone.

HOWARD BRAUN: I remember it as a camp well met. And I think I was there for maybe one summer or two.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Were you living with your uncle then or aunt?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: With my aunt, while I was still there. And after that, my mother joined a mothers club. It was a mothers club that had a camp in Mountainville, New York in the Catskills. And so every summer from there on out-- so I was about, I don't know, through high school, I guess, or in the midst of high school, I went off to this, it was called Camp [? Iva ?] in Mountanville, New York. It's a place I visited subsequently. It's now taken over by some Hassidic group that runs the camp.

But it was a Jewish camp with a woman named [INAUDIBLE], who was a social worker, who was the leader of the group, and had this camp for kids. And that was probably the greatest stability in my life at that time. Because I had successive summers and individuals who kept coming back. And I kept coming back. And we got to see each other during the winter on occasion. And so that was my stable period or the stability in my life--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you go there, for how long a period?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: About ten weeks.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Oh, the whole summer, oh.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I think it was one of those settings where again, my mother had the sense that there ought to be someplace off the streets that her son goes to and so she found this camp. It was a cooperative camp. It was not privately owned. It was owned by this mothers club. And so the fees were relatively small.

I remember her salary at one point in time, somewhere, in the '40s--

HOWARD BRAUN: Who's salary?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: My mother's salary. About $15 a week or so.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Wow.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: And those were her only assets. I mean, her parents didn't leave her anything. So she really did an amazing job of maintaining herself and a son rather well.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you have feelings of wanting things that you couldn't have?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Probably, but not that I can recall. But there was a sense of here's what we can have and what we can't have. And we can't do that. There's no question, but that in retrospect, there was a sense of not having very much. But never a sense of deprivation.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you have many friends where you lived?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, for that first period, I remember being with some groups, but I don't remember any friends until we moved into the Hunts Point area because I never stayed there long enough to have developed any friends. But I do remember some kids I used to pal around with who I knew at school. But it was more of a lonely period than a highly engaged period with others.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK, so when you moved into Hunts Point you were about 10 years old then?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I was about 10.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK. Tell us about that period.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: It was mostly during the war. I do remember that it was not unusual for us to be eating steak. And steak was unusual, so much because it was expensive, but rather because it took a lot of ration coupons.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: That's the story of World War II, of course.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: During World War II. And somehow or other, my mother was able to manage to get steak every now and then. And I remember this particularly because it just seemed surprising that we could have it. So where did we get it? Obviously there were black markets and all kinds of products and she was able to get it. So I think it was a period, I remember being rather excited at the prospect of going on our own. I remember feeling that I was going to be the man of the house and that it was our thing. So I was really delighted that we were there.

She worked as a clerk in this bakery around the corner from the house, so she was always accessible if I needed her. School was about 10, 15 minute walk away. And it was a period when I did indeed find myself with a few friends that I got to know and know fairly well.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I was about two years younger than most of my classmates, and I remember feeling I ended up-- New York City had a [INAUDIBLE]-- a semi-semester arrangement. You got promoted not by the year, but by the semester. And so I remember I went from 1a to 2a to 3a-- skipped 1b, skipped 2b, and then skipped a semester.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Because you were precocious?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Because I was precocious, and so they moved me along.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Now, did you just have this native intelligence? Or did you read a lot? Or did you--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I am not sure that I read a lot. I think it was that I was doing very well, and they may have had an overcrowded 1b, so they put me into 2a. I don't think it was that I was-- that I felt troubled by being bored or anything of that sort. So they just pumped me along. And as I recall, I felt rather bad because most of the other kids were bigger, taller, stronger than I was, and so that was a problem for this little pipsqueak trying to compete in basketball and trying to compete in other things.

And the nice thing about going to camp was that at least those were people my same age, and I felt much more comfortable. I felt much more comfortable as a boy at camp than I did with my school classmates, who I had a real sense were older than I was.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you play ball in the streets?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah, stick ball. I used to go skating, roller skating, ball bearings. I remember skating up to Bronx Park. It must have been about three miles or so and back. We played stoop ball. We played stick ball. Stick ball was a rubber Spalding ball and a sawed off broom handle. And then stoop ball-- there were these steps up to the houses. So you'd throw the ball against the stoop and see if you could catch it before it bounces. What other games did we play?

HOWARD BRAUN: Were you a chess player?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Eventually I learned it, but I never really did much chess, no. But I remember doing a lot of reading as a child.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Was there a library?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Made use of the library. Oh, yeah, there was a library-- about a 10, 15 minute walk. And I was a pretty voracious reader at the time, reading lots of biographies and other stuff appropriate to that age, I guess.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you have a religious education, then?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Some. My mother was clearly Jewish and strongly identified with Judaism and with the world of the Jews. But religious education didn't come up until it was ready to become bar mitvzvah'd And maybe at 11 or so they sent me to Hebrew. She sent me to Hebrew school in a little, orthodox shul around the corner. I do remember that there was this orthodox shul just right around the corner.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Do you remember the name of it?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No. It was the shul. And about a block further down, I remember the conservative synagogue, which I remember as being in a rather large house. It wasn't a synagogue built specifically for that. It was obviously a house. So it was taken over as a synagogue, and I ended up visiting there some years later while we were living here and was struck by the fact that that large synagogue was about half the size of the house I live in now. But this is a kid's view of the size of the world.

Anyway, this little shul, I remember it had this rabbi who would go around pinching your ear when you misbehaved. And I guess I learned Hebrew enough so that I could get through my bar mitzvah, which, of course, I was going to have to do and felt appropriate to do. The party for the bar mitzvah was held in our apartment when a bunch of relatives came and friends came. And so we had a little feast. And compared to some of the bar mitzvah parties that we see today, it was rather mild.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: But it was still your day.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: But it was my day, and it was very, very exciting and very proud. And up to that time, I think, you know, having been part of the little shul, I would go to services, and there was a social content to the services, but it was so meaningless to me, it conveyed nothing that, I think, post-bar mitzvah, I don't know if stepped in a shul until an appreciably longer period of time. It just didn't hold anything in particular. It was a neighborhood that was I'd say predominately Jewish but with strong Irish and Italian populations. And I would guess that the neighborhood as whole, maybe one-third each.

HOWARD BRAUN: Did you go to the holidays?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Occasionally.

HOWARD BRAUN: You had Rosh Hashanah?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah.

HOWARD BRAUN: You did occasionally?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah, occasionally. My mother didn't, but she would go down for the Easter service. But, again, she was a woman. It was an orthodox shul. And there was a sense of distance that she had. So there was never a sense of religiosity about her.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Were you comfortable with being orthodox? Or when you talked about this conservative shul, were you longing for that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not at all. Not at all. That was very distant, very remote. I don't think I ever went in there. I do remember when I was a young kid, a few friends and I-- we were eight years or thereabouts-- a few friends and I learned about Friday night services, and we could go in and get a sip of wine. So we would go and line up and get our little bit of wine.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You'd wake up, and the service was almost over with that.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: [LAUGHING]. That may be. It goes to the wine. I assume it was Manischewitz wine. And it was fine. It was the thrill of doing it. There's no question that I took off from school on the Jewish holidays because no one went to school on the Jewish holidays. So it was clearly a school holiday, and I do remember one holiday.

It was not one of the major holidays when I was playing basketball in the schoolyard, and the class came out for recess of some sort, and I do remember the teacher saying that, you know, this is a religious holidays to do things religious rather than come to school and play basketball. But I think I went to services somewhat but certainly don't remember it as a significant activity or a meaningful activity in my life at that point.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Discipline was never a problem with you?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not seriously. I remember my mother had a red strap, and she would threaten me with her red strap and particularly when we lived with my aunt, my cousins would heckle her about using the red strap. Frankly, I don't remember ever being hit by the red strap, but it was that threat that was out there.

And I do remember on occasion when I would castigate my mother about something, and she would start crying, and I would feel very badly about it. But I was a pretty good kid, pretty well-disciplined and pretty much did what was expected of me. She had two other siblings. One was an uncle.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What was his name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: An Uncle Isaac.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And his last name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yellen. Isaac Yellen had a candy story, a classic New York candy store over in the West Bronx on Burnside Avenue and Davidson Street. I think he got up in the morning at about 6:00 to open the candy store-- ended up closing it about 10:00 at night. His wife would come in and either bring him lunch or send him home for lunch. And it was a major social fixture in the neighborhood the way a bar might be in an Irish neighborhood. It was an important place where lots of people would come in.

And so my mother would bring me two big bags full of baked goods to deliver to my Uncle Isaac, and so I would take them to the subway and go to Isaac and his wife Anna and visit with them and sit around in the candy store and chat.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: How often would you do this?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Every two, three months-- something like that. And he was a very pleasant man. Having gone through all this, he retired when he was 65 or so.

And through a compulsion, either to leave something to his children or because of this compulsion to continue working, he ended up getting a job as a messenger boy in downtown New York. I think the notion of going from this 15-hour day, 7 days a week to idleness was horrible, and he died a few years after that-- very interesting object lesson in retirement.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What happened to his candy store?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: He must have sold it or something. It was a one-family operation. It was too small physically for anyone else to do there, and there wasn't enough business to warrant anyone else there. I wouldn't say he was overworked, but the notion of being totally tied down for 15, 18 hours a day, 7 days a week, is mind boggling.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Tell us about some of your friends in the early years.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Can't remember any.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You were more of a loner then.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Much more of a loner-- much more doing my own thing, and now, probably the closest person about my age was my cousin Harriett, who was the daughter of my mother's sister, Gertrude. Gertrude was a truly free spirit.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What was her last name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Her married name was Barlevi. But she got divorced also. I think it was a very different situation. She married a man named-- I don't remember his first name-- Barlevi-- had two kids with him, and I think some how or other, I am not sure why, that marriage broke up, and so her daughter Harriett and I were sort of in similar situations, and Harriett is

about a year younger than me. Harriett had a brother named Ronald, who was really a problem. He wouldn't do this, wouldn't do that, and Ronald ended up I think being disabled in a variety of mental ways, but Harriett survived and stuck it out.

And so she was probably the closest companion that I had when we got together because we did have lots in common. She ended up living in Brighton Beach. And so I would go out and visit them every now and then, but gee, that was about an hour and a half subway ride. I'd do that every couple of months or so and got to know her. Her mother was rather heavy handed and heavy handed on Harriett, probably even more heavy handed on Ronald.

HOWARD BRAUN: What was her name-- Harriett's mother?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Gertrude. And Gertrude-- she ended up taking her maiden name. So she wanted Gertrude Yellen. I had a fascinating experience a few years ago. We were at Ellis Island, and they have the voices of immigrants recorded and recording on their experiences. Dolores listened, said, gee, that sounds like your aunt.

And indeed, there was the list of names, and it was G. Yellen, and she was talking about what it was like in [INAUDIBLE] and what it was like coming here. But that was very Gertrude. She was the egomaniac of her family-- very self-centered and very interested in experience and romance and travel, and she was a very interesting woman. I think my mother was phenomenally self-effacing and would never thrust herself forward. Isaac sort of rambled on did his work-- was a very friendly, joke-cracking individual. Gertrude was going to be Gertrude regardless.

Another relative who I was close to, but he was about seven or eight years older, was Isaac's son, Milton. Milton was probably the first-- yeah, none of Libby's kids went to college. So Milton was the first in the whole family to go to college. He was an accountant and graduated from City College and worked as an accountant for a little. I guess shortly after he graduated, he went to the business school, got a degree in accounting, and got drafted, and ended up in the European theater-- was there shortly after D-Day in Normandy and ended up getting wounded and came back after the war.

