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Interview with Louise Rosskam

Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

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Name of Interviewer: Gary Saretzky
Premises of Interview: Mrs. Rosskam's home, Roosevelt, NJ
Birthdate of Subject: March 27, 1910

Deceased: April 1, 2003

Louise Rosskam, April 2000 (photographed by Gary Saretzky)

Mr. Saretzky: Louise, it's a pleasure to be here and I am really looking forward to speaking with you. I know you have some wonderful stories that you are willing to share with me today, and for people in the future as well. You were born in Philadelphia?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes.

Mr. Saretzky: Can I ask you about your parents?

Ms. Rosskam: I was born in Philadelphia in a large family. By the time I was born, there were seven other children. My father had been an immigrant from Hungary, and he came to Philadelphia with two friends just after they were fourteen years old; boys were considered men at that time. And they all would have been put in the army if they hadn't left Europe. So they left and came to Philadelphia with absolutely nothing, no contacts or anything.

Mr. Saretzky: When was that? What was your father's name?

Ms. Rosskam: My father's name was Morris Rosenbaum. I am a bit hazy about what year that was, but it must have been around the 1850s or 1860s. When they arrived, there was no arrangement for receiving immigrants at all. They didn't land at Ellis Island; they landed in Boston. They didn't know anybody, but

one of them decided that everybody should buy something, so he became a peddler. The other one had been a sort of a catered intellectual in Hungary, and he decided to sell books. And my father rolled cigars.

Mr. Saretzky: That was a big business in Philadelphia.

Ms. Rosskam: That's right. Eventually, the boy who was a peddler started a chain of department stores and became a millionaire. The one who liked books was named Charlie Sessler, who is well known in Philadelphia for collecting Dickens and Thackery originals, and he became very well known in the Philadelphia intellectual circles. My father gradually became a banker for immigrants who didn't know how to speak English or anything and didn't trust banks. He had sort of a safe deposit company, and he also represented the steamship companies which brought immigrants to the United States. If they landed in Philadelphia, they looked him up and he showed them how to get along and what to do.

Mr. Saretzky: Do you remember the name of this company?

Ms. Rosskam: M. Rosenbaum's. The office is still there in Philadelphia at 205 South Third Street. The building is there with an "M" carved on the top, but of course he had to sell it during the Depression. So our family doesn't own it anymore. He was very well known, and all of the three of them became very Americanized. They were all Jewish, but they didn't believe in carrying on their old Jewish background in an American country. My father was influential in forming a Reformed synagogue because he felt that if you were in American, you can't have all these prayers in Hebrew. Your children have to learn English, and even if they are going to be Jewish, they have to be American Jews.

Mr. Saretzky: And do you remember the name of the synagogue?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, Rodev Shalom. It is still there, it's the big building on North Broad Street.

Mr. Saretzky: And how about your mother?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, her family had come to America before my father's family did. My mother's father had been a rabbi and was very intellectual. They had a stationery store in the Lower East Side of New York, where they settled. Her name was Hannah Rottenberg. But my father, who was rolling cigars and starting a business, really wanted to meet people he could talk to. So my mother's father and my father found each other and used to go to the stationery store, where they would sit in the back and would talk about religion, books, and things like that. But my mother was a pretty, young seventeen-year old girl, and my father had his eye on her. And one day he leaned across the counter and kissed her.

She got mad and she slapped him, which is what you were supposed to do. She loved it, of course.

Mr. Saretzky: This was in New York?

Ms. Rosskam: In New York. So gradually he came to the store more often and then asked her father if he could marry his daughter, which was what you would do. She thought, "Oh that's great. I could get married, could get out of the store, and I could get all kinds of nice clothes and everything." So she said yes. And the first thing she did was to go out and buy all the non-Kosher food that she wanted. So she was a very gay young girl and she enjoyed life.

Mr. Saretzky: And so then they moved to Philadelphia?

Ms. Rosskam: They moved to Philadelphia after they got married, and he started his business. I have clippings, if I could ever find them, about his work with immigrants. He had two great friends in Philadelphia. One of them was Mark Blitzstein. He worked for my father. There was a little group of people who had common interests. But my father was very active...he wanted to make Philadelphia a major port. He tried every which way to convince the powers that be to open the Delaware River enough to have steamships that would land in Philadelphia. But it didn't work very well. He was also on the Board of Education and he was very interested in the development of a good city and good family life. They still lived in the old Jewish neighborhood. His oldest son was very bright.

Mr. Saretzky: That is your brother?

Ms. Rosskam: He was my oldest brother. In the same neighborhood, a little bit north of South Philadelphia, where the Jewish neighborhood was, there was a very elegant neighborhood of very, very wealthy and important non-Jewish society people. My oldest brother was so bright that every once in awhile the school would send him to meet these people because they thought it would improve his understanding of American life. So he met all sorts of people...the Biddells and I forget all their names. When he got old enough, he didn't want to live at home with all the brothers and sisters because he couldn't study. So my father got him an apartment all by himself when he was about eighteen years old. When he went to college, he went to the University of Pennsylvania; he went through law school and became the top editor of *Law Review* and all that stuff. But I hardly knew him because I was very young and he was twenty-two when I was born.

Mr. Saretzky: Were you the youngest member of the family? How many children were there?

Ms. Rosskam: There were eight all together and I was the last one. The second youngest was my sister, who became a doctor. The one after that was a brother who never wanted to be anything but an actor, but he went into the travel business eventually. Two others were chemists. Another was a geologist, and then the oldest one became a real big shot in Philadelphia. He was a lawyer and assistant city...head of just about everything because his contacts were so great. But I never liked it very much because he was never home...he went off to England.

Mr. Saretzky: Could you just tell me the names of your brothers and sisters?

Ms. Rosskam: Which way do you want to go?

Mr. Saretzky: Start from the oldest.

Ms. Rosskam: The oldest one was Samuel R. Rosenbaum. The next one was a girl named Goldie Rosenbaum, and she married somebody named Lichten. The next one was a boy whose name was Ignatz Rosenbaum, which was Americanized as Archie. He was a bad boy, and my father made him join the army when he was just seventeen, and he became a Colonel. The next one was Eli, and he became a chemist. The next one was Robert, and he became a chemist as well. They were partners, those two boys. The next one was Paul, who wanted to be an actor and gradually went into the travel and real estate businesses. The next one was Katharine. She married three times. Her first marriage was to somebody named Guest. Then she was Katharine Boucout. Her last marriage was to Sam Sturgis, who was a doctor as well. And then came me. And my full maiden name is Leah Louise Rosenbaum. There was a twenty-two year spread between Sam and me.

Mr. Saretzky: So he was already out of the house by the time you were born?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, he got a fellowship to England and he married an English woman. You know the old story about a father "reading you out" of a family? Well that's what happened. He married an Episcopalian. My father was a Reformed Jew, but he felt you had to keep your heritage. But my brother married an Episcopalian, and actually my father never spoke to her in her whole life. She died of cancer after they had two children. My father felt very badly about that. He didn't believe in private conveyances like cars. He thought you should take the trolley car and "be a part of the people." So anyway, he rented the first car he ever rented and got himself driven to my brother's house in Germantown. He sat outside of the house to talk to my brother and convey his condolences, and then he left. Isn't that horrible? I mean it's just unbelievable.

Mr. Saretzky: It's sad the way things can break up a family.

Ms. Rosskam: One of those children from his English wife is now very well known. Her name is Rosamund Bernier, and she gives lectures at The Metropolitan. I don't know if she would like all this stuff. My brother got to be very...in his final years he had so many "big shot" contacts that he sort of dropped his Jewish background. Since his wife was Episcopalian, she was buried in an Episcopalian church, and the children were brought up as Episcopalians. So, all this goes on in these families. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Saretzky: Well, it's very common in America for this to happen.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. But you see I was the youngest, and I went to Jewish Sunday School. I learned a lot there, and it was great. Girls didn't have bar mitzvahs, but they had confirmations. I was supposed to give a speech at the confirmation. The rabbi was a friend of ours, naturally, or a friend of my father's. But I said, "I'm not going to belong to this Synagogue when I grow up, so I'm not going to make a speech." And the rabbi said, "You've got to make a speech. Your father organized this Synagogue." And I said, "Nope, I don't believe in it. Why should I be a hypocrite"? So he said, "All right. All you have to do to please me, and your father, is present this beautiful wreath of flowers to the congregation of the Synagogue as a thanks for your education." And I said, "That sounds okay, but I'm not coming back after that." And I never did go back until my father died. Of course I went back then. I don't know why I was like that...I have no idea.

Mr. Saretzky: Would you say that you had a happy childhood?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. It was very, very happy. I had lots of friends. We lived in a house on the corner, and all the way down the street on one side were these porch houses. You could look all the way down the street. I had friends there, across the street, and around the corner. And my brothers and sisters were around, you know. My father used to bring in good people who used to be good influences on us...like a guest for dinner. It would be someone like Colonel Lipton of the Lipton Tea Company and people like that. There were musicians and philosophers, etc. So it was really great.

Mr. Saretzky: Now when you were a child, there was a large group of children sitting around a big dinner table. Were the children permitted to speak?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes. Not only were they permitted to speak but.... We still had Friday night services. My mother really never gave up being an Orthodox Jew. She would pray over the candles, and we had a covered twist [a loaf of challah bread], and all that stuff. Then we would have this...well not much of a ceremony...but I always had to read Psalm 23 "The Lord is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want..." I used to go through it in about a second. Then we all sat down, and we always had this wonderful dinner. There were all these people around the table, and my father would always try to be very "fatherly" and what not. But my

brothers would be sitting there and taking spoons of water and flipping it at each other. (laughter) It was crazy...a lot of fun. But my brothers were really great. There are so many stories about that house, I don't know whether or not they would fit in this story.

