Isidore Starr Interviews
Interviewed by Anna Samuels, Legacy Project volunteer
July 29, 2012

Anna Samuels: This is Anna Samuels, volunteer at the Washington State Legacy Project. I'm interviewing Dr. Isidore Starr today, the 29th of July, 2012, at his home in Seattle. So thank you for having me.

Isidore Starr: You are welcome.

Samuels: I am so glad to be here. I think we should start at the beginning, because that's a good place to start. So, you were born in New York?

Starr: Brooklyn, New York. November 24, 1911.

Samuels: My birthday's January 24th, that's a lucky day.

Starr: When we go upstairs I'll show you *The New York Times* front page of November 24, 1911.

Samuels: You still have it?

Starr: I was given that as a gift at my 100th birthday by some of my relatives.

Samuels: That's a good gift.

Starr: Yes, a lot of interesting things happened.

Samuels: Were you on the front page?

Starr: (laughing) They didn't know I existed.

Samuels: So your parents were Russian immigrants, is that right?

Starr: They were Russian immigrants, yes.

Samuels: Tell me a little about them.

Starr: My mother's name was Yetta Lampert and then she married Nathan Starr, my father, I don't know when but I was born in 1911.

Samuels: When did they come over?

Starr: I have the ship and the date on which they came but it's upstairs, so when we go upstairs I'll show it to you. There were three children in the family, myself the oldest and my two sisters, Vivian and Belle.

Samuels: That was my grandmother's name.

Starr: You know names change, it was Bella. Isidore eventually became Irving. In other words the Isidores changed their names to Irving for a variety of reasons. One of the big jokes of the time was a man went into court and the judge says to him, "Why are you here?" And he says, "My name is Isidore Stink." And the judge says, "What do you want to do?" And the man says, "I want to change it to Irving Stink." That was a big joke, because those of us that were Isidores saw no reason to change our name, but so many Isidores did, for a variety of reasons, Irving probably sounds better, Isidore is kind of biblical. Isaac and Isidore.

Samuels: My great-grandparents came over from Lithuania and their last name was originally Rajinsky and they changed it to Samuels.

Starr: They themselves?

Samuels: Whoever records them, it was Sam Rajinsky and the guy said, "Well, now you're Sam Samuels because I can't spell that."

Starr: Well, I asked my father's brother, who was the oldest one and who came first. In those days you know, Anna, the oldest brother came first then he brought to the United States his next brother in age, and they brought over the entire family eventually. It was remarkable, familiar devotion, incredible.

Samuels: What was that oldest brother's name?

Starr: The oldest brother's name was Abraham. And I asked Abraham how he got the name of Starr and this is still very, very vague to me. They all came from Russia, you know, and he said, "My name is Sturr." That's not a Russian name and I still don't understand what he said. But he said, "My name is Sturr," and they said, "OK, Starr." Immigration officers changed names, they didn't know what your name was, they asked "What do you do?" You're a baker, your name was Baker. Name is Taylor. So that's the way it went.

Samuels: So was that your father's brother, Abraham?

Starr: He was the oldest, yes, then my father came next, then Joe and Willy and two sisters, Sophie and Anna. It was a very nice family, my parents were ideal parents, absolutely ideal parents. And I think that's why I treated my son so well and he treated

his children so well. You set a precedent or a standard for behavior, and when there is child abuse and all that, it carries over, you know. So I was very fortunate, I will show you some of the pictures of what I looked like as a child.

Samuels: Were you close with your sisters?

Starr: Yes, we were very close. As a matter of fact, when I retired from Queens College in 1975 we all lived in New York in the same general area, you know in those days nobody owned cars, you walked everywhere. So when my two sisters discovered I was going to move to Arizona because people from New York move to Florida, we moved to Arizona, I knew in advance because my wife had two sisters there. My two sisters were devastated because they were planning to move to Florida, they were just devastated that I was moving to Arizona. They cried terribly, and their husbands were very sad, and I assured them that I would call them at least once a week and eventually we would see each other once again.

Samuels: Well good. Did they end up going to Florida?

Starr: They both ended up in Florida and we called each other once a week.

Samuels: That's so nice.

Starr: Yes, we kept in touch. It was a loving family and I was very fortunate, very, very fortunate.

Samuels: Did you ever know your grandparents?

Starr: No, they were in Russia. I heard stories about them, which I've now forgotten. But the one thing I do remember is when I was young I sat on my mother's knee in a rocking chair and she taught me Russian songs and Russian poems and I remember that to this very day.

Samuels: That's beautiful. Do you remember them?

Starr: It's incredible, isn't it? You forget so many things, but I remember being rocked and her singing, and she asked me to sing it with her. And those were wonderful memories.

Samuels: That is nice.

Starr: Am I too close?

Samuels: No, I think you're perfect. I think this little [recorder] is stronger than we give it credit for. What was it like being a first generation American in New York?

Starr: We lived in what I would describe as a ghetto, that's a term that came later, everyone in the neighborhood was Jewish. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, you name it, everyone was Jewish. And we spoke Yiddish until I went to kindergarten, when I started kindergarten I couldn't speak English, just Yiddish. I remember clearly my first day of kindergarten, where all the Jewish children and woman were lined up outside of the room, and the kindergarten teachers opened the room and they asked us to come in, but not the mothers, just the children. They spoke English, we spoke Yiddish, so I'm not sure how we communicated, but we did. They asked us to sit down at these little tables and the mother's outside were crying.

Samuels: But then you remember learning English. Do you think by the time—

Starr: Children manage to learn very quickly, it wasn't long before we spoke English and our parents spoke English too. My father was a cabinet maker, a very, very skillful cabinet maker. And he and his oldest brother, Abraham, worked for the Bergen Cabinet Company. And they and a number of other workers built United Cigar Stores, and at the time people who smoked could actually go into a cigar store and get all kinds of cigarettes and cigars. Father traveled, not all over the country, he travelled east of the Mississippi building cigar stores in Buffalo, Cincinnati, and he told me all about it. And what intrigued me is that all the plans were in English, the plans for the stores.

Samuels: He spoke English by then?

Starr: I think he spoke cigar store English.

Samuels: He knew what he needed to know.

Starr: Yes, I think he was probably the first one to learn English. He was kind of a silent man. He was out of town a good deal of the time, and my mother would say to me when I was 6 or 7, I must have been about 10 or 11, when he came back from an out of town job, she would ask me to wait for him at the subway entrance so I could help him with his tool baggage. And of course it was incredibly heavy so we would come down, and he would carry it, and I would have my hand of his hand. I was helping him.

Samuels: I bet you liked waiting for him and being able to welcome him back.

Starr: Oh yes, yes, my mother was very, very sensitive in that sense.

Samuels: Did your family live in the same house the whole time you were growing up there?

Starr: I was born on the same block, on the same street, it was called Rockaway Avenue. And I was born and I was a child in one apartment house, those were called high rises, there were no apartment homes. And then we moved on Rockaway Avenue to another block where they had new houses. I remember that move. These were all kind of railroad apartments, you could see right through them, kitchen to bedroom, kitchen, living room, bedroom.

Samuels: I went to the Jewish Tenement Museum in New York—

Starr: Oh, you did?

Samuels: And it's probably buildings kind of like that, very tall, lots of apartments all stacked up

Starr: Yes

Samuels: It was really interesting, my mom's a history buff.

Starr: For example, I imagine this is an exaggeration, but we all knew that milk came from cans, and we relished our horse unless it was driven by an iceman. But agriculture was out of our realm.

Samuels: City life.

Starr: Yes, it was a great city life.

Samuels: So you went to grade school and high school—

Starr: I went to elementary school and then I went to junior high school, I went to high school and college, that was usual.

Samuels: Did your sisters go to college too?

Starr: My sisters went to the same elementary school but the junior high school was for boys so I don't remember where they went.

Samuels: Somewhere else.

Starr: I know they went to high school. Of course this is 1932, 1933, we're in the depths of the Depression. The idea was to get a job, so when I graduated in 1932 from college I looked around for a job for a year. It's hard to imagine what a depression is like, you have some idea now with the Great Recession, it's a depression in my view. I did a film for Encyclopedia Britannica entitled "The Great Depression of 1929" and it was shown in schools. We tried it out first in a number of schools, and students refused to believe what they saw. We had pictures of two people jumping out of a window at the time, two stockbrokers I think. There were long lines leading to food banks. People were selling apples on the street, and of course we kept hearing FDR's friendly advice, that the depression would soon be over, but it lasted a long time. And I graduated from State College in 1932 and couldn't get a job so they gave me a scholarship to take a master's degree. So 1933 is a blunt. I decided to go to law school, there were no jobs available.

Samuels: So they were paying for you to go to law school? You said they gave you money to—

Starr: City College gave me money for a master's degree in Education, so I took half of it and then decided that that's not leading me anywhere, I need to do something to get a job eventually. So, like many people, I went to law school. I should tell you, I had to borrow money from my parents to go to law school, it was $200 a year, or $100, I don't know. I decided to go to law school and began law school in 1933.

Samuels: So your parents were very supportive of your educational—

Starr: Oh yes, my father did very well as a cabinet-maker. Skilled cabinet-makers made a good living.

Samuels: Oh, good.

Starr: And my mother was a saver, and she encouraged us to save. We used to contribute money each week to a Christmas club to collect money at the end of the year, she was very insistent. I felt the Depression, which began in 1929, by the way, and I went to college from '28 to '32, so we got intimate with each other, the Depression and I. I remember my mother gave me 50 cents to go to college, 5 cents for the subway each way, the college, by the way, was an hour and a half away by subway. And you

could go by subway anywhere in New York for 5 cents, and 5 cents to buy an apple from an apple vendor, people were selling apples on the streets. And I remember she drilled it into me, "I want you to spend this 5 cents on an apple and nothing else."

Samuels: And did you?

Starr: Yes!

Samuels: So you made it work, your family made it work.

Starr: Yes, they got through the Depression, I would say, pretty well. One of my sisters, my oldest sister, got a job after she graduated from high school.

Samuels: What was she doing?

Starr: (laughing) She was a hosiery sales lady.

Samuels: In a department store?

Starr: No, in a private store. And she eventually became the manager of the store, so she was very enterprising like my mother.

Samuels: She did a good job.

Starr: I don't remember what my sister did, but that was the Great Depression and it affected our thinking. At City College, am I rambling, or?

Samuels: No, not at all.

Starr: At City College I took a course in Economics in 1929. We started the course and the professor said to us, "I'm giving you $100 or $500 dollars, a sum of money, I want you to invest it in the stock market and we'll follow it every week and eventually everyone's gonna report on how you've done." So we invested in September, in October we were all broke, that was the great crash. So for many, many years I stayed away from the stock market, wouldn't touch it, and this is a Depression generation. The stock market is gambling, stay away from it!

Samuels: Yeah, I don't think I'm going to be interested in that, ever.

Starr: Especially today, with what they call the financial mafia, the financiers who created a large part of the present recession, with their—what do they call it? Their assets, there's a word for it. The assets which decreased in value so completely that people are afraid to entrust their money to these guys, these investment bakers.

Samuels: Yeah, I think that makes sense.

Starr: Oh yes, as a matter of fact there's a group that calls them the right name, they are the mafia of our present day, they manipulate our money, they are paper pushers, and they've lost millions for us. JP Morgan just admitted to losing, first it was 2 billion, then it was 9 billion in six weeks. When you listen to some of these people testify before congress, you are amazed at the chutzpa of these people. They think they know what they are doing!

Samuels: And they obviously don't! It's hard for me to imagine that much money. So, were you always interested in law school?

Starr: Well I was interested in law school because in history you read a great deal about the law. And there are people like Clarence Darrow, great criminal lawyer of his time, and Lincoln's law career, and they kind of resonated in my mind. So when I took history at City College I had a professor, very well known, Robert Morris, and I asked him, "How does one prepare for law school?" And his reply, I still remember to this very day, he thought for a while and he said to me, "Read Chaucer and Shakespeare." And I told him, "What does that have to do with the law?" And he said, "If you're going to practice the law, you must understand human nature. And you read those two authors and you'll learn what human nature is really like." And he was absolutely right. And to this day, when students I have ask me how to be prepared, that's the advice I give them (laughing).

Samuels: That's true. That works. You graduated from City College—

Starr: In 1932. 1933, I was at loose ends for a year.

Samuels: '33?

Starr: September '33 I started law school.

Samuels: When did you graduate from law school?

Starr: 1936.

Samuels: Did you think, was your plan always to become a lawyer? Or did you think that you'd teach law?

Starr: That was a dilemma. You are in a dilemma now. [Isidore is referencing the fact that Samuels is an aspiring journalist burdened by student-loans and a weak economy.] I was in a dilemma. I loved history and I loved the law, as a matter of fact I was pretty good at law school. The second year of law school I was given a scholarship so I didn't have to pay at all. And the third year I lost the scholarship by I think half a point. Only one person could get it, so my best friend got it so I was very happy.

Samuels: Oh, good.

Starr: I was in a Law Review, and two articles that I wrote for the Law Review, the first article was about Social Security law and the other was the National Labor Relations law. Two extraordinary pieces of legislature, landmark legislature. This is my recollection, though I'm not sure how he said it: at graduation we got our law review, and I don't know whether the Dean said to the audience, "I'm happy to present this key to Isidore Starr, whom the Supreme Court has sustained," or whether he said, "I present this key to Isidore Starr who I hope the Supreme Court will sustain." I can't remember what he said.

Samuels: Either way, you did a good job there.

Starr: It was an eye-opener to me. I understand all the opposition to the Obama Healthcare Act. Everyone except the people who need it, help, are opposed to it. I can't remember, the American Bar Association's opposed to it. The people who are opposed to it, and by the way I think most of the people who are opposed to it called it the "Dole," the government was handing out a dole to people, and it was never that because you contributed to it and the employee contributes to it. But the same thing accompanied Medicare. Social Security was socialism. We have it now and everyone accepts it, it's not socialism anymore.