So he was the only connection I had to the war, and my mother would send him back boxes of cookies that he and his friends really enjoyed, and we'd get letters back from them thanking her for the cookies that she sent. And the war was pretty remote to me at the time. But it was clear there was a war going on, but other than rationing, which was a rather minor imposition, there wasn't much of an effect of the war.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Were there any teachers that were influential to you?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In grade school or high school?

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Mhm.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: The one teacher-- I remember a teacher, Miss Tucker, who I think was a kindergarten teacher, and I remember liking her a lot. And then there was a grammar teacher,

Miss Grinehart, who was very demanding, but very gentle. Then there was an interesting teacher, who I didn't adequately appreciate at the time, a Miss Shay, who I think was a real anti-Semite. She would talk about all the horrible ways in which the English language was getting distorted by appetizing stores. Stores can't be appetizing, she would say.

And I also remember a feeling during school around Christmastime when we were singing Christmas carols and reading the words about Christ our Savior and such and really feeling that sense of considerable discomfort in going through those Christmas carols. I've reflected on Miss Shay and some of the slurs that she would fling out that I didn't appreciate at the time that were pretty heavy handed.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You mentioned in your neighborhood there were Irish and Italians. Did you interact even minimally with--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Most of my friends were Jewish. I do remember one incident when there was one of the Irish kids at that school who was sort of a very popular good athlete, and I was playing stick ball out in front of the shul that I mentioned. And this kid came by, and I said, hi. I don't remember his name-- probably Mike or so. I said, hi, Mike, and he said, hi, you go to the shul? You go to this place?

I said, yeah. And so he started beating up on me because you killed my God. And that was the pre-war period. Well, I guess it was during the war, but it was a time when anti-Semitism was widespread, and certainly this was a message that the church was conveying to the kids at the time.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you encounter much anti-Semitism in your life?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not-- I would encounter slurs probably in various settings at various times. Probably the most surprising was when I got out of college in 1951. I was looking for jobs. And two things stand out. One was a letter from some large company. I don't remember which one. But we are interested in hiring engineers who are Christian, white. So that was one.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: That was just a regular letter?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Just a regular letter to the employment office-- no inhibition about sending it. And in the context of the time, I guess not that unusual. The other was interesting. It was a major company-- Sperry Gyroscope Company. It became Sperry-Rand out on Long Island. And whoever applied for a job was given an interview with the striking exception of three of us who happened to be in a Jewish fraternity.

And you could tell we were in the fraternity because our address was the fraternity. We moved in the fraternity house. And so one of us went to the employment office, placement office, and said, this looks like overt discrimination against the three of us because we're Jewish because we didn't have horrible records, and so it couldn't be on the basis of that.

And so the placement office got in touch with them, and so they rescinded their refusal to have us for an interview. They had the interview, but none of us got an offer. So they at least went through the motions of interviewing us. But those are the ones that stand out in my life. I guess I remember--

HOWARD BRAUN: What college was that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Cornell.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: During your high school years, this was now after the war.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No. It was the end of the--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Oh.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I guess I was in high school from February of '43 to February of '47. And so my first two years was during the war, and my last two years would be after the war.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Could you tell us about some of those times?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: That was an interesting place. Bronx Science, what was a competitive high school, you had to pass an exam to get in, and so I took the exam. A number of my friends from elementary school were going there, and that's probably where I had the closest friendships. It was a period of four years of new people that I was close to, and I would say Bronx Science was probably 95% Jewish. I remember one black guy who was there who lived in Harlem and told us about the strange goings on in his life and his culture. There were a number of non-Jewish, white people around, but it was very [INAUDIBLE] a Jewish environment.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Because of where it was or because of the [INAUDIBLE].

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: A mixture of where it was in the Bronx.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: There were certain standards to get in?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: There were academic standards to get in, and Jewish kids of my generation had parents who, by god, were pushing them along, typically, first generation, their parents were immigrants, and so the kids were really pushed along and did very well.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: This science school-- it was public.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: It was a public school.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: There were three schools in New York City that had entrance exams. One was Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan. One was Brooklyn Tech High School in

Brooklyn, and the other was Bronx Science in the Bronx, Bronx Science has five Nobel laureates among its graduates. One of my classmates got a Nobel prize 20 years ago.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Who was that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Leon Cooper-- for work in semiconductors. Not only a classmate-- he was one of the members of this club that I belonged to. We used to go down to the 92nd Street Y every Sunday-- go down and have a club meeting some counselor who would meet with us, and then we played basketball or would go swimming, and then they had a dance afterwards, so we'd go down there and pick up girls-- dance with girls.

And it was a fun time. We were friends. We were all in the same class. There must have been about 10 of us or so. Leon was one of them, and the group leader was a guy named Walter M. Binder, who ended up becoming a psychologist. Most of my classmates ended up going to City College. I was reluctant--

HOWARD BRAUN: How did you get to Cornell?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Hmm?

HOWARD BRAUN: How did you get to Cornell?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I was reluctant to go to City College because there was a sense that there was prejudice against it because it was seen as a socialistic place. And so I wanted to go to a private school if I could. I graduated in February--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: 1947?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: That was 1947. And one of the few places that had college admissions in February was Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. So I applied for Pratt and got accepted and ended up with a scholarship that covered a very large part of my tuition. And so it was in Pratt, and then in Spring of that year, New York State had regents scholarships. This $100-- and this was $200 at the time.

HOWARD BRAUN: Was it?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah. $200. Let me think. It was $200 a year to cover tuition, but tuition was only about $400 anyway. So it was designed to be geographically distributed so that each assembly district or New York's equivalent of the House of Representatives was assigned five scholarships in that assembly district so that otherwise they would all have gone to New York because New York students did a lot better than the rest of the state.

The scores on that-- and so I got one of those and was delighted. The scores on those were used to award Cornell scholarships but without geographic distributions. So the first so many would get to go to Cornell. And we were able to manage the tuition at Pratt because with Pratt's

scholarship, we were able to-- my mother was able to scrape together, and by that time, I was working over the summer and was able to earn a few hundred bucks there.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you never work until then?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: No, I used to deliver flowers. I remember I could earn $0.60 an hour.

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JUDY RUBINSTEIN: --19, 1999. We're in the living room of the home of Doctor Alfred Blumstein. This is Judy Rubinstein and Howard Braun interviewing. This is our second session. And we were speaking last time about-- you were getting into Pratt.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Right. I graduated from high school in February. And--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Of what year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: 1947. And most colleges didn't have a entering classes in February. But Pratt, being in New York City, did. And so I got a scholarship to Pratt and started there. I was one of the few non-veterans in a class. So my history of being a young kid was amplified by the fact that these were mostly veterans. And I was still appreciably younger than they.

And I commuted about an hour, hour and a half to school. I lived in the Bronx. The school was in Brooklyn. And so I did my first semester in the spring and then finished the second semester in the summer. So that by September, I would be up with the sophomore class in electrical engineering.

During that time, I took the exam for the New York Regent Scholarship, which was awarded by assembly districts and ended up being awarded one of those. And then was told that-- I think the first 200 in the state were awarded Cornell Scholarships. I was told I was on a waiting list for that. And in late August, got the word that I was one of the recipients of scholarship to Cornell.

That was rather exciting. But was filled with all kinds of trauma. My relatives were putting a heavy pressure on that I should not leave the city because my mother would be left all alone. And so was torn about whether I ought to go or not.

I did finally go up there. And the place was in enormous turmoil. They didn't have enough housing. There were lots of veterans coming back. I learned that I couldn't get into a four year engineer degree, that I would need a five-- that the engineering program was now a five year program. Not only that, but I could get credit for a good part of my one year at Pratt, but not all of it. So I have to spend the following summer at summer school.

Things were it in enough of a turmoil, I ended up spending a week there and then coming home. I had no housing. And I was about to send a letter to Cornell declining the scholarship. And my mother was taking it down to mail. And she came back and she said that, no. You really should go.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Aw.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: And I thought about it and ended up going back. And it was a wonderful decision, but it was impressive that she--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: You came that close.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I came that close. And she very much, at another significant self deprivation, saw to it that I went off. Anyway, I started in electrical engineering at Cornell. And discovered I was going to have to take courses in power line transmission theory and a lot of stuff that had really no interest to me. And Cornell had just started up a program in engineering physics.

It was designed to follow up some of the experiences of wartime where the engineers knew the handbooks but they didn't understand the theory. Physicists knew the theory but they didn't know what to do with it. And so here was a strategy to train people who really had a stronger grounding in the physics of phenomena, but also knew how to bring it to practice.

Most of my colleagues identified as physicists. Somehow or other I ended up developing an engineering orientation. And throughout my time have always felt like an engineer making things go better.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Had you been engineering? Or what made you even think to go into that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Number one, I needed a major that was going to get me a job when I finished. Because my mother had no great assets. I had no assets. My father was not earning very much. And the only jobs I saw were accounting, which a number of cousins had been in which seemed to be boring. And engineering. And--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Did many people go into engineering in 1947?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not many that I knew. There were-- the engineering college was filled, as all colleges were filled. But it was a field that Jews were discouraged from going into because of anti-Semitism in industry, and tradition of anti-Semitism. But somehow or another that didn't phase me. And I really had no idea what engineering was about. I had no idea what engineers did.

But it was a profession. And so I followed through with it. I ended up getting very interested in lots of extracurricular activities. I ended up being the president of what was then the Engineering Student Council. And throughout my career, I've gotten involved in a variety of extracurricular things.

And I had a sense that I was probably the first Jew who was involved-- there were still very few Jews in engineering. But I ended up becoming a significant actor dealing with the dean in a variety of those areas.

It was a very solid education. I think I learned a heck of a lot. I learned about methods. I learned about physics theory. But I came out knowing that I didn't want to work in a physics lab. I was thinking of law. And in my senior year, I read an article in Fortune Magazine that talked about this new thing that had come out of World War II called operations research. It was scientists working on military operations using their scientific methods, mathematical analysis. And it was one of those very glamorizing articles.

And I said, gee, that's exciting stuff. I really ought to do that. Would love to do that. Based on the article, you really had to be a genius to do it, and I knew I wasn't a genius. So how could I possibly get into that?

And Korean War had started in 1950. I graduated in '51. So the war was underway. And I went out on job interviews. And it turned out that the best job offer I got was from a place called the Cornell Aeronautical Lab, a research lab in Buffalo owned by Cornell University, to join an operations research group that was studying fleet air defense, defending Naval vessels against air attack.

And so I was immersed in operations research in '51. A year later was the founding meeting the Operations Research Society of America, which was in Washington. And I got permission to go to that. So that was the first meeting of that society. I joined it and have been involved in that field ever since. Ended up being president of that group in the late '70s.

And then a sister organization showed up, the Institute of Management Sciences. I ended up being president of that in the late '80s. And then in the '90s, those two organizations were merged into the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, called INFORMS, and ended up being the second president of that.

So that was really the discovery of a field. I really wasn't sure where to go, but that sounded very exciting. I was working-- this lab was an old Curtiss-Wright wind tunnel, basically, when Curtiss-Wright used to be in Buffalo. They were about to close it down, but the--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: And Curtiss-Wright was a--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Airplane manufacturer. And they had this wind tunnel. The eastern airplane manufacturers like Grumman and Northrop-- Grumman, anyway; there were some others [INAUDIBLE]-- wanted of the keep that tunnel going, so they got Cornell to take it over. And Cornell-- they assured Cornell that there wouldn't any economic loss, that they provided a starting cap.

And that provided a basis for building a much more generic and important institution doing mostly defense research. That went into a variety of other areas at a later time. I was there for about 2.5 years. And then the Office of Naval Research in Washington was setting up a project on defending fleets. They wanted somebody to come down because we were major operation.