Mr. Saretzky: Let me ask you one thing more about your brothers. Several of them went into science. You said they became chemists. Did that have something to do with you going into biology?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes. Mostly my sister, because she always wanted to be a doctor. And she knew many, many doctors. But it was an accident, though, that I went into biology. I wanted to go to Wellesley College because my best friend went there, and I thought it was the height of intellectual elegance to go to Wellesley. I took the entrance exams, though, and I failed the math part. I didn't get in, and I was absolutely devastated. But I was very very close to the next one of my sisters. She wanted to be a doctor and go to medical school, but she eloped and got married, so she couldn't go to medical school. But she said to me, "Look, you don't have to go to Wellesley. It's just a waste of your time. There's lots to do right here in Philadelphia. You register at the University of Pennsylvania. They give you sort of a placement test, and you'll see, you'll be at the top of it." So I was! But girls were not admitted then in the regular University. They could only be in the pre-medical department or the architectural department, for some reason. So I went into pre-med. Then there is a really long story after that...because the Depression came. And my father lost everything, absolutely everything. I was a freshman in Cat Anatomy class, looking at the cat's circulatory system, when I got a call to go home immediately. So I rushed home and my father was home, which he never was. He used to leave at seven in the morning and come home at nine at night. And my father said we had lost everything and I would have to leave school.

Mr. Saretzky: How could he lose everything?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, all the banks closed. And his business was a bank. The money that he had for safe keeping was in the regular banks. He couldn't pay his customers any interest. So he was devastated. He had kept safe keeping accounts for all of us children for all of our lives. So he took all that money and paid off all his customers. We had zero.

Mr. Saretzky: So you lost your money, too.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, even though I didn't know I had it until then. The oldest brother, the one who was a lawyer, was connected with a big bank in Philadelphia. I think he knew that the banks were going to close, because he came and told us we didn't have to leave our apartment...that he would take care of that. But I didn't know what to do, so I went back to school. The worst thing was that I was just seventeen years old. I said to my father, and this was horrible,

"We can just sell apples." You know, that's what they did. And he cried...imagine my father who never cried in all of my memory. So I felt awful. I went back to college and I said, "I have to leave." And they said they'd work something out. So they gave me a job as the assistant to the guy who prepared all the material for the classes...the lobsters and the frogs, and all that stuff. So I had a job there.

Mr. Saretzky: So how old were you when you started college?

Ms. Rosskam: Eighteen. I had to go five years because I had a job all the way through. I made slides, did cell division, and I had all kinds of jobs, but always in that department. And I went to Woods Hole on a scholarship for a couple of years. I was really into biology until I met Edwin.

Mr. Saretzky: Tell me a little bit more about what you were trying to do in the field of biology.

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, I was trying to find out what was the origin of life...simple.

Mr. Saretzky: How far did you get?

Ms. Rosskam: Well I got as far as... I had a mouse cage on me in the basement of the lab building because they let me do my own research. I was studying genetics at that time. I was figuring out exactly how you inherited everything. That was in the air at that time. So all my mice had designs on their tails. They were little stripes. I baited these mice, and I carefully drew the design on their tail. They gave me these boxes because they didn't have enough cages for all my mice. So they gave me these square boxes, and I put chicken wire over the top. I put the mama and the daddy, with the marks on their tails, and I waited twenty-two days. Then they all had babies. I thought, "Oh great. Now they are a little too young to look at their tails. They're not really developed yet, so I better wait a week." So after a week I went down to my room in the biology department, and all the baby mice were out on top of the cages because they had gotten through the chicken wire. (Laughter) I couldn't take the measurements or anything. So that was a disaster, but that's how you learn things. Of course the department let me do whatever I wanted in my research. But I really wanted to find out exactly how things got started and how they developed. Of course nobody at that time knew the genetic symbols or anything.

Mr. Saretzky: That was before DNA was discovered.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, it was before all of that.

Mr. Saretzky: Did you also have any teaching responsibilities?

Ms. Rosskam: No, just research. One of the professors there made all their slides, if you remember, that you had to use to look at cell division. Each box of

slides had twenty slides in it. Each one had to be at a certain stage of cell division. She would get these cells that must have been from horses because they had very big chromosomes. She got these from the veterinary department. Then we had to slice all those up. First of all, we had to imbed them in wax. Then we had to slice them all up with a microtone and then spread them all out. Next we dyed them with this aniline dye, and then we looked at all of them to find all the stages. Then we would mount them on slides, put the cover-faces on, put the slides in a box, and so there were twenty, separate stages. And I had to do that for four years. My eyes were a wreck! But I got two dollars per slide, so I could pay my whole tuition.

Mr. Saretzky: That sounds like a pretty tough job.

Ms. Rosskam: Well, it was. I used to go early in the morning to find the right stages, and then the actual making of the slides got to be easy. The hardest thing was finding the stages. Of course you had to throw out half the stuff you had already sliced up and dyed because you had too many of one thing.

Mr. Saretzky: You had to catch it at the right moment.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, that went on for five years. I had other jobs around and other interests while I was there. One professor gave me a job...well, it wasn't a job. He just showed me how protoplasm is elastic. You have to find out how elastic it really is because it will bear a certain amount of stretching. There is a big slime mold that grows on the bottom of tree trunks and all. He used to bring that in. I used to have to take two little wires and stretch it until it broke, and I had to record exactly how much...that was a stupid job. But the professor was very dramatic, so I stuck at it for about six months. Then I said, "The heck with this." But that was by the time I could graduate. I didn't bother going to my graduation because it was a year after my regular class, and I didn't even know anybody in that class. So I graduated in 1933.

Mr. Saretzky: And this was at Penn?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, and I should have graduated in 1932.

Mr. Saretzky: So that's really at the height of the Depression and Roosevelt had just taken office at that point.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes.

Mr. Saretzky: And it was a very exciting time.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, it was. As soon as I left Philadelphia and went to live in New York with Edwin, we really got into all sorts of things.

Mr. Saretzky: Why don't you tell me how you met your husband, Edwin Rosskam.

Ms. Rosskam: He had been a painter, and he had gone to art school in Philadelphia. He married a student, and they went off to Paris together. They were both painters, and then she walked off with his best friend. He got desperate and followed the trail of the painter Gaughin. He first went to Martinique, then to Tahiti, and then off to a little island called Raiatea. And he stayed there for three years. He got some kind of tropical disease, the woman with him got very sick, and left.

Mr. Saretzky: That was his first wife?

Ms. Rosskam: No, it wasn't his wife at all. This was just somebody that went with him on his trip. Anyway, he went into Tahiti and stayed there for about six months and recuperated. It's the story of this mural, actually. He met a lady there, an elderly lady, who had lived in China. This is all like a novel...but her husband had been a merchant of some sort in China. He traveled around all over, and she would often go with him. When they got up to north China, she came across an old barn with the roof gone. But the walls were intact, and they had these beautiful paintings on them. She got all excited and went back to Peking. She hired a group of workmen and drove all the way back up there. They cut this wall into twelve pieces, so she had twelve murals just like this one. She brought them back and sent them to the States to be kept for her upon her return. She put them in the charge of a guy who was the head of one of the arts projects in New York. Then the Depression came, and it really hit everybody. He lost his job then. But he had these murals he was storing, which he had put in a bank in San Francisco. He had been keeping them there for this lady, who would pay him for them upon her return. But she didn't know where he had gone or where the murals were. And he was very secret about where these murals were because they were his "lease on life." But he really couldn't sell them because they were very, very valuable and everyone would want to know where he got them. Then they would trace back to this lady. So while Edwin was still there, this lady asked him to see if he could find this guy when he got back to the States. She gave him his name, and he came back. He hung out at Romany's, which was a café for artists in the village at that time. The guy who he was looking for had been pretty well known...he was on the government payroll. Everyone said this guy was gone and that he probably was in some flophouse in New York. So Edwin toured all these flophouses and left a message with the desk clerks for this guy. The message was that Edwin needed to see him...that he had something for him. I don't remember this guy's name, but he was told that somebody had something for him. They gave this guy Edwin's address, and he went to Edwin's apartment. He was really ready to bash Edwin to pieces, you know. He just wanted to get the location of these things Edwin had. I'm a little mixed up about this...whether she had arranged to put them in the bank vault and this guy didn't know where they were or if it was the other way around. But anyway, he was threatening

Edwin. And Edwin said, "You better not say another word, because I have a witness." And Edwin had somebody hidden in the bathroom who had heard all this stuff. So the guy left, and all Edwin found out was the name of the bank where the murals were, in San Francisco. So Edwin wrote or wired this lady, her name was Gray Worswick, that he had found the murals, they were in this bank, and she would have to get them out. It was very expensive because they had run up an enormous amount of storage. She told Edwin that if she got them, she would either give him $10,000 or one of the murals. And Edwin thought that would really solve all his problems! Then, about three, four, or five years later, when he was still living in the village, a great, big truck drove up with a mural. Not $10,000, but a mural.

Mr. Saretzky: The one in the brown frame there?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, we've had it all those years. It's really fabulous if you look at it.

Mr. Saretzky: How did you meet him?

Ms. Rosskam: I was in Atlantic City. My mother was a diabetic, and I had to give her the insulin shots. So I had to go wherever she went, and I went down to Atlantic City with her. Edwin had come back from the South Seas, and he had had appendicitis. His mother was a friend of my mother, and they were staying in neighboring hotels. Edwin was bored to death in Atlantic City, you can imagine after a life like that. He said, "Aren't there any girls around here?" And his mother said, "Well there's Louise Rosenbaum, but she's a nice girl and I don't think you'd like her." But anyway, we did meet. I had a little, crummy camera, one of those little Kodak cameras. Edwin asked me what it was, and I told him it was my camera. He asked what I did with it, and I said, "What do you think? I take pictures." So he said he wanted to go and take a picture. We went down to the beach, and there was a boat. It was lying on its side on the beach, and it was a beautiful, sort of grayish day. Edwin said he wanted to take one of the pictures, so he took the camera. I mean I would have just taken the picture, but he walked all around until he got just the right shadow and everything and then took a picture. Then he said, "Let's go on the boardwalk and find a photography shop and get it printed." And I said, "Now"? And he said, "Sure." So we got it printed, and it was beautiful. It was absolutely a perfect little shot on a crummy, little camera. And I was really impressed.