Samuels: Everyone likes it now.

Starr: Medicare was socialism, now it's acceptable, not socialism. Now healthcare is socialism.

Samuels: But hopefully someday that'll be accepted.

Starr: It has to be. Every European country has healthcare. The mandate of our constitutional ruling is, you tax for the general benefit. Or, in a commercial sense, everybody should have healthcare and if you wanna opt out, they call it the mandate. To me, it's not a mandate, it's a penalty. If you opt out, you pay your penalty. All this talk and the Supreme Court's reaction to it….well, let's forget about it.

Samuels: It's frustrating to think about. I'm in my first, this is the first job where I have benefits, which is nice, but you know, it's expensive, but it is what it is.

Starr: Well hopefully we'll have healthcare for everyone.

Samuels: Yeah, as we should. It's a basic right.

Starr: I have a Norwegian friend, he's American, his parentage is Norwegian. And in Norway they have healthcare from cradle to grave, you're taken care of, it's no problem. As a matter of fact, when I was in England I had a cold and I asked to see a doctor, I think I was referred to like a 5th Avenue doctor. And he took care of me and I said, "How much do I pay?" He said, "It's free."

Samuels: That's such a—

Starr: It's taken for granted! Doctors take it for granted.

Samuels: When were you in England?

Starr: Oh, several times, beginning with the 1960s. We went to London and England a number of times, we did a lot of travelling. We didn't travel to the Far East, waiting to move to Arizona.

Samuels: Well, before we move away from your childhood and growing up, was there any, did you experience any prejudice as a recent immigrant family or were you in such a densely populated—

Starr: It was a ghetto part of life.

Samuels: But at school was there any?

Starr: I remember we had Irish teachers, and they were just great.

Samuels: Ok, so you had a great, no complications.

Starr: In junior high school I remember we had some prejudice from, they were a group of Italians and horses and we had to go through their neighborhood to get to the junior

high school and we had problems with their children also, but we would go as a group so they wouldn't start up with us. But that's about the only trouble I remember. High school, no problem, City College, basically all Jewish. At St. John's it was so Jewish it was called St. Jacob's.

Samuels: Really? How interesting.

Starr: I should tell you the Vincentian Brothers ran St. Jacobs

Samuels: Who?

Starr: The Vincentian Brothers, and they were very impartial. In other words, there was no prejudice at all. The Jews accepted the Catholics, the Catholics accepted the Jews.

Samuels: So it just turned out there was a large Jewish population at that school?

Starr: Yes. Back then everyone was going to law school because it was the cheapest way for a job in the future.

Samuels: When I think about it, my grandpa was a lawyer and it seems like, I have a few friends that are studying to become lawyers now, I don't know if I'll be one of them.

Starr: It's a great field, but law school is kind of a nasty experience.

Samuels: That's what I hear.

Starr: I'll give you an example of how nasty it can be: I was called on the first day of law school, we had more than 200 students in the class and the professor had a chart that was almost as large as this table with our names on it. And my name was the easiest to identify, Starr, so he says, "Starr, give us the first case." And the first case was a very easy case to give, in law school you give, it's called the Case Study Methods, you give the facts, the plaintiffs argument, the defendants argument, the issue and the decision, that's what I did. So I get up in front of these 200 people and I'm just glad the first case in the book was a one page case, great. So, I gave the facts, went through everything very quickly and he didn't say anything so I sat down. And he says, "Get up." And I don't know whether he used that term, get up, stand up, he said, "You forgot to tell us whether you agreed with the decision." My first day at law school, whatever the judge says is right. So I said, "I agree." He says, "Stand up. You forgot to tell us why you agreed."

Samuels: Did you ever get to sit down?

Starr: I began to discuss, I had taken a course of philosophy of law at City College so I remembered some things and he said, "Where did you pick that up?" He was very nasty. He finally said, "Sit down." Then he did the same thing with the next person, same thing.

Samuels: So he wasn't your favorite professor?

Starr: Well he turned out to be my favorite professor. Because he came up to me afterwards, I think we had an intermission or maybe at the end of the session he came up, he called a number of us to the same area and said, "I hope you didn't mind what I did to you," and of course we said, "Oh no."

Samuels: "Oh no, we don't care about that."

Starr: You can do it anytime, make us look silly. He said, "I'll do it to all of you because I want to toughen you up." And then when I was on Law Review I got to know him pretty well. I asked him why did he use this method of intimidation? And this is what he told me, he said, he was a graduate of Harvard Law School, and when he graduated he was appointed to the Justice Department, I don't know what you call it, he got an appointment at the Justice Department with one of the lawyers. And the first case he tried was a Belgian Trust case, a Belgian company that was apparently engaging in anti-trust activities. And he said he got up to examine his first witness and this is what he told me, he said the judge said to me, after a little while, "Sit down, sonny, I'll do the questioning." He said, "I should have talked back and told him, 'Who are you to tell me to sit down?'"

Samuels: So he was toughening all of you up—

Starr: He said, "I want you to go into a courtroom with a lot of confidence because I'm battering at you and making you sore. Talk back."

Samuels: Did it work?

Starr: I had him for Criminal Law and then Anti-Trust Law. We had a great relationship.

Samuels: Good. When did you graduate from law school?

Starr: 1936.

Samuels: 1936. And then what?

Starr: Well, in 1935 I met the woman I finally married and that's a long story too but I'll try to keep it short.

Samuels: Well I want to hear as much as you want to tell me. What was her name?

Starr: One of my friends with whom I played tennis had three sisters, and two of them lived in New York City with him. And Kay, who was the woman I married, and Kay worked at Macy's. Now when I would go pick him up for tennis, he lived in the same neighborhood, he would come up to my house I would go over to his house, and we'd wait for each other and then go out to the tennis court. And his sister, Kay, worked for Macy's, was always in and out, I never really saw her, much of her, kind of a wisp, will of the wisp. But then he, his name was Bo Rueben and he married a young woman, Phyllis, and they established a home together and then they had a housewarming party and invited their friends. Do they still have housewarming parties?

Samuels: Yeah, they do.

Starr: We all came, and in those days a housewarming party eventually became a dance party because that was the era of the big bands so they would put on records and people at the party would dance. It was a great way of communicating with each other.

Samuels: Sure.

Starr: Well I was at the party when in walks this woman. I've told this story so often I actually believe it. She walks in and she has this incredible hat. It was a broad-brimmed hat, gray and I think it was shaped, it was kind of a shaped hat, and it had a blue ribbon at the base of it. And everyone actually said, "Who is that? What a wonderful hat." And I said to myself, "I'm gonna marry that hat." You don't believe it, do you?

Samuels: (laughing) No.

Starr: I was fascinated by that hat. Then she takes her hat off, and I say, "Oh, its Kay!"

Samuels: And then you saw the woman under the hat!

Starr: I was willing to marry the hat, whatever came under it. And of course she said her hellos to everyone and I was the last one on the receiving line, way back there, by the time she got to me they had started playing music. So, we knew each other casually, you know, so we talked, and then we danced all afternoon. And then I asked her out, next

week she said she was free, we danced then too. And then I told her I was going to law school to study and I was also teaching and it's very difficult to date anyone—

Samuels: You were busy.

Starr: It's a tough program. She said, "It's ok, call me whenever you can." And then two weeks or three weeks later she calls me, she says, "I have two tickets to The Little Foxes." That was a great play on Broadway, Little Foxes, I forget who wrote it, wonderful play. And she said, "I'd like you to come," and I went. And that evening her first niece was born, so she was on kind of tenterhooks, you know, watching the play, calling. And somehow or other we began to talk to each other, became more and more friendly, and then I borrowed my father's car—he had a car—and took her to the theater, and that's the way it went. But we courted for five years because I was in terrible trouble, when I graduated from law school in 1936 New York City had a rule which said if you graduated from law school your law school degree would be equivalent to a Master's degree and you'll get tenure. A law school degree is more demanding than a Master's. In 1936 they changed the law, they would not accept a law degree as a Master's degree. So I had to get my Master's.

Samuels: So you had to go back to school?

Starr: Back to school because I didn't want to get married not having a permanent job. I told that to her and she said, "Ok, you do what you have to do. I'll do what I have to do."

Samuels: So she waited for you.

Starr: Yeah. So I took my master's from '36 to '39 and we married in '40.

Samuels: Where did you get your Master's degree?

Starr: At Columbia University in history. That was an interesting course of study, but it was tough because you're teaching in the morning and the afternoon, and you're going to school in the evening. And I did this for six years. It was very demanding.

Samuels: I can't imagine.

Starr: I don't think I could do it again. You have to have some kind of commitment.

Samuels: Did you drink a lot of coffee?

Starr: I don't know what I did, all I remember was riding on the subways because I taught at Brooklyn Technical High School which was in Brooklyn, Columbia's 116th Street, City College is 137th Street, and I should have gotten a permanent pass on the subway.

Samuels: Yeah! You were on the subway for a lot of your day, back and forth.

Starr: Yeah.

Samuels: So, you started teaching high school when you were in—

Starr: 1933. I started law school in '33.

Samuels: And you started teaching after that?

Starr: '34.

Samuels: Was that to help pay for school?

Starr: Oh sure. And of course I also got a scholarship my second year which meant I didn't have to pay. Although the sum seems little in today's market, it was quite a sum, $200 a semester or a term. It's hard for people to imagine what that meant. Maybe it's the equivalent to $1,000.

Samuels: So did you enjoy teaching high school?

Starr: I taught at Brooklyn Technical High School and I discovered that I liked teaching much more than practicing the law.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: As a matter of fact, when I graduated from law school in '36 I sat down with my father and I said to him, "I'm torn." I should tell you I was interviewed by a law firm and they offered me a job.

Samuels: That was in '36 when you graduated?

Starr: Yes, '36. I told my father, "I don't know what to do. I like both, I would like to do both, but you can't do both." So he said to me, "What does teaching offer you?" I said, "I like it very much." And he said, "What will it offer you at the very end when you've been teaching for 25 or 30 years? At the end of 30 years will you get a pension?" Of course my father didn't know anything about pensions, he didn't get any, nobody got pensions. I said, "Yes, at the end of 25 or 30 years I'll get a pension of $2,500 a year. And

law school of course, I don't know what will happen, if I accept this job I don't know where I'm going." He said, "Stay in teaching." Because he had no pension, and for the rest of his life he and my mother had to live on whatever savings they had. So, I couldn't make up my mind, but actually the Army made up my mind.

Samuels: The Army?

Starr: The Army, because I was married in 1940. Well I should tell you in 1940, when I went to law school, three years of law school dealt only with traditional law. We were in the midst of the New Deal, but in law school there was no reference, just contracts, torts, pleading and practice.

Samuels: Textbook stuff.

Starr: But nothing with the New Deal except, you know, the Law Review articles. And I was intrigued by the New Deal, the SEC, all the other administrative agencies, and I decided I had to go back to law school so I could keep up with the New Deal. I'm still uncertain whether I want to go into the law so I want to practice whatever I knew about the law. So I went to law school and took, it's called the Doctor of Juridical Science.

Samuels: This was after you were married?

Starr: After we married, I was married 1940. And I talked to my wife about it and she said, "Yes, if you want to go back to law school, do it." So for two years—

Samuels: You couldn't stay away!

Starr: Well, I would have preferred to stay away because I was just married and who wants to spend that valuable time at law school. But she encouraged me, she said, "If you feel you ought to know the New Deal law," and I wanted to learn that and I did learn that. So I graduated in '42 and I'm about to really make up my mind when I'm drafted, and I spent three and a half years in the Army. So when I came back, New York City offered me my old job back, so that's how I decided to stay teaching.

Samuels: The job at?

Starr: Brooklyn Technical High School.

Samuels: So you were in the army for 3.5 years? And where were you stationed?

Starr: I was stationed, and it's the funniest thing, I finished my basic training in Fort Bragg. And then we got out of the train and all the shades are down, the enemy's watching, everybody knows it's a troop train because the shades are down but nobody said anything. After basic training we reach a place, we get out, it's 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, there's all yelling and screaming, "Line up! Line up!" I ask, "Where are we?" He said, "You're in New Orleans." Two of us were taken into a Jeep and the others were all taken into trucks so I didn't understand the significance of that at the time. Two of us were taken by Jeep to a barracks, so we ask, "Where are we?" "A New Orleans staging area." "What is the name of this camp?" "It's Camp Plauche." "What do you do here?" "We train negro battalions to engage in…" I forget what you call it, they load and unload ships. Mostly negro battalions but there were white troops too. And then we get into our barracks about 5 o'clock in the morning and the clerk says to us, "Just don't get undressed because the revelry will be at 6. You'll have to get out of bed." So we get out of bed, go to our breakfast and come back. I was told to report to the company clerk, the company clerk says to me, "Get out of your fatigues and get into your ODs," your olive drabs, your dress uniform. I didn't understand that either, so I get into my ODs and he says, "You are required to report to the Army Administration School." So I ask, "Where is it?" And he indicates quite a walk and he says, "You can walk there." So I walk there, and I get to the school, it's a barracks, and there are two officers standing outside and they are both smoking. What you're supposed to do is you're supposed to go up to the officers, salute and say, "Private Starr reporting for duty." So I said, "Private Starr," and the captain says to me, "Where the hell have you been?"

Samuels: Were you in the wrong place? What is going on?

Starr: I remember I was panic-stricken. I've been in basic training, where had I been? I understood later what he meant, he clarified it, he didn't exactly mean that. So I said, "I've been in basic training." And then, if you know the Army, he unloads expletives, a load of expletives. He says, "I've asked for a teacher, an educator, to join us because nobody here knows anything about teaching." And he says, "I did that months ago, now they send you here." He says, "I'm glad to have you." So I said to him, "I'm so happy to

be here, I'm so happy to be a student in the Army Administrations." So he says to me, "Hell no, you're gonna be the instructor." So I said, "What do I know?"