And that was a rather exciting time. I discovered Washington. We were in one of these temporary office buildings on 17th Street and Constitution Avenue right next to the AEC. And--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: The AEC being the--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Atomic Energy Commission. That was-- and during that time, that was when they were holding the security hearings on Oppenheimer and lifted Oppenheimer's clearance. And there was a lot of hubbub. They were in the adjoining temporary building to ours. Every time--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Tell us more about the time of Oppenheimer.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I wasn't involved. It was just a--

HOWARD BRAUN: You were not involved?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I had no involvement. I just saw the hubbub around it. We did these studies. One of my colleagues there was an interesting guy named Robert Truax who was a commander in the Navy who had started working at Annapolis during the war on JATO, jet-assisted take offs for airplanes. And Bob Truax became one of the major players in getting the US into the space mission.

Here I was, this 22, 23-year-old snot-nosed kid. And we did our studies on how to organize the Navy better in terms of defending the fleet. And the results of the study were sufficiently interesting that it was arranged that we would brief the Chief of Naval Operations. And so part of the briefing-- I think I had the biggest piece of the briefing reporting to the Chief of Naval Operations how he ought to organize his combat intelligence.

HOWARD BRAUN: What was his name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Carney.

HOWARD BRAUN: Carney.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Carney. How they ought to organize their combat intelligence operations in the task force, which again was a rather exciting experience for this little kid to be able to do stuff that people really cared about and somebody as important as the Chief of Naval Operations cared about.

That project was finished. Went back to Buffalo. And ended up getting a grant to design-- it was called Project STAG, Small Task Group. That came out of the war, it was four carriers and a bunch of cruisers and a bunch of destroyers. And it became clear to me from the work I was doing that they didn't need all that firepower, all that ship power, with nuclear weapons. So got a grant to design a small task group and worked at that and worried about the air defense issues, the offense issues, anti submarine issues.

And had a team of about five people. Submitted a report. And I think it had some influence, but I've never followed through with it.

After I had been there for about five years, I concluded that this was sort of a good field and Cornell was just starting up a PhD program in operations research. And I ran into the chairman of that department, a guy named Andy Schultz. And Andy said, you ought to come down here and get a PhD.

HOWARD BRAUN: What year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I went back in '56. I graduated in '51, worked for five years, went back in-- oh, during that time-- there's an interesting story. During that time, as soon as I got to Buffalo I decided I ought to take some courses at night. And I had taken a course from Andy Schulz in statistics and figured that statistics is something I really enjoyed.

So I took a course in statistics at Buffalo. And I took a course in theoretical physics. So I took two courses at night just to take the courses. Then I figured, hell, if I'm taking courses, I might as well get a master's degree out of it. And the statistics program was in the industrial engineering department at Cornell. So I went to the IE department at Buffalo and said, I'd like to register for a master's degree. Can I do that?

They said, well, send your transcript. I sent the transcript. And he said, well, you've got about these 20 undergraduate courses to take first. After you take those, then we'll let you register for a master's degree. And then I went over the statistics department at Buffalo and they said, well, we'll give you credit for the stat course, we'll give you credit for this physics course. And you'll write a thesis. And you have two or three other courses to take. And so that seemed like a much better route.

It turns out, interestingly, that when I went back to Cornell, my degree was out of the industrial engineering department. And about 10 years later I had an offer from that industrial engineering department at Buffalo to be chairman of the department.

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway, so--

HOWARD BRAUN: And PhD at Cornell in what year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: So I went back in '56. By this time I had finished the master's degree at Buffalo. I did a thesis doing what people had been marveling at-- had marveled at. It was a simulation of a ground controlled approach airplane coming into the ground to an airport using the card program calculator, which meant I had to do the program in machine language. That is, I had to know what storage registers each of my variables was in. And so each of the commands was, take the variable, locate it in storage register 19, add it to the variable in storage registers 23, and put it in storage register 24. And with a code for the operation. So it was all numeric that a 22-year-old kid could do, but anyone past that would go nuts.

And of course, Fortran assembly line would follow that and Fortran followed that. But anyway, it was an interesting effort to try to do a simulation in computer machine language.

HOWARD BRAUN: And the topic was--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: It was in the stat department and it was on ground controlled approach. Simulation of a ground controlled approach with the controller telling the airplane to turn left, turn right, and so on.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: You were obviously looking at things from an engineering and statistical point of view. Were you interested politically at all?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yes. I was interested in social problems and had a number of friends with majors in sociology when I was an undergraduate. And said, that stuff is really fascinating. I'd be very interested in it. But had no slack in my program and knew I had to get my degree and go on and get a job.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: You were in the Korean-- working in Washington during the Korean War? Did you have feelings about the Korean War?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I think the war was sufficiently remote to me. I was professionally involved, but didn't feel that it was a war we had to win. I assumed it was a war we we're going to win. And was doing my little bit to it.

One of the factors, by the way, that contributed to the decision to go into the Cornell Aeronautical Lab was it that that was the defense industry. And was the basis for not getting drafted into the war.

Anyway, I was there for five years. Oh, yeah. The war had ended by that time. But the draft was still on. And I started to get the feeling that, I'm not sure this is really where I want to be in the long run. And if I go to college, if I go back to graduate school, I'll probably get drafted. And I said, what the hell? That's what I want to do.

And the idea of going back to graduate school was not-- I didn't have the sense at that point that I was going to go to a university. It was strengthen my skills. It was strictly a sense of strengthening my skills. And so I ended up going back.

Oh, yeah. I did apply-- during the time I was at Cornell Aeronautical, I just didn't want this draft hanging over my head. So I did apply for the Navy for OCS, Officer Candidate School. And applied for it and got turned down medically. So--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: What year was this?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: This was in '55 or '56, just before I went to graduate school. Because-- yeah. I think it was in '56 that Eisenhower lifted the draft. And it was after I had applied for the OSC, then Eisenhower lifted the draft. Then I got word I was turned down medically. So that was the end of that.

But there was the sense that I might be doing this because it's draft deferable or because that's what I really want. Anyway, went back to Cornell. They gave me a year's credit for my master's degree. So I was there for two years. And basically taking courses during that time and writing papers in courses. And after two years, decided I would go back to Buffalo and write my thesis in absentia, which I felt I had done my thing there and it was permissible. The requirement was three years of residency. And Andy Schultz was my faculty advisor.

So-- oh, by this time-- let's say. Delores and I had gotten married in January of '58.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Well, we'll get into some of the personal--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: We got married in '58. And there was an interesting convergence in our lives. But anyway, so in '58 I decided I'd go back to Buffalo to the lab and continue working there and then do my thesis while I was there. I felt I had the discipline to put it together without being on campus, so chose to do that.

Finished the dissertation in '60. And you asked about being politically interested. We were living in a--

HOWARD BRAUN: The dissertation by title?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: The dissertation was The Operations Capacity of a Runway. I had done a paper-- one of the issues that was coming up-- that was a time of a lot of turmoil in air traffic control. And then one of the issues that had come up was how many planes can land on a runway at any time. How can you expand the number of planes that can land on the runway?

And the government was building high speed turnoffs from runways because somebody had done a paper earlier that showed that the capacity of a runway depends on how much time the airplane spends on the runway.

I did a paper called The Landing Capacity of a Runway, which showed that the time on the runway is not a dominant consideration, but rather the separation distance between two successive airplanes to keep them from running into each other, what was the more frequently the consideration that the runway occupancy [INAUDIBLE] was not important. I'm told that the result-- one of the results of this paper was that to the FAA stopped the high speed turnoff building. They were building essentially ramps so the planes could get off faster. And they stopped that program because they didn't need it to increase the landing capacity.

So that was the start of it. That was the first-- one chapter. And I started dealing with the issue of landings and takeoffs being interspersed in a runway. And were the takeoffs going wherever there was a gap in the landings. And the beauty of it was that it took account of some of the statistical variation across different types of airplanes. Got into sequencing rules. And it was a rather nice dissertation. Operations being landing and takeoff.

And so that was kind of fun. That was finished in '60. I graduated in '60. Got my degree in '60.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: OK. You started talking about some political--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Oh, yeah. I was very intrigued in 1960 by John Kennedy. He was a very exciting guy.

HOWARD BRAUN: I was hoping you'd finish--

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: OK.

HOWARD BRAUN: --personal stuff and I would have taken the [INAUDIBLE].

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: Go ahead.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: We'll come back.

HOWARD BRAUN: Yeah, no. Finish in personal.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: So I got very involved. And at that point Delores and I were living in a suburb of Buffalo called Amherst, which was largely Republican. There were more slots on the Democratic committee in Amherst than there were Democrats, I think. So a friend and I joined the Democratic Committee. And we decided that we would run an experiment.

The experiment was political campaigning experiment. Because I was no great politician, but I know how to run an experiment. And we decided that what we would do is the place to campaign is the place where there's greatest variability in the turnout. So we looked at historical election data and organized an experiment. Places to campaign and not campaign, places with high variability, places with low variability.

It turns out in the experiment that our campaigning didn't make a heck of a lot of a difference. Obviously we weren't going to effect very much the way people voted in a presidential election just by knocking on their door. But it turned out that we did poorly in the places with high variability and well in the place with low variability. It turns out that the source of variability was really the Republican-ness of the district because Democrats had to be politically conscious. They always voted. Republicans only bothered to vote when there was a hot election.

So that gave rise to a decision the following year to close down the campaign office with a big flair. We sent letters out saying, we have been telling-- this was a local election. We've been telling you for the last number of years that the Republicans are doing a crummy job. You refuse to listen. We're going to start campaigning.

We didn't win the election, but we did better that year than we had ever done before.

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway, that was my venture into active politics. Let's see. When Kennedy came in, I was very impressed by the guy. His press conferences were very exciting. And I was very impressed by

Robert McNamara who was this whiz kid from Detroit who really was looking to develop strategy. And at that point--

HOWARD BRAUN: [INAUDIBLE] keep looking [INAUDIBLE]

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: At that point, I started looking at university jobs. I kept getting invitations to university jobs. And I really wasn't very interested in those because mostly they wanted people to do mathematics and I wanted to do interesting and important things to make things better.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: You were talking about strategy and McNamara. One of the thing that I thought when you were-- especially with strategy. A few years earlier, Kissinger had written his book on conventional warfare. Wasn't that 1956? I believe. With the strategy of--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Right.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: --warfare. An you were dealing with Naval warfare in those same years. Did you ever--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Those two sets of ideas never really intersected.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: OK. Not at all?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Not at all.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: OK. Because they were concurrent.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDY RUBINSTEIN: OK.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: His was much more macro political. Mine was much more operational—

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ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I started to say that by 60 I started to get offers for university jobs and was really-- just didn't find them terribly interesting. By '61 when the Kennedy administration started, I was very interested in being part of that. And so, a friend of mine had a job at a place called the Institute for Defense Analyses, which was a think tank for the office of the Secretary of Defense, as Rand was for the Air Force. And he encouraged me to come down, and I was very interested in that.

HOWARD BRAUN: What name is it?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Institute for Defense Analyses, IDA. And I moved down to Washington. Let's see, we had two little kids and one in the oven at the time. Moved down in June of 1961. And that was a very exciting time. Did you want to carry on from there?

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Well, let's just back up on your family life, because we really didn't-- how you met Dolores and all.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: OK.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In the early fifties, about '54 or so, I was on a trip to Boston, and called a friend of mine telling him I was coming in. And it turned out that this friend was engaged to one of Dolores' roommates. So he said, how'd you like to come out with my fiance and her roommate? I said, sure that'd be great. So we went out and that was really a very pleasant, delightful evening. But, you know, she was in Boston. I was in Buffalo. And on subsequent trips to Boston, which occurred every year or two, we got together. But there was not much to it.

