

Interview with John Raymond “Rex” Kaiser for the Hagley Museum and Library Oral History Project, by Richard James, June 22, 2004.

JAMES: --June 22nd and I’m interviewing John Raymond “Rex” Kaiser. This is Richard James from the Hagley Museum. Mr. Kaiser is the nephew of John Jacob Raskob and we’re going to discuss his family, his recollections of the Raskob family and anything else that comes up in conversation. Thank you, Mr. Kaiser. Can I call you Rex? Is that a family nickname?

KAISER: I was only known as John when I was in the boat business, and we would exhibit every year for twenty years at the Annapolis Sailboat Show. I’d walk around there and people would say, “John. Hey, John. Hey, John.” I didn’t know who they were talking about. So, yeah, it’s been Rex ever since I was a little kid.

RJ: That’s a common story with some of the Raskobs we’ve been speaking to, that they were never called by their given names, either. Their nicknames—

JK: You know, to this day I’m not sure what Boo Duffy’s real name is.

RJ: Mary Louise.

JK: I know it’s Duffy.

RJ: She’s Mary Louise.

JK: Mary Louise. Well, now, I’m glad to hear that.

RJ: Always referred to everybody by Boo.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: A good example. If you just want to say—start off with just introducing yourself and maybe giving us a year for your birth, if you’re comfortable with that, and describe who you are in the family.

JK: Oh, does that mess up things?

RJ: That's fine.

JK: I can hear you better a little closer. It's just you vibrate around this.

RJ: It's echoing in here.

JK: What were you saying?

RJ: If you can introduce yourself and if you can give us a date of birth and just describe how you fit into the Raskob family, and then we'll start talking.

JK: Well, I was born in Wilmington, Delaware, on what they called Park Drive then. Now called Kentmere Parkway. First house on the right, coming out of town, on the second floor right bedroom, because neither my mother or father had that much love of hospitals, and they loved the family practitioner. On July 11th, 1927, which makes me, God! Old.

RJ: We don't have to do the math. That's fine. And your mother was Edith Raskob Kaiser, who was John Jacob Raskob's sister.

JK: Correct. She was his youngest sibling.

RJ: And your father was G. Ray Kaiser?

JK: George Raymond and he hated George, yes.

RJ: And Mr. Kaiser, your father, was your mother's second husband.

JK: I'm sorry, I couldn't—

RJ: As I understand. Mr. Kaiser was your mother's second husband.

JK: Yes. Her first husband and infant baby died from a flu epidemic in 1918.

RJ: That was Mr.

JK: Mr. Dole.

RJ: William Dole.

JK: William Dole, correct.

RJ: Perhaps talk about how your mother and father met or were introduced?

JK: I am not certain, but I think they vaguely knew—maybe more than vaguely knew each other when my father came up to live in Wilmington, somewhere down around Madison or Jefferson in a neighborhood that's not as nice now as it was then. Then he went to California, and then he came back and by that time my mother had been a widow for awhile. I do not the details of that courtship, except they were devoted.

RJ: And married for many years?

JK: Oh, yeah. Well, my mother—they were married in 19—I think 1926. I was born not much over a year later, and my mother died in 1967, and my father in 1984.

RJ: Now, as you were saying to me yesterday, in our conversation yesterday, your father, when he was in California, was nominally at least employed by the Standard Oil Company, but—

JK: Well, he had a real job there. He'd had a year of college in Wilmington before he went west, and I think that had to do with the second marriage of his father. That none of his siblings liked the stepmother. This is all family lore, so I don't know how accurate, but he didn't stop moving until he got to California. His fun job was an extra in movies, silent movies filmed over in Morin County, which was just rolling countryside interspersed with trees and ideal for silent movie Westerns.

RJ: Like long horse chases?

JK: Long horse chases

RJ: Carriages, etcetera. And he shot those movies with the Warner Brothers?

JK: Yeah, they were—I think there were four of them. A couple have died over the—one died early on and he just came to really appreciate as a, I guess, eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old, something like that, what they were doing and the way they did it. He became kind of a stuntman and

good friends with the Warner Brothers, Harry Warner in particular. I think he said at one time they convinced him he should, in lieu of pay, take some kind of stock in their little company. San Francisco then was a hotbed of penny stocks. So anyway, he always had an affection for the way Warners, later on when they became so successful, the way they went about their movie building. The directors, from all I heard, always worked within budget and within time, and always with a good story to tell, when they told it.

RJ: The great days of the studio system, when they could put out thirty movies a month.

JK: Yeah, I don't know the dealings. I'm afraid I really don't.

RJ: It's quite an accomplishment, I would say. When he came to Wilmington, obviously, after that, when did he go to work when he returned to Delaware?

JK: I don't know dates, but he came back and he did work with Dupont Company. It was not in the scientific or technical field. I think—

RJ: Administrative kind of thing.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: Is that how he came into kind of the sphere of your mother, through the Raskob connection with Dupont, do you think, or is there another explanation?

JK: I do not know. All I know is whatever it was, really blossomed.