Samuels: Yeah, what did you teach?

Starr: I'll tell you in a moment. He says, "You'll learn like we all did." And I taught military law, I could learn that from the manual, and army administration law. There were four private instructors, including myself, and that was a wonderful assignment, I had so much fun teaching. We were teaching 30 or 40 white students in the morning, army administration and military law. By the way, army administration is a complicated subject, I won't go into it, it's complicated. They were there for a month. I don't remember how long, I'm sorry. But each class was for at least a week, let's put it this way, or maybe two weeks. And what happened is that we had 30 or 40 white students in the morning session and 10 or 8 black students in the afternoon session because troops were segregated at the time. So I liked the teaching very much. And after teaching for a while I said to them, "Aren't we wasting our time teaching 30 or 40 in the morning and 8 or 10 in the afternoon? Why don't we join the two groups together?" And they said, "There'll be fights." My captain was a southerner, "There'll be fights and I'm just afraid of what would happen." So I said, "Why don't we try it and see what happens?" Well, we tried it and it worked out well.

Samuels: So everyone was in one big class.

Starr: And in the afternoon we had time to do research because problems were constantly being presented to us by army clerks, what to do in this, what to do in that. The one thing I remember most clearly is we had the largest venereal disease rate in the whole army. We had black troops and we had New Orleans, which is a fatal combination. So the venereal disease rate was very high. Now the army rules 107, Articles of War 107, if you had venereal disease you were supposed to have reported it and be treated without pay, while you were being treated you couldn't get any pay. So nobody was reporting it. So the general asked the Administration school to see if they could find an Article of War where they could be treated and paid and I was assigned the job because I was the only one that had a law degree there and felt that I would be

able to do it. And believe it or not I found an Article of War where it is possible to interpret it in such a way as to pay people while they're being treated.

Samuels: Well that's good.

Starr: Yes. So the general called convocation of all the troops, all the officers in charge of companies and the adjutant told my captain for me to prepare a talk for them. So I prepared a talk which was very easy because I knew what I was doing and the convocation occurs, all the officers are assembled in the barracks, or the dining room whatever it was, and the general was standing about 10 feet away from me with his adjutant and the adjutant says, "Sergeant Starr will present the way in which our officers can treat the people that have venereal disease, treat them in such a way as to guarantee their pay while they are being treated." And the general says in a loud voice which I can hear, "I'll be damned if I let an enlisted man tell my officers what to do." That's the Army. And he says to the adjutant, "You do it." So the adjutant comes up to me and he says, "Dictate your talk to me and I'll do it. But you remain right here in case I have any questions." And he goes into his talk, I don't know if there were any questions or not, and that's the way we solved our important problem and were able to pay the black troops while they were being treated.

Samuels: Well that's good even though you didn't get credit for it.

Starr: Who cares about credit?

Samuels: True. People were healthy and paid.

Starr: The Army took very good care of me. I was private first class within a week, I think I was a corporal within a month, I think I was a sergeant within a month, so quickly I couldn't change my stripes fast enough. So it was a great career.

Samuels: Did you teach the whole time you were there?

Starr: Oh no, the army announced they were opening an Information and Education school at Washington and Lee University in Virginia and the people in charge of Camp Plauche asked me to attend because they said, "You're a teacher and you're the best qualified for this job." I was sent to the Washington and Lee University and I enjoyed it very much, learned a great deal about it. Then they said to me, "You gotta go to law

school." I should tell you this about law school before I continue: at Camp Plauche, one of the coronels there took me under his wing and said, "You shouldn't be an enlisted man, you should be an officer." So I said to him, "I'm perfectly happy being an enlisted man." My wife, by the way, had joined me. She had left her job at Macy's and I urged her not to, I was earning $50 a week, a month, as an enlisted man. And she said, "No, I'm coming down." And she was with me most of my stay at Camp Plauche until I went overseas. So that was wonderful, I had my wife, New Orleans is a wonderful city, I'm digressing now I know, it's a wonderful city with dancing every Saturday, wonderful food.

Samuels: Did she find a job there? What was she doing?

Starr: Yes, I said to her, "Look, we're not going to be able to live on my salary," and she said, "I'll get a job." And she got a job at the Touro Infirmary, which is one of the largest hospitals in New Orleans. And she got a job, I think, assigning nurses, they were just mad about her because she brought northern efficiency to southern, I shouldn't say this but, to southern lassitude. They do things rather slowly, she did things rather quickly.

Samuels: She was ready to get the job done.

Starr: They adored her, absolutely adored her and, uh…

Samuels: You were telling me about—

Starr: About Washington and Lee University and Officer Candidate School, gotta get back, sorry. But I wanted to take that, it was a one week course—

Samuels: And it was Officer Candidate—

Starr: I wanted to tell you about the officers. This colonel insisted I become an officer, just insisted. He said, "I'm ordering you to!"

Samuels: You have to!

Starr: "I'm ordering you!" I liked him very much, he was one of the best officers, he was a colonel. So he said, "I'm going to prepare your application for Officer Candidate School." And he helped me prepare it, I prepared the application and we send it in. By the way, I should tell you I wanted to be, as an officer, an officer of the law, Judge Advocate General, JAG, Judge Advocate General. So he said, "Of course you should be a

JAG," because I was handling all sorts of legal problems at the Army Administration School, and Judge Advocate was not handling any of them, they were having trials but they were not interested in our problems. Well, the application comes back, "Sgt. Starr is accepted to the Army Administration School, somewhere." And I said, I should tell you, the Army Administration school I was in was for Camp Plauche, this is for the entire army, a 17-week course on Army Administration.

Samuels: Which is not what you wanted.

Starr: I didn't want that. He said, "Let's try again." The second time I was accepted to the Medical Administration School, administering hospitals, being in charge of hospitals. I said, "No way."

Samuels: Wrong again.

Starr: So we try again. The third time I made it to Quarter Master School, so he says, "There's something wrong, I'm going to call the Corps Commanders." And he calls and they say, "We cannot admit him to Judge Advocate General School because he does not have an Ivy League law degree." Well, when we he saw that, you should have heard what he thought about the Army!

Samuels: You had so much law experience. And you'd been teaching at the Army!

Starr: Well, I was glad. I was just happy! When I went to the Information Education School at Washington and Lee University, when I finished that they said to me, "You've gotta go to law school because you've gotta go through OCS." I said, "I've got plenty of experience, I don't want to go to OCS."

Samuels: And OCS is?

Starr: They said, "You're going to be an Information Education Officer, no matter what assignments you get, go to any OCS in the army. But when you graduate you are going to be an Information Education Officer." So, you'll go to Quartermaster, learn all about Quartermaster, but then you forget about it." "I wanna be an Education Information Officer." They said, "We don't have such a school yet."

Samuels: OCS is Officer—

Starr: Candidate school, 17 weeks of hell. Well, so I decided to go. I liked the group that was supporting me, so I picked the OCS where I was on Camp Plauche. It was called Transportation Corps OCS because Camp Plauche dealt with transportation corps. So I went through 17 weeks of hell at Transportation Corps, I'll tell you more about that, but I graduated. This is the way, we're all sitting at graduation, and by the way, I think 200 of us started and there were 99 left. We were at the Virginia Embarkation Center, Transportation Corps, they mention all the transportation corps, and then they get to me which is at the very end. Starr, they say, "Starr, Washington & Lee University." That's when I had all my revenge on the transportation corps. They all turned around, what the hell? And I was Information Education Officer in the army during my stay in the Philippines, it was very good, I had great assignments.

Samuels: So you got to stay in New Orleans for the 17 weeks, so you were with Kay then?

Starr: I was not with Kay then because she was in New Orleans and you had very little time with each other.

Samuels: Oh, you were at Camp Plauche.

Starr: But we were together when I left.

Samuels: When did you go overseas?

Starr: I went overseas, I was scheduled to go overseas in July but the problem was I was an Education Officer and I was not attached to any unit. So units went overseas, they had to place me so what they were doing is they were waiting to get 10 Information Education Officers together and send them overseas as a unit. So I finally went overseas, I think late September.

Samuels: Of what year?

Starr: 1945. The war had technically ended, but when we went overseas under wartime conditions because the Japanese subs had refused to surrender, they refused to believe that the Emperor had surrendered. So they were afraid that the subs would create havoc.

Samuels: And you were in the Philippines, is that correct?

Starr: Yes, we didn't know where we were going. You're not told where you're going when you go overseas. So, I was Information Education and they wouldn't tell me. The captain knew but he wouldn't tell me. We didn't know whether we were going to Japan or we were going to the Philippines. So, the second day on the ship I was appointed I.E. officer for the whole ship. So I was told to do whatever I wanted to, so I decided we would hold language lessons for the men. Now the morning on deck we would teach them Japanese, all oral instruction, memorization of about 200 phrases if possible. In the afternoon it would be Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines, and there must have been 1,000 men sat around the decks. By the way, I should tell you, I found one, an officer who could teach it, not an officer, an enlisted man, who could teach Japanese and one that could teach Tagalog. So that was our favorite activity, learning our languages, and the men said regularly, "How do you say, 'I like your sister?'" Is it time for ice cream?

Samuels: I think it is time for ice cream.

[Break in interview]

Samuels: Well, we just had our ice cream, and you put on darker sunglasses.

Starr: Yes, I forgot to put them on.

Samuels: Trying to remember where we stopped, I think we stopped—

Starr: Can you turn it back?

Samuels: I think we stopped at the end of the war. What happened after the war, when you came home?

Starr: Okay. Like all veterans I had to get used to civilian life, I spent 3.5 years in the Army and suddenly you find that you're in control of your own fate, it's quite a challenge. When I got home, trying to think of—August of '46, it was a long trip home, at least 14 days by sea and at least 5 or 6 days by train to get to New York. When I got home, oh, I should tell you that when I was overseas, my son [Larry] was born.

Samuels: Okay.

Starr: When I knew I was going overseas, we talked about it, and my wife certainly said to me—by the way, after we were married, we had such a great time we weren't sure

whether we wanted any children to interfere with our great times. We went to the theater, the ballet, the opera, sports, we love everything and we had a common interest in anything, we had no differences as to our likes and dislikes. So, when I got home, I forget the date in August, I remember getting home and taking two steps at a time to get to my apartment, you know. Somebody, by the way, met me at the subway and decided to carry my duffel bag for me, which was very nice.

Samuels: Who was that?

Starr: Well, when I got on the train after I left the Army, I got a week's leave and then I had to go back to be mustered out of the Army. When you come overseas they generally give you a leave of absence so you can go home and then you have to come back and mustered out officially, which means you're put on inactive duty, and officers put on inactive duty. When I got on the subway, everybody wanted to help me with my duffel bag, I'd come accustomed to carrying it on my shoulder, you know, big duffel bag. Anyway, I get off the subway and this man, a neighbor, meets me in his car waiting for me so he can take care of my duffel bag. Well anyway I get home and think "To hell with the duffel bag." I run upstairs, open the door, and say, "Kay, I'm home!" And she's holding our son in her arms and she has a look that I don't recognize, it's a look of despair, I think. Remember, I was overseas during her pregnancy and during the first four months of his childhood, infancy. And he was colicky as a child, so he slept all day and was up all night, and she was almost destroyed by this. Of course, she was alone. So I take a look at her, it's not my Kay, and she says, "Here is your son." So I say, "Put him down, I want you! I don't want this thing, I want you. I've been gone!" Well, anyway, we got together, my parents lived across the street, so after we greeted each other and hugged each other, and then I held him in my arms, this four-month old thing. It's a thing. He looks at you and says, "Who are you?"

Samuels: "I have never seen you before."

Starr: "What are you doing here?" then we took him across the street to my parents and we all greeted each other. And then I went back to be mustered out and they told me according to my records I had developed allergies in the Army, which I had, and that if I

were to spend three days in the hospital being inspected or examined I would get a lifetime pension because of the allergies. I said, "I have a wife and a child at home and I've gotta get home as soon as possible. You can take your pension and keep it."

Samuels: What were you allergic to?

Starr: Grasses, trees. I had been stationed for more than two years in New Orleans and all the maneuvers we did, we did in the bayou country, very bad country for allergies. Mosses and trees, and in the Philippines it was the same thing, allergies. So, I had allergies, I just had them, that's it apparently. Well, I get home and try to get used to civilian life. I got home in August and the Board of Education of New York City said, "Your job is open for you, beginning of September." I got in touch with them and they said, "You can start work in September." So I went back to Brooklyn Tech again.

Samuels: Wow, so you didn't really have very much time to readjust.

Starr: No, I didn't have any time to adjust. But I was glad, you know, to get back with all my friends.

Samuels: So, Kay had moved back to New York when you—

Starr: Kay had moved to Brooklyn.

Samuels: Was that when you went overseas?

Starr: Kay had been in Washington and Lee with me until I went overseas and then she went back to her sister's home. Her sister took her in and that's when she bore, she went through her pregnancy there. Although her sister and her husband were very nice people, very cooperative, it's difficult to go through pregnancy alone, without your husband, it's an entirely different matter. Your husband is your support, they will support you as best they can, they have other interests. So, she went through that, and then his infancy which was a disaster for her. I pleaded with her when I got back, I said, "I'll take care of him!" and she "No, you've just gotten out of the Army, you're very tired," and I said, "You are more tired!"

Samuels: "You're tired!"