Then when I was in graduate school, I would say in about '56 or the summer of '57, it turned out that Dolores was working down in New Jersey at Fort Dix. And I was in Washington that summer working with the Navy. And so that was, rather than a 12 hour drive away, that was like a three hour drive away. So we spent a lot of weekends together.

Then it turned out that Dolores was going to be transferred out of there. And she had a choice of being transferred to Syracuse or some remote place. And so she chose to go to Syracuse. Well, we were now only an hour away, because I was in Ithaca, which was about an hour from Syracuse. So ended up getting together every weekend. And ended up, I think, in November deciding we were going to get married. And by January of what was then '58 we got married. We went off skiing in New England and Canada.

I had one of these great cars. it was a 1953 Packard convertible. Great big leather, red leather seats. And when Dolores drove it, you couldn't see her head above the top of the seat. And so during the winter she drove that car back and forth to Syracuse. We rendezvoused at my apartment in Ithaca. And come June I finished my exams and was leaving school. And I was going back to Buffalo with my two weeks of vacation a year.

So before I got into that, we decided that we really ought to take a last fling vacation. And so the two of us got a-- we got a $1,000 ticket from New York to Rome. SAS with having a great sale, that allowed us to stop wherever we wanted on the way to Rome and then on the way back. So we start with-- we flew from New York to Copenhagen. Went to Stockholm and bought all our furniture. We had no furniture at the time, because I had a furnished apartment in Ithaca. And stopped in Germany, and in Switzerland, and Italy, and France, and then took a side trip off to Spain to see Dolores' uncle. Dolores' father was from Spain.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What was Dolores' name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Dolores Reguera. Interestingly--

HOWARD BRAUN: Two G's?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: R-E-G-U-E-R-A. Her father was Spanish. Her mother was Jewish. She too had been the child of a divorced couple. Her parents broke up when she was about one also. So both of us came to recognize that we had been through that similar, rather stressful experience as kids. We've talked about it that those were probably high risk. We were both probably at high risk for failed marriage, given our parents having broken up. But we recently celebrated our 41st anniversary.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Where were you married?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: We were married in Boston in January. It was a rainy night that turned to snow. And I picked her up not at her home, but somewhere in Syracuse I guess. A cop stopped me on the way. He said, what's your rush? I told him I was going off to be married, and so that seemed to work. One of those times when it really was the truth.

So we drove to Boston. And her sister had arranged most of the arrangements in a hotel in Boston, and had found the rabbi. And my family came up mostly from New York. Her family's in Boston. And we must have had-- oh, some friends from Ithaca came. And it was really very delightful. We had arranged to drive up to Quebec. My Packard ran into the snow plow and got a little bit of fender crinkle. It was built like a battleship. Oh, and I had been to Quebec seven years earlier. And had told her that I had found this lovely hotel called the Chateau Frontenac, which was obviously mobbed in the summer. But we were going to have no trouble in the winter.

We showed up at Quebec. And it's really the story of our travelling life. We make no reservations of course. We stopped in a motel on the way in Maine. Showed up in Quebec, and asked for a room. And, of course, the desk clerk laughed. It was Winter Carnival. There were no rooms to be had in Quebec whatsoever. And we ended up in a place that one of these long courts with a bare light bulb that I suspect was used for other purpose other than Winter Carnival.

But we got a kick out of it. It worked fine. We spent a few days in Quebec, then moved up into the Laurentians and went skiing up there. Then came back to Albany. And Whiteface had just opened. Went skiing there. And work our way back to Ithaca just before classes in early February.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Sounds lovely. OK. So then you later honeymooned--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, that was our honeymoon. But then we took this six week trip through Europe.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: In the summer.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In the summer.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: The fall and summer. OK.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Because I had just finished exams. And while we-- we had a great time going marching through markets. We both enjoyed markets. And then when we were in Rome, Dolores was having trouble wandering through the markets. And it turned out that we decide we better check with the doctor. And sure enough, Dolores was pregnant with our first daughter.

And she was rather concerned, because her sister had had a miscarriage. So she was afraid she was going to have to go home and bed rest or something. And the doctor said dont' worry just don't jump. So we finished our trip through the rest of Europe. And came back and--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You started saying in Spain you saw some of her family.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: That's right. Delores' uncle Marianno was there and a number of his kids. And none of them spoken any English. Dolores spoke some Spanish, and I had French, high school French. So we communicated with some of the kids in French and some of the kids in Spanish. And it was a very pleasant visit. It was--

HOWARD BRAUN: What was your uncles name?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Uncle Marianno, but they're gone now. But it was my introduction to the Spanish family. This was before refrigerators were prevalent in Spain, and so they had servants. And the servants would go down for every meal and buy whatever food they needed. And we talked about refrigerator, and I remember them saying that they'd much rather have a servant than a refrigerator. Appliances have been the bane of the efficiency.

So we spent about a week in Spain and then moved on up to Paris, and London, and back home. So it's a rather exciting trip. And Fromer had just come out with his Europe on $5 a day at the time. And so we used it rather well. And when we came back we calculated our expenses, and we got by in Europe on $2.20 a day.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You're kidding.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Stopping at tourist offices, at railroad stations, and airports, finding our room. And they were always very nice. But the only handicap was that we rarely had a toilet and a bath in the room. But other than that, Europe was just so much cheaper than it is today. That was in 1950-- summer of '58.

And so we moved back to Buffalo at that point. We had no furniture. I guess we had bought a bed, and then we went to an auction and got two bridge tables for $0.50 each. And we had this little garden apartment in a housing complex in Buffalo, outside of Buffalo. And there was an overhead light in the dinning room. So one was our kitchen, our eating table, and the other was my desk. And some kid said, somebody told us that there are really strange people who moved into this apartment. They sit and eat in their dinning room all the time.

But we had a bed and a vacuum cleaner, and then about two months later all of our furniture arrived at the suite. And the so we were finally furnished in a well furnished house with furniture that was really quite nice for the time.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And you mentioned that Dolores was pregnant, so--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: So she was pregnant. She had been working at-- her training was in biology. She worked in biology for a while. Didn't particularly like that. And ended up being recruited by RAND, which was then doing a massive project of staffing for the installation of the North American Defense Computer Network. And they were doing it in New Jersey, and then they moved her to Syracuse.

But by the time we got to Buffalo, she was-- there wasn't much point in taking on a new job. She was going to be having the baby. And so Lisa was born at that time.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And when was her birthday?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Her birthday was in January-- I'm sorry February--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: 1959?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: February, '59. Ellen was born in May of 1960, and Diane was born in September of 1961.

HOWARD BRAUN: Ellen [INAUDIBLE]

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Ellen in May of 1960, and Diane-- this was just prior to technology. None of these were carefully thought through and planned.

HOWARD BRAUN: Diane in when?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In September of 1961, so they were basically 15, two 15 month intervals.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Wow.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: And In June of '61 is when we moved to Washington. And we had this non air conditioned house. It was a brand new lovely house in McLean, VA that we were renting.

HOWARD BRAUN: June of '61.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: June of '61 we moved to Washington. And so Delores was about six months pregnant with two older sisters in diapers. And so when Diane was born we-- when Diane was born, we decided that what we really ought to do is get a live in housekeeper. We weren't near a bus line or anything, so it ought to be someone who lived in with us. So we hired a girl who stayed with us.

And this was our first time in the house, all we had was this garden department. And she was around us in the evenings. She didn't have any kids to deal with. So we decided our solution to avoiding her intruding on our privacy, was that we bought our first TV set at that point. And so Annie was able to watch. She would sit around reading True Confessions and other stuff.

So that was when we got our first TV set. It was a black and white VHF only set. And that was the TV set that we lived with until our kids went off to college.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Your kidding.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: This is largely strategic. And once our kids were gone, we then became decadent, as the kids told us, and got our first color TV. And started to live it up.

HOWARD BRAUN: What year was that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Let's see, probably in about 1980 or thereabouts.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Did you have much with the kids, when there were three so close? Or is that one of the reasons why you wanted [INAUDIBLE]

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I was still very much working full time. And I think it's fair to say that Dolores carried the big burden of it. She was not working outside the home. And I came home every night, and wasn't doing a lot of traveling at the time. It is the case that-- let's see. We moved in in June of 1961, and then I went off on a two or three week business trip. And I think I spent a good amount of time with the kids. I'm not sure how helpful I was. Dolores was the diaper changer, and the feeder, and so on. But I certainly was part of the bringing up process. And I think they were very close, and ran out of arms. So there were the three of us.

And, let's see, in September of 1962, Diane was about a year old, I was sent off to Vietnam for three months, as part of a project. And by that time we have moved into a house it Bethesda. We were renting this house in McLean for a year, and decided we ought to own a house. And so, we bought a house in Bethesda. That was on a culdesac. And it was really a great arrangement, because not a lot of traffic, virtually all the mothers were home, virtually all the kids were, so they were very young. And so, it was a real community, and that just worked out very well.

HOWARD BRAUN: When did you buy the house?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: When?

HOWARD BRAUN: What year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In 19-- let's see, we moved in '61, so we bought it in '62.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: So you went on a trip to Vietnam in '61? Tell us--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In '62.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Oh. OK.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: When Diane was about a year old. And Vietnam was-- it was still before the war had escalated. They wanted to-- they wanted a team, the Defense Department wanted a team out there to figure out what research R&D could do about dealing with a guerrilla warfare issue. And Vietnam was an interesting situation at the time.

Khrushchev in, I think, January of '61, had said Korea has proven that nuclear-- we know that nuclear war is a stalemate. Korea proved that limited war was a stalemate. The way the communist world will win is through wars of national liberation. And so this was the last line of defense in effect. If we could show them that they can't win through wars of national liberation. That then there would be stability in the encroaching of imperial communism.

So [INAUDIBLE] that-- and so here was a major issue. I had been working on the what was then called counter insurgency. Dealing with issues of guerrilla warfare and wars of national liberation. In fact, this two or three week trip that I took what was a-- we had two teams going around the world. One going east. The other going west. And I was in the team that went to Hawaii, and the Philippines, and Thailand, and Vietnam.

The team was led by a Nobel laureate in physics. A man named Louie Alvarez.

HOWARD BRAUN: Oh, great name.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Who-- and it was a team of really distinguished folks. And the two junior people in it were a young economist named Dan Ellsberg and myself.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Writer of the Pentagon Papers.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Writer of the Pentagon Papers. And Dan and I became very close at the time, because everyone else was really a very senior guy. I was 30. This was in '61. I was 31. Dan was about the same age. And so we had lots of our own discussions, but also interacted rather well with other memberss of-- There was a man named Bill McLean who was really the genius behind the infrared missiles.

So it was a very exciting opportunity. We got to-- and here was a-- Dan, by the way, had been a student of Henry Kissingers. And so, Dan was thinking much more strategically about lots of issues. And the whole trip had a lot of strategic content. So that it was a very interesting and important opportunity to see issues at both the ground level as well as the strategic policy level. So I had gotten involved in those issues, and so I was the natural one to be sent out there for part of this team.