RJ: Yeah. They lived here, I guess, through the '20s and the early '30s, and then returned to California in '36, from my understanding.

JK: Yeah. I think I mentioned they took my younger brother and myself to California for a winter and my mother had a classmate when she attended Wilmington High School, whose last name, maiden name I do not

remember, but this lady married a fellow in California, moved to California, and then my mother and father, when we went out there, they all got together. His name was Colter and her name was Mimi Jones, and he in the '30s was the Cadillac dealer for Beverly Hills and I think more than that. We used to—I remember personally, several times we went to the Santa Anita Race Track, which at that point was new. If you ever saw the movie Seabiscuit, I suspect strongly that the Jones's were good friends with—who was the fellow who was the hero, owner of Seabiscuit?

RJ: I can't remember. Jeff Bridges.

JK: No, no, no. Not Jeff Bridges. [laughter] But anyway, I don't know details of that except my father said the only people who clean up on the horses are the grooms. He always called himself an improver of the breed.

RJ: And that was a personal interest or a business interest?

JK: I couldn't hear.

RJ: Was that a personal or a business interest with horses?

JK: Horses? Oh, my father never thought of owning a horse. When he was a stunt extra or whatever for early Warner Brothers, he kind of told them he knew how to ride a horse. He didn't quite say that, but he said all southern Delaware people could ride a horse. That was in 1915-16, somewhere in there. He didn't know how to cinch a saddle, so he's riding along in the posse chases when they're making these Westerns, and somehow the saddle of his horse rotated, slowly, but it didn't look good on the posse chase because this one extra had to kick himself back up into the saddle. Anyway, that's family lore.

RJ: You can probably still see it in the movie, if you could ever find that one movie.

JK: No, that's on a cutting room floor somewhere.

RJ: Do you think when they were—you may recollect this or not, but when they were living in Beverly Hills, you know John Raskob was at the height of some of his business activities in the west and had interests in Palm Springs and was often traveling and staying in that part of that country. Would you remember in participating in sort of his social life?

JK: I know that he visited them out there and they rented this house, that I'm sure the Jones's found for them, and it was on the corner of Camden Drive and it was either Sunset or Beverly Boulevard, and it was a tony location. The house belonged to—it was either the Andy or the Amos of the radio show.

RJ: So the Raskob's rented the house?

JK: No, my dad and mother rented the house, and I'm pretty sure my Uncle John stopped by there, but I was ten years old. I didn't keep track of that stuff.

RJ: No, no. Yeah, because I guess your family returned—you returned back here after the war.

JK: Oh, this was only—California was just the winter.

RJ: Oh, okay.

JK: We came back here. Matter of fact, my brother and I got a tutor while we were out of school for all that time. A fellow named Kevin McGary and even back then, I remember him talking to us, my brother and me, about the impending war, and that he was going to be a Conscientious Objector. I didn't have a clue then, ten years old, "What's that?" Heard more about

it when I came back here and I was plunked out of Urseline School at the end of the sixth grade and dropped into culture shock, Friends School.

RJ: Your mother and father didn't have any objection to employing a Conscientious Objector to tutor their children? They were pretty unpopular at the time.

JK: Well, he was talking about—I just vaguely remember this conversation with him, that he was not going to—and this is 1937. He just didn't want to fight in a war. He didn't want to kill people. I just remember it.

RJ: Right, that's interesting.

JK: No, he never—I don't think he talked to my mother or dad about stuff like that.

RJ: And so you returned to Wilmington and carried on and you at that point moved to Friends School.

JK: I'm not sure of the sequence because that was '37 and I was ten years old, but that put me in seventh grade? No. That came later. Okay. Skip forward. Maybe I'll remember better.

RJ: Yes. You were four or five years older than the youngest of the Raskob children at that point. Did you socialize with them? Were they—did you go visit them or did they visit you?

JK: When I was ten years old or thereabouts?

RJ: Anytime during your childhood, you can just speak to that.

JK: Not much. We'd come over here from time to time, since we lived just round the corner there. We sometimes went down to my Uncle John's farm down Pioneer Point on the Chester River, and I lost track. I know my mother told one of the first visits, she said, "Oh, I was so proud of you. You held still as a baby while Al Smith kissed you." I thought, "Oh, wonderful." [chuckles]

RJ: The Al Smith connection always come up.

JK: Yeah, but I was a little bitty one then. I do remember, maybe I was seven or eight, my Uncle John and Aunt Helen had a maze, and this maze was live. It was all planted trees and you were not supposed to sneak between trees. You had to follow it, even though some of the trees were a little on the ratty side and you could see your way out—"I'm going to do this." Well, I'm here, so I must have found my way out.

RJ: Yeah. Do you remember generally what kind of experience it was going to Pioneer Point Farm? Would there be a lot of people? Was there kind of a structure to it or were people just there to relax? Was there business going on? But then again you were young, so—

JK: Well, when I was older, I don't think—I never had a real recollection of there being more than a handful of trips down there over all those years. So, no, I'm too vague to personally remember what we did down there, but I think I liked the car drive down, as much as anything.