Mr. Saretzky: Had you done much work with this camera before?

Ms. Rosskam: No, it was just a camera. I had no idea about photography. I had worked with a microscope a lot, but not photography.

Mr. Saretzky: Did you develop your own?

Ms. Rosskam: No, nothing like that. I didn't know anything. I did a lot of lab work, but not photography lab work. I made slides and things like that.

Mr. Saretzky: So he impressed you.

Ms. Rosskam: Oh yes. Not only that, it was very romantic. He had been in the South Sea Islands! Then when I got out of college, I decided to move to New York. Of course, it could have been because he was there! Anyway, I got a job with the Sheffield Farms company testing milk. And that was another sort of off-shoot of biology. I got paid, which was remarkable. I had an apartment with a cat. And Edwin had an apartment with a garden.

Mr. Saretzky: Nearby?

Ms. Rosskam: Across the street. Very strange that I rented an apartment across the street from him! (Laughter) Anyway, I used to have to go over to his apartment every day to get dirt for my cat's box. So we gradually got very friendly. He ran around with a lot of fascinating people who were artists, writers, etc. One of his friends had a marvelous shop where they serviced people's camera equipment. And that was interesting and part of science.

Mr. Saretzky: So did you make some good friends through him?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes. First of all, we were together for about three or four years. It's hard to remember all the stuff, though. I feel like I'm writing a novel. But Edwin used to go up to Provincetown in the summer. And I had a job at a summer camp that wasn't too far away from Provincetown. Sometimes he would come to the camp. He liked the cook at the camp. She was a wonderful, wonderful black woman, and when Edwin came, she would make him some of her special fried chicken. So he came often. I don't know whether it was me or the fried chicken! (laughter) So we got more and more friendly. Finally I got a wire from him that said, "Come up to Provincetown. Get married." So I replied back, "No." I mean, why would you get married like that? But anyway, I did go up. There are so many of these crazy stories... When I arrived, he met me in Boston, and then we went back over to Provincetown on a boat that crosses over. We ended up in a bar, of course. I looked at the bar and all of a sudden there was a double-brandy in front of me. And I said, "I didn't order this." And the bartender said, "Oh, Rosskam's girls always get a double-brandy." Anyway, it was a lot of fun. It was a very loose time. After Provincetown, we both moved to Greenwich Village in New York. I had been in the Village before, but we moved into some other part of it. We were across from Bergdof Goodman's in an apartment that used to be the repair shop for that store. It had lights all over the ceiling. You know where the women used to sit at their sewing machines? So we had this wonderful apartment full of lamps, and we had a darkroom. Our friend, the one I told you about who did the repair of cameras, had a darkroom. And that's where I learned my darkroom technique. He was a marvelous teacher. I knew how to

work in a lab already, but the only thing is that in a lab you have light, and in the darkroom you have dark. But I learned how to do the whole thing.

Mr. Saretzky: Did you and Edwin go over to the Photo League at all?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes we did, but we weren't active in the Photo League.

Mr. Saretzky: Well you had your own darkroom essentially, so that you didn't need their darkroom.

Ms. Rosskam: No, but we liked the people over there. We knew Sol Libsohn, one of the founders, and the other people that were in the Photo League at the time. Of course their work was really influential on Edwin. He had done photography in the South Seas, but it was very arty photography. I have some of it here. But it wasn't documentary in any way, and the Photo League was a very, very strong influence on Edwin.

Mr. Saretzky: In terms of doing more documentary-type work.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. The thing about it is, I wasn't doing too much photography at the time. I was doing some because I had a better camera by that time, and I was a counselor at a camp up in New York State, right on the Hudson River. There was a brickyard there where they made the bricks that were sent down the river on barges, and I got fascinated with that. I did a whole, little story about that. I mean it wasn't very good because I didn't really know too much.

Mr. Saretzky: You started out as a biologist and eventually got more involved more in photography. Edwin started out as a painter and got more involved in writing and photography. Can I just ask you a little bit about him and how he made that transition?

Ms. Rosskam: In Paris, when he was a painter, he was a friend of Man Ray. He was one of the group that hung out at Le Dome. He used to go over to Man Ray's darkroom and see what kind of thing he was doing. He got interested in photography that way. When he wanted to go off to the South Sea Islands, he was going to have to support himself somehow. So he went to the Trocadero Museum. It is now called the Museo del Homme. He went there and said he was going to Tahiti. He asked if they would be interested in anything. They said they would be very much interested, and they asked him to do whatever he could. They especially wanted him to try to translate the local language into English...or French maybe. But I have this little dictionary that he put together. They also gave him the equipment to do whatever photography he could. And so he did do very beautiful photography, but some of it was.... There was one photograph of a woman with that disease that makes your legs all big...elephantiasis. He later made a painting of that, much later. But anyway, he photographed some beautiful things like palm trees with a beautiful design, etc. There was a leper

colony near there. He got interested in what kind of life a leper lived, and he went and stayed with them for awhile. He actually took some photographs of them, and that's when he first started to write. He wrote a novel about this leper colony.

Mr. Saretzky: Was it ever published?

Ms. Rosskam: No, none of that was ever published. It was pretty corny, actually, but it was beautifully written. I have it. He threw it all away, and I rescued it out of the garbage. (Laughter) So that's where he started both photography and writing. When I first lived with him in New York, he was writing a book about the day in the life of an unemployed man. I think I showed it to you, didn't I? He had a friend of his who was an unemployed actor. They both decided they were going to publish a book. But the actor was unemployed, so Edwin thought they should do a book about one day in the life of an unemployed man in New York City. So they did. They did just about every darned thing you can imagine, you know. There were windows with the menus on them, etc. Of course his friend was the hero of it, and Edwin was the photographer. They put it all together in a book, but of course, it never was published. I do have the copies of all those photographs from that book.

Mr. Saretzky: I think you told me once that you heard something about it years later on the radio.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, that's the story.

Mr. Saretzky: And you contacted the daughter of the unemployed man?

Ms. Rosskam: Her name was Zebisky. She was a well known actress...Grace Zebisky. (?)

Mr. Saretzky: Not Zebriski?

Ms. Rosskam: I don't know. I'm not sure. I think I have it written down.

Mr. Saretzky: So were you interested in the work that he was doing?

Ms. Rosskam: Because of my father bringing in all of these famous people, I became a hero-worshipper. This was even when I was little. So I had found a whole bunch of new heroes to worship, and Edwin was one of them! Of course he wasn't as famous as some of the others, but a lot of the people I knew were really "up at the top." So what did you ask me?

Mr. Saretzky: Did you get involved in the work that he was doing?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. I was involved in a way. I wasn't writing, because I always had another job. I felt that his writing was absolutely wonderful, and I met all the people that one would meet when you were in that circle.

Mr. Saretzky: Was Ben Shahn one of those people?

Ms. Rosskam: No, not yet. We knew him a lot later. But there were a whole lot of famous names, but I can't recall them now.

Mr. Saretzky: Now at some point, Edwin began working on this series of books called *The Face of America*....

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. He had been born in Germany and lived in Germany as a child. Some of the people that he knew when he was little had come to America. There was a young woman whom his mother had known, and she had married a fellow named Gunter Koppel. He was a German from Munich. They had come over as refugees. He lived up in Croton-on-Hudson. When Edwin found that his old neighbor lived up there, we went up to visit them. Gunter said to Edwin, "Look, I'm here in America. I don't know how to get started. I don't have any ideas." Edwin knew he had been in a book publishing company in Germany, so he told him to start a publishing company. Gunter wondered how he was supposed to do that, and Edwin told him to think of something that hasn't been done and try it out. Gunter asked what hadn't been done yet, and Edwin said he didn't think there was a book on every big city in the United States. Gunter asked if he thought anybody would buy a book like that, and Edwin said they would if he made it so they couldn't read it in the bookstore. So Gunter told him ok. He told Edwin to pick two cities, that Gunter would finance the book, and they would see what happened. So Edwin picked San Francisco and Washington D.C. So we got started. We left and went to Washington, with this advance of money.

Mr. Saretzky: Was this about 1938, or 1937?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, I'd have to look in the books. I think it's around that time. Now when we were doing that book on Washington D.C., Edwin decided to do a chapter on each of the agencies, but to make it exciting and interesting. In the process, he did one on the Department of Agriculture. That's when Roy Stryker had started the photography project at the Resettlement Administration.

Mr. Saretzky: Stryker directed the Historical Section of the RA, later the Farm Security Administration.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. So we had to go there and see what was there. Now all this time, you might ask what I was doing. Well I was sort of helping out. (I think I left a whole chapter out - we worked for a year on the Philadelphia Record before we started the *Face of America* series.) I mean I did all the darkroom work, the organizing of stuff, and the discussing of everything. But I didn't actually, at first,

do the actual photography. That came gradually. I first learned the lab work. I was a really good printer. That was what I was used to anyway. So to get the nerve enough to hold the camera took a little while, but I kept watching how things were being done. When I finally did get a decent camera, it was a Rolleiflex, which was a wonderful camera to start out with. You can see exactly what you are doing. The only trouble is that you get belly shots of everybody because you hold the camera down here. So I had to learn to stand on chairs all the time. But that camera was a marvelous, learning camera. I still have that very same camera.

Mr. Saretzky: I want to come back to Stryker in a few minutes, but I'd like to ask you a question before we get to that. Did the first two books in the series, *San Francisco: West Coast Metropolis* and *Washington: Nerve Center*, both published in 1939, come before you got involved with Stryker?

Ms. Rosskam: The Washington book got us involved with Stryker, because we had to go there to look at the photographs for the book that he had.

Mr. Saretzky: That he had in his file.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. There we saw the marvelous things that were going on there. After the book was out and Edwin had kept in contact with Stryker, Stryker needed an editor for the file. So Stryker told Edwin that he thought he really was a photo editor from all his experience with the books, and he asked Edwin to take the job. And that's how it all got started.