Starr: So, it went back and forth, who's more tired. She insisted on taking care of him because I wouldn't know what to do. So, that's the way it went for quite a while. We

were living on my teacher's salary, she never went back to work after that because she had developed postpartum depression. And I knew there was something wrong with her, and she knew there was something wrong with her. And I don't know whether you know what that is, that's a deep depression that comes after pregnancy, not to all women, but to many, many women. And to some it lasted a few months, in our case it lasted well over two years. That's a long time. I was as sympathetic as I could be, you know, but then I began to work. I got back in 1946 and there was pressure on me to take the chairman's exam. The education department is divided into teachers, and chairmen, and then the principle, and you have chairmen of the department. And my colleagues were pressuring me to take the chairman's exam because when I got back I think it was the last year that you were given extra credit for being a veteran on the examination. But I wasn't ready for it, you know. It's hard for people to understand that after three and a half years in the Army, suddenly you're back in civilian life, you're kind of confused with what's going on. So I took the examination, it has four parts, I passed three parts, and I failed the fourth part which was the teaching exam. I failed the teaching exam. And I failed the teaching exam because BTT only had American History and each time I was given the teaching exam I was given a World History class to teach. Now if you've never taught World History, it's very, very difficult to all of a sudden develop a teaching plan. So I messed up, there was no question. I passed three parts but I failed the teaching exam. I'm telling you this because there's a sequel to it. So I failed the examination and went on teaching.

Samuels: Okay.

Starr: And in 1957, the GI Bill was about to run out. You know about the GI Bill?

Samuels: Talk about that.

Starr: You go to college free of charge, the government will pay for it. So I decided to take my PhD. So same old story, teaching, going to school. And of course, I had the added burden of my wife who was not feeling well, I talked to her about it, but it was the last year. She agreed that if it was the last year they're gonna pay for your education, take it while you can, you can quit if you feel like it. By that time she was kind

of getting over it, it lasted two or three years. And anyway, I took my doctorate in political science. Something interesting happened. In the early 1950s, I failed the teaching test. They judged you at that time by what they called the Developmental Lesson; you had to teach a lesson according to a format. The format consisted of a motivation that actively tested your students, two interview questions, summary, it's a format. And then, including that format, is you had to adjust your teaching to individual differences in your class. So it occurred to me if you use a format and they also want you to conform to individual differences, how do you do that? So I decided to write an article, I was muffed by being failed, and I wrote an article entitled "The Basic Pedagogic Myth." The myth that there's one method of teaching that applies to all the individual differences. And it was published by New York City in its High Points bulletin. I was answered by a number of people, all condemned my article, principles, chairmen, all thought it was a terrible article to write, to criticize the golden idea of the Developmental Lesson. I received one letter, just one letter, and it had four lines in it, and I've never forgotten it. It said, "Isidore, God bless you," the Associate Superintendent of Schools. Little while later, Queens College got in touch with the Associated Superintendent and asked them to recommend a teacher to go to Queens College for a year to help them with their teacher education program. And, of course, he called my principal, and my principal called me. And I think that was the reason, I think the article did that. And I went there for one year '61 to '62 in their Education department, and then remained there until I retired. When I left my principal I told him I'd be back in a year, you know it was just a year, and he said, "You're not coming back." And I said to him, "What do you mean by that?" and he said, "Once they see you, they're going to keep you."

Samuels: He was probably sad to lose you.

Starr: And that's the way it happened. I spend the rest of my career teaching at Queens College, which was magnificent because it was one mile from my home so I walked to work every day. And I eventually taught graduate courses like "Law and the Social Studies," or "School Law" which I loved, those courses. And so, my failing turned out to

be an asset, it actually did. As a matter of fact, at one of the conventions, one of the chairmen of the New York City department said, "I can't understand why Queens College took you when you criticized the Developmental lesson." And I said, "That's why they took me."

Samuels: Because they knew you had some new, different ideas.

Starr: They were also opposed to it, any thinking person would be opposed to it. So I did get my doctorate, and I taught until 1975, I taught at Queens College from 1961 to 1975 and retired 1975.

Samuels: Now, when you were teaching at Brooklyn Technical High School, teaching high school level, and that was—

Starr: Social Studies

Samuels: Social Studies. And that was an all boys school, is that what you said?

Starr: 6,000 boys. I was also the head of the Service Squad, as I told you. 6,000 boys controlled by 600.

Samuels: That's a lot of testosterone.

Starr: As a matter of fact, when I got back the principal said, "I want you to run the Service Squad." And I said, "What do I know about the Service Squad?" He said, "You were an officer, weren't you? You commanded men, didn't you? You can command 600 boys."

Samuels: "Command these teenagers!" When you were teaching high school there, is that when you started experimenting with different teaching styles?

Starr: Oh yes, yeah.

Samuels: And did that just make sense to you?

Starr: Yeah, my first teaching assignment was in 1934, as I told you. And I was given 12 classes of Civics to teach, we met twice a week. And next semester, 13 classes. The Civics curriculum was dead on arrival in my classroom. It was so boring, it was called "Our City" and it was based on rote memorization. What you had to do was ask the students to memorize the divisions in the police department, the divisions in the fire department, the divisions in the health department, and then regurgitate it the next

day. And it was deadly! I had been trained in the philosophy of John Dewey, which meant including students in the learning process. In other words, learning consisted of teacher and student learning together, not the teacher questioning the student, but they're working together. So, I was in my second year at law school in 1934, I started in '33 and '34 was my first job. So it just so happened, it's a matter of strange coincidence, that the day before I was supposed to teach the police department with all the divisions, detective bureau, homicide bureau, this, that, we were studying the 3rd degree in law school. The Third degree was a method of torturing prisoners to illicit confession, beating them, subjecting them to all kinds of torture. And so, we discussed this at law school and I thought, "Instead of talking about different bureaus, why don't I bring it into the classroom and ask my students what they…" I said, "Look, we create a police department to apprehend criminals. Then we handcuff them by saying, 'You can't torture them.' Do you think that's right?" And the classroom atmosphere changed, we were beginning to discuss moral reasoning, what's right and what's wrong in dealing with situations. And that intrigued me, I discovered, why not bring more law into this whenever I can? So whenever relevant, I began to bring the law into it and began to write about it. So, eventually, they say I pioneered it, I like to believe I did but I'm not sure. I pioneered a field called Law Related Education: using the law in elementary and secondary schools to discuss moral issues of our time. And I started, I was one of the pioneers of this movement which to this very day is growing by leaps and bounds. Margaret Fisher in Washington is one of the leaders of this movement, there are judges, Supreme Court judges in our volume. It's nationwide.

Samuels: It was really, they didn't have the term "Law Related Education" before—

Starr: No, I referred to it as "Law Studies" at school, because in the 1960s we had all these law studies, women's rights, African history, women's history, Latin American history, Jewish history, all that kind of stuff. So, it's a movement that I started and I'll discuss with you, tell you about one of the byproducts. I was dealing, in 1951, that is a year very important to me. In 1951 we were engaged in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, a hot war with North Korea. It was the year in which Senator Joseph McCarthy

appeared on the American scene, searching high and low for communists. It was the year in which I was elected president of the Association of Teachers of Social Studies in New York City. It's also the year which I received a fellowship. I was elected to attend Columbia University and take the entire year off teaching and spend the entire year at Columbia University doing whatever I wanted to do, taking any courses I want to take, things like that. So it was an important year, both for wars and for my own personal experience. When McCarthy appeared on the national scene he created havoc. I'd like to describe it as a pall of orthodoxy descended on the education system and people were in fear of their jobs. You didn't have to be a communist, all you had to do was be accused of communism. So I was a case in that, at that time. I was called down to the principal's office in 1951. The principal and I knew each other, I had known him for some time, and he said to me, "A teacher in the English department who has a student in your class also has a student, same student, in her class, and he told her that you had taught your class that the Declaration of Independence was a collection of glittering generalities." And I said to the principal, "What's wrong with that?" He said, "Nothing." So I said, "What is this all about?" He said, "When a teacher complains about another teacher's teaching, I have to hold a hearing."

Samuels: So he just had to say something?

Starr: What?

Samuels: He just had to say something to you?

Starr: He had to hold a hearing to find out whether there was something communist all about this. In other words, she was accusing me of communist. I was teaching the Declaration of Independence in a false way, that I was derogating the Declaration of Independence, that's the way she viewed it. A collection of glittering generalities. You understand what I'm saying?

Samuels: Yes.

Starr: So he said to me, "What did you do?" So I said, "I came into the classroom and I wrote on the blackboard: 'The Declaration of Independence is one, a collection of glittering generalities', and in parentheses I gave them the source (Charles and Mary A.

Beard, *Rise of American Civilization*. I said, 'That's where this comes from.' That was the most popular history college text in the country at the time). Second, the Declaration of Independence is the birth certificate of the American nation, citation. The birth certificate is a universal declaration of human rights, in parentheses. And the Declaration of Independence is a war song." Now that's very interesting. Could the Declaration of Independence be sung? It was sung by the *5th Dimension*, I don't know whether that means anything to you, that was a great vocal great that sings the Declaration of Independence as a war song. If you can get it, get it and listen to it.

Samuels: Yeah, I'll look that up.

Starr: (singing) "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created"…it's done like a war song, you know. And five, I said, "Do you have a better characterization? Tell it to me and I'll put it on the board." We had a great discussion! It leads to a great discussion, so which do you think, they all describe the Declaration, but which is the best? And I said, "We had a great discussion." And he said, "Okay. The hearing is over." He dismissed his secretary and said to me, "I'm no longer a principal, I'm no longer a principal, I'm a hearing officer." He said, "Everyone who wants to complain, complains against the teachers and I have no way out except to listen to their complaints. They refute against each other, they call each other communists." It was a terrible period, people were dismissed from jobs.

Samuels: Did anything happen after the hearing? Or was it just?

Starr: Oh no, he just laughed it off. But he held a hearing. So, I decided that something had to be done about the situation, this was going on throughout the country. You had the House on the American Activities Committee which was investigating everyone in subversive activities. The country was in kind of a turmoil. Well, I decided to do something about it, so I wrote an article for *Social Education*, the magazine is an official magazine of the National Council for the Social Studies. The article was entitled, "Teaching Controversial Issues Through Supreme Court Decisions," pointing out that if a Supreme Court can handle controversial issues in an intelligent and civil way, why shouldn't we be able to do this in the classes? I sent it in. The editor, Paul Todd, his

name was Paul Todd, writes back, “Great article, so good I’ve divided it into two parts, I’m gonna run it in two issues. But,” he said, “there’s one problem. The title is too controversial.” That’s what he actually said.

Samuels: So your article was okay but the title needed to be changed.

Starr: Yeah, the article, there’s the controversy. “But,” he said, “it’s like a red herring to McCarthy and his gang.” So we changed the title to “Recent Supreme Court Decisions.” And it ran for 13 years, for 13 years I wrote it for Social Education and was elected president of the National Council.

Samuels: Oh, you were president?

Starr: Yeah, became president of the National Council. I think maybe I’ll rest my voice for a little bit.

End of First Interview

Second Interview

Anna Samuels: This is Anna Samuels. I’m back with Isidore Starr at his home again today. It’s the 12th of August, 2012 and it’s a beautiful, sunny day!

Isidore Starr: It is.

Samuels: Thank you for having me back again.

Starr: Oh, you’re always welcome, Anna.

Samuels: Thank you. So, I want to talk just a little bit about a day in your classroom. Tell me about a typical day in your classroom at Brooklyn Technical High School. Did you have to get all the students quieted down. Were there loud boys there?

Starr: It was an all boys school, 6,000 boys on single session. And they were very much interested in science and math because they were science students and had very little interest in history and English. And the problem was to get these science students interested in history, to explain to them that this is a part of the life they are leading and its part of the life of the nation in which they are living too. It was very difficult to convey, they didn’t seem to have much use for it. And so it was a challenge, and I liked

my students and I think they in turn they liked me. I had one student who was the outstanding student at Brooklyn Tech, and he was in my class, the outstanding math and science student. And he couldn't understand why he should study history, just as a nurse doesn't understand why she should study algebra. So, I did the best I could to explain to them that they live in a world in which they have very little control at times, things happen in Europe and we become involved in it. And I explained in my own case, when the European war occurred, I said to my wife, "I may turn out to be in Europe or the Far East before long." And that happened, I explained to them that I was living a happy life, I found myself enmeshed in European affairs. Well, I think most of them understood it, but this outstanding student had great difficulty. So I know you asked me to explain a day in my life, I'll explain a day with a student, what happened with a student.

Samuels: Yeah, go for it!

Starr: He eventually went to MIT, got a scholarship and I think he graduated in three years instead of four. He was obviously very gifted. And years afterwards, he came back to see me. And I was very pleased, we had a nice talk, and the school day was closing so he said to me, "Why don't I drive you home?" I had no car. So I said, "Fine." Well, he had a Cadillac, and he drove me home in a Cadillac. And since, I regard this as one of my few triumphs in teaching. I believe I influenced him in a way which brought him back.

But the ordinary day was five classes a day, five times a week. And it depended on you, for example, my day of teaching existed of five classes, American History and Economics, and I had to prepare for each of these classes. It seemed to me a very pleasant task, I enjoyed teaching very much. And I sincerely think the students sensed it, because I was interested in the subject and in my students, and they understood that, I believe. So I taught there for 27 years, when I got back from the Army. I went back to Brooklyn Tech in '46, and the principal called me into his office after a year or two and said, "I want you to assume the position of head of the Service Squad." Did I tell you this story before?

Samuels: You mentioned it.

Starr: Yeah. Brooklyn Tech had 6,000 students on single session and 200 teachers could not control them, impossible to control 6,000. So the principle calls me into his office and he says, "I'd like you to take charge of the Service Squad." And I said, "I've just gotten back from the Army, I don't know much about the Service Squad." And he said, "You were an officer weren't you?" Did I tell you that?

Samuels: (laughing) Yeah.