RJ: It was a long drive, as well, in those days. My recollection, my sort of information from other family members is there was shooting and fishing and boating and swimming. Just kind of a vacation atmosphere, but there were often a lot of people there coming and going at different times. It was a busy scene.

JK: Yeah, I suppose so. This is—I was told they had a big yacht out there in the Corsica River, which was a little—I'm not sure if it's a real river, but it defined part of the—

RJ: A neck.

JK: Yeah, a neck, and it was called Raskob backwards, which was Boksar.

RJ: Boksar, yeah, that's right. Yeah, I've heard of that.

- JK: And I thought, isn't that creative, just think of every name of the world, and end up with your name backwards.
- RJ: Yeah, they had that for a few years and the story goes that Raskob wasn't particularly fond of sailing, you know, the big boats and he didn't like the water that much, but you know, there was an obligation to have that kind of boat at that point.
- JK: I know, and this skips years later, that he had mentioned and possibly my mother had backed this up, that he belonged to the New York Yacht Club, because he lived a great deal in New York.
- RJ: Right.
- JK: And when he kind of parted ideological company with Mr. Roosevelt, he withdrew from the New York Yacht Club because it wasn't going to be Roosevelt and Raskob—no, Raskob and Roosevelt listed in that ship book.
- RJ: He didn't want to be on the roster with him.
- JK: No. So I did verify that in the collection donated to the Edgartown Yacht Club that I presently belong to. The New York Yacht Club annual membership lists were somebody's gift to the club, and in 1932 or '33, somewhere along there, all of a sudden RA is out of there and RO is still in there.
- RJ: That would be exactly the right timing, when they really started to come into political opposition.
- JK: Yeah.
- RJ: You were also speaking yesterday about the reported feud between Raskob and Joseph Kennedy. Was that along the same—
- JK: Oh, I mentioned I'd heard that from my mother, but I have no idea in the world about—she also said something about she thought her brother was

very interested in Warner Brothers at that point. By that time it had established itself. It had basically been the prime developer of sound. No, I don't know anything, other than she once or twice mentioned that he was in California to look at—maybe it was just to look at it to see whether he just wanted to buy some stock in it or whatever. So I don't know.

RJ: What do you think was your mother's opinion of her brother? Was she proud of him? Grateful to him? How did she sort of speak to him, to you?

JK: Oh, she loved him. Of course, this is the youngest and the oldest, but she did. She really—no, that's all I can say on that. I know she did.

RJ: I know some of the correspondence that we have between them, she buys nice gifts for him for his birthday and Christmas and they visit a fair amount, and they spend time with each other throughout, up until you know, his death in 1950. Did she ever speak to you about their childhood? About growing up together? Reminiscences, either of her own life or the family life in Lockport?

JK: I can't remember any details. I think she said—was her father, did he make cigars? Do you know what he did?

RJ: Her grandfather did that.

JK: Her grandfather?

RJ: The German.

JK: Anyway, no, she just—I know she just loved living in Lockport and she used to talk about the canal and the barges and all that kind of stuff. She also living when they moved to Wilmington. She was sometimes asked "What do you like about Wilmington?" She said, "Oh," she said, "the

Pennsylvania Railroad. I can go down there and go anywhere.” So we were—

RJ: I guess in Lockport she would have been sixteen or seventeen.

JK: Well, she was in Wilmington High when they moved here.

RJ: Okay.

JK: The old Wilmington High, which is very close to whether the thruway passes under Delaware Avenue. So I don’t know exactly the age then.

RJ: You don’t have the impression that—do you have any impression that their life in Lockport was, you know, hard scrabble or difficult?

JK: I never heard any mention of that.

RJ: She really didn’t talk about it.

JK: Well, if I know my mother, she wouldn’t. She would have adjusted to whatever it was. She was turned on.

RJ: How would you characterize their relationship, sort of you know throughout, after adulthood for both of them and after Raskob’s great success? Did he look after your mother’s family during her widowhood or first marriage or even your family?

JK: Well, I was executor of her estate and I think he treated all of his brothers and sisters handsomely with gifts of stock, Dupont or GM primarily. I’m just about certain, as executor, there was a lot of GM in there and it couldn’t have come from lunch money.

RJ: A lot of the time, typically, I guess the model of how he took care of people was to give them that kind of seed money to enable them to sort of become independent.

JK: Yeah. Well, I know my father managed my mother’s affairs and he really did very well with it. My impression is much better than others in the family.

RJ: Such as which others? Some of the siblings?

JK: Well, I'll just leave it at that.

RJ: She actually—I got the impression from looking at the records that she was a pretty astute, capable financial woman, particularly for the time because she was the executor of William Dole's—or the executrix, I guess I said that, of Mr. Dole's estate and seemed to be able to sort of grasp—

JK: I never got involved in seeing that estate when I was her executor, but I believe the, maybe not the only but a substantial gift to her probably occurred when she married Mr. Dole, but I don't know for certain.