Mr. Saretzky: When the Washington book was put together, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote the introduction. Did he just go knock on the door of the White House? How did he get Eleanor Roosevelt's cooperation?

Ms. Rosskam: No. The time is all mixed up in my mind, but we had been on the Philadelphia Record when we first got officially married. We lived in Philadelphia.

Mr. Saretzky: That was a newspaper.

Ms. Rosskam: That was a newspaper. Edwin was the only person that anybody in the whole newspaper business had ever seen with a mini-camera.

Mr. Saretzky: A 35 mm camera?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. And they thought he was crazy. They wondered how he got a shot with that little thing. But he got the idea, while he was on that paper, to do a thing called "Talks of the Town." It was once a week, and it was a consecutive story about something like the Philadelphia Orchestra or the Museum or the Zoo, etc. The editors gave Edwin three assignments, to try him out. And we were living in a hotel in Philadelphia then. We didn't have much money, but we did

have a hotel room. I used to see people with their little boxes outside their window where they would keep their leftovers. We did three jobs, Edwin and I, always together. Either I was holding a light or an extra camera, or I was telling him what was happening, but we were always together. One of the assignments was the Philadelphia Bridge, and he was way up on top of the tower that holds the cable. I looked up and saw a plane coming, and I screamed...so he got that shot. That's how we worked together all the time.

Mr. Saretzky: And those stories have photographs and text together.

Ms. Rosskam: They had photographs and text, and he did both. The Philadelphia Record, though, didn't think that photographers should write their own text. So Edwin told him he had an assistant, which was me, and he said I would write the text and he would take the pictures. So Edwin said I would have to be paid also. And they told him they could only pay me with gas and oil. So that's how I got my first job.(Laughter)

Mr. Saretzky: That must have been very good experience that helped him when the time came to do a whole book.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, we worked together on that all the time. On a book there were all these features that needed to be fixed like the layout, the printing, etc. Of course I was a good printer and so was he, but we worked together in the darkroom all the time. When we did the San Francisco book, there was an interview in which they asked how I met Mr. Rosskam. I told them in the darkroom! Of course they quoted that all over the place. But that's how we always were, so it's hard to say. My daughter Ani thinks it's terrible that I didn't get the credit all the time.

Mr. Saretzky: Yes, your name isn't on the title page in some of these books.

Ms. Rosskam: No, only the *Towboat River*.

Mr. Saretzky: We'll come to that. So how did you two get Eleanor Roosevelt to write the introduction?

Ms. Rosskam: To explain, I've got to go back to our work for the Philadelphia Record. There was a fellow named Roger Butterfield, who was one of the editors. Edwin had said that if ever took a job like that on a newspaper in Philadelphia, it would be for one year and that would be it. He didn't want to stay there long because he had too many relatives in the Philadelphia area! So he went to Roger Butterfield and told him he'd really like to get out of the country. He asked him if he could have an assignment somewhere else. Roger told him they really did need someone in Puerto Rico. They were having some sort of a revolution there, and there was a fellow named Pedro Albizu Compos, who is leading the revolution. He told Edwin he could go down there, photograph him with his

cohorts, and get it back as soon as he could. The intended publication for the photos was LIFE magazine.

We didn't know anything about Puerto Rico, but Edwin had this way about him to "find a lead" always. We found that Mark Antonio, a politician in the Upper East Side of New York, was connected with Italians and Puerto Ricans. So we went and got acquainted with him. We just called him up and told him we had to go to Puerto Rico, and we asked if he could give us some information. So went up there, never having met him before or anything, and he was a delight. He bought us cannoli, do you know what cannoli is?

Mr. Saretzky: Yes.

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, boy, they were wonderful. He told us that if we went down to Puerto Rico to photograph the nationalists, of course we wouldn't meet their leader. But he said that other people were there, and if we really were sympathetic and wanted to know what was going on, then he would give us the names of some people to contact. So we went down to Puerto Rico. Of course, we felt that we couldn't get in touch with the nationalists if we were on an assignment for LIFE magazine, because we felt they would just tell us to go home. So we met the Governor and told him we wanted to take a little vacation for three weeks, because the United States already had a program going, and that's what we were going to photograph. We met these friends of Mark Antonio, and they were nationalists. See that picture there on the wall? That is when he got so sick later, and he painted his memories. Those were Puerto Ricans in the plaza in the southern part of San Juan, Puerto Rico. There had been a demonstration. The leader of the revolution and his followers wanted to have a demonstration, and they got permission from the Governor. They went to this plaza, and the Governor rescinded his permission. So the army was called out, and they shot at these kids, who were only seventeen or eighteen years old. They were very enthusiastic and they wanted independence for Puerto Rico. So a bunch of them were killed. And the worst of it is that the army came in from two sides, so some of the army people were shot as well.

Mr. Saretzky: So they were shooting at each other.

Ms. Rosskam: So the other young nationalists were put on trial, and they were convicted. These people in the painting were the parents of the nationalists' kids who had been shot.

Mr. Saretzky: I can see in the painting that there are bullet marks on the wall.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, Edwin took a photograph of them. I didn't take that, but he did. So it was pretty hectic.

Mr. Saretzky: Where does Eleanor Roosevelt fit in?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, I forgot. We both started to do a lot of photography in Puerto Rico. We had a lot of pictures of the conditions there. The reason the nationalists wanted to get rid of the United States was because the United States was being impossible. Horrible things were going on. So we had a very interesting collection of photographs. The man who became the Governor of Puerto Rico later, who at that time was a politician, saw the pictures and helped us a lot. He got to be very friendly with both of us. His future wife and I got to be very close. We also became friends with Ruby Black, who was a friend of the Governor's. She was a newspaper woman. Later she became Mrs. Roosevelt's secretary (or she had been before, I don't remember which way that went). But she told Mrs. Roosevelt about these wonderful photographs and the terrible conditions. So Mrs. Roosevelt saw our photographs. When the book was to come out, Edwin said to this publisher, "You know my name is nothing, and the book is going to be interesting. But it won't sell without some name, and you have to get at least a preface by somebody." And the guy said,, "Well, who do you think you're going to get, the President?" And Edwin said, "No, but maybe the wife of the President." So Ruby made a date for us, and we went to see her. And that's another whole story. The night before, we printed a dummy that we were going to show her. We used a kind of developer that makes your hands all black, and both of us had black hands. Marion Post, the photographer whom we had met through Roy Stryker, came to see the dummy. And the night before we were to show it to Mrs. Roosevelt, she dropped a cup of coffee on it.

Mr. Saretzky: Oh no!

Ms. Rosskam: So the three of us were up all night long, printing the new dummy, which was about twenty pages long. The next morning we arrived at the White House with black hands. (Laughter) But Mrs. Roosevelt was lovely, she really was. She invited us up to her sitting room. She asked Edwin if he'd like a cup of tea and...[transcriber unclear about what was said here] then she said, "I think the young man would like a table." Anyway, she looked at the dummy. There was one picture in the book of the Washington Monument, and way down at the bottom of it there is a little couple hugging each other. She said, "Isn't that charming?" And Edwin asked if she'd consider doing a preface for us, and she said, "Of course. I think I would love to do it." And Edwin said to her, "Mrs. Roosevelt, I've never hired anybody in my life. This is a professional job, and I don't know how to approach you." And she said, "I'll do it for love." So she did, and she wouldn't take any money. So that's how we got that preface.

Mr. Saretzky: In Jack Hurley's book, *Portrait of a Decade*, he wrote that Sherwood Anderson did the *Face of America* series. Now that isn't untrue, is it?

Ms. Rosskam: No, that's not true. He just wrote the text for *Home Town*, one of the books in the series. I don't remember Jack Hurley.

Mr. Saretzky: So it was Edwin who really did the *Face of America* series.

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes. Edwin's name was on it as editor, on all of those books. But anyway, Sherwood Anderson was another nice story. Of course, by that time, Edwin had been editor for *Farm Security* and worked with the photography file. It was the real face of America, it had all sorts of... He liked the name, Home Town, but then again, he had to have somebody launch it...somebody who was well respected. Obviously, it was Sherwood Anderson, because he had written *Winesburg, Ohio* and all sorts of other things. I have his biography, by the way. It was interesting.

Mr. Saretzky: So first there was San Francisco and Washington. They came out about the same time?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. And in the meantime, the publisher went broke.

Mr. Saretzky: And was the next one *Home Town*? Or was it *As Long As the Grass Shall Grow*?

Ms. Rosskam: *As Long As the Grass Shall Grow* came out in the spring of 1940 and *Home Town*, which was about a small, midwestern town, in the fall. After he decided that he wasn't going to be able to do a book on every city because the publisher went broke, Edwin decided to do a book on every minority. *As Long as the Grass Shall Grow* was about Native Americans. The last one in the series was *Twelve Million Black Voices*, published in 1941.

Mr. Saretzky: For *Twelve Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright wrote the text. Oliver La Farge did the text for *As Long As the Grass Shall Grow*.

Ms. Rosskam: And Helen Post did the photography on that. You know, later we went back to Puerto Rico and lived there for eleven years. Both of our children were born there. And we had to leave and go to the States because Edwin had been working for the government of Puerto Rico for a long time. Luis Muñoz Marin was then running for Governor...or maybe he was already the Governor...I forget what the politics were. But Edwin had been in an outfit which was interested in native Puerto Rican culture. One of the things that they did there was to make little statues. They are little things that Puerto Ricans would put up on a little altar and pray to. They were all hand-carved and wonderful examples of local craft. Edwin had a friend who collected them. By that time Edwin was the head of an organization called Community Education, which tried to get each community to try to work out its own problems instead of depending on the government. And they made movies and little booklets and so on.

Mr. Saretzky: Let's just try and get the chronology down a little bit. That long period that you spent in Puerto Rico, that was after Edwin worked for Stryker at FSA?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. After Stryker had already gone into Standard Oil.