Starr: I said, "Yes." He said, "You commanded men?" I said, "Yes." He said, "You can command boys." And that was one of the most pleasant experiences I had. There were 600 boys on the Service Squad and we had to take charge of opening the school in the morning, closing the school in the afternoon, and managing to get 2,000 students into the lunch room every 45 minutes for three different sessions. And that was a logistical problem, getting 2,000 students in and out every 45 minutes. But the boys managed to do very, very well.

Samuels: So this was you and a group of students?

Starr: Yes. And there was a rapport among the boys of the Service Squad. There were 600 members of the Service Squad, and I believe 60 lieutenants, each with a squad of 10, it was in Army fashion. And they did their job extraordinarily well. I may have told you, when I left they gave me this testimonial?

Samuels: No.

Starr: When I left to go to Queens College they gave me a beautifully framed testimonial, which was worded in such a way that I knew they couldn't have written, couldn't. So after all the ceremonies about the presentation, I said to the captain, "Where did you get this?" And he said, "We got it in *The New York Times*. We got it in *The Times* and we put your name in wherever it was appropriate." Which indicates, you know, the good relationship I had with them. But, it was a challenge teaching, and the boys were not hostile, they didn't like social studies and they didn't like English. They couldn't see the connection between that and the mathematical formulas they were engaged in doing.

Samuels: How long did it take for them to come around?

Starr: I don't know that they ever came around.

Samuels: No? They just loved you as a teacher?

Starr: Well, we liked each other. And it was compulsory, so.

Samuels: They had to like you!

Starr: They had no choice.

Samuels: You were teaching in such a way, you referred to it as "law studies" before "law related education." Is that a term you came up with, or did somebody else come up with—

Starr: Well, I'm credited by many people with starting the movement, and I called it "law studies," introducing the law into the elementary and secondary schools. But the American Bar Association took it over, I was glad they did, they decided to call it Law Related Education, a meaningless term to me. But it's law studies, and I preached and practiced it for many years, urging teachers, beginning in the kindergarten with rules, why we have rules, you wanna change a rule, can you change it yourself? Or do you have to change it according to a system? And that's a rule of law, you know. And, progressively we increased the sophistication of the teaching, and in the high school we began to teach Constitutional Law, but there's a steady progression of the law in our lives. My mantra was "From the moment you get up in the morning until the moment you go to sleep at night, the law is with you." And they said, "How is that?" Well, when you sleep on a bed, did you ever notice the tag on it? What do you think it says? And why does it say that? Why do you get dressed?

Samuels: Why do you do anything?

Starr: And we did problems like that and the students liked it very much.

Samuels: So, one of your big projects it seems that you were very, very widely recognized for was your Bill of Rights program, teaching Bill of Rights. What was it about the Bill of Rights is something that is very basic and that everybody should know?

Starr: Well, I'm gonna put it very bluntly. The Bill of Rights is our Bible, it's a secular Bible. Just as you try to understand the Bible, the Bill of Rights is what binds us together as a community, it covers every religion. In other words, the Bill of Rights is secular, it

demands that we as a community remain a secular community, that we respect each other, that we live under what is basically called the rule of law. If you want to change the law, you must use the law to change it, you can't change it yourself. President Nixon once said, "I am the law," and he was almost impeached for it, because he regarded the law as his domain, and nobody's above the law, no one. So that in itself influenced me, and one of my motivations was to explain and involve students in understanding what this means. John Adams said, "Ours is a government of laws and not of men." That summarizes the Bill of Rights. But what also intrigued me with the Bill of Rights is that when you study it carefully, it clarifies a number of great ideas. The idea of liberty, the first amendment is the definition of liberty. The idea of justice, amendment 4, 5, 6, and 8 clarify the meaning of justice, equality. There's what we call a supplemental or second Bill of Rights, which is amendments 13, 14, 15, 19, 26, the freeing of the slaves, giving them rights, giving women rights. There's the idea of property, amendments 2, 3, 4, and 5 are property amendments. 2, the right to bear arms. 3, no quartering of soldiers in your home, they're all property amendments. And lastly is power, I developed an idea in the form of a solar system: in the center is the power of government and revolving around it are four planets: liberty, justice, equality, and property. And there's a love/hate relationship between them, liberty needs government to protect it, but government can be too protective. Justice needs government, it may be too protective. So, what makes our system so wonderful, the constitutional law, is that there's a constant tension in our system which we ought to treasure instead of criticize.

When I started at Brooklyn Technical High School, my first year was 1934. You asked me for a day at Brooklyn Tech, which I constantly…I was appointed to Brooklyn Tech in 1934 and I was in my second year at law school, because at that time the Depression of 1932 almost disabled us. We didn't know what to do, there were no jobs available so people went to law school in order to prepare for something, just as those who could afford it went to medical school. So in my first year at Brooklyn Tech, I don't know when it was, maybe the first or second, though, the curriculum consisted of- (interruption, ice water refill).

Samuels: The service is amazing here.

Starr: They're very, very nice. I can't find criticism with anyone, although people here find criticism with everyone.

Samuels: But not you, and that's, you know, very important.

Starr: Anna, you get very crotchety.

Samuels: You're not crotchety!

Starr: Well, I'm still young.

Samuels: Yeah! Well, let me interrupt you for a second. You said you were appointed to teach.

Starr: Yeah, I passed the teaching exam.

Samuels: Oh, okay.

Starr: It had several parts, a written part, an oral part, an interview part. And 24 of us passed it, I remember that clearly. 700 probably took it, because you took everything in sight, just to get a job, you know. So I was appointed at Brooklyn Technical High School and it was my second year there, my first year there, my second year at law school, and the curriculum appalled me. We had to teach the structure and functions of government and use the method of teaching called rote memorization. I made an assignment, the students memorized it, the next day they regurgitate it. And it was deadly, all of us who taught it felt it was just deadly. We'd do all kinds of little devices to make it interesting, we had them keep notebooks and things like that. I was just appalled because I was trained to teach in the John Dewey method. John Dewey, have you heard of him? John Dewey felt that education should not be teacher dominated, it should be teacher and student participating in it, and I couldn't do that. In other words, I asked them, "How many divisions does the health department have? How many divisions?"

Samuels: It's hard to have a back and forth with that.

Starr: And then had them regurgitate what they've learned about. And it really wasn't interesting to them or to me. But then something happened. In my second year at law school we were studying criminal law the night before I taught the police department, the next day I taught the police department. And what we did at law school was discuss

something called the Third Degree, police were using the Third Degree to elicit confessions, torture, to elicit confessions from the alleged culprits. And really there was something modern about our discussion because we were discussing torture. Today we do that, too! And I asked them, I began the session by saying, "We create a police department to apprehend criminals and then they use methods that are useful to them, they torture prisoners. And in New York City, the police department uses the Third Degree." And I gave them some cases, where prisoners stood up in court and showed the lashes on their backs from being tortured. I said, "Do you think that's right?" And then the classroom atmosphere changed. We were discussing moral reasoning. And everybody had an opinion! It was not based on any book. So it occurred to me that maybe the law itself ought to be used wherever possible, that's what I tried to do, incorporate it. And then when I taught American History, it's loaded with law, the laws of the Puritan, the Witchcraft trails, John Marshall's decision, the Dread Scott case, and the whole position of slavery in the United States were all based on laws, segregation laws. So, I introduced the law, but instead of just reading about the law and regurgitating it, I used something called—what we did at law school, the case study method. We had to find out what was because of the action, what were the facts in the case, and how do you differentiate relevant facts from irrelevant facts, very important. And having discussed the facts, what is the issue? And the plaintiff's argument and the defendant's argument and the decision. But when I came to plaintiff's argument and defendant's argument eventually it occurred to me, why not have the student get up in class and make the argument in front of the class? And they loved that. They became advocates, you know. So, I became fascinated by the law and the importance of it in teaching. And I wrote articles on it and books.

Samuels: Lots of books.

Starr: And there are people all over the country now teaching law related education.

Samuels: Oh, that's great!

Starr: Yeah. Trying to think of something…I discussed the year 1951?

Samuels: Yes.

Starr: Discussed the articles I wrote?

Samuels: Yes, and being called into the principal's office.

Starr: (Laughing) Yeah.

Samuels: I was going to ask you about that, you know, did the other teachers start warming up to the way that you were teaching? Because in the beginning they were probably a little—

Starr: No, as far as I know there was no transfer. Students, I was told this, I don't know, I never asked details, but my students told me that students in other classes said to their teacher, "Why don't you do what Starr is doing?" But I never experienced that. But the students talked to each other and what especially intrigued them was my use of the mock trail. I would have a mock trial, that is, an actual trial in class with the judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, and jury, and they liked that. Now I used that for John Marshall's decisions and the students liked that very much. So eventually the mock trial became very popular and now they have mock trial competitions in every state, practically every state.

Samuels: Wow, that would be fun to watch.

Starr: Yeah. And, the other thing in 1951 that I don't think I mentioned was that I was president of the Association of Teachers of Social Studies, did I mention that?

Samuels: Yes, but keep going.

Starr: Teachers in the city of New York. And, at that time, in November of that year, the National Council met, the National Council for the Social Studies, it's the umbrella for social studies teachers. Did I tell you about this? I said to my colleagues, "Why aren't we represented, I was president, why aren't we represented at this national conference for the social studies, National Council for Social Studies? It's unnatural." So they said to me, "If you wanna go, go." I said, "That's not the point! The point, if I go I want to represent you! I wanna be representing the Association of Teachers." So we bickered and bickered and they said, "Okay, we'll pay your way, your transportation, you'll assume all other expenses." And so I went and since we were all pressed for funds, took a night train to Detroit. And I got off the train and I got into a cab, he says to me,

"Where are you going?" I mention the name of the hotel, he says, "A lot of people going there, what's going on?" I said, "It's a meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies." He said, "Oh, the banjo players." I don't know where that came from (laughing). But, when I appeared I was a kind of a celebrity, New York City was being represented, it had never been represented before. I was treated like a celebrity and I learned a good deal. I said to my colleagues before I went, "We could learn something from them." And some of them said, "Forget it, we know everything, we can't learn anything from them." They had this insular view of teaching. I came back and told them a lot of stories, so they were so impressed with my report, they paid all my expenses. But I said, "The important thing for us to do is make sure that the Board of Education pays the way of every president to this organization." I said, "It means a lot to New York City to be represented there because you're going to be treated like a celebrity, you'll learn a lot but you can also give them a lot. And, next year they bought the Board of Education, we did a lot of politicking involved, but next year the Board of Education paid for the expenses of the president.

Samuels: Well good!

Starr: That's an achievement.

Samuels: It is. How long were you president?

Starr: One year.

Samuels: One year, '51.

Starr: '51 to '52. That was a very interesting experience.

Samuels: I bet you learned a lot from those people.

Starr: Oh yeah. If you go with an open mind, you can learn a lot. If you go with a closed mind, you are the best. So, that's another experience.

Samuels: So—

Starr: Go on, Anna.

Samuels: Your first, when you first went over to Queens College, that was for a teacher training program, is that correct?

Starr: Yes.

Samuels: And it turned into you staying.

Starr: Queens College in 1961 asked the Board of Education to name a teacher who would help with teacher training at Queens College. The Chairman at Queens College felt his faculty was in a rut and he felt if you could mention a dynamic teacher who could come and rev up the faculty, he would appreciate it, just for a year. And, I was appointed teacher from New York City.

Samuels: That's quite an honor.

Starr: Well, it's also an interesting story, which I may tell you know, if I haven't told you.

Samuels: Please tell me now.

Starr: When I got out of the Army I was encouraged by everyone to take the Chairman's examination. Did I tell you that?

Samuels: Yeah, you didn't pass the—

Starr: I didn't pass it.

Samuels: The teaching part, right?

Starr: Because you had to conform to a special formula. I just come out of the Army. And, by the way I was a teacher in the Army for three and a half years, so I knew something about teaching.

Samuels: You had the experience.

Starr: I had the experience. I couldn't use their formula. So when I failed, did I tell you I wrote an article?

Samuels: Mmmhmm.

Starr: It was called "The Basic Pedagogic Myth." And the myth is that there's one method that fits all. And I pointed out the fallacies in this myth. And, I must have told you, I was assailed by everyone, assistant chairmen, principals wrote articles in response to my article. But I received one good letter, did I tell you about that? "Isidore, God bless you." and that was the Associate Superintendent of Schools. And apparently it was Queens College that contacted him for a dynamic teacher. So, he called my principal, that's the way it happened.

Samuels: He knew exactly who he was going to recommend.

Starr: And years later, people from the New York City system said, "You failed the examination, how was it that Queens College took you?" And I said, "That's why they took me." So, I was supposed to be there for a year. I began in September and at the Christmas holiday when we all celebrated. The Chairman came to me, he said, "You're not coming back." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "They're going to keep you." That's what…

Samuels: And they did keep you.

Starr: Yeah, four months after I was there the Chairman came to me, he said, "We want you to stay." I loved it, I was one mile away from my home, I walked every day, it was glorious.

Samuels: What was it like going from teaching high school to teaching college level?

Starr: Well, it's much harder to teach in high school than to teach in college. High school is a stratified and highly organized system, five classes a day, five days a week. When I was in charge of the Service Squad, I taught three classes a day, and later they wanted to reduce it to two classes. But I loved teaching so much, I said, "No, I don't want to reduce, but give me assistance." So they gave me another teacher to work with me. But, at Queens College, walking to work every day except in an ice storm was heavenly. And they were excellent students there, so I could have stayed there forever except that my wife insisted that we move. In the 1970s the crime rate in New York was so awesome it invaded our area and Flushing, which was a very nice area, but the drug addicts were all over, and I was held up. I told you that?

Samuels: No.

Starr: Oh, I didn't tell you that?

Samuels: I want to hear that.

Starr: That's another story.