RJ: That would probably be—

JK: I do know this, speaking of astute, she one time when she was a widow and she was living here with my Uncle Will—I'm almost certain of that—she went out and bought a car and it was a non-GM car and it was called a Stutz.

RJ: Oh, a Stutz Bearcat?

JK: I don't think it was a Bearcat, but it might have been, knowing her. At one time, she tells the story, she came tooling around the corner out here of Kennet Pike and where Route 100, and somehow she thinks the transmission sort of dropped out of it and it stopped dead out here, practically in front of Uncle Will's drive, and he came out to see what all the problem was, and he just looked at her and said, "Serves you right."
[laughs]

RJ: Should have bought General Motors.

JK: Yeah. That was the only, so far as I know, the only non-GM car she ever invested in.

RJ: She learned.

JK: She learned mightily.

RJ: And do you drive GM now still?

JK: I had, as the kids were growing up, I had two Volkswagen busses, one painted orange with a varnished teakwood roof rack that my boat shop made. The neat thing about it—let me see, my friend Charlie Robinson, had one and he went through the windshield of it or close to it in a little bumper problem, whatever it was, and he went right back and got another one, if I understand correctly. I thought, “Well, that’s my kind of car.” It was not exactly a sports car to drive, but all of our kids at that one time, they could stand up inside of it and walk around. This was before seatbelts or any of that stuff, and they still all, when we’re together they’ll talk about life going to school in that VW bus with—

RJ: Oh, you had sufficient children yourself that you needed a bus to take them to school?

JK: Well, it was convenient and GM didn’t make anything like it.

RJ: The Raskobs had one made special, when they lived in Archmere. Aunt Betty talks about the bus that they had.

JK: Oh, they did?

RJ: To take them to—most of the children at that point were at Ursuline and several of them—

JK: That must have been huge.

RJ: They weren’t all going to school, but it must have been at least six or seven of them.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: They had a bus. There was a bus tailor made to their specifications to take them to school. Did you understand when you were sort of young

and a teenager and a young adult, what Raskob did? What his sort of level of success was? His wealth?

JK: I'm not sure at what age I realized there was some substantial money here, but it wasn't when I was really tiny. I just figured, well, everybody's like that. I remember, I must have been very small, but my mother showed me pictures of some kind of party Uncle Will had here, a lot of people dressed up and she had me dolled up in little white hat.

RJ: Sailor suit.

JK: And they posed me for some pictures. I'm not sure if they're still outside—yes, there's one right outside. A big flower cast plaster iron urn and I'm sitting on top that thing with mud in it or whatever, to get my picture taken and I wondered why. [laughs] But it was more than eye level and I guess I looked heroic. That is a recollection. You know, over the years I certainly knew when I was in high school that things were a little different than most people from that regard.

RJ: You were recognized as being part of the family and treated in some way differently because you were a Raskob, essentially a Raskob?

JK: Well, if it was, whoever did it, I told them to go to hell. But, yeah, I heard it sometimes. Matter of fact, my mother and dad—I guess my dad was a member of the Sea View Country Club, which was a privately owned club and the man who started it, controlled it, and those he liked, joined it and otherwise forget it. I remember my mother and dad and my Aunt Lucille, my brother and I were over there for dinner one evening in the summer. It's a few miles away from Atlantic City and probably a half hour drive from where we had a summer place in Ventnor. My dad had got the car—he was getting in the car with my mother. Back then they had a livery service that brought the car up, parked it under the

portico of the club, and I had lingered saying hello to somebody. Oh, I remember, it was a friend of my dad's, Johnny Weissmuller, and they were both competitive on the golf course, no matter what their ages. So I'd said hello to him, so I'm a little late going out the front door.

Everybody was in the car and I remember these two men standing on one side, kind of talking to each other, and they said, "That's that Ray Kaiser. He married that Raskob money," and I stopped and I walked over to them. I said, "That's my father you're talking about. You want to tell me anymore?" I had just got out of the Navy and I wasn't going to take stuff like that. [chuckles] So anyway, I was very aware that sometimes things like that were said.

RJ: You summered, as you said, in Ventnor, in New Jersey.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: Near Atlantic City. You had the same house? You had owned property there or rented?

JK: No, no, my mother and dad rented. I think I was a one year old infant when they first went down there, and they rented one or another house between Atlantic Avenue and the Boardwalk. I think it wasn't until, oh, maybe I was ten, twelve years old, they started to rent only on Suffolk Avenue, which was one of the blocks that skipped a block of housing and had a big tennis courts and a much bigger beach area behind the Boardwalk. Double parking out in front, much wider street, and they rented three different houses on that street, as I was a little kid, and finally my dad bought it, after my mother did, and then years went by and I bought it from him, and my wife and I—well, sometime after I bought it, decided we'd much rather—by that time I'd been building boats and we still living on a demonstrator boat—helped to sell it—and eventually

there were a few years where I didn't have a boat to live on, because we'd sold it and Claire said, "Why don't we build one and just keep it for ourselves." That boat is now twenty-five years old and we're going to have a big party for it this summer.

RJ: And that's the boat you are going to be on this summer that you were telling me about.