Mr. Saretzky: Let's go back to the earlier period when Edwin joined the Farm Security Administration staff as an editor.

Ms. Rosskam: At that time, Edwin really couldn't get out to take photographs much. Both John Vachon, who was the other editor of the *File*, and Edwin wanted to be photographers. But Roy said they couldn't go out taking pictures because he needed them in the *File*. I had a job then. I really was a photographer then by that time.

Mr. Saretzky: And who were you working for?

Ms. Rosskam: When we first got started, I set up a darkroom. I was trying to just take some picture because I was always interested in kids. I had taught at a progressive school and so forth. I found an old friend who had a toy shop in Washington, who needed some photographs of his little girl. So I did a whole little study of his little girl. He put it up in the shop to show how nice it looked. And then I began to get requests to do this one, and that one, and this one, etc. So I did about fifteen or so of those. I always had the family give me a week's access to the house so I could come back and forth at any time such as in the morning, or when they went to bed. So I had a little study of each child. Then I would bound them and give them the extra prints. I charged $100 for each book, but I hated to have all these extra prints when they would like them, you know. So instead of charging for them, I would just give them the extra prints.

Mr. Saretzky: And these were all Washington families?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. They were all very interesting people. But Edwin said my profession was costing him a fortune! (Laughter) So one day I got a call from somebody on *Collier's*, that there was an old sea captain coming in, and they couldn't find a photographer. I told them I couldn't photograph sea captains, and the lady told me to just bring my equipment and they would work it out. So I went. By that time I was using a speed graphic with a (4 by 5?) back and a lot of lights. Every shot had three lights because I wanted a back light, a highlight, and a fill-in light like this. Anyway, I had all this wire and junk. I got up to Washington with all this stuff, and here was this delightful old sea captain. I got all set up, you know. And he said to me, "Young lady, I think you should take the slide out of the back of your camera." (Laughter)

Mr. Saretzky: He was right!

Ms. Rosskam: But I did get the picture, and that was the first really professional thing I did. Another time General Stillwell came to Washington, and all the press was there. They were all doing black-and-whites and *Collier's* wanted a color cover. So here I come after all these "hot shots" with my little Nikon, and I had a way of holding the flash way off so it wasn't flat light. So I came last because they were all finished, and he was still standing there. I mean I was terrified, really

terrified because this was a color shot. I had to dream up a colored background, and I didn't want to have a flag, you know. I forget what I did, but I had something in the background. He was very tired and annoyed, and he didn't like the press at all, so I thought I had better say something to him. So I said, "General, when you were out there, did you ever think of a big, fat juicy steak"? He said, "What?" And it was awful, but when you are getting started you make mistakes. I mean I really was not a real honest-to-goodness photographer. Kids were fine because you could play around with them and all that, but generals? So afterward, I did a lot of work on my own without Edwin, because he was busy over at FSA.

Mr. Saretzky: You said that he had some frustrations working with Roy Stryker because he wanted to go out and take some pictures.

Ms. Rosskam: That's right.

Mr. Saretzky: If I might ask, didn't he also want to give directions to the photographers?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh yes, he wanted the photographers to take shooting scripts. They didn't like that.

Mr. Saretzky: But Roy wanted to do his own directions.

Ms. Rosskam: Well, Roy had a different idea. He didn't believe in shooting scripts for people to follow. He thought that might frustrate them when they saw things on their own. They wanted to get the "feel" for things and didn't want to have to go back and ask permission to get the shot. Roy didn't think that was a good thing to do.

Mr. Saretzky: Did Edwin ever actually prepare shooting scripts?

Ms. Rosskam: He did, but they got to be sort of... I think they all exist somewhere... but Roy had another way of influencing people completely. He would just talk. He had them read stuff, like this book called *Storm*. Everybody had to read *Storm.* He was really amazing. But Edwin was very much more organized. How Roy ever got anything done, I don't know, because he was totally unorganized. Edwin was used to discipline, but they got along well. Some of the photographers didn't like it if Edwin wrote a shooting script, so they just didn't follow it.

Mr. Saretzky: Do you think Edwin would have liked to have had Roy's job?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh no, never. Never in the world...absolutely not. When Roy worked for Standard Oil later, we were in Pittsburgh. We were in a very fancy hotel because the Standard Oil people thought you had to live well. It looked like the wood was black. They hadn't taken all the soot out of the steel works yet.

Even the cats on the street were black, whether they were white cats or gray cats. And the phone rang. We were sitting by the window feeling kind of gloomy, and it was Roy. And he asked Edwin if he wanted to go to Puerto Rico because his friend Rex Tugwell was Governor down there, and he wanted to start a *File* like theirs. He said Edwin was the only one that could do it. So Edwin asked when we would go...he didn't ask what we'd get paid or anything.

Mr. Saretzky: This was when Roy Stryker headed up a documentary photography project for Standard Oil of New Jersey, which I think is now Exxon. But at that time it was Standard Oil. Just to review a little bit about the sequence here, Roy Stryker had been the Director of the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration. There he had engaged in a documentary photography project for the federal government. Then he, along with the FSA photo file, was transferred to the Office of War Information. And then after a relatively brief period, he left the federal government and got another position working for Standard Oil, where again he had the opportunity to hire photographers, some of whom were the same photographers he had worked with before at the FSA.

Ms. Rosskam: That's also when I was hired as a photographer.

Mr. Saretzky: After Edwin left the Farm Security Administration, you two went off and did something else for awhile. As I understand it, Edwin came back and worked with Roy at FSA, then at OWI. Roy went to Standard Oil and asked if both you would like to work for him at Standard Oil.

Ms. Rosskam: At Standard Oil, we worked for over a year. We really traveled together, and I did a lot of photography.

Mr. Saretzky: In his interview with Richard K. Doud, about thirty-five years ago, Roy Stryker said that you and Edwin worked marvelously together as a team.

Ms. Rosskam: We really did. We were always a team. Edwin was basically the idea man. He had been a painter and knew how to look at things, and I was sort of into the analysis because I had done that kind of thing at work. So when we went on a story, we were like one person, like a team. I don't know how to explain it. For example, if Edwin was doing something that needed three flashes, I would hold one and he would hold another, and we had a signal system worked out. Everything was coordinated in our lives. The same thing was true even when we traveled. When we were out in San Francisco, for instance, I know we had a darkroom and a Murphy bed. You would open the Murphy bed in the closet, you know, and it made a perfect darkroom. And I could set up a darkroom in half-an-hour. I kept justifying this to my daughter all the time. She said Pop was always the big shot and I just followed along, but that isn't the way it worked.

Mr. Saretzky: Now the largest project that you did for Standard Oil resulted in the book *Towboat River*, which really is a classic photodocumentary book.

Ms. Rosskam: Well, what happened was the Standard Oil Company had a magazine called *The Lamp*. And every issue of *The Lamp* had some photographs in it. We had some photographs; all the photographers did. Once we happened to be in Memphis and we saw these towboats using a lot of oil. And Standard Oil shipped oil. The towboats weren't really towing anything, they were little stern-wheeled boats, and they actually pushed a bunch of barges. And the barges had to be all connected so that they could be dropped off along the way down south. And that was all together a very complicated operation. It was absolutely fascinating! So we got on one of those boats, I think it was in Memphis or somewhere along there, and we went all the way down to New Orleans. Edwin, who was a really good writer, wrote the story. And it was published in *The Lamp*, and it got such a reaction that we thought it really could be a whole book. So Edwin made a dummy...did you see that dummy?

Mr. Saretzky: Yes.

Ms. Rosskam: And he took it to a publisher, and they took one look at it and thought it was great. They gave us a big advance, but we were no longer working for Standard Oil at that time. We were both off the payroll at that point, so Standard Oil had nothing to do with the publication of this book. There is one picture in it that shows "S.O." but other than that, there is no reference to the company. We went over to Pittsburgh where they were building these towboats, and I think there are some pictures of those. Then we went back up the Ohio River for awhile and then up the Monongahela River, where the big iron and steel companies are. And then...I'm trying to think how the oil got into the barges. What the barges did was to deliver the oil to various places all along the Mississippi and Ohio. But how did the oil get in the barges? There is a picture of it in there.

Mr. Saretzky: How long did you spend working on this?

Ms. Rosskam: Two years. Two full years.

Mr. Saretzky: And during a lot of that time, you were riding on these towboats?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. We would get on a towboat in Pittsburgh, for instance. Then we'd go down maybe to...I'd have to look at a map. Then we'd get off that towboat and get on another towboat, until we got all the way.

Mr. Saretzky: How did you persuade the captains of these boats to take you on board, host you and feed you, and let you live on them for such a long time?

Ms. Rosskam: The captain of the boat was always getting paid for his work by the Standard Oil Company, because they contracted with these barges to be delivered. So we always had an introduction from them. I think...I don't know.

Mr. Saretzky: It sounds like, "Well, let's go to work on this boat for a couple of years, and it's like a free hotel room, and we'll see the world from this boat." And you said the food was marvelous and the people were great.

Ms. Rosskam: You know, I honestly don't know how we did it! But obviously they gave us introductions because when we started in Pittsburgh, our introduction was to the shipbuilders who were building boats. Now the Standard Oil Company didn't own those boats, but they did own the barges.

Mr. Saretzky: So you had that helpful connection.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, that must have been the connection.

Mr. Saretzky: Now one of the aspects of this project that I find really fascinating is that you also recorded their voices. You and Edwin really were pioneering oral historians.