And so, left Dolores with her three babies in diapers. By this time Annie was gone, by the way. We just had her for three months, and we felt we could do fine without her. And I came back and everyone was curious about who this new man was. And our baby Diane, who was a year old, she-- I would remember I was shaving, had my face full of shaving cream. And Diane came in and saw this and just burst out crying. This monster who was invading her home.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You were interested strategically in Vietnam and in other places. As we are sitting here in your living room, today there's fighting in Kosova. And do you see any-- this is now 30-- we're leaping 38 years or so. But do you see any thoughts similar, or different, or have we learned?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Vietnam was a-- there was the hope in Vietnam that we could stop it. And if we could stop it, then we were there. One of things that happened, I got back and continued to do a variety of studies in the Vietnam insurgency. And came to realize that everything we did they were matching. And over a period of time it was clear that we either had to get out or had to do something decisive if we could. And I remember sending a note over to the Pentagon on that. And they said what are you doing inflaming these issues. This is not your business, which gave rise to a whole sequence of other professional activities.

Kosovo is now a month old. It was the utility over five or more years in Vietnam that really started with an advisory role in the early '60s. Escalated with Johnson's election, after Johnson's election in '65, and continued driving on, the and on, and on. I can't conceive that Kosovo would last anything like that. But one can easily see the possibility that we could get dragged into it, because it's another of those wars with profound restraint. Because we don't want to send ground troops in.

If we could do something decisive, and it's not clear that we can, but if we could do something decisive, I think it's important to do this. There's no question in my mind that Kosovo can't last for years and years in the same way that Vietnam lasted. But part of what made Vietnam so-- generated so intense a political reaction of Vietnam was a draft, people getting killed, which is undoubtedly a concern that is forcing this to be-- forcing Kosovo to be such an immaculate intervention.

We don't want people to get killed. We don't want to have to mobilize a draft and do all the things that would in gender the political opposition to. So there are similarities, but there's also the Munich similarity about letting a clearly evil guy get away with genocide.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You saw things, when you went into Vietnam in '61, that you saw so clearly. Why?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I had a very interesting-- while I was there, this was fall of '62. I had a very interesting conversation in a restaurant with some people from the military. One of my observations was from the viewpoint of the government of Vietnam the worst thing that could happen is that they lose this war. Second worst thing that could happen is that they win this war. It was clearly in their interests that the thing drag on. Because there was lots of American resources pumped into the country, building the country, building the economy, strengthening their power.

And so there was a real perverse interest. This was when Ngo Dinh Diem, what was the ruler. And just before I left Vietnam, I had a call from his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu who was sort of seen as part of the intellectual power behind the thrown. I had a call from his office. They wanted me to go and meet with him. I had become friends with one of his advisers. And I guess the advisor

had said, this guy has some useful thoughts, or can be a vehicle for sending thoughts back to Washington. And so we had about a two hour conversation.

It turns out that I had permission from the powers that be at the office I was in to go over the see him. But the Pentagon didn't like that, so I was taken off the project that I was on. And that's what gave rise to my going off for a year's leave of absence at Cornell. Teaching at Cornell in 1963.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And what did you teach?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: I taught in the industrial engineering department, taught a course in operations research. And taught a course in-- a project course. One of the students in the project course now happens to be the CEO of Hewlett Packard, Lew Platt. It was a very interesting experience. I taught for that year and Cornell was a wonderful place to be as a student. Ithaca was a great place, isolated. My experience as a professional made it a terrible place to be. It was very isolated, very parochial, so I concluded that wasn't a place I wanted to spend my time. And so, I went back to Washington the following year.

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JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Our third session with Dr. Al Blumstein. We are sitting in his living room and we would like to being today talking about when you were leaving from Washington, DC. When you decided to make a bit of a career change.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In the midst of my time in Washington, in 1965, I was invited by the president's crime commission to take on a position as director of a task force on science and technology. Prior to that, all my work had been involved in military matters and related to defense issues. And when they first came to me I was intrigued by it, but it was really in the midst of some other analyses and so sent them to a few other people. At that point I was in the midst of those other analyses and they ended up coming back about three months later, at which point I was finished with those things and this represented a major career change. The commission had its task forces on police courts and corrections. And they decided that since science and technology was sending a man to the moon, they might as well have a task force on science and technology to solve the crime problem in the nation.

That was an intriguing period in a technological sense. It was a move from really modern technology back to a quill pen era. That was very little to the was advanced technology going on in the criminal justice system. They were just starting to use computers in interesting ways. And so my task was assembling a team of about the 10 people from around the country to really take on a whole set of issues. We looked at questions of interaction across the criminal justice system from-- we were systems types, and so we were the first ones really we started talking about the criminal justice system as an integrated set of activities.

We did analyses, simulation of cases moving through the courts, we looked at improved radio use for police, radios in the cars, is portable radios. We looked at the computers for identification, for retrieval of automobiles and the like. So it was a really fascinating adventure

and must say I got fascinated by it partly because it was totally unclassified and it was work I could talk to people about, and it was really bringing the skills to deal with significant societal problems.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: This was all under the jurisdiction of?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: The Institute for Defense Analyses. I decided that rather than become a government employee and working for the commission, I and the task force would be better served if I could stay at IDA, which was the Institute for Defense Analyses, continue to gain the support of the organization, the support services, and so we were a special task force. But in order to do that, it required an agreement by both Nicholas Katzenbach, who is the Attorney General and the chairman of the commission, and Robert McNamara, who was Secretary of Defense, because IDA would not do that outside the Defense Department unless the Secretary of Defense agreed to it. So it took their agreement for this task force to be established.

It was one of those times in life when you can really play emperor's clothes. We weren't expected to know anything about the criminal justice system, so we could ask all kinds of naive questions, such as how do you know that, when we were told what the appropriate the facts were, and in many cases the facts just didn't stand up. So we started analyzing recidivism data, we made an estimate, in our task force, we made an estimate of the chance that someone's going to be arrested sometime in his life, that a male in the United States would be arrested. Our estimate was 50%, which was astonishingly high to everybody. We thought it was more like 5%. We figured we must have slipped a decimal point. So that was part of the exciting new information that started to show up, and it really has fueled an awful lot of research about crime and criminal justice. Following the work of the commission--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: How did you get up that high to 50%?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, there's lots of stuff people get arrested for, particularly as juveniles, that people end up getting arrested for. The way you get the estimate is find out how many first arrests there are, and it turned out that-- I think most people felt arrestees or criminals were a tiny portion of the population. It really changes your thinking about offending when you learn that fully half the population has done it. Now it's not all serious, and in a later study I re-did some of those estimates, it turns out that about 15% of whites and about 50% of blacks, or a total of about 25% get arrested for something relatively serious, what are known as the index crimes, that go down to larceny, which is shoplifting, and from there on up.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And what year was this?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well the initial study was '65 and we finished our report in 1967.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: [INAUDIBLE] figures that you used were protected from then?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well based on rates of arrest then and projected into a lifetime. Following the work of the commission, we had one of the task force reports, task force report on science and technology, one of the chapters in the volume, and we had recommended a major

research program. The Justice Department, we noted, was that last cabinet department with no research program. And it just was not part of the culture of the lawyer world to have a significant amount of empirical research. They did a lot of research in case law.

Anyway, following the work I was fascinated by several issues, and so got IDA to set up an office of urban research, and I ended up chairing that office. And then remember having a long discussion with Maxwell Taylor who was the president of IDA, encouraging him to do more on the way of civil research. RAND, at the time, were starting to do that sort of work, they set up an office in New York and RAND was a similar kind of organization. They did work primarily for the Air Force at the time, but they spread out from there, and Maxwell Taylor decided that he really didn't want the organization to go beyond defense.

And so at that point, I started thinking about university jobs and in fact had a number of offers because universities were now starting to become much more involved in problems. Harvard had set up the Kennedy School. I was thinking of taking a job chairing the department of industrial engineering at Wayne State, and even had an intriguing offer from the University of Buffalo, or what was then SUNY Buffalo, a department I had applied to for a master's degree some 10-15 years earlier that told me I had lots of undergraduate courses to take before they would accept me as a candidate for a master's degree. I had an offer from them to become chair of their department of industrial engineering.

And right at that time, Carnegie Mellon, which had become Carnegie Melon just a few years earlier, had decided they wanted to set up a school of urban and public affairs. This was founded by a grant from Richard King Mellon and the Mellon Foundation, and as I hear the story, it's an intriguing on, Mellon and his colleagues had been the ones who cleaned up the environment in Pittsburgh, between Mellon and David Lawrence who was the Mayor. David Lawrence running the politics, Mellon running the money and the corporate world, cleaned up downtown Pittsburgh.

HOWARD BRAUN: Is that RK?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Richard King Mellon, right. And concluded that the problems starting to emerge in the '60s were not so much one of land use our environment, which he could manage, but were starting to be societal problems. We were having the civil rights strife in the south, and we had the riots following the Martin Luther King assassination. And so Mellon decided that what he needed to deal with these issues was a academic institution that would start to pay attention to some of these societal problems.

I had a call from Bill Cooper, who really was a major researcher in operations research, who I knew of extremely well. He was just recently appointed the first dean of the school. And he said he wanted to meet me in Washington and so we went up. I had no idea what it was about so we arranged to go to some bar, some jazz joint down in Georgetown, and he and a colleague of his, Abe Charnes, ended up interviewing me about a possible position on the faculty here. And that worked out very well, I was intrigued by the offer, I was intrigued by the plans to build a brand new school to deal with some of these issues. And so that ended up working out.

I was ready leave Washington. The Defense Department, even under Lyndon Johnson and especially under Richard Nixon, were nowhere as attractive as they were under Robert McNamara. And so Washington was becoming less attractive generally, and so that made for a move up to Carnegie Mellon--

HOWARD BRAUN: What year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: This was in 1969. I came up in March, commuted between Washington so we could let our kids finish school, and started as a first time full-time faculty member. I never had to go through the tenure fiasco, I came up as a tenured professor and then I think that was largely based on some of the creative work that we had done as part of the Task Force on Science and Technology.

HOWARD BRAUN: I would like to go into a little more detail. You observed that Mellon, understanding or initiative, because of funding and personal interest was key, an important ingredient anyway, of this--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Rejuvenation of Pittsburgh.

HOWARD BRAUN: Not merely rejuvenation of Pittsburgh, what I'm really reaching for is the role of multi-centered initiative in American society and starting things. Not everything started in government planning or need, and could you comment on that? In that case and in others, the significance of that issue.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well Richard King Mellon clearly loved Pittsburgh and clearly saw that Pittsburgh was having its troubles, as were other cities in the country. Pittsburgh probably reasonably benign compared to many other places that were really getting into serious trouble. And he knew he had solved the land use problem, totally transformed downtown Pittsburgh from an ugly smoke-belching industrial activity into really a rather attractive place, for the time at least. He was key in getting rid of the bituminous coal and its dominance as the heating fuel for the region. But society was having all kinds of problems associated with racial tension and and integration, and he knew that the politics couldn't deal with it, and the money couldn't deal with it. And so it was a sense that he needed an intellectual activity that would be centered at a major ins—

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HOWARD BRAUN: And variety and multiplicity of them makes it possible to initiate actions which may appear random at the moment, but which indeed turns out to be of great significance, it's the very variety of initiatives not dependent totally upon a corporate structure or a government structure or any other power elite group, all kinds of different interests. Is that a point in your thinking anywhere?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: It certainly became an issue in the turmoil of the '60s and the '70s. That turmoil saw the empowerment of many groups that previously had no power. We saw the student power through the Vietnam protests, we saw the peace movement generally, we saw the Black

Power movement, and prior to that, America was a much more homogenized, centrally-- centrally controlled is too strong, but there was an elite that had a lot more control. And what we saw in the '60s was very much of an anti-elite set of movements. The hippies generating their interests.