JK: Oh, I hope so. How did this relate? You asked me about Ventnor. Oh, and then I finally after years of the Ursuline order used the house as a summer R&R and they'd bring people in, nuns from their different provinces, I think they call them. They just loved it, but it just got to the point where I needed to sell it. So they didn't want to buy it.

RJ: No, they would have wanted to have received it.

JK: Well, anyway, I sold it and they—

RJ: How did your interest in boat building come about?

JK: I think it started early in college. One of my fraternity brothers, his family had a Lightning sailboat down on the Northeast River.

RJ: And you were in college where, I'm sorry?

JK: At this time I'm at Delaware. I dropped in there a couple of times in my varied eclectic college drifting, which had purpose to it. Anyway, this, four of us went out in this sailboat and I think I told them I'd read about sailing. So we got out there and the very first thing I did was capsize it, and the owner was—well, it was his family's boat, but he came out in a little power boat and he wouldn't rescue us. He just started telling us what to do to bail it out. I think we might have sailed that boat one more time without capsizing it, and I got thinking, "This is fascinating." I was studying engineering. I was still hard-pressed to figure out why a sailboat would go into the wind. So I finally figured that out and I got

fascinated by sailing and I built a sailing surfboard in the garage in Ventnor and I thought, “Hmm, I keep breaking the mast every time I try to sail it.” So I started getting very interested in yacht design and read a lot about it. Well, I’m not here to talk about me.

RJ: Well, it’s interesting because, of course, you know the longstanding Raskob family, the various siblings’ interests. The aunts and uncles, many of them were interested in yachting. Betty Parkman, her husband came from a family of yacht builders. Her father-in-law was a big yacht builder on Long Island Sound.

JK: Oh, I never knew that. Where?

RJ: On Long Island Sound, from my understanding, but the Parkman name is associated with I think Starboats and that’s how—

JK: I never knew that until right now.

RJ: That’s how they met, through those Starboat racing circles. So it is interesting that you came to that interest.

JK: It might be the DNA somewhere, because my father had no interest in sailboats. I must say as a kid, an infant I think in ’28 or so, they had a powerboat, a thirty-eight foot Chriscraft and they kept it—that was the in boat then I guess—and they kept it down on the Christina River at a yard called the Marine Construction Company. By the time I started building boats I actually ironically bought property almost directly across from what had then become known locally as the Marine Destruction Company because everything they did was busted up. [laughs]

Anyway, my father and mom, I think they had that boat not much over a year. The Depression sat in and they basically gave it away, and my dad told me that maybe the new owner, he was lucky. He said, had it down Chesapeake some place. It caught fire and he was able to get away

from it. It just burned to the water and sank. So that was the end of my father's desire to ever own a boat since then.

RJ: I'm going to change tapes. We're going to take a brief pause because we're almost—[tape off/on]

JK: Yeah, his name was Jack Corcoran and he was sort of tutor and—

RJ: Well, he was—I mean [unclear] I guess. You know, you might want to say he was associated with the family in oh so very many capacities.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: And eventually, of course, he was Helena—he was Skipper's second husband.

JK: Yeah, I knew that. How long did—how long after Uncle John's death did they marry? It couldn't have been too long.

RJ: I think it was two, four years?

JK: I don't know.

RJ: It was either 1952 or 1954 when she married.

JK: I hope they had a lovely time. I don't know how long it was until either one died.

RJ: Skipper died in—

JK: Are we on camera now?

RJ: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes. Yes.

JK: Oh, we are. I was going to pick my nose, but okay. So much for that.

RJ: Skipper died in the early '60s, and Jack lived—he was, you know, somewhat younger than she was and he carried on. He was—

JK: I just remember meeting him quickly and I think he was doing athletic stuff with all of them. Maybe I was involved in running around or whatever. But it's too vague.

RJ: Well, he was a lifeguard originally. They met him in Lake Placid, where he was a lifeguard at either a country club or a resort they stayed at. So he was very husky and very sort of sporting, and he taught all of the children to swim.

JK: Great.

RJ: Do you remember—do you have any other recollections of him?

JK: No, I know I met him. As a little kid, you know, you look up to guys like that. Sounds like he was a Ronald Reagan type.

RJ: He was a big man.

JK: Yeah, sounds like it.

RJ: Did you maintain a relationship with Skipper after the death of Raskob?

JK: No. No.

RJ: What about aunts and uncles? Were there any that you were particularly close to?

JK: I couldn't hear you.

RJ: Were there any of the aunts and uncles, as you called them, you know, the children of John Raskob, that you were particularly close to. You told about being a friend of Charlie Robinson's.