Ms. Rosskam: Well Edwin was, because he drew that up. He had worked with Roy Stryker on the Historical Section, which had similar objectives. When we worked for Standard Oil, everywhere we went, we really tried to get the feel of what the people were talking about and how they were living. But we never recorded anything then. When we started *Towboat River*, Edwin thought we really never got to remember everything the captain said. So he went to some sort of business company, and he asked how their stenographers recorded what they said. Of course by that time, they weren't taking shorthand anymore. There were these round discs called "Soundscribers." He asked if they were really reliable, if you could really transcribe them on a typewriter. They asked him if he wanted to hear it, and they demonstrated it for him. And then he told them he needed three microphones, and they told him that would require an awful lot of wire. And Edwin didn't care, so he got them to make a setup where there was a recorder with three microphones. He had one, I had another, and the captain had the third. This way three people were always recording. Sometimes it was just the captain, or maybe it was just Edwin, and sometimes I just said what I was going to have to do. But it worked out fine. We had all these discs and soon as we got to a place where we could hire a stenographer, we had them transcribed. By the way, I don't remember how we got paid for all that time. At Standard Oil we got so much money that we didn't know what to do with it all. So I guess we used that money to do this book, because each of us got a hundred and fifty dollars week, and at that time it was just a fortune. We didn't use it because we didn't really need it, so we probably put it in the bank or something.

Mr. Saretzky: So in a way, Standard Oil indirectly funded this book.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, that's right. But I don't ever remember getting paid while we were doing it. I know we got a big advance, and then we got royalties. So that's how it must have been, now that I think about it.

Mr. Saretzky: When this book came out, the reviews were marvelous. You shared some of those with me, and I was so impressed by reading the reviews. They just raved about this book! It was interesting to me to see that at the same time another photography book came out by Clarence John Laughlin, *Ghosts on the Mississippi*, which was about the old mansions. And they compared your book to his book, and they said your book was a superior book. And that book has been reprinted a number of times and is well known today. Why did your book never get reprinted?

Ms. Rosskam: I don't know, it would be great. Of course, it's way out of date now. We never even thought about it, we just loved the whole two years. It was marvelous. We didn't have any children then, so we could do it. Life on the boats was absolutely incredible. Sometimes you could walk all the way out on the tow to the very end, and I used to love to do that at dusk. You'd hear the boilers swishing and the lights along the shore...it was like another country.

Mr. Saretzky: Looking at those books, this one being really the last in a series starting with San Francisco and Washington then the one about the Native Americans and then *Home Town* and *Twelve Million Black Voices*, and then this one, they are all wonderful books. But to me, this one is kind of a peak. You spent two years working on this book, and it shows. It is a wonderful book. Why wasn't there another one after this?

Ms. Rosskam: By us you mean?

Mr. Saretzky: Yes.

Ms. Rosskam: Because you couldn't find another one like that, that would be in any way like it.

Mr. Saretzky: Wasn't there ever another topic about which you got enthusiastic and wanted to do a book about?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, let me try to think where we were. I'm trying to think why there wasn't another topic.

Mr. Saretzky: This book was published in 1948.

Ms. Rosskam: Then we went back to Puerto Rico, that's why. We got totally involved in life there, not only the life but the politics there. See we had met Luis Muñoz Marin before when we left the Philadelphia Record. We had met him and he and Edwin hit it off right away. Once we got into Puerto Rico, it was such a totally different life. We also got involved in the politics there.

Mr. Saretzky: You didn't first go there as a result of Roy Stryker?

Ms. Rosskam: No, not at all. We went there from the Philadelphia Record, we were there just for two months.

Mr. Saretzky: That was a short time.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes.

Mr. Saretzky: But then you went back.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. The reason we went back was not because of Roy but because of Rex Tugwell. You see Roy and Tugwell were professors together.

Mr. Saretzky: Roy reported to Rex in Washington. Rex was the head of the FSA.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. That's right. Tugwell got down there on this own. He had been in politics in Washington. When he went to Puerto Rico, first he was Dean of the University. Then he was appointed Governor. He wasn't elected, he was appointed. And he was the first decent Governor they ever had. He and Muñoz Marin got along very well, but they were on two totally different levels. There are stories about that that are just fascinating. Anyway, Tugwell was a very pompous kind of guy. He was brilliant, and handsome, and all of that, and he was super organized. He instituted the Planning Board, which they had never had before. Before, somebody would say to the Governor that they wanted to be the head of this department, and that was it. But Tugwell really organized their economics, which was a disaster. Muñoz tried to keep people happy. So I remember one night, Tugwell made a speech and he was picketed. Muñoz made a speech the next day, and they loved him. There was a story about that...I wish I could remember the wording. Muñoz said, "Why are you picketed and I'm not?" But anyway, I forget how the rest went, but that was the difference between the two men. Everybody loved Muñoz and adored him, and people resented Tugwell, although he made their life possible.

Mr. Saretzky: Maybe he was cooler?

Ms. Rosskam: He was organized and used to government organization where you have a....

Mr. Saretzky: Bureaucracy.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, a bureaucracy that works a certain way, and that was the way it had to be. The Planning Board was what he organized there, which was wonderful. But the people hated it.

Mr. Saretzky: So when was it that you came to Roosevelt, New Jersey, here in Monmouth County?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, after we had gone down there and gotten so involved because Edwin had started that whole government photography file there, he and Jack Delano worked together. Jack's wife, Irene, worked with them too. They started this sort of a propaganda outfit, really. It was not supposed to be run by the popular party; it was supposed to be run by the government. They set up an organization which was called Community Education. The idea was, and they sold this idea to Muñoz because he hadn't thought of it yet, to get the people not to be dependent on the government for everything. Jack, Irene and Edwin thought of this. They wanted the people to be able to organize themselves and get things going for themselves. The problem was, they didn't know enough to do that. There would be people who had never left their little town to go the neighboring town in their lives. So the idea was to show the people a bigger picture of their lives, really...not just their tiny, little town or home. They set up little organizations in the little towns all over the island, and somebody was the, well not the mayor because that would have been too official, but perhaps would be a local teacher. They would produce material for that person to use. They made these little booklets, and they made movies, and they made posters. They would go around with an electric generator, and Jack was the one who made all the movies. Edwin tried to hire local writers, but he never could find any writers so he had to do most of the writing himself. The photography was done by all of us. They would take a generator and go up to a little town. First they would put the posters up that there was a movie coming. Then they distributed these little books, because the kids could read them to their parents. Then the night came when they were going to show the movie, and they came with their generators and screen and everything, and all the people would be coming from all around.

One of the first ones they did was on boiling your water because there was so much dysentery around. So they showed this water in a big can being boiled, and then they showed these big flies which carried germs. The very first one that they showed, the people said, "We don't have to worry about that. We don't have big flies like that." (Laughter) So they had to learn a lot about making movies for so-called "primitive" people. Anyway, they worked on that for ten years. And all that time Muñoz was the elected Governor. The first elected governor there was Jesus Pinero. Then Muñoz was elected. Community Education was getting a little worried because in order for them to get funding, Muñoz had to put them into the sports and recreation department. They should have probably been in the university, but the university didn't want them. The university wanted their own funding. For about five, six or maybe seven years they were in the sports and recreation department. Then they decided that, since they were an education organization, they really ought to get an educator because none of us were educators. We didn't really know what we were doing. We just did it. So Jack, Edwin and Irene decided they should bring in an educator. They found this guy named Fred Wale, whom I think was at Columbia. They invited him down and showed him what they were doing and all, and he got fascinated and accepted the job. But sooner or later, he took over. And he ousted Jack, Edwin and Irene. And that was a disaster. I mean it was a disaster for Jack, Edwin and Irene.

Mr. Saretzky: And then you came back?

Ms. Rosskam: No, we didn't come back right away. Muñoz got very sore about the whole thing, and he insisted that Edwin move into the Governor's Palace and run his publicity. So we stayed for a few more years. Jack became head of the Puerto Rican National Television Station, and Irene started the Tourist Guide. It was beautiful...you never saw one like that before. I have lots of copies of it. And I had two children.

Mr. Saretzky: Were your children born in Puerto Rico?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes.

Mr. Saretzky: What are their names?

Ms. Rosskam: We didn't want them to have names that didn't work in both Spanish and English. The first one was called Susan Emma Rosskam, and Emma was her grandmother's name. Everybody there called her Susa, which is bad because it means "dirty" there. But we didn't realize that. And Anni's name was Anita Louise Rosskam. "Anni" is the way you would say her name in Spanish.

Mr. Saretzky: So after a few more years working Muñoz, then you came to New Jersey?

Ms. Rosskam: Well, what happened was, things began to get very politically hot. Edwin's organization was really trying to show people their own work, See those little statues over there? They are called "Santos," and the people would make a little altar and that's where they would pray. And they would make these statues themselves, and it's a real art form. Now they are collector's items. One of the people who was a very good friend of Jack, Irene, Edwin and myself, made a collection of these statues. So we all thought that this would be a very good thing to show in the art museum. It would show that the people could produce things themselves. They didn't have to go to the store and buy them. So they had a wonderful exhibit but unfortunately, at the entrance of this exhibit was a large "Santo" of Jesus, and he had a very big penis! (Laughter) So there was a Catholic guy there who was violently anti- Muñoz. He absolutely hated Muñoz. He came down to this show, and he published a big article in the paper that Muñoz was sponsoring pornographic images was against the Catholic Church. Oh, I tell you, it was a disaster! They accused Edwin of being a Communist, and the whole thing kind of broke loose. So by that time this new head had come in, and Edwin was really working for Muñoz. Muñoz was running for Governor on the third or fourth term, or something like that. We thought we were really standing in his way. We were very, very, very close friends. Edwin decided we better think of going. There were other reasons too, including our daughters. Life for girls there was very formal. You have to move with important people, you

know, and all their girls "come out" at the age of fifteen. They have to have gowns that cost $500, and we didn't think that was going to be good for our girls to grow up that way. So that was another reason that we wanted to come back. We wrote to everybody that we knew in San Francisco, and we wrote to Ben Shahn, who was a friend of ours by that time. And his wife Bernarda answered immediately. She told us to come to Roosevelt, that it was a wonderful place in New Jersey. She said there was beautiful scenery and we wouldn't have to worry about our children if they got lost in town, somebody would bring them back. She also said that down the road there was a pre-fab factory, so they could build us a studio. We considered all the other ideas, and we felt that this sounded the best. So we came here, and it was really complicated. The house they had found for us wasn't for sale, and we had to park our children in Atlantic City at my sister's house while we hung around here to try to find another house. And that's how we got involved in Monmouth County.