And sorting through all of this work was an important aspect of research, and we certainly saw that through the criminal justice system, where there are many kinds of crime and that are determined by power structure rather than by laws of nature. Whereas theft and violence are reasonably universally seen as crime, a lot of economic activity, a lot of civic protest, a lot of political activity are certainly not given the freedom in most places that they are here and that freedom really showed up in many ways in the '60s and '70s, a time of considerable turmoil in the country. A time when violence in the nation, violence rates, particularly rates of homicide by African Americans, really went very high, higher than they've ever been.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: I'd like to continue with your thought of the change in Pittsburgh then. First of all, did you have some preconceptions before you came to Pittsburgh?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: That's a very interesting question. Having come from Washington, I thought of Pittsburgh as a very remote place away from where everything interesting was going on. I thought of Pittsburgh as the smoky city. This was '69, about 15 years from its transformation, and word hadn't quite reached Washington that it really was a nice place to live. And so I had some trepidation, but it sounds like an exciting job, and so I put up with whatever I had to to take on that job, but never really expected to be here more than two years. For at least 15 years after I arrived I would never bet more than even odds that I'd be here more than two years.

It turned out that Pittsburgh was really a delightful place to be. My quick summary of Pittsburgh it is that it's big enough to be a city, so that it has a lot of the amenities that you want in a city, it's small enough that they're very accessible, and there's enough corporate money around that it makes it far more attractive in terms of amenities than the market alone can sustain. We also found that it was a wonderful place to raise children. Our children were about 10ish when we got here, and it was very convenient because all the fads took about five years to get here, and so we'd have early warning.

And I was struck by how many of their friends from Washington got into trouble with drugs and the like. But there was a very much of a family town and a very comfortable place that we ended up having come to. We rented a house in Edgewood for the first year we were here. Someone tell me about the wonderful school system in Edgewood. It turned out that our kids were the only Jewish kids in that school, which was somewhat of a surprise, and we were struck by that they were using the Palmer method that I had used in the '30s to learn how to do penmanship.

And they were very rigid when we took our children to-- when I was on spring break we decided we'd go up to Mont-Tremblant in Canada to go skiing and took our children of course, figuring that would be a great cultural experience, they'd be with people who speak French, and they'd get some sense of language. And the school was very hostile to the fact that we were taking them out. We told them we were taking them out, and that's when they gave us the hostile comments.

So there was a primitiveness to life in Edgewood, and we did start looking around and ended up getting a house in Squirrel Hill, which is this delightful neighborhood.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: On Wightman Street, what number?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: 1455 Wightman, on the corner of Northumberland Street in this lovely house that we ended up buying about 30 years ago.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: You were speaking of Richard King Mellon and the renaissance that was going on in Pittsburgh, and also the problems. It was called Carnegie Institute of Technology before then, and you were starting to say about the fallout with the University of Pittsburgh.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Yeah, the Mellons had invested in a Chancellor Litchfield, who had been recruited. I think he had been dean of the business school at Cornell, and was recruited as the chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, with some assurance that they wanted to build a world class institution. And he took them seriously, I guess, and, as I understand it, ended up spending lots of their money to try to build this world class institution and I think they had some second thoughts and ended up getting Litchfield fired as chancellor, and so there was this falling out with the University of Pittsburgh.

My sense is that what was then Carnegie Institute of Technology, predominately an engineering school with a very strong business school that was a major innovator in business school education, saw the opportunities of access to Mr. Mellon, merged with Mellon Institute, which was then a nonprofit private research institution, and together created Carnegie Mellon University. Since Andrew Carnegie's assets were totally depleted, they felt that it would be a good idea to have Mellon in their name, where the male assets were a major part of the wealth of Pittsburgh. And, as far as I know, the major contribution, until very recently, was the $10 million endowment, given to SUPA, the School of urban and public affairs, to establish this new public policy school.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And the mission was primarily--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: The mission was primarily to find ways to manage public affairs better and to train people to do that. The basic structure of the education program-- it was a graduate school, it had a master's program that in many respects looks like an MBA program, because the students have to pick up the whole array of technical skills associated with management, but more in the way of political skills, more in the way of dealing with ambiguity, and more in the way of project courses. I think I was instrumental in urging the creation of project courses, and those have still but are still an important part of the curriculum of the school.

A project course is driven by a problem that students take on with the client, so it's the best approximation to a real-world consulting project. There's a client with a problem, the students study the problem, find out what they can do in the available time, over the course of a semester or a year, and end up giving presentations of what they're going to do with a mid-course presentation, then a final presentation with their best estimate of the solution to the problem.

It's particularly useful because it gives students experience in formulating a problem, usually the problem is formulated in a textbook. It gives students the experience of reaching conclusions where the data don't fully support the conclusion, but it's their best estimates. It takes them away from the answer in the back of the book. There's no definite answer. And it gets them into the mode of dealing with unstructured problems, which was a major thrust in the planning for the school. I got here in March of '69. We admitted our first students, I think, in September of '70. I was chairman of the curriculum committee, and ended up in lots of rich discussions with Bill Cooper, who was the dean, and the other faculty members who were here. Most of the faculty were really spin-offs from the business school at Carnegie Mellon, and then there were a number of junior faculty that were brought in after that. So I think I was the first outside faculty member that came to the school.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: About how many faculty were there at the beginning?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Probably about a dozen or so, and our first entering class of master's students had about a dozen students. We also had and have a PhD program that started off with a few students. We now admit about seven or eight a year, graduate about four or five year, have a steady state, about 35 per year, in residence at any given time. We've now built up to a master's program of about 120 or 130 entering each year from the initial dozen.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: To finish on the thought of the projects, did you ever go back or follow some of the problems over the years?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well some of them. One of the more interesting projects we had was one that followed from a grant I got from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration. This was in the early '70s, when buses were being equipped with wheelchair lifts and there was great attention to the needs of handicapped people, and my sense was that, for the large majority of handicapped people, what they really wanted was point-to-point service, rather than sitting in the snow waiting for a bus in their wheelchairs. And so I had this grant to design a brokered paratransit system, paratransit being something above your own car, but below the regular scheduled bus service, and then the idea was to have taxi-type vehicles with a broker organizing the taxi service to meet various people's needs.

A whole bunch of social service agencies were providing their own buses for their clients, which struck me as pretty inefficient. So the idea here was to design the system that would have a broker working basically with taxi companies to take people from point to point to meet their needs. I hired a former graduate named Rick Stafford, who was working at Westinghouse at the time, and he was the project leader on it. We ran that project for two or three years and that ended up becoming the ACCESS system, which I believe is still working today, under the authority of the port authority of Pittsburgh, port authority transit, the bus company. But when I initially invited them to be a member of the advisory committee for the project, they said what are you doing that for, we are in charge of all transit and in the county. And there was an initially hostile response to it, until about a year later that they decided they really would like to hire Rick Stafford to implement this full-time with the port authority, and that was the ideal outcome. So they did hire him and they

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HOWARD BRAUN: This is tape four, interview of Al Blumstein on May 3. Tape four is a continuation of tape three, which was short. Al Blumstein continues. [INAUDIBLE] initiated from all kinds of sources, and they end up here or there.

AL BLUMSTEIN: OK. That was--

HOWARD BRAUN: In a planned society.

AL BLUMSTEIN: Absolutely.

HOWARD BRAUN: It's one of my notions about randomness. Here, somebody got you going, and then you did something, and Pat says, what the hell are you doing, Al? It's my turf. I'm supposed to do that. And they would never have got to it. So the mere fact that somebody else--

AL BLUMSTEIN: Is your tape ready, Judy?

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: It's on.

AL BLUMSTEIN: OK.

HOWARD BRAUN: Is that a new two tape?

AL BLUMSTEIN: But you're right. It's an excellent example, and my understanding is that there are access-like operations throughout the country. I haven't stayed close to it, but they did have a tenth anniversary dinner, some years ago. And so they invited me and Rick, and Harold Miller, who replaced Rick when Rick got dragged off to be part of the Dick Thornburg campaign team for governor.

And so they expressed their appreciation to us for starting it. And the Port Authority basically runs it, oversees it. And that's the way it should be, because they're the operating entity.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And they probably continue to run it, because they got funding from the state lottery.

AL BLUMSTEIN: And they get funding from the state lottery for serving elderly and handicapped, that's right. So it worked out to be a very attractive, appropriate service--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Was this replicated in many other place?

AL BLUMSTEIN: Yes.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: How did they find out about it, and--

AL BLUMSTEIN: Oh, there are all kinds of national-- there's American Public Transit Association and lots of interaction. And so I assume it's through there. Once Pat took it over, then it was out of my hands, and I went on to other projects.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And it's a wonderful program.

AL BLUMSTEIN: And it's a wonderful program.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: There are so many people that feel independent as a result of being able to utilize the service.

AL BLUMSTEIN: See, the idea was, you either have a taxi, which is on demand, or you have a bus, which means you wait on a fixed route, which may be far from your house-- farther from your house than you want it to be. And this is in between.

The only restriction is that you have to call sometime in advance to make the reservation, and then the transporter aggregates customers, so that they get multiple people into the van or the bus to increase the efficiency. The other neat feature of it was that different social service agencies didn't have to run their transportation system.

What they would do-- there was a chit that you used. I don't remember, say $5 chit for transportation. So the social service agency could sell it to its clients for a subsidized price, where they might sell it for $3. Different agencies would subsidize to different degrees for the people that they serve.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK, so you're teaching at the university now. Were you just as much interested in research as you were also in teaching?

AL BLUMSTEIN: Very much so. And Carnegie Mellon certainly is a place that encourages research, and rewards it. When I came up here, I started looking at transportation issues, because I had done some transportation-- actually, my doctoral dissertation was on air traffic control. So that was involved in transportation.

I got involved in transportation in Washington when I set up this office of urban research. So I started looking at transportation issues. I also had a simulation model, called Jussim, a simulation of the flow through a criminal justice system, and started using that in Connecticut.

HOWARD BRAUN: How do you spell--

AL BLUMSTEIN: J-U-S-S-I-M. Justice simulation. It was a fascinating model, because it was designed, obviously, for the computing capacity of the early '70s. And we had 32,000 words of memory, in contrast to the smallest PC today, which has megabytes of memory.

So we started dealing with that, but it really didn't get very much re-involved in criminal justice research until the late '70s, when the National Academy of Sciences was asked to interject some expertise into an area that had been pretty much-- increasingly technological issues came up.

Isaac Ehrlich had done some research that brought rather elaborate econometric models to bear on capital punishment. He estimated that each execution averts eight homicides in this econometric model.

And at the same time, there were rather complex stochastic processes or statistical methods being brought to estimate incapacitation effects. So I was invited to chair a panel at the National Academy of Sciences to try to sort out these areas, one of which related to deterrents, and the other which related to incapacitation. The criminal justice system basically succeeds in controlling crime in three ways.

One is through deterrence-- by sending a threat message. If you do things-- if you do criminal things, you will be punished. And the evidence for it is all the other people who are punished. So that sets a price on the crime. The other is incapacitation, which is simply removing the offender from the street, so that he can't commit crimes while he's in prison-- can't commit crimes on the outside.

And the third is, presumably, rehabilitation, which is some behavior change you induce in the individual through training, treatment, or through the unpleasantness of the prison time. It was deterrence and incapacitation that we brought together, and so I had a team of two graduate students-- Dan Nagin and Jackie Cohen-- who worked with me.

And the three of us were the authors of that volume on deterrence and incapacitation, which really became a major impetus to getting re-immersed in some frontier work in criminal justice. And I ended up devoting essentially all of my research since then on the area of crime and criminal justice.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: We haven't seemed to have made much progress, have we?