JK: Well, Charlie and Josephine, yeah, we saw them from time-to-time. Saw Boo Duffy. Oh, on our honeymoon, Claire and I had a little twenty-three foot sailboat and I thought that was the neatest little boat. That really got me interested in design work because I did some—how would I say it? Suggested some ideas to the builder, which he incorporated, and then later added into the model that he was building. We sailed up Tread Aben, to where Patsy and Steve Bremmer lived at that time, on the downstream side of the bridge there. I just thought that was the neatest thing, to have a place on the water. As we got more along, every boat we

ever built for ourselves was named Claire, except one. There was a well-known movie. It was a remake of the Philadelphia story, Philip Barry, and they turned it into a musical with Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. Louie Armstrong I think was in it. It was called High Society, and they had a song in there and this was in the movie theaters just about as we were getting married. I'm impressed by some things, and especially neat movies that relate—they had a song in there called "True Love." So we once owned a boat, not a Claire, but we called it True Love, and I made the mistake when I sold that one. I said, "Claire, the next boat, why don't we call it True Love II?" and as soon as I said it, I thought, "Oh-oh, this is a mistake."

RJ: It's a nice sentiment.

JK: In law school I discovered why there are very large margins in case books. I had all these sketches of boat designs along the margins because I'd been studying engineering in college, and I still have a few of those. Sometimes—this is from much publication—sometimes the sketches would be beautiful women's bodies, all these curvy shapes and I thought, "There's a relationship between them." That's why they call boats 'she.' Anyway, let's skip that a bit. [laughs]

RJ: Did you, when you were with Boo, the Duffys and the Robinsons, did you ever remember them, did they speak about their father, particularly after his death?

JK: I know my cousin Francis Hull Feeney married Jim Feeney and we used to often go down when the Feeneys bought a place down on Island Creek, Claire and I'd go down and see them because they were, I would say, totally, totally unstuffy. Francis, particularly told stories about when she was—I guess she was sort of boarded at Ursuline because even in

Wilmington they just wanted her to get different experiences. She had comments about my Uncle John because she'd say something like, "Oh, he's very pleasant, as long as you don't cross him." She said that more than once in different occasions.

RJ: Now, she—who is Francis Feeney?

JK: She is—she was the daughter of—her mother was Gertrude Raskob. She was my mother's—Gertrude was my mother's older sister.

RJ: Gertrude and Royal Hull.

JK: That's right. Pete, they called him. She was much more fun than her brothers and sister. Her sister is still alive and is just delightful.

RJ: Oh, really?

JK: Francis, piece of work, she was just--and Jim. We really enjoyed their company, right up until not too long before they died.

RJ: But they would speak of him still fondly, I guess.

JK: Oh, fondly, but you know, Francis called a spade a spade. There were just, I gather many times when if she was in—

[end of Side A, Tape 1]

JK: --my Uncle John's presence, he said something she didn't agree with, she'd just let him know it. Not too many did that.

RJ: And our understanding is that the ones that did, especially the woman that did, he admired that.

JK: I think that has to be so.

RJ: There was a very sort of specific kind of strong women who'd come up, who had good relationships with, at least in part because they were kind of defiant and not deferential to him.

JK: You're telling me things I always suspected, but—yeah, I'm sure that's the case.

RJ: But your aunt, I guess, that's another example of—

JK: This one—Francis was my cousin.

RJ: Cousin.

JK: Yeah, and her mother, I didn't really know her mother that well. We used to visit over there. We were only a block apart over in—pardon me—Westover, and we'd go over there from time-to-time on Sundays. Even then Francis was so much fun to be around. I don't remember her uncle or—I mean, Francis's mother or father that well. Her mother got quite ill in her later days and was I guess reclusive, but I don't know the details.

RJ: She was widowed, as well, I think, somewhat early.

JK: Francis's mother? Her father died first.

RJ: Right. There was a difference, I guess, between the households of John Raskob's sisters and his household because his household was huge and full of servants and on a great amount of land, and your lives were more regular. Did you have big households and—

JK: We had what my mother and dad called an upstairs maid, and her problem was from time-to-time the police would come out with some kind of warrant. She was in trouble from time-to-time and my mother—I can't think of her name, but my mother and dad would take care of matters and then she'd continue on. My mother and dad for years had a couple, Mac and Mary McKinley Roister. McKinley, how he managed it I do not know, but he loved to sip and on his—he didn't die in our employ, but the drinking problem really got serious and my mother deemed not to notice it and he had those, you know, the little half pint bottles. They were stashed behind every cushion in the parts of the house she wouldn't check on. He was just the nicest guy and my mother and dad, I think well into—oh, Mary was getting so she couldn't go up and

down stairs particularly well, and they finally had to retire. Yeah, it was, let's say my mother and dad just—I'm not sure what the word is. They accepted people who worked for him, warts and all.

RJ: In contrast, I guess with the John Raskob household where there were so many servants. They had such a large staff, chauffeurs and governesses.

JK: I know almost nothing about that.

RJ: Because you weren't really part of that at that point.

JK: No.

RJ: But there was no—you never got the impression that there was any envy from your mother, you know, his success.

JK: I think they were delighted with their own life and the way they lived it. We never had a chauffeur except Mr. Mac used to drive my brother and me before I could get a driver's license.

RJ: When he was sober.

JK: After that, I did all the driving.

RJ: And you're the oldest? The oldest of you and your brother?

JK: Yeah, my brother was a year or so younger.