Mr. Saretzky: And this was in the 1950s?

Ms. Rosskam: This was in 1952. By the way, at first we thought the scenery was horrible. It was all flat and we couldn't find any ocean, so we went swimming in a big lake down the road. But anyway, we did begin to get adjusted to it, and people here were so friendly. After we had lived here quite awhile, Muñoz' older daughter married somebody who was working in New York City in the slums. It was very bad for those children because they weren't allowed out on the street, so they decided to move here near us. This would mean their children could be free. And that was funny because the children had never actually played with other children before. They used to have to sit in the window and watch everything going on like sniffing gasoline out of the tanks of cars, swiping stuff, and all that type of thing. So the first thing they did when they came here was to decide since all these cars were sitting around with the keys in them, they could get stolen. In New York, you didn't leave your key in your car. So they took all the keys out of the cars up and down the whole street, and they threw all the keys away. (Laughter)

Mr. Saretzky: They threw all the keys away and nobody could go anywhere?

Ms. Rosskam: That's right. It was awful. They had been caged up there on the fourth floor where they lived, and the children across the street were allowed to go out. They had a bird, which was in a cage, and when everybody was out one day, they decided to release this bird. They thought it was mean to keep something in a cage. They felt they had been in a cage for some time, so they released it. Of course, there was all heck to pay, and luckily the bird didn't fly away. He flew up into a curtain rod, so they got him back. Our friends, the Muñoz family, would come to visit all the time.

Mr. Saretzky: Their parents.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, and they came with their bodyguards. They had a car in front and one in back. He liked to drink a lot, too. One night he was sitting right here, and he drank a whole bottle of Irish whiskey. But he wasn't an alcoholic, he just liked drinking, I guess.

Mr. Saretzky: Did you have a very active social life here in Roosevelt?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes.

Mr. Saretzky: Was everybody going to everyone else's house?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, absolutely. It was very open. As a matter of fact when we moved into this house, it had venetian blinds that I didn't like. So I asked a neighbor, who was helping us, how I could get other blinds. So she said to me, "What do you like, privacy?" So we never did get any other blinds. So that's the way it was. People were very friendly. The whole town was friendly. Of course, now it's different, because it's a whole new generation. At that time, there were only about three or four non-Jewish families in the whole town. It was the only town where there was no church but there was a synagogue. And that was active. We had never been very religious. I hadn't been as a child and Edwin had been in Germany and wanted to forget the whole thing if he could. It was a very traumatic thing, you know. I suppose that should have made us want to be more Jewish, but we had lived a very free life of artists, writers, painters and so on. And we never really thought about being Jewish, although we didn't say that we weren't or anything like that, like my older brother did, whom I resent to this day. Down in Puerto Rico, the big holiday is Three Kings Day. The children put something under their bed with some water, and the Three Kings come and eat the treat, drink the water, and leave a gift. It's like Santa Claus, except it's the Three Kings. Then when the Americans came down, Santa Claus started coming around, so they started to have Christmas trees. Then came Hanukkah, for everyone who was Jewish. So there were three holidays. When we came here, we had a Christmas tree the first year. Ani had a little friend that lived up the street. She came into the house and said, "I didn't know you had a Christmas tree. I thought you were Jewish." So Ani told her she was half Jewish and half Christmas! (Laughter) So that's the way it's been really.

Mr. Saretzky: Did you and Edwin get at all involved in the government of the town?

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes, sure. I was on the Board of Education, but Edwin never ran for anything here. The first year when we first came up, he really went into a decline...a real decline. He just could not adjust to leaving Puerto Rico, with the situation and the politics there. He just couldn't seem to do anything. It was very serious. But luckily he had a wonderful, old friend we had known for years and years in New York. He was a doctor, but he was also a psychiatrist. Finally, I told Edwin he had to talk to Frank, that it was getting ridiculous. So Edwin went in and

started to have talks with him. His name was Frank Safford. Frank told Ed that he was a writer and shouldn't be sitting around. He asked him if he had a typewriter, and Edwin told him yes. So Frank told him to go home and write. This was a year after we got back from Puerto Rico, and so then Edwin started to really write. He wrote *Alien*, a novel about Puerto Rico.

By that time he was fine, and I was working at the school. And he was still doing jobs for Puerto Rico. More and more Puerto Ricans were coming up to the States. The first thing he did was a movie on how to prepare people to and what you would need when you got here, like having to need a coat and all the ways to adjust to being up North. So that took quite awhile. Then we went back to Puerto Rico for a whole year, because Muñoz wanted Edwin to do something for the party. I think it was a movie they were going to make. So we stayed there for a whole year. The kids went to school there. We traveled back and forth.

Mr. Saretzky: And you kept the house?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. We had a friend who used it as his studio. He was writing a book. It was such a close community here. Dave Martin lived across the street, we'd go back and forth, and it was like one family. Maybe it was mostly the writers and artists, but the other people were just as friendly. By the way, since we're here in Monmouth County, Ben Shahn had told me how beautiful it was around here. I used to go driving around and think it was beautiful, but it was so flat. But then I began to notice the farming, and it was really an eye opener. In Puerto Rico there is just a burst of color all the time, and the farming is mostly growing sugar cane and tobacco, but nothing that you could eat. Driving around here, it took me about three years to be able to really see Monmouth County. Gradually it got to be so interesting that I began to photograph vegetables, farms, and things like that. And then the real turnabout was...well I guess I didn't tell you about when Ben died. That was just horrible for everybody. He used to like to stay up late at night. He would come and sit here, and he liked some of the things I used to make like little fruit tarts. He and Edwin would just talk and talk, and they got to be so close. It was almost like one family. Their daughter babysat for my kids, and Bernarda and I got to be very close friends. We had our own little group. And then Ben got cancer, and it was a very long illness. First his liver went on the blink and he was in the hospital in New York. Anni used to work for him in his library. He liked Anni a lot. She used to draw, and he let her sit in the studio and draw for him. He asked Anni one summer what she was going to do, and she told him nothing. So he told her he'd give her a job. He told her to come to the house every morning at ten o'clock, start at one end of the bookcase and go all the way down to the other end, and put a little mark on the outside what it is. But he told her that she had to look at all the pictures first. That was pretty decent of him. That was when she wasn't even in high school. So she went over every day and looked at every book, and she put a little mark on the outside. Of course Bernarda had a fit about it, because she felt it spoiled the cover. But that's the way it was, and then he died. It was just awful. Anni was at Solebury School

at that time, and I thought she would have a nervous breakdown. She was so fond of him. And Edwin was devastated. And that's when Edwin got the idea to write the Roosevelt book. First he wanted to write a book about Ben. He went to the publisher he was dealing with and suggested the idea. That was Dick Grossman of Grossman Publishing. But Dick thought it was too soon, that he shouldn't think about it yet. He told him to think about something else about Ben to write about, so that's when Edwin decided to do the Roosevelt book, where he taped all the people's conversation.

Mr. Saretzky: Tell me about *Roosevelt, New Jersey: Big Dreams in a Small Town & What Time Did to Them.*

Ms. Rosskam: He wanted to do a book really as a tribute to Ben. Ben was like the king around here. But he didn't want to make the book just about Ben, so he decided to think about the town itself because Ben had introduced us to everything about the way the town started, etc. Edwin thought there were a bunch of people around there he didn't even know. So he got a tape recorder and started asking people if he could tape their stories about how they got here and how they felt about it and so on. I've got a great bunch of tapes in here that he did. Sometimes they would come over and sit here, and sometimes he would go there. He taped about seventy people at least, including Bernarda and other good friends of Ben's that had ideas about him. By that time, I was teaching in the school, so I didn't have much to do with all of this. I didn't even always read everything because if I had, I would have cut out one sentence -- one woman got so mad that she never spoke to him again.

Mr. Saretzky: Was it true what he said in that sentence?

Ms. Rosskam: It was absolutely true, but it was very derogatory. Then he had a neighbor of Ben's transcribe the whole thing. She wrote down everything, and then out of that he made the book. He had to work from that. We had gone to Venice. I had gotten sick and thought I would have to have an operation, but it ended up I didn't have to. So Edwin asked me what I wanted to do to celebrate, where I would like to go. And I told him to Venice, never giving it a second thought. He went and bought the tickets, and we went to Venice. We stayed there for a few months, and in that few months this book came out. And our name was mud. The residents of Roosevelt got angry if they weren't in the book, and they got angry if they were in the book because they felt they were misquoted. Sometimes they weren't even quoted and they said they were misquoted! In the book, all the names were changed. And when we got back, we found out that they were circulating a dictionary that told who the names really were. So it was a little difficult.

Mr. Saretzky: Why was it decided not to use the real names of people? Was it because it was too frank?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, it was too frank, and it was almost like fiction. I don't think he could've used their real names. He would have had to get releases, of course. Actually one person came to me and said Edwin had done this whole tape on her, and she wanted to destroy it. She wanted me to get it for her. I did and took it over to her. She was the mother of four girls and evidently, she didn't want the girls to read what she had said. So I destroyed it right in front of her...tore it up and threw it away. That was the only one that had an objection.

Mr. Saretzky: But Ben Shahn's name was used.

Ms. Rosskam: Oh, yes. He had died but Bernarda talked a great deal about him, and so did a fellow named Ed Schlintsky. Did you ever know him?

Mr. Saretzky: No.

Ms. Rosskam: Well he was a big character...a fascinating character. He also has died, but his former wife still lives here. He was a marvelous, unusual artist. He did papier-mâché caricatures. They were big ones, and they were wonderful. And he also painted and drew, and Ben influenced him a great deal. He loved Ben, and Ben was very fond of him. So Edwin interviewed him a long time about Ben...the two of them talked about Ben. That was really the high point of the book, I think.