Samuels: Was that—

Starr: It was the 1970s and I was walking to work from my home, it was in the morning, Acena Boulevard ran from my home to the college and I walked that way every day. It was a mile, a mile and a half walk, very pleasant. And, in the 1970s we had the crime

wave. I was walking to work one morning when suddenly somebody behind me appears, I noticed, I looked around and we were under a tremendous tree that covered and came down almost to our hips. I was about to cross the street from that tree, this man says, "Stop. Don't move." So I said, "You must be kidding!" Something like that. He said, I don't remember, there was something in my back, by the way, something in my back. And I said, "What do you want?" He said, "I want your money." I said to him, a big mistake, "I'm a school teacher and I don't have much money." He began a tirade about school teachers. Wow! I can't even repeat it to you! He had it in for all school teachers, maybe I told him I'm a college teacher, I don't know, for every possible teacher. Then he said, "I want your money." Now, I don't know why I said this but I was just appalled by this punk. I couldn't see him, of course, every time I turned he turned with me so I couldn't see him. So I said to him, "If you want my money, come around and get it." I wanted to be able to identify him. He hesitated for awhile and then came around. He said, "I want your money." I said, "You'll have to take it out of my pocket." I don't remember what happened, but anyway I had 17 or 18 dollars. He said, "That's all you have?" I said, "Do you want my credit card?" I was hoping he would take it, one way of identifying.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: "No I don't want your credit card." And he says to me, "I'm going to run for the bus that's coming here, if you chase me I'll kill you." He started to run for the bus, and I start running after him and yell, "Stop thief! Stop thief! Don't let him get on the bus!" So in disgust he turns around and he runs away. And in the meantime since I had yelled, people assembled so they started to chase him and it was remarkable, they chased him to his home. I began to run, and I pulled my hamstring muscle so I was limping around and I looked down each street and I finally found the street where the mob was waiting for me. And there was a police car there too. So they said, "There he is! There he is!" So I came and the police car, police officer said, "What happened?" I explained. They said, "He ran into this house and we want to make sure that you were here to identify him." So they go up and they knock on the door and a young woman opens it and says in a

very hostile voice, “What do you want?” They said, “A person accused of a crime has just run into your home, we want to go in and search for him.” And she repeated the same invectives, vulgar language that he had used, exactly the same thing. Told us where to go, told me where to go, and closed the door. But before she closed the door the police officer put his foot in the door and said, “If you don’t let us in I’m going to put out an APB on it and he may be killed.” She said, I can’t repeat it, and closed the door. So they put out an APB. The police officers, since I couldn’t walk asked me where, I said I was at Queens College. So they drove me to Queens College and everybody said, “A police car with Starr in it!”

Samuels: “What did he do now?”

Starr: (laughing) Prestige!

Samuels: Well I bet you had something interesting to talk about in class that day.

Starr: Oh, I didn’t do much in class. I was supposed to meet the teachers who were doing student teaching. I met them and they drove me home. And as I got home my wife was waiting out in the corridor, the door was open, and she and the neighbors are waiting for me. And she says to me, “What happened? Why didn’t you call me?” I explained to all of them what happened and nothing seemed to happen much. My wife was very distressed with what happened, but I assured her I wasn’t hurt, and we went to bed that night. And about 3 a.m. I get a telephone call. My wife answers it. “This is lieutenant so-and-so on the so called precinct. We have apprehended…” I had described the criminal, what he was wearing and all that, so they had a real picture of what he looked like. They caught him. So they said, “We have him here at the Booth Memorial Hospital and we would like your husband to come down and identify him.” So I start to get dressed. My wife says, “It’s a trap! It’s a trap!” I said, “Look, I’m going to take a hammer and chisel and if it’s a trap I’ll get some of my punches in.” Well, she wanted to come with me and I wouldn’t let her. But I did say to the detective, I said, “When I get to Booth Memorial hospital (he told me where), I want you to stand aside and show me your badge.” And he did, he stood a few feet from me, he help up his badge so I could see it. So I go in there, and he’s in Emergency Care, he had taken drugs. And the nurse in

charge, by the way, the culprit was black, the nurse in charge was black, and she says to me, “Look mister, pray that he die now, pray that he doesn’t get out because if he does, your life is in danger.” I thanked her, identified him, and they put a policeman in charge. And the detective says to me, “Are you a professor?” I said, “Yes.” “Don’t you have sense enough not to run after a culprit?” So I said to him, “If you’re in the Army and trained to confront enemies…” I was trained and I was going to confront him. He says, “That’s stupid.” Well, eventually the arraignment came up, he had to be arraigned and I had to be there at the arraignment. So he comes into court, by the way he was dying of an overdose but he recovered. So he was arraigned. We come into court, and they bring him into court, and he waves at me! “Hey! Hello!” (laughing) The judge after awhile says, “Well Mr. So-and-So, you’re going up in this world, now you’re attacking college professors.” He was held over for trial, held over for the Grand Jury. Of course, trained in the law, this is nothing to you, so I’m called into the Grand Jury room. And the head of the Grand Jury says to me, “I have just one question for you,” and I said, “What is it?” “Was he a student in your class?” I said, “Never. No student in my class would ever.” That was it. So he was held over for trial, he had stolen a television set from his grandfather and was out on probation at the time he held me up. And that year I was going to Chicago for a year to teach, to be a consultant in the Law Related Education field. So I said to the District Attorney, “I’m going out of town, but as soon as the trial comes up let me know. I’m willing to testify.” He said, “Forget it. We’re going to plea bargain this,” he said, “because he has to finish the first conviction. And then when he finishes we’re going to put him into a drug rehabilitation program.” He said, “I don’t think he’s a danger to society.” That’s what he said. And I said, “But if you try him, I’ll come back.” They never tried. But my wife kept wondering whether he’d come back, but he was so friendly to me afterwards, “Hi, how are you?” So, that was the great criminal case of my life.

Samuels: Was that kind of the last straw for Kay? It sounds like she was worried sick about you.

Starr: Oh, that she was definitely going, leaving New York City.

Samuels: Yeah. And what was it about Arizona? Why did you two want to move there? Or, I guess you three.

Starr: We moved to Arizona in, I retired in 1975 and how old would my son be?

Samuels: '75…he was born in?

Starr: '46.

Samuels: '46. 29? No…yeah, 29, right? 29? Almost 30?

Starr: '46, '50. '46 to '75, can you subtract?

Samuels: I think its 29, I'm really bad at math, though. But, did he move? I mean, he was old enough—

Starr: No, he was at Berkeley at the time.

Samuels: Oh, okay, he had already gone away to school.

Starr: And graduated, yeah. So in 1975 we moved and he was at Berkeley.

Samuels: Why did you move to Arizona?

Starr: Well, we went through the farce of traveling all over the country looking for a place to settle, knowing in advance we would settle in Arizona. It gave us a reason for touring the country. My wife had two sisters living there, and I had two sisters in Florida, so the choice was either Florida or Arizona, and I deferred to my wife, of course. So we moved to Arizona. I'm glad we did.

Samuels: Yeah, you, you really liked it there, didn't you?

Starr: Loved it. Loved Arizona. Out of door living, out of door dining, swimming practically every day of the year, playing golf. It was an out of door life. During the hot season it gets very hot, one day it was up to 122.

Samuels: Whew! Do you have to stay inside when it's that hot? What do you even do?

Starr: What are you going to do is right. You either stay inside or you go to a movie.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: During my stay in Arizona, I was there for 1975 to 1999. 13 summers I taught in institutes in Hawaii, and during that entire time I taught Texas summer, so we were always in air-conditioned hotels. And in Hawaii it was utopia. You know what they say,

when you get off the plane in Hawaii you begin to suffer from Polynesian paralysis. That's true.

Samuels: I guess Kay was probably used to you, you had been going to school and teaching and in the army since the time she met you, so she probably realized you were going to keep working after you retired.

Starr: Oh yes, as a matter of fact we began to talk about retirement and I said to her, "When I retire, it means I'm assuming another job." And she said, "No you're not." But, she profited from it because we went to Hawaii 13 summers and she loved it there, we made many friends. And in Texas, the people in Texas are part of my extended family, they are really part of my family, we care for each other. I'm speaking of the people in charge of the program there. So, they all came to my 100th birthday, they came to my wife's memorial, all of them came, large group. So, we have good love for each other. I not only taught there, I enjoyed life there.

Samuels: You were always surrounded by friends.

Starr: Lucky that way.

Samuels: Yeah, that is. Before we leave Queens College, I just want to know a little bit about, what was it like teaching during the civil rights movement? Did you have students extremely passionate and coming to you and wanting to enroll in all your classes, or was, were there protests?

Starr: Oh yes. Everybody at Queens College was deeply involved in the civil rights struggle. I'm trying to think of, every summer a number of students from Queens College went down south to Mississippi to teach the children there because schools there were not educating, they didn't cater to blacks, and so the blacks had to be educated otherwise. And so a large number of our students went down there, and some of our teachers went down there. So, we were deeply involved. I was writing articles at the time about civil rights and teaching about civil rights. But I was not personally involved in the movement. But students were, a good number of students were. And I think, I may be wrong Anna, but I think Andrew Goodman, one of the three white

people who were killed by the racists in Mississippi was a student at Queens. I think so, I'm not sure.

Samuels: But not one of your students.

Starr: No. I think so. But we were all deeply involved, we talked about it, condemned the racism. I worked in Texas for 30 years, so 30 summers, and I taught in every part of Texas and experienced, I never experienced racism there but the teachers told me about racism. I took my students on a number of occasions into court, Texas court, to see justice in action. And one judge said to me, "In this court we don't permit guns, except for the judge" (laughing). And then we saw a trial in which a black man was accused of raping a black woman, she was a very old woman. You couldn't imagine a young man doing that. And he had an attorney, and the attorney told me he couldn't find the person who was his alibi. But what intrigued me was this: the woman was asked to stand up and identify the person who had attacked her, and she said she couldn't find anyone in the courtroom who attacked her. The jury found him guilty. I was just appalled and disgusted with the prosecutor and the defense attorney, that's the way it is in Texas.

Samuels: I guess so.

Starr: If you're black, you're guilty. Terrible, terrible. So I experienced that part of Southern justice. Anything else, Anna?

Samuels: So, you taught every summer after you retired and that was either in Texas or—

Starr: Or in various parts of the country, Cincinnati…

Samuels: Hawaii.

Starr: Hawaii, California. I taught in many states.

Samuels: And you were part of the Arizona Bar Association, right?

Starr: No. I saw no reason for taking the exam because what would I do with my license?

Samuels: But it seems like everywhere you went, people wanted, you know, wanted you to lead seminars.

Starr: Well, I was invited to seminars to lead them. The people I associated with were all professionals. They were all highly interested in Law Related Education, or in education in general. And teaching in Texas was not a challenge because the people came voluntarily to the seminars. But I recall one episode, which I'll relate to you. The Supreme Court had handed down a decision declaring void our constitutional benedictions in junior high school, graduation, religious exercises at graduations in junior high school declared unconstitutional 5 to 4. And whenever I was confronted with that I would have them, I would get a copy of the decision handed out and we would read actually the decision, not the newspaper commentary, newspaper summary. So, we got it and we went through it carefully, we found out why five Justices felt it was unconstitutional, 4 who felt it was constitutional. At the end of the session, a woman comes up to me crying, and I knew her, of course she was in our class. I said, "What's the matter?" She said, "This decision is against my grain, it's against everything I learned growing up in religion. But I do promise you one thing, if I ever teach it, I'll teach it the way you taught it." Which in a sense was a triumph because she probably would never be permitted to teach it.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: So, that was interesting. The thing was this burning of the flag in 1988, I forget, 1980s, occurred. I was teaching in one of the communities, and they came in the next day after the decision was announced, they said, "Let's discuss it." And I said, "We can't." They said, "What do you mean we can't? It's very important." "Yes, we don't know what the decision, we don't know the reasoning of the decision, so we can't." "What do you mean we don't know, we read the newspaper!" I said, "The newspaper's a summary, but not a very good one. We'll discuss this when I get copies of the decision for you." It was also, I think, 5 to 4, that's my recollection. Well, when the decision came we discussed it, and I felt the lesson was, if you're going to do something about our laws, read the laws! The summaries are useful only to people who can't read the laws, but let us look at it from the point of view of the court, why did they make that

decision? And I think I taught them a lesson there, that before you begin to criticize the Supreme Court read what they said, not what the newspaper said they said.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: Well, these are the petty victories (laughing).

Samuels: So, when you and Kay moved to Seattle were you finally sick of the heat, or did you think you wanted to be—

Starr: She had developed dementia.

Samuels: Did you want to be close to your son?

Starr: My son insisted we come up and I'm glad he did. I know now that maybe it would have been better for us to stay there because my friends tell me that when you employ a Mexican family to take care of anyone that has dementia, the entire family assumes responsibility. They all assume it, so she's never left alone. I didn't know that at the time, or maybe they didn't do that at the time we left. So, I brought her up here and for a few years we managed together. I didn't want to turn her over to a nursing home, but gradually she was, she never had deep dementia, she had mild dementia, couldn't remember things. She remembered the past, couldn't remember a thing about the present. And so I received an invitation to go to Texas to participate in an institute and they said they would send up a person from Texas to escort me down there and then escort me back. That's almost incredible, isn't it?

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: In other words, they wanted me to come there for those three days, and I felt having my son here, my grandson, everything would be fine. And I said to the homecare person, I had somebody coming in every day, looking after her, "Would you be able to stay here for the three days while I'm away?" And my son urged me very much to go, so did my grandson. So they said, she said, "Yeah, I'll take care of her." And the day before I left she comes up to me and says, "I caught fibromyalgia from my dog and I'm sick." I've never heard of anyone catching, in other words she was weird, it was a weird thing to say.