RJ: You had mentioned, I guess, yesterday a couple of anecdotes, I guess, that I'd like to revisit for the tape, if you want. One about John Raskob's visit to your mother's house at Ventnor when he had to make the twelve point turn.

JK: You rascal. You remembered that. I remember it only from having the sixteen millimeter silent movies that my dad loved to take. This big, big car—this is a summer in Ventnor on I think Dorset Avenue. This was a house a block or so from—a house or so from the Boardwalk, and he came driving up, my Uncle John in this—it must have been a Cadillac. He got it turned around so he could park on my mother and dad's side of

the street and, of course, all those houses, the porch was one floor up. The basement was showers and things like that because of the tides occasionally. My dad is up on the porch taking these movies and my uncle went around and opened the door to the front passenger side, and out stepped this lovely, lovely gorgeous floozing film type lady. My mother and dad never told me who it was, and I don't think they knew quite themselves, except she could have been an investor in his—who knows? I don't know, but it's on this can of film that I—I don't know if I still have it, but I don't know if any of it is beyond repair or not.

RJ: I think that we would like to try.

JK: But I do remember seeing it, so.

RJ: I think if you wanted to, we would probably be happy to look at that and see, you know, if anything could be—sort of give you advice on what could be done, as far as preservation of it, and a copy.

JK: Don't say too much here. All I know is, it was not my Aunt Helen.

RJ: Right.

JK: But anyway—

RJ: Well, that's part of the—that's part of the sort of the mystique and the sort of the story.

JK: Oh, yeah.

RJ: You know, he had a life, several lives lived at the same time.

JK: Probably more than I know.

RJ: Right.

JK: Yeah.

RJ: And you know at least part of it, I guess, with that. You know, there's a New York side. There's a Maryland side and there's a few other states, I

guess, too. But that's really—that's really your only exposure to that side of his life? His social world?

JK: I know my mother said he had friends in the Broadway show business and I think she mentioned the name Eddy Foy, Junior.

RJ: Eddy Foy?

JK: The son.

RJ: F-O-Y, Junior?

JK: F-O-Y, yeah, and I don't know how much that relationship was, but he did, he loved music.

RJ: He loved musicals, too, right.

JK: I don't know if he—we found an old—in the attic of our house, we found an old violin and I think, but I'm not sure, I think my mother said it was her brother Will's violin as a kid. It was one of those cheapos you learn on. So I don't know what kind of musical interest—I know my Uncle Will said, because I once asked him right here in the living room, music room, "Do you play an instrument?" and he said, "No, my favorite instrument is the victrola," which is at the end of the room in a fancy Oriental case, or it used to be.

RJ: He, you know, saw a lot of musicals. Was often in New York sort of out at Broadway shows and it's a big thing that the family did, that he would go to with his kids, you know, a lot. He also, I know, had a long relationship with Eddy Dowling, who was a producer.

JK: Maybe that was the name.

RJ: That's possible.

JK: That's the name, Dowling.

RJ: I can check.

JK: Okay, I'm wrong.

RJ: He was involved in production and did put some money up from time-to-time to produce shows.

JK: Were any of them successful?

RJ: That's a good question. I'm not sure. Eddy Dowling turned out to be pretty successful. I mean he produced some Tennessee Williams plays for the first time.

JK: Oh, really? Up into that generation?

RJ: I don't think—[unclear], but he kind of, you know, gave him a little boost up at the beginning of his career. Of course, John Raskob was one of the primary investors in the Playhouse, as it is now.

JK: I knew that. And I think my mother said he reserved inside the building, the building, near where you go into the Playhouse, the cigar and newsstand—

RJ: The Beehive.

JK: Beehive, I was thinking. Is that the name? Is that some—yeah, I think it might still have that name on it.

RJ: Oh, really?

JK: Yeah, I'm not sure.

RJ: And I think that that was an investment, along with P.S.—P.S. Dupont was involved in that, too. It was a little sideline for them.

JK: I think it started as mostly good cigars.

RJ: And I never knew until this last week or so that the Green Room was named after Skipper, allegedly.

JK: Oh, I knew that.

RJ: I'd never heard that story until we were talking about the renovations this week.

JK: I told you that—did I tell you that story about my dad and mother used to take my brother and me to the hotel Green Room after church at St. Anne's, to which we drove in one or the other of my parents' new Cadillacs. They traded every other year, and my dad would get us all dressed up, or my mother. It's a block and a half away and we would drive, and we would leave fifteen minutes ahead of the Mass, so it could be parked right in front. I think my dad just had this feeling, "These are great cars. Look at it!" Anyway, we'd drive on down to the Green Room and there was this one time we're sitting—we always sat at a round table in the corner that looks out across 11th Street to the—I'm not sure what denomination the church across the street is. It's a lovely piece of brick architecture. Anyway, we're sitting in that round table. My mother and I have our back to the window. My brother and my father are facing us and at one point, waiting for breakfast, my mother makes a little squeak sound and she said, "Did you see that?" and she's standing up. She's only five feet two or so, and she's standing up and she's going like this to Robert. He was there for years after. He was not much taller than my mother. He came running over and said, "Mrs. Kaiser, what's the matter?" She said, "Did you see that?" and she said to me, "Did you see that?" I said, "Yes, it's a mouse." Robert came over and my mother said, "I saw a mouse," and Robert said, "Mrs. Kaiser"—he was a cool guy. And he said, "Mrs. Kaiser, when you saw it, which way was it going?" and my mother said, "It was going that way," and he said, "That's Pierre. Lamont's in the other corner." So my mother said, "Oh..." So that was okay, friendly mice.