AL BLUMSTEIN: We haven't made much progress in controlling crime, but I think we know a heck of a lot more now than we did then. We have much better estimates of the effects of the criminal justice system. We know a lot more about criminal careers, and the whole theme of incapacitation really is finding the people who commit crime at the highest rate, and keeping them for the duration of the rest of their criminal careers.

We are somewhat better off at knowing what those criminal careers are going to look like then we were before. We now know that a small number of people commit crimes at a high rate, a large number of people commit crimes at a small rate. And if we could only find those with a high rate, we would be much more effective and efficient in controlling crime through the criminal justice system.

But I think we've learned quite a bit about criminal careers, about things that work. Unfortunately, the policies that we make are so strongly driven by ideological consideration that we fail to use the knowledge that we have, in terms of being more intelligent about focusing our attention.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Could you give a few examples of these policies?

AL BLUMSTEIN: Sure. One of the intriguing papers that I wrote with Jackie Cohen was written in the early '70s. It was titled, A Theory of the Stability of Punishment. It was a recognition that, for 50 years, the United States incapacitated-- I'm sorry, incarceration rate, prisoners per capita, was about 110 per 100,000. Very stable, plus or minus 8%.

Starting in the early '70s, we suddenly decided we were going to become much tougher. And I don't know that we ever made that decision, but certainly it became politically important to be very tough. And we now have an incarceration rate that's four times as high, driven in very large part by the fact that what we-- increase the incarceration rate of drug offenders by a factor of 10.

No one wants to see the drug offending the way it is, or the way it has been. But incarceration is not a terribly effective way to deal with a drug problem, because we incarcerate predominately sellers. It's a very resilient market out there that's driven by the demand. When you lock up a seller, you end up encouraging the market to recruit a replacement.

Turns out that the replacements tend to be young, because they have to pay less of a risk premium to young kids. And so we saw a major growth in the late '80s of young people recruited into the drug markets. The major rationale for incarcerating drug sellers is that you will increase their risk premium that you have to pay them in order for them to work in that business.

That increases the price of drugs. That thereby should reduce the demand, because of the price effect. It turns out that the period of the 1980s, when we were most aggressive at incarcerating drug offenders, the price of drugs dropped by a factor of about five. So this risk premium didn't show itself in any effects on the price. Drugs ended up becoming a lot cheaper.

At the same time, it turns out, into the early '90s, the demand for cocaine has dropped rather markedly, in terms of demand by new buyers. We're not getting new buyers coming in, not because of the price effect, but because the young people saw what it was doing to their parents, their siblings, their friends. And so what used to be cool in the '80s became very uncool in the '90s.

Our drug policy has been utterly bizarre, in terms of this enormous effort at locking people away, not having any effect on the transactions, not having any appreciable effect on price, resulting in far more deleterious consequences, because the young people that got recruited ended up carrying guns. Young people are tightly networked, and so their buddies started carrying guns, and their buddies started carrying guns. And we saw a massive growth in homicides in the '80s, attributable to young people with guns.

All of it was a growth in young people, not in older people. All of it was a growth in gun homicides, not in non-gun homicides. And that was the major violence growth that everyone made an issue of in the '80s. There was a lot of talk about super predators, and so on. All of it was attributable to the growth in handguns in young people's hands.

And that was followed by significant efforts at capturing those guns from the kids, deterring them from carrying them, and I think we've seen recently their homicide rates have come down

appreciably. But they're still, in '97, about 50% above where they were in 1985, when all of this started.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Do you try to affect national policies for--

AL BLUMSTEIN: Very much so.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK. Can you explain how some of that is done?

AL BLUMSTEIN: Well, this was interesting. I had been deaning at seven years at the school, and finished my time in December of '93. I started looking around for things. I had negotiated for a year with no teaching, and I decided I would get back involved in the crime issues. I had been involved in them, anyway, but the issue of the growth in homicide was a major concern-- widespread-- and so I started looking at some of the data.

And that's when I came, did the analyses that showed-- through the '80s, we saw a doubling of the number of homicides by young people. We saw doubling of the number of homicides with guns, and we saw a doubling of the arrests of young people-- nonwhites-- for drug offenses. And started wondering what was tying those things together.

And because I didn't have all the other minutia to worry about that a dean or any other administrator worries about, I was really deeply immersed in the issue, and I remember, one morning, I was shaving and thinking about what the heck is tying these things together. And that's when it occurred to me that kids had been recruited into the drug markets.

If you're in the drug market, you have to carry a gun to protect yourself, because you can't call the police, and the realization that kids have always fought. And now, they're fighting with far more lethal instruments. And that gave rise to the gun issue, and realizing that it had to go beyond the kids in the drug markets, that there was this diffusion of guns.

And I started giving a paper on this. And indeed, was invited to the National Institute of Justice to give a paper on it. And it turned out that Janet Reno happened to be there. And--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Janet Reno was the Attorney General of the United States under President Kennedy-- Clinton.

AL BLUMSTEIN: Right. And so she said, gosh, the people tell me that alcohol is a major part of the problem in young people's violence. And so I went back, and I said-- what had happened was that there was a really sharp increase in homicides by people. And it was just-- she said that people tell me that it's correlated with alcohol.

And so I looked at alcohol, and there hadn't been much change. In fact, alcohol use had gone down recently. But it was basically very flat. But my comment to her was that we saw this really sharp change in about 1985, and you need more than a correlation. You've got to explain these sharp changes. And the sharp changes were occurring in the gun homicides.

And that's when I started arguing for important efforts to control guns with kids. And that was always out there, but I think this was the strongest evidence that had come through, that it was really kids and guns that really had to be dealt with. And that became an important part of the thrust of the Justice Department's program, dealing with kids and guns, mobilizing effort at the ATF-- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

And so that was one of the vehicles for capturing national attention on the issue. I was-- another aspect of trying to deal with policy, I was president of the American Society of Criminology in 1992, and at that point, had become appalled at our drug control policies. And in my presidential address, I had established the theme of the criminology meetings to be relevance and rationality. And the title of my presidential address was Making Rationality Relevant, and talking about the irrationality of the drug war, and the futility of pursuing a predominantly incarceration policy.

And this meeting was in November of '92, and I basically-- one of the thrusts of the recommendation was calling on the newly-elected president, who had just been elected two days earlier, to convene a national commission on drug use-- on drug policy-- to try to bring some rationality to it. But the emotions and ideology wrapped up in dealing with crime and drug policy were not easily turned around.

And I think President Clinton had his own ideas, driven by his brother's drug addiction, and a concern that pervaded the political environment, of a concern about being seen as soft on crime. Now one of the other ways in which I get involved in policy was through the state. When I came to Pittsburgh in 1969, the federal government had just established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, LEAA, which gave out grants to the states to, number one, create policy councils to look at the total criminal justice system.

I think this was one of the impacts of my task force. Here was an opportunity to link police and courts and corrections together. And when I arrived here, the powers that be in Harrisburg knew of the work I had done, so they appointed me to a group that was an Allegheny County group. The other thing they did was give out grants, and so I was appointed the Allegheny County group, which was then chaired by Dick Thornburg, who was US Attorney here at the time.

We had a Republican governor. I think Dick Thornburg was one of the few responsible Republicans around that the government could have appointed to chair that. And so Thornburg and I became pretty chummy in the process. I was one of the few people in the country that had thought hard about what the criminal justice system was about, and so when he couldn't make a meeting, he would ask me to chair.

And so that was involved in trying to develop some local plans. When he became governor-- oh, during the time he was chairman, Governor Shapp ended up firing a number of the members of the council, the Allegheny-- 13 members. I think in part, that was because Gene Kuhn, who was Sheriff, was putting in a grant proposal for a major drug task force. My sense is the reason he wanted the task force was that he was about to embark on a political campaign to become a county commissioner, and so he didn't want unreliable people on the local counsel to vote against his program.

And there were 13--

HOWARD BRAUN: Who did not want--

AL BLUMSTEIN: Kuhn didn't want, right, and he got Shapp to fire them. Of the 13, five of them were people who had been very responsible and very effective, including Bill Robinson, who was the warden of the local jail at the time, Dave Craig, who was a former public safety director, and myself, and two others who I don't remember. But Thornburg went to Shapp, and asked those five to be reinstated.

And as I understand it, Shapp said, I was having too much trouble with Rizzo in the east. I'm not going to start a western front by having trouble with Kuhn, so I'm not going to reinstate them. So Thornburg slapped his resignation onto Shapp's desk, and resigned as chairman. When Thornburg became governor, he called and said, I'd like you on the state commission that oversees these activities at the state level.

I said, I'd be delighted to do that. He said, I want you to chair it. I said, whoa. It's one thing to go to a meeting every now and then. It's another thing to be responsible for it. So I said, I have to worry about classes and research, and so on.

And I said, give me 48 hours. And called him back the next day, and I thought about it, and said, how often do you get a chance to have some effect on policy? And so I said, OK, I'll do it for 18 months. He said, great.

So I signed on. The commission had-- this was the first Pennsylvania commission on crime and delinquency. The legislature had changed the operation. It used to be the Governor's Justice Commission, but the legislature and the governor had gotten into fights, so it was now the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. So I was the first chair of that organization, and that organization is still in business.

I changed monthly meetings to quarterly meetings. I built up the role of the staff. I recruited a staff director, who's really a vary able guy. He was there for four years. It turned out that the burden became quite manageable, so that I ended up staying for Thornburg's eight years, and then, when Casey was elected, I sent the letter to Casey-- Robert Casey, as governor.

I said, you ought to get your guy in here. I never heard from him. I sent another letter-- you ought to get your guy in here. And then, in the third year of his administration, he ended up essentially commandeering, in his budget, some of the money that we had always been free to allocate as we saw fit. And I raised a protests, and they ignored the protest, so I resigned.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: What kind of changes did you see as effective over those years that you--

AL BLUMSTEIN: Well, one of our-- that was a time-- I started in '79. That was a time when crime was-- it was an interesting opportunity to link the research insights that I was emerging with with the policy implications. That was a period when crime was coming down, or when I had forecast crime to come down, but the criminal justice system was getting piled up.

And so it became a time when much more attention had to be given to issues of prison crowding, and management of the corrections system. And so we had a task force on corrections, and put a lot of our attention in trying to get a more intelligent management of the corrections system. It was also a time when computers were becoming more important.

And I urged us to get some police information systems that would be useful for police departments in managing their operations. And so the commission contracted with [? Search Incorporated, ?] and developed a generic police management information system that became standard throughout the state, and is now becoming standard elsewhere. But it was the realization that a major emphasis and a major attention has to be focused on corrections, which is where the thrust of the group was.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: It seems that we have so much of the overcrowding in the prisons and we keep building more prisons.

AL BLUMSTEIN: Crime has been coming down for seven years, and we keep filling the prisons more, in part because we are locking people away for their drug offending, that isn't doing much good. In part, because we keep lengthening the sentences. I have a recent paper, which is trying to explain the factors that have contributed to this enormous growth in prison populations-- this quadrupling.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And where is this paper?

AL BLUMSTEIN: It's going to be published in a journal. And in the paper, what we try to do is sort out how much is due to more crime, how much is due to more police arrests per crime, how much is due to more commitments per arrest, and how much is due to longer sentences. It turns out that none of it is due to more crime, none of it is due to more police arrests per crime. It's virtually all attributable to the growth in commitments per arrest.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK. But longer time served is not necessarily a deterrent.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Longer time served is not as effective as other means of using incarceration. When you compare what is called certainty, which is the certainty that you'll be punished given that you committed the crime, against what's called severity, which is the time served, that the deterrent effect is greater with certainty than with severity.