Samuels: Yeah!

Starr: I didn't want her around my wife. So the question was, what could we do? And we decided that the three days I would be gone it would be safer to be in a nursing home. And we explained it to my wife, and she agreed. We took her down there, and when I came back my son pointed out to me that she was getting pretty good care, and we ought to leave her there. And I rebelled, but he said, "If you continue taking care of her you're going to die much sooner than she will ever die, and so what's the good of that?" Well, he convinced me, and I was really never really convinced. So she went into the nursing home, but I did see her six hours a day, three hours during the lunch and afterwards, and at least three hours at night before she went to bed, until she went to bed. So, we were together for six hours. But the first, she was there for five years, the first year she pleaded with me to take her out. And she said, "These people are strangers to me, take me out of here." And my son wouldn't let me, wouldn't let me do it. By this time I was too weak to protest, to confront him. But I'm sorry, I would have liked to keep her at home with me, it didn't turn out that way. She eventually died as a result of an accident.

Samuels: At the nursing home?

Starr: Yeah. Did you know that?

Samuels: No.

Starr: She was in the nursing home for five years, more than five years. I was asked to come to Texas again, I was asked to come to Texas every year! They said they would send somebody up for me, escort me down escort me back. And these were close friends, so it was a joy to be with them. Well, on the last trip to Texas I was there for two days or three, my son called me and said, "Don't get excited," and I knew it was serious. "Mom had a fall, but she's recovering." Well, I could hardly wait to get back, and began to investigate what happened. Her regular nurse's aide had to be absent on that day, so they appointed a substitute. There were signs all over my wife's room, "She is not to be moved except by two people." This nurse's assistants was either ignorant or illiterate, she picks her up, took her into her wheelchair, took her into the bathroom and picked her up, and my wife fell and hit her head on the sink. And I was glad I was in

Texas when this happened, I think I would have attacked the woman who did this. They all tried, everybody was very sympathetic and all that. She died a week later. And I saw her gradually decline, it was a terrible period for me. 67 years of marriage and she was still wide awake to recognize everyone in our family. Our assistants, the people who were helping her, said she still had a number of years to live, but she died.

Samuels: I'm sorry.

Starr: Broke her nose and neck. Of course, I sued them.

Samuels: Good.

Starr: And they denied responsibility. They didn't do anything wrong, it was finally settled in mediation, they mediated it. But I wanted very much to go to trial because I wanted to address the jury, hopeful that there would be a jury on the case, to get some publicity for people who are old. I was told by every lawyer I knew that suing was a hopeless task, that a 97-year-old person wasn't worth anything. And I was going to prove that a 97-year-old person was worth as much as a young person. I was very anxious to go to trial, but my lawyer was kind of hesitant and so he sent it to mediation. You know what that is? Mediation is where they, you appoint a mediator and he meets with both sides, both sides are in different rooms, and he meets with us and then with the opposing side, meets with us and the opposing side, and then suggests a settlement, he suggests it. And my lawyer was anxious to accept the settlement, I would have preferred a trial.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: So we settled. They accepted settlement.

Samuels: What year was that?

Starr: About five years ago? I just forget these things, can't pinpoint the year.

Samuels: Maybe like 2006, 2007?

Starr: I don't remember.

Samuels: Well it must have been nice that you were up here at least, because you had your son here and grandson.

Starr: Yes. I didn't want my wife to die with a whimper, I wanted her to go out with a bang! She went out with a bang.

Samuels: Well good, and I'm sure she would have been proud of you.

Starr: I hope so. But all my friends in Texas and here, the lawyers, forget it, 97-year-old, forget it. I said, "I can prove that a 97-year-old has a life and a life that has value." And I'm sorry I never got the chance to prove it. She recognized everyone, on television when Katrina occurred, she said, "Please turn the television off, I can't stand it." She was alert to many things. And, to go out that way because of an incompetent nurse that doesn't understand instructions. Now you talk a little while (laughing).

Samuels: Okay, I'll talk a little bit. I'll talk for a little bit so you can rest your voice, but I haven't heard a lot about your son. The one story I have, I was listening to the recording, was you coming back from the war and being ready to have your reunion with Kay and then there's a little baby in your face!

Starr: Oh, yeah, that was in 1946.

Samuels: So, I'm—

Starr: She had postpartum depression, which lasted much too long, very depressed, she's a very joyful woman. As a matter of fact, as soon as I walked in I knew something was wrong. But we finally conquered it, she finally conquered it I should say.

Samuels: I bet it was great growing up with you as a dad.

Starr: Well, you'd have to ask my son. (laughing)

Samuels: Well you get to say everything good about yourself now, we don't have to ask him! Well, just hearing the way you interacted with your students and, you know, talked to them like real people who had opinions and weren't robots.

Starr: Oh yes. They had a life, they had a life.

Samuels: I'm sure that, you know, he grew up, did you teach him about the law? Was he, was he like your guinea pig student?

Starr: We treated him like an adult, did I tell you about his growing up?

Samuels: Oh yeah, but you should tell me more about, he was interested in music?

Starr: Yes. I don't know, he was born in '46. As he grew older he began to crawl around. My wife would be in the kitchen and would follow him around the house, couldn't do very much. So she decided to put a record on, and he crawled over to the record and sat there listening. So she kept putting records on and he sat there listening. And he gradually, there must have been something in him, my wife was a singer, she could sing very well, so there must have been something in him about music. And I told you the story about the…

Samuels: The music store?

Starr: The music store and all of that, yeah. These were records put out by, being distributed by *The New York Post*, the newspaper. And they were all classical records, and so he learned about Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms, Bach, and he would ask, when he could, but when he still could hardly talk he would say, "Here comes a loud sound. Now, here's a soft sound." He was able to recognize the difference. But, when he grew up, when we got to about 5 or 6, 8, we were told, "You better start him on an instrument." So we asked him whether he wanted to play anything, and he wouldn't. He said he was not interested. We wanted him to play the violin, so my wife would play the violin and I would play the violin, we'd have a trio.

Samuels: A family of musicians!

Starr: In that sense we pressured him. "How about trying the violin?" So we gave up. At the age of 10 he said, "I want to play the piano." And we said fine, "We'll buy a piano for you, but you must promise us you'll practice for three years." He said, "Yes." He's been practicing ever since.

Samuels: So music has always been a big part of his life? And now he's a professor!

Starr: Professor in music, yes. And I think his last book is the, *Gershwin on Broadway*, and it sold very well in England because of Fred Astaire and his wife. You know, they danced to George Gershwin's music. And it sold well here, too, for a music book. But he's written other books too, he's written a book a book on Charles Ives. And he's written a book with a colleague, *Popular American Music*, which is a best-seller, people buy it.

Starr: So he's following in your footsteps. Did he always talk about teaching? Do you think that's something he watched you do?

Starr: We've talked about it. I think he did. He was at Berkeley and I think he may have been one of these instructors of small…they have a lecture, lecturers of many but then they come up in small groups. He decided he liked to teach, and there's no teaching in writing.

Samuels: What do you think? Should we take a little break?

Starr: Yes.

Samuels: Okay, we are finishing up our final recording.

Starr: Okay.

Samuels: Unless Isidore has me back every weekend for conversations and dinner, which would also be nice. Let's talk about the future. You've lived a long time, and you've seen a lot of things, and, you know, you've seen so much more than I've seen, what do you think? We have an upcoming election, we have people plugged into technology, what do you think we're facing?

Starr: There was a distinguished Princeton scientist, his name escapes me at the moment. He was associated with the nuclear bomb. And he was interviewed by a newspaper reporter, I imagine. And the newspaper reporter said to him, "Are you a pessimist or an optimist?" and the scientist says, "I am an optimist." So the newspaper reporter says to him, "You helped to create the nuclear bomb, it has been used, the atomic bomb has been used to destroy lives, how can you possibly be an optimist?" And this was his reply: "I'm an optimist because I believe the future is still uncertain." And that's the way, Anna, it seems we ought to try to understand the future, it's uncertain, it could go either way. The future was uncertain when Hitler was around, and we got rid of that kind of human trash. It's difficult to imagine who's going to be elected or reelected, but I would like to think that Obama will be reelected. And the reason I say that is that Obama has a vision of the future. Most of my friends are unhappy with Obama because they feel he did not do enough for the country, that he was kind of temporizing, compromising. But if you're a politician, you have to do that. Our

constitution is a bundle of compromises. So, politicians can't be ideologues. I feel the Tea Party represents what I find dangerous to this country, they are ideologues and they discovered the truth. It's difficult to foretell what the future is, the future now is so different from my past that you don't know what's going to happen. But politically I hope that Obama gets reelected. And I hope, sincerely, that we have a Congress that understands what compromise means. People like John Boehner and Senator Mitch McConnell don't understand the meaning of compromise. Mitch McConnell said something a politician may think but never say, he said his primary aim is to see the defeat of Obama. So the American people don't matter, they're out of the loop, he wants to defeat Obama and do anything to defeat him, even if what he does hurts the American people. That's such a dangerous thing to say and even think that you wonder where these people come from. But Mitch McConnell, I understand, he doesn't represent anyone except Tobacco. As I said, the future's uncertain, you don't know where we're going.

Samuels: No, and there's no way to tell.

Starr: I hope that we've learned experiences about wars from the past. The Vietnam experience should have taught us a lesson. Wars are no longer fought in the old-fashioned way with the Germans and the French and the Americans and the Russians confront each other. Wars are fought by groups of guerillas, ideologues, fanatics, crazies, and they can create tremendous havoc. And I don't know how you handle people like that. The Islamic fanatics are similar in many ways to the Christian fanatics of the past, the Jewish fanatics of the past. Religion it seems to me in its fanatical form is a danger to our future. And unless you have a liberating religion, I would point to the Unitarian church for example, these are people who have, to me, a humanitarian view of the future rather than conflict, compromise rather than geneticism. Tolerance. But then you're always going to have the incidents of that individual killed the Sikhs.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: That's something you can't prevent. But, education to me is a slow, laborious process, which in a sense holds the key to the future. People have to be educated that

humanity is a many-splendored thing, many colors and many views, many opinions, many ideas, ought to be welcomed into the community of nations, but reject all those ideas that are one-sided, fanatical, harmful to people. And the Southern Poverty Law Center has a report every three months of the hate groups in this country, and it's awesome and frightening. There are irrational people and there will continue to be irrational people who will try to change our government, try to change our way of life, and we have to confront those. But the future's still uncertain, we don't know. The computer age, the technology age, like all inventions brings with it benefits and problems. And we haven't seen the end of the technology revolution yet, what it's going to do. But it raises terrific dangers because it makes it possible for small groups to capture the attention of large groups, to attack their logical means. Am I correct?

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: And you have to do something about that. We certainly have to do something about our electoral system, election of president and vice-president. We can't have primaries that go on for months, supported by millionaires and billionaires. It has been said, Anna, that the sport of kings was war, kings used that as a sport, the 17th, 18th century, they fought each other. For a variety of reasons which we can't understand today, there were religious wars, the 100 Years War was a religious war. These things happened, but somehow or other we have to confront them and hope that the people we elect to office are not the result of the action of kings or millionaires whose sport is politics, funneling millions and perhaps billions of dollars into the primary election and to the election itself. Spewing forth hate, inaccuracies, distortions about each other, that includes both parties. We have to do something about that.

Samuels: I have to tell you, you are so sharp and so bright, really. You're laughing at me, but—

Starr: I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing with you because that's the future. If you can't laugh, forget about the future.

Samuels: There's so many people who I meet who are my age, who are older, who don't know what's going on—

Starr: Don't care, that's the important thing.

Samuels: Don't care what's going on, who don't know how to express themselves, who don't care to express themselves. And here you are, and, I mean, you could stand up today and give a speech to anybody and convince them of anything, that's what I feel like! How, I mean, "What's your secret?" Sounds a little silly, but really, we see the other people here and you are a very healthy 100-year-old man.

Starr: Anna, you're very kind, you're very kind. But humanity consists of a multiplicity and variety of personalities, individuals who are self-educated. My wife for example is an example of an individual who is self-educated, I think I told you the story when she graduated from Delaware High School, Bloomington High School, she was the outstanding English student. The outstanding English student was entitled to a four-year scholarship at the University of Delaware, did I tell you that?

Samuels: Yeah, but you can keep going.

Starr: Yes, teacher came to her and said, "Kay, you're not getting the scholarship, the fellowship, because you're Jewish." What my wife did is a remarkable thing, she could have acted in anger, she could have condemned them, she could have tried to do something about it. She went on with her life. And when you're confronted by challenges, you have three choices: you can either overcome the challenge and go onto the next phase, or you can just about meet the challenge and remain stationary, or you can let the challenge overcome you and forget about life. In other words, you give up. And that's the way it is throughout life, and there are all kinds of people, Anna, and you must accept them for what they are because every individual is considered to be innocent until proven guilty. So, we have to develop, and this is not novel with me, its novel with a large group of people, we have to be tolerant of each other, accept each other, weigh each other's arguments, and argue without killing each other, or without destroying each other. And there are too many politicians in Congress today who regard the other party as the enemy. Its one thing to regard the other party as the competitor, it's another to degrade them.

Samuels: There's a lot of hate in these elections.