Mr. Saretzky: Let's go back to the pictures that you were making of Monmouth County. You did some barns.

Ms. Rosskam: It was after Edwin died, which to me was like the end of the world because we had never, ever been apart. All those years we were always together and always doing something together. Even if we weren't doing something, we were together. I mean we had one little "up and down" point, but everyone has that. Sherwood Anderson solved that problem. I was getting very dependent on Edwin when we were first together in New York. I was just following him around. Edwin just moved up to a hotel, so I decided I had better start doing things on my own. It was a wonderful chance because PAC, the Political Action Committee, was very active. And that's where I really got to know Ben and David Stone Martin and all. I started photographing these lines of people waiting to vote, and one of them is now in the Library of Congress. They bought it. So I really got out on my own then. That's when I took the picture of the man in the zoot suit, later used in *Twelve Million Black Voices*. But one night, Sherwood Anderson came over and asked me to go to dinner with him. I said fine, and we went to Charles...that fancy restaurant. Did you ever know that restaurant in New York?

Mr. Saretzky: No.

Ms. Rosskam: Anyway, we spent a nice time talking. And then we went the five flights up, and he took me all the way home. As we got to the door, he told me he thought I should call Ed. And then he walked down the stairs and said goodbye. So I wondered why he said that...he saw Edwin every day. I thought maybe he knew something, and so I did call Edwin. And he was back at the apartment in about fifteen minutes. That was the end of that problem. But really the thing was, it had gotten me out on my own. I went out with a camera without Edwin, and I found out I could do it. That was really the beginning of my getting up the nerve to really do photography.

Mr. Saretzky: What happened when Edwin passed away?

Ms. Rosskam: He had been sick for six years, and I just never left the hospital. I was there all the time. Before that, though, he had started to paint. He painted his memories, and he hadn't touched a canvas from the time he got divorced. It wasn't the kind of painting that goes on these days, but to me they were wonderful. Every one is somebody I know and that he knew. Finally he had lung cancer, and I was at the hospital all the time. And Anni was there most of the time, too. One day the doctor told me he didn't think Edwin had a chance, so I said we were going to take him home then. They told me I couldn't handle that, but Anni and I got in the car with Edwin and came home. Luckily we were involved in a thing they call hospice care, so the nurses came. This one particular nurse told me that whatever happens, day or night, just get on the phone and call me, and I'll be right over. She lived in Monmouth County somewhere. And really they are angels! They are wonderful. So really I couldn't handle it anymore. He had been in bed all afternoon, but a whole bunch of people came over because they knew how sick he was. And we had an intercom system set up. And all of a sudden we hear, "Hey, what the heck is going on in there"? So one by one everybody went in and talked to him. I didn't even know that he could even say anything at that point. But anyway, that night he died at about four in the morning. That nurse stayed. The Monmouth County nurses are unbelievable. We could be right with him, Anni and I, and the nurse. So it was very hard.

After that, I just couldn't function, you know, for quite a while. So finally I decided I had to do something. I decided I would take a camera and go ride around and see what happened. So I began to see water, and it looked so calm. And I thought I'd just photograph water, wherever I found it. So that picture right behind you was the first one I took. It's of a little lake up above Roosevelt, and you can even see little fish down at the bottom. That started the whole business of going all over photographing water. My grandchildren lived in Virginia, and they went to stay in a motel, where I stayed with them. There was a swimming pool, and I tried photographing that. That makes fabulous water pictures, and then the beach and everywhere. So that got my cameras going again.

Mr. Saretzky: How about the barns?

Ms. Rosskam: Bernarda and I went to Spain together on a trip. We stayed in the little town of Denia, in the south of Spain. The government had taken over all the farms, you know. So there were no farmers left. But they had made these stone farmhouses there, and they were all dilapidated and falling in. I had rented a car there. Bernarda was writing a book, so I would drive around with my camera. I kept seeing these dilapidated barns and finally I stopped at one of them. There was an old lady there and I asked her to tell me something about it...if it was a barn or what it used to be. She said it had been...they grew oranges there, but there was something else... Anyway, she said that she didn't want to leave. I asked her if that meant she lived in it, and she said she did, and her son would give her food every day. I thought, "My golly, she's that emotional about this old barn." And so I started photographing them there, and I photographed four or five not-great photographs. But I had gotten into the idea of barns. And then when I came back here, I started looking around. There are all these barns falling down right here, and I didn't have to go to Spain to find them! So I started right down the road with the first one I came to. Then I got fascinated with them...they are so different, especially when you get over to Route 522 in Monmouth County. You go along there, between Freehold and Englishtown. I could see them way over in the background. Some had a "no trespassing" sign, but I'd just walk around the sign. I figured I wasn't "trespassing" but was just "walking around." I don't know if you saw any of those pictures, but there is one of a dairy farm. That's on Route 522, and that was particularly interesting because it had a big opening. I just got fascinated with the way they were built.

Once a lady cop came along with a gun. She asked what I was doing there when there was a sign up, and I told her I hadn't noticed the sign. I told her I was doing this project, and I had gotten a state grant to do this project. I showed her my credentials, and she told me it was all very nice but asked what would happen if I fell there. Who would come to rescue me? She told me I should let them know where I was going. So she was really very nice, and it was true that I could have fallen down or tripped or something. But anyway, along Route 522 there were three or four wonderful, old barns. And then I started branching out, but they're all within about fifty miles of Roosevelt. Some of them are in Ocean County, it's possible. Some of them are on the road to Route 537, which goes to Mount Holly. So along that road there are some. And then all along the road that goes to Freehold...well I have maps of every county. There is a map store on the other side of Princeton, and they have all the county maps. So I got a bunch of those maps and followed them.

Mr. Saretzky: These barn photographs are now at the New Jersey Museum of Agriculture.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. The first time they were shown was in Philadelphia. It was a combination show of Edwin's and mine. They had one whole room of just the barns. Then they were shown somewhere near Mount Holly and in a bank. Then they were shown here in Roosevelt. They were shown quite a bit, and they were

shown at the Peddie School. They have a very nice gallery there, and a lot of people came who lived around here. I got a phone call from these people that I never heard of. They said they had seen the pictures and wished I would come to their house. I asked where it was, and it was on a back road. They told me the name of the road but that the house was quite far back, and it was on the historical register. So I went back and met the old couple, and there they are in this wonderful old house with an old barn and everything. They were really a little bit upset. They didn't know what to do because they weren't allowed to change anything, and they couldn't take care of the whole house. They wanted to build a cottage at the back, and they couldn't because they weren't allowed. I was very sympathetic, but I didn't know what to say. I was glad to be able to photograph what they had, but they weren't glad about it. And they rented out their land to one of the Chinese farmers, so I felt really weird. I thought all this historical stuff was well and good, but what if somebody needed to change it. We ran into that in Venice. You can't change the outside of anything and they didn't want to stay in the house the way it was.

Mr. Saretzky: You can change the inside, but local laws often make you get approval to change the outside.

Ms. Rosskam: So that's the story of how I got involved in it. I got so involved in it, that I went barn crazy. I would just drive around and see sometimes just an old, wooden wall. And then I wanted to make it a campaign, to stop using up the agricultural land. And that's why I gave the photographs to the agriculture museum at Cook College. I thought they'd make a campaign, but they didn't.

Mr. Saretzky: It sounds like it was something that helped you deal with your grief.

Ms. Rosskam: Yes, it definitely was. By the time I started working on those barns, I was all ready to go. I did a lot of driving around. It was a lot of work. I wasn't doing my own printing then. We had a darkroom for awhile across the street, but I didn't have a darkroom anymore. So I got them printed, and that's not exactly "kosher." You really should be printing your own stuff.

Mr. Saretzky: You're excused.

Ms. Rosskam: I got some beautiful prints. Right now there are so many campaigns not to use the agricultural land, and it seems to me that they ought to set them up somewhere to get people to see what they're missing. Anyway, it doesn't matter. It's done. And then I started a whole new project after the barns went off to Cook College. I started photographing trees, which are fascinating because they are only good photographically when there are no leaves on them. So I have a whole set of those.

Mr. Saretzky: Louise, we've covered a lot of territory.

Ms. Rosskam: I know, too much.

Mr. Saretzky: No, it's been great. Is there anything that you would like me to ask you that I haven't asked you?

Ms. Rosskam: Let me see, I'm trying to think. The thing about it is, when you have kids you want to pass on something to them. Our older daughter studied photography for awhile in New York, but she had a very bad marriage and it broke up. She had to earn a living and he was an alcoholic. So she started to work on alcoholics' programs, and now she is head of a big organization down there. So she gave up doing photography, but she is always still doing it. See that picture there? She did a whole bunch of things like that.

Mr. Saretzky: That's your daughter in Virginia?

Ms. Rosskam: Yes. And then Anni, of course, she got the other side of Edwin. And that's why she gets so irritated because she thinks Edwin took over my life. And I never can convince her that that's not what happened. And she's a duplicate of her father...exactly. And her little boy...do you see the picture of him and Edwin? They are duplicates of each other. The only trouble is, the little boy is so involved in possessions. He watches that show "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" He called me up at ten o'clock last night and asked me if I saw it.

You know, Andre Kertesz was a friend of Edwin's. He took some photographs of Edwin and his first wife. They have been reproduced here and there, but we happen to have one that he took in Paris when Edwin had a studio there. It's just a small print and for awhile, Anni and her family were kind of up against it. They just won't let me give them money most of the time, unless I somehow or other get it to them without too much fuss. But they had this photograph, and it was reproduced in a magazine. Anni wondered what it was worth, and she took it into Sotheby's, and they said it was worth something like $14,000. Anni couldn't believe it was worth that much, so she left it there to be auctioned, but it didn't sell. So she has it back, and she said she is never leaving it out of her sight again! So things like that happen. It's interesting to see how these two girls develop in such opposite ways.

Mr. Saretzky: Louise, thank you very much for sharing all these memories with me and others in the future who will read your oral history