Furthermore, that's the deterrent theme. The incapacitation theme is that the longer you serve, the more likely it is that you'll be serving time after you've finished your criminal career, the time when you would have been criminally active. So that longer time served is not a very effective way to reduce crime. It's much more efficient and effective to deal with certainty, getting people while they're active offenders, and finding ways to enhance that certainty than it is through increasing the severity of the sentences they serve.

We have been on this kick of increasing sentences. I think an important part of the political environment that has contributed to that has been the growing importance of political soundbites, TV soundbites in political campaigns. It's easy to-- in a 30 second soundbite-- to have a cell door

slamming and to show that you're a tough guy than it is to talk about the complicated trade offs between how much punishment you want to send out, how much money you want to invest in rehabilitation, how much you want to invest in schools and job creation and job training and so on.

But those don't have the political appeal in a frightened country of a cell door slamming shut. And so as we've moved to the soundbites as a basis for political judgment and as we've move to soft on crime as a profound political epithet, we have moved into an era of increasing punishment. And that's been an important factor in this growth that's quadrupling of the incarceration rate.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Have you met with judges and attorneys and those who make the sentences to try to educate them to your way of thinking.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: One of the things I did was-- Dick Thornburg appointed me to the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission. And so I was one of about a dozen members of the commission. And people would come to the commission and say, I want to have the sentence for x increased. And I was the one who usually would say, well, what crime would you like us to reduce the sentence for in order to make the room for the additional prisoners for the sentence you want to increase?

Usually people were flabbergasted by that question. And they would stammer and say, well, that's your problem. It's not my problem. But all the political pressures are for increasing in the sentence and not for decreasing it. Obviously, that commission had always been chaired by a judge. And I testified at the Congress. I've testified at the legislature on some of these issues to try to bring them to the attention of the people who make the decisions.

The second panel I chaired at the National Academy of Sciences was one on sentencing reform. The title of our report was Sentencing Research-- The Search for Reform. But that was a time when sentencing guidelines were really coming out. And so here was an opportunity to report to the public on what we knew about sentencing guidelines, to consider what different ways they might have been. And I understand that report became an important document for the whole variety of sentencing guidelines commissions that were established subsequently.

So that was another opportunity to get involved in the policy implications of the research that was going on, some of which I had been doing.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Earlier you were talking about your concern for the increase of handguns and that really is the main issue now.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: And handguns particularly in young people.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: OK. And here we are sitting now in-- we just had in April of 1999 the Littleton, Colorado, massacre in the schools. And we seem to have so many of these throughout the whole country. Can you enlighten us of this terrible tragedy going on in our school?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: It's a horrible tragedy. This is number six or seven in the last year and a half or so, starting with Pearl, Mississippi. There's an enormous amount of copycat going on. There's an enormous amount of discussion about the aberrant behavior of these kids who do it. But that--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: [INAUDIBLE] topic yet. How is it that so many people do copycat and are inspired by that?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, in any given school I think it's reasonable to anticipate that about 10% of the kids are aberrant in some way, are outliers in some way, are looking for some way to establish identity, to get even, to send a message to parents, to peers, to the peers who have dissed them.

And kids have always engaged in-- teenagers have always engaged in aberrant behavior. But not all teenagers. But there's always been a group who do strange things. The horrible piece is the availability of guns, high powered guns, high firepower guns that enables them to kill and injure multiple people at one time.

And that's really been the dramatic change. Fighting has always been a feature of male teenage dispute resolution. Kids have always fought. The gun is a major equalizer so that little kid can pick on the big kid or the single kid can pick on the multiple kids. But the consequences are lethal and end-- we're in a situation where these kids now have access to guns that they didn't have before. And access to high power guns.

Most who've done it may not have been able to think of it on their own. But when they learned about it, that triggered the thought that they can do what these other kids have done, and that's where the copycat comes from.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And how we stop getting these guns in their hand?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, number one, working on the kids is not going to do it. You've got to work on the sources of the guns. Parental responsibility. Responsibility for leaving guns lying around that kids can get access to is one vehicle. The adults are the ones who can display responsibility.

Trying to find ways to limit sales of guns. We passed a Brady Bill some years ago that precludes guns in the hands of people who have criminal history or mental health history. So that there are a variety of ways to-- and it turns out that obviously someone sufficiently intent will find a straw purchaser or other means. But it turns out people who have been denied a gun by Brady Bill do less gun crime than people who have not been denied a gun. So that there is some effect.

But there's a loophole. And that is anyone can buy a gun at gun show. So we now have legislation introduced to limit access-- to require a background check at gun show associated with purchases at a gun show. So there's a variety of efforts to try to get tighter control over gun markets.

In Littleton, this 18-year-old girlfriend bought the guns for not quite 18 boyfriend. 18 seems like a pretty immature age to even permit handgun purchase. And so I would argue that at a minimum that the eligible age should be 21. And if I had my druthers, I'd push it to 24 or 25.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Why is the National Rifle Association so powerful? To try to-- their feeling is that there should be freedom to purchase these.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: There is an obsession about the freedom to purchase that Freudians have linked to maleness in terms of a gun. But they are taking the Second Amendment and using it for an almost obsessive position on the right to have arms. The word regulated militia is in the Second Amendment. And apparently, the courts have never seen fit to-- have always accepted the degree of control. So there is this natural tension between the NRA on one hand and handgun control on the other and other gun control organizations.

Somehow or other they have the legislatures in their pocket. Largely because they have had enough members who they could mobilize on the one issue of gun control or no and legislate. State legislatures and the Congress have been astonishingly responsive to the NRA.

I think we've started to see some turnaround. There used to be a coalition with police, but when they came out against control of what were known as cop killer bullets, that diminished their support by the police. I think the public is becoming increasingly incensed at their operation. They had this convention in Denver right near Littleton with the Littleton survivors really picketing them.

So I think their a political position, which has always been one of enormous strength, has weakened somewhat. And I hope will weaken further.

Now the issue there-- when I did this research on kids and guns, I spoke to some NRA folks about their position and asked what their view was about kids and guns. And their position was-- it's not the way I would put it-- but they said children don't have Second Amendment rights. So at least they acknowledge that they were not prepared to support unlimited access to guns by kids. And that was very important in pushing that issue.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Today we see so many parents who are justifiably upset and worried and concerned since it's now in their own backyards. And schools are reacting with monitors and making sure guns don't get into the schools. Are those the answers?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Well, those-- there are no answers. But there are ways to improve the-- to diminish the risks. One thing you can't do is try to predict who are the kids with aberrant behavior who are going to become the Harrises of Littleton. Because there are too many of them and the base rates are inherently low, so you make lots of false positive predictions.

What you can do, first, is get much better information fed into the schools about who are the kids who are likely, in the near term, going to be doing this. Who are making the threats? Who are carrying the guns? There's a rule, a federal rule, that requires kids who bring a gun to school to be expelled. Expelling them isn't going to do a heck of a lot of good because they still have the

guns, they're going to be outside, they're going to be on the street, and they could end up showing up in the school if they're going to do these terrible things.

Many places have put them into alternative schools, which involve much more supervision, much more care, much more attention. It's also the case that there's the opportunity for much greater surveillance of the kids who have been identified as a short-term threat, an immediate threat. Much more attention to them, checking them out when they come into school to make sure that they're not caring weaponry. And these are inherently very rare events.

It's also crucial that the schools develop plans for what they do in the event that someone does come in armed. So there are a lot of things that could be done to lower the risk. We've seen in the last-- the Littleton event was two weeks ago tomorrow. And in the last two weeks, we've seen alerts in many places of kids carrying guns to school.

And schools are inherently safe places. Not much goes on. I think in a recent academic year there were 100 murders in and around schools. But that's a large number, much larger than we would like. But in the context of there being 4,000 to 5,000 murders of school age kids in a year in our total murder rate of about 20,000 per year, that's a very small number.

So the schools are inherently safe places. Kids are not safe people. But we have to worry about those things.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: How does criminology in the United States compare with other cultures?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: We probably-- criminology in the US as a scientific discipline is probably far and away the leader. In most places, criminology has much more of an ideological content than it does empirical. And in the United States, say 20 years ago, it may have been somewhat balanced between ideological and empirical.

But today, there's no question. The empirical people have the-- are the dominant ones in criminology. The American Society of Criminology must have, oh, I'd say maybe 2,500, 3,000 members. At their meetings they get at least 2,000 people showing up, many from overseas. And there's nowhere the kind of bulk volume that there is in other countries.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Tell us about your professionally in--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In criminology?

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Yes. And some of those achievements.

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Oh, let's see. When I finished the work of the Crime Commission--

HOWARD BRAUN: What year?

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: In '67. I went to a meeting of the American Society of Criminology. That meeting had about 30 people. Or maybe 50 people in one of the lounges at the NYU Law School. And it was just a tiny bunch.

Meetings today are much larger. I think in part because the government has started funding research in criminology in the '70s and '80s. And that gave rise to the growth in the field.

I became involved in a variety of ways. I remember-- I have been involved in parallel really in the operations research profession and in the criminology profession, operations research bring methodological and criminology being substantive. And sort of operations research is people and advanced technology activity. And I remember one of the early criminology meetings, if I wanted an overhead projector they said, well, you'll have to pay for it. I said, this is outrageous. How can you have to pay for something which is a necessary part of communication in a meeting?

Seven years ago I was awarded the Sutherland Award, which is their top award for research, basically based on the research I had done on criminal careers. The criminal careers research was interesting because it was a direct outgrowth of this work in the 1979 National Academy of Sciences report on incapacitation and deterrence.

The notion of incapacitation inherently involves the issue of a criminal career. That is-- and we introduced a concept of crimes per person per year. Crimes per offender per year. And then we used the standard stochastic process designation for that of lambda. Lambda is the Greek letter for the rate of committing crimes.

And so here was an important concept. And it was important that be identified-- in many respects, it should be as important to criminologists as the speed of light is to physicists. And so we identified this concept of lambda. That is, the crimes per person per year. The criminology world was very distressed at a Greek letter being introduced into their midst, at symbols taking the place of concepts. And so there was a lot of anxiety in that.

But it's a major theme, because you want to get the high lambda people in prison, the people who do a lot of crimes per year, and not waste prison time with low lambda people. Also, the duration of a criminal career was an important part of it. You want to get people incapacitated while they're active, but not after they leave.

So I think it was the work on criminal careers that had been a major piece, major factor, in this Sutherland Award, which-- I don't remember. Was probably the early '80s. And then in, I guess, '91 or so I was asked to run for president and was willing to do that. And--

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: And that's president of--

ALFRED BLUMSTEIN: Of the American Society of Criminology. And so I ended up serving as president that year. And it was a very different culture than I had been used to because it had so much more of an ideological content. All of my time in defense, all of my time at Carnegie

Mellon. The cultures I had dealt with were essentially empirically driven. I had been very active in the operations research profession.

And again, ideology hardly entered there. And I remember when I gave my presidential address at the American Society of Criminology-- I'm sorry. When I gave an address when I got the Sutherland Award, I talked about my feeling being similar to that of an immigrant. I had come from a different culture and so talked about the various culture shocks that I experienced when I encountered the world of criminology.

And I was clearly in the opposite camp of the ideological group known as critical criminologists whose basic view is that there's corruption by powerful people driving criminal justice. And so I remember one of them came up to me afterwards and said, what do you have against immigrants? And I said, what do you mean? He said, you talked about immigrants in your address.

And I said, but I identified as an immigrant. I wasn't being hostile to immigrants. They saw what they wanted to see. And the notion of scientific approach to any endeavor was just not something that was central to their thinking.

JUDY RUBENSTEIN: Thank you.