Starr: And there are people who are trying to do something… For example the election for president has to be changed, it can't go on this way. Having ten individuals competing for the presidency, month after month appearing on television, wasting millions of dollars which they could contribute to education or some other important activity. I was asked, well, let me put it this way, if I were asked to speak on the subject of the presidency, the election of the presidency, this is what I would say: "The primaries should begin, first of all, the election should take two months, that's it. It should begin in September and October and end in November. There should be no electioneering, you can do whatever you want to, but no electioneering for public office before that. So it's two months, and that's enough. The other thing is the primaries should take two weeks, first two weeks of September. In other words, we would decide the presidency in two weeks. Each party can do whatever it wants to do in those two weeks to decide on how to choose a candidate, but they get only two weeks to do it. That would cut down on all the animosity, the malice, the distortion, the hate that takes place during one of these primaries that go on for seven or eight months. The election should be six weeks in duration. I would oppose debates. I'd opposed them when it first came up with the League of Women Voters. I don't know who it was, but I had a confrontation with one of the leaders of the League of Women Voters when it first came up, and I said, "You're going to make a media event out of the presidency. You're going to make sure that the best debater is president, the one that has the best performance. That's a hell of a way to choose a president, a good debater! A good debater can alter any argument he wants to into an important argument. I would give, in six weeks I would give each candidate for the presidency, that's the two major ones and the minor one, an opportunity to present their program, one hour a week for six weeks. So each one would have one hour for six weeks, they can do anything they want to to persuade the public, they can have speeches, group gatherings, you know, have citizens question you and all that. No debate." As a matter of fact, what she said to me, "Well, how about the Lincoln-Douglas debates?" You know, when I said, "No debates." I said, "They were not on television. You had to come there to see them and hear them!" But it has

become a media event. And Nixon was criticized very highly because he had a five-o-clock shadow, that's a way to choose a president. Or, the one who says, "It's morning in America," great quote, that's not the way to choose a president. Let them each present their programs without any debate and then we'll choose a president. I'm going to ask the National Council for the Social Studies, which is meeting here in November, if I have an opportunity to speak to them, to consider this as their major program for the next four years. Spending all that money on the presidency—

Samuels: I know, when it could be used for—

Starr: It's vulgar! Well, you think about these things and you hope that they will come to pass. The important thing about my life is that I'm so grateful to have been born in America. My parents came from Russia seeking an escape from the tyranny of the Czar. They were persecuted. They came here seeking liberty, as a matter of fact, I dedicate my liberty book to them, saying "They came to this country seeking liberty" as confronted by the tyranny of the Czar who was an irrational torturer, a killer, and the Cossacks of Russia were a group of hate, a group saturated with hatred of Jews. What the Jews did to them no one will ever know. But what they imagined, of course, was horrible.

Samuels: So your parents—

Starr: I'm very proud to have been born in America, and especially proud of the opportunities America offered us. It offered my father an opportunity to be a skilled carpenter, it offered my mother an opportunity to raise three children in a loving atmosphere. And we in turn, my wife and I mirrored what our parents did, her parents also came from Europe, and she loved this country, too, even though it was disappointing in some respects to her. But she got a job at Macy's despite the fact that she had this disappointment and did well. And we raised a son who married a woman and they've been married, together, ever since. They raised three children. I think this atmosphere of love and affection and respect for each other permeated our lives, and the precedent was my father and mother. I'm sorry my grandchildren never met them. My son, of course, met them. We were living in New York and they came to visit, and we visited them, and whenever they came to see us, they lived in Brooklyn, we were living

in Brooklyn then, in Queens, my son would say to my mother, “Come into my room, I want to talk to you.” And he gave her a run-down on the hardships I have [

] him, the terror I created in the house, the monster I was, and he would say to her, “And go on and tell him these things!” And she’d come out and say, “What are you doing to your son?” (laughing) I remember that, he doesn’t remember that.

Samuels: No?

Starr: No. But, regularly whenever they came he had a long litany of grievances, which he voiced.

Samuels: Probably thought your mom would put you in your place.

Starr: My mom had no sympathy for me. “Why are you doing this to him?” It was all imagined so far as I’m concerned, but I wouldn’t let him do this or I wouldn’t let him do that. For example, he wanted to go out with some boys and I pointed out the reason why he shouldn’t go out, I don’t remember the episode at all, but I explained to him that he shouldn’t go out that night for a certain reason. And that’s a grievance he had against me. But when he was on the telephone speaking to someone, he says, “My father says…” so you have these contradictory episodes.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: I wish society would mirror what we, the way my family felt about each other.

Samuels: Yeah.

Starr: But, we’re, I don’t know whether we are a majority or a minority. There is so much disruption, and distortion, and dissention in families. There’s even hatred in families.

Samuels: I’ve never understood that.

Starr: Well, because of your family.

Samuels: Yeah! I’ve always loved visiting them and, you know, I want to have a family of my own and I know that the way I raise my kids is going to be affected by the way my parents raised me.

Starr: Oh, it’s a wonderful thing to have children. You see yourself growing up when you see them grow up.

Samuels: So your parents probably, you know, made you aware that you were living in a great country.

Starr: Oh yes. In a sense they worked together with the school in developing this feeling for your country and for what it means and for what it has meant in the past. I regard history as a birth certificate for each individual because the history of each of us is so bogged up in the history of this country. And there are so many good things that it stands for and has stood for and I hope will stand for, but the future is still uncertain. You know that during the Great Depression of 1929, the country [ ] spoke of having a dictator to take us out of the Depression, do you know that?

Samuels: No, I didn't know that.

Starr: Conditions were so bad and people were so despairing and despondent that they looked to somebody to save us. And one group suggested that engineers ought to take over this country and run it because engineers know everything, okay? The others felt that the general in charge of the Marines, General Smedley Butler, who was in charge of the Marines, would know how to handle this. And he had a following. So you had the technology group offering a solution, Smedley Butler offering a dictatorship, temporary period dictatorship, and people did not know where to turn. But fortunately we had FDR who turned out to be the savior of this country, just as Churchill was the savior of Great Britain. So we produced great presidents in our time. Republicans have had great presidents. The first Republican was Lincoln, extraordinary figure in American history. The next great Republican was Teddy Roosevelt, extraordinary man in many ways. And the Democrats, of course, have had their own. Of course we have had presidents that never deserved to be president, like Nixon. We'll leave that, his expression was, "Whatever the president does is lawful." That's an outrageous statement made by somebody who's supposed to have studied law. "The president can do no wrong," that's taken from "The King can do no wrong." Well, I don't know, I think I've run out of advice.

Samuels: Well I have it all on tape. You're part of the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library, here in Seattle.

Starr: Yeah.

Starr: And you've written a number of books and articles and you're reading all the time, or you know, listening to books all the time. What kind of role has literature and writing played in your life?

Starr: Well literature was very important in my life from the very beginning. I shouldn't say from the very beginning, but a transforming moment in my life was when I had Ms. Harrington in high school. I had her in the senior year, and she taught me so much about the English language, about how to express myself in the English language, that I treasure her memory. Did I ever tell you how she taught us to read poetry? Ms. Harrington was an older woman with frizzled hair, not very attractive, but she transformed poetry for us. Now this is the way she did it. We were reading Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," and she said, "I want a number of you to volunteer to read this." Did I tell you this at all?

Samuels: I think you mentioned it at dinner last time, but I like the story so you can tell me again.

Starr: Well, she said, "Read the first stanza, first part." (I don't know what you call it, stanza? I forget now) So we read it: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, The ploughman homeward plods his weary way, And leaves the world to darkness and to me." That's the way we read it and she said, "Now listen to me, this is the way you read poetry: (reading with more feeling, and more slowly) 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea, The ploughman homeward plods his weary way, And leaves the world to darkness and to me.'" So that's the way you read poetry? She's transformed our reading of poetry and also, in a sense, transformed our reading of essays. The essay, which I still remember, was "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" by William James, and the first sentence in that is such a revealing sentence. He was a psychologist, they said, who wrote like a novelist. "All of our judgments, big or little, depend on the feelings these things arouse in us, and since our feelings differ, our judgments differ." And that was an eye opener to us, that our opinions are all based on feelings! And then, we learned, that

Plato, the great Greek writer, thinker, said that each of us is a chariot drawn by the twin steeds of reason and emotion. So, William James says that our judgments are based on feelings and Plato says our judgments are based on reason *and* emotion, so we began to think about which is right. And it's interesting that, you know, we were 16-years-old at the time, to realize that the place emotions have in our feelings, emotions have in our thinking, that even to this day there are people that just judge everything by their feelings. And on the other hand, you got to keep your feelings in tandem with reason, and that's very difficult. So she taught us many things, and of course we learned to read Shakespeare the way it should be read, and I told you about my return to Franklin K. Lane, my high school.

Samuels: No.

Starr: No?

Samuels: I don't think so.

Starr: In the 1980s I was invited to come down to Franklin K. Lane High School, the high school from which I graduated. I didn't tell you that?

Samuels: No.

Starr: Oh yes, I must have told you that, that's one of the high spots. And that's where I spoke about the teachers at Franklin K. Lane who influenced my life. And I said to the class, "I have five degrees and none had any effect on me, the same affect on me, as Ms. Harrington."

Samuels: Was she still there?

Starr: Rare woman, and, by the way, was not liked by many people because they didn't like the way she read poetry!

Samuels: I think she sounds like fun!

Starr: Uh-huh. They didn't like her for a variety of reasons. She was insistent that we learn how to read and write properly. And I remember writing an essay, my reaction to William James' "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," and she had me read the essay in front of the class. So one of the girls in the class, who was the best English student, she got up and criticized my essay saying that what I was doing was quoting

William James. The teacher said to her, “What did you want him to do? He’s writing an essay.” I remember that little episode.

Samuels: So you liked Ms. Harrington and it sounds like she liked you to.

Starr: Well, I can’t speak for her, but I loved her. And a number of my friends, close friends, you know, we were close friends in later life, all agreed. As a matter, we began to read poetry to each other for a little while. Read about Flanders where the poppies grow, “only God can make a tree,” the last line, “only God.” She was a delight to have, but very straightforward and very serious, I don’t remember any humor on her part, she was determined to teach us something and she did.

Samuels: And then you kept reading and you kept writing.

Starr: All my life. When I began to go to law school, though, my reading was distorted because it was all law books. And my wife after we married she kept complaining to me. She said, “Why don’t you read this book, it’s a good one, it’s called *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, read it!” Oh, I did read some of the things she suggested, but I was very busy reading law books. Did I tell you about the teacher I had in City College whom I asked what I should do to prepare for law school?

Samuels: Yes.

Starr: That, in a sense, set the stage for this, “If you want to go to law school, understand human nature. If you want to understand human nature, read…” We’ve just finished, started reading a play in our play-reading group, which, I’ve been a member of play reading, did I tell you that?

Samuels: Yeah, how long have you?

Starr: Well, must have been seven or eight years now, I’ve attended practically every session. I used to participate and took all the leading roles on Broadway because I was the only man in the group. But now I can’t read anymore and there are some more men, which makes me happy.

Samuels: But you go and you listen?

Starr: I listen, yes, and comment. And we are re-reading plays. “All My Sons,” I don’t know whether you’re acquainted with that.

Samuels: No.

Starr: It's a World War II play. It's a rather complicated play, but the play itself deals with human nature. The owner of a factory who produces gadgets that are put into planes and at one time there was so much pressure on them to produce more and more gadgets that they produced gadgets that were distorted and improperly made. And they sent it through, and pilots died, some 40 pilots died because of these gadgets. They were put in the plane and the plane had problems and went down. And this is a study in human nature because the two partners who own the factory were criticized by the government and then legal action was taken against them. And one partner testified against the other, and the one who was testified against went to prison. And later on, it's a very interesting story, it's a very complicated story. Later on the one who's in prison speaks to his son who's a lawyer and tells him what happened, and it's the other guy who permitted this thing to happen, not him. And so this is a story of human nature, and a family that seemed respectable to everyone but turned out not to be so. Great story, it's more complicated than that.

Samuels: So you guys read the plays and then you'll have a discussion?

Starr: And then we see the movie.

Samuels: Oh!

Starr: And very often the movie is a little different from the play, as you know.

Samuels: Yeah. And you're in the book club here.

Starr: A book club, we read a book every month. I enjoy, I've been in it for a long time.

Samuels: Are those pretty big groups? Do lots of people want to do the play-reading?

Starr: I might say maybe 15-20.

Samuels: That's pretty good.

Starr: Yeah. There should be more, it seems, but that's regarded, I think, intellectual, I don't know why. I also take yoga once a week, I may have told you that.

Samuels: No, you didn't. They do that here?

Starr: Yeah. We now have two students in yoga.

Samuels: You were the only one before? Private lessons?

Starr: Two, there are two of us. Nah, at the last session there were four, she's a very nice yoga teacher. I've taken her since the very beginning, which is about nine years. Its chair yoga, not the regular, my wife and I took yoga in Scottsdale, Arizona and we had mat yoga. You get yourself into a pretzel and then try to get out. This is chair yoga, you know, it's very, very useful, you do move around, they get you to move around. And the yoga instructor is very, very pleasant, and for a long time we just had two people, now we have four, but the two of us are regulars, we come together, and that's every Friday. I wish we had it every week.

Samuels: Yeah. So you're exercising your body and mind.

Starr: Yes. They do a lot of exercise in the morning here, all kinds of exercises. And there are a lot of younger people here who can do it, but I'm no longer eligible for that.

Samuels: But yoga is very, very good for you, and it's nice because it's—

Starr: It is, and it also teaches contemplation, breathing.

Samuels: It's personal.

Starr: Have you ever taken it?

Samuels: I did, I took it one semester in college. And it was nice because it was my first class of the morning so I got to wake up like that.

Starr: Did you like it?

Samuels: Yeah, I really liked it.

Starr: Did you do mat yoga or chair?

Samuels: Mat yoga. And it made me feel ready for the day.

Starr: That's great, like my walk to Queens College every day. What time is it?

Samuels: Let's see…

Starr: Well I can check.

Samuels: 4:16.

Starr: Are we finished?

Samuels: We're done unless you have any last words you want to squeeze in there.

Starr: I'm all out of words.

Samuels: You're all out? Okay, well thank you very much.

Starr: Thank you, Anna.

Samuels: This was a pleasure.

End of Second Interview