RJ: They're not just mice. The table you're describing is, I'm lead to understand that's the 'power' table in the Green Room now.

JK: That little table in the corner?

RJ: The round table in the corner. You have the windows on both sides.

JK: No, this one only had the windows—it was in the corner against the wall that separated it from the entrance in. It wasn't—oh, I know the table you mean. Yeah, yeah. My brother and I used to get together down there for a table for two and it was, as you walked in, just directly across on Market Street.

RJ: You could see the whole room.

JK: I do remember the waitress was kind of quiet about it, but they were doing this construction work outside and they were replacing all the glass along there with bulletproof glass, which might have been insurance for the power table you talk of.

RJ: Yes, I guess so. Where it is the table where, sort of, the legislators will go and the big wheels, as it were. I'm not sure which table Raskob ate at when he was there.

JK: Well, that was before my time.

RJ: Right.

JK: I was still in college when he died.

RJ: Well, thank you. Do you have anything else comes to mind kind of as a wrap?

JK: No, just my memory of him is I had a few conversations with him when I was in college and basically he was very supportive of my getting my act together. Matter of fact, he even said, "You know, you might thinking about going to law school."

RJ: Which you did.

JK: I did, yeah. Not because he told me to, but I wanted to. It was redemption for five and a half years of undergraduate.

RJ: Your conversations with him when you were in college were apropos of family. Just events, meetings, family occasions?

JK: I didn't see him all that many times. I think he was more asking me how I was doing in school and I'm telling him. No, there weren't that many conversations, but I guess enough so that he said to my mother—maybe he was just being polite, but he did say that if I got my act together, I could do better. Which I did.

RJ: He was interested in your success, though.

JK: I think so. Somebody had to.

RJ: Well, I mean in part, you know, I think his sons, although I think they were all pretty content with their lives for themselves, didn't necessarily achieve—

JK: How old was their oldest son Bill when he was killed? I think he was in college.

RJ: In 1927, he would have been maybe in his early twenties.

JK: Yeah, that made me an infant.

RJ: Yeah, I guess you were. When's your birthday, what month?

JK: I was born this coming month in '27.

RJ: So you were—you know, he died in July, early July, so you had just been born when he died.

JK: Well, from just a few things I've heard, he was the one my uncle had the high hopes for.

RJ: I had that impression, too, what—and I just have that impression kind of speculatively, but what kind of supports that for you?

JK: I couldn't hear.

RJ: What's the kind of evidence for that, that you have? I mean I agree.

- JK: Just my mother saying that she thought he was—I guess it was information from his father.
- RJ: Did she ever talk about him, his reaction to Bill's death?
- JK: No. No.
- RJ: Because I'm also interested in how he responded to Yvonne's death, which was 1935. She died when she was still in college. Do you have any sort of recollection of that, either? Well, you would have been again too young.
- JK: I was at Ursuline at the time, and I remember my mother telling me about it and what a terrible—I think she had gone to Ursuline, Yvonne had. Of course, she was much older, so no, I just remember my mother was very upset about it. I don't know what she died of, but apparently she was kind of frail or ill most of her life.
- RJ: She'd been frail from a very young age, birth maybe, and eventually died of pneumonia. I think it was a culmination of severe asthma and allergies and various kind of combination of illnesses.
- JK: Where was she in college?
- RJ: St. Vincent on the Hudson.
- JK: Oh, that's one I don't—sounds like a Catholic school.
- RJ: Yes.
- JK: I know a number of the—well, the Robinson kids went to Haverford.
- RJ: Oh, really?
- JK: Yeah.
- RJ: A lot of the boys—I think most of the boys, except for Ben, that Bob and Junior and Bill all went to Newman School in Lakewood, New Jersey.
- JK: That's another one I don't know.
- RJ: But that was in the teens and twenties.

JK: Well, I did go to a year at Georgetown and a year at a division of St. Louis University, both Jesuit schools. St. Louis University was—I bet you never heard of this one, Parks College of Aeronautical Technology of St. Louis. They couldn't put it on the gate.

RJ: Nor on letterhead.

JK: No, but I'm—are we still on that thing?

RJ: Yeah, if you're—

JK: Oh, okay. Well, I was very—it didn't take very long to become very impressed with the Quakers and their approaches to—I shouldn't say sink or swim education, but it might have been a little bit. It worked for me.

RJ: All right. Well, thank you very much.

JK: Well, thank you, Richard.

RJ: Very interesting. I'm going to turn it off now.

End of Interview