

Albert K. Gayzagian

JSF: This is an oral history project for the Perkins School for the blind. The interviewee is Mr. Albert K. Gayzagian and the interviewer is Jan Seymour-Ford. The date is June 20, 2005.

This is a note for the interview with Mr. Gayzagian. OK, so just for the record, could we ask you to give us your full name?

AKG: Albert K. Gayzagian. The K standards for Kagham, K-a-g-h-a-m, which is an Armenian name. It was the brother of my mother, and he was one of the children who was slain in the massacre in 1915.

JSF: Oh my goodness.

AKG: So she wanted to make that part of my name.

JSF: Very (inaudible).

AKG: Yep.

JSF: And then may, we also have your date of birth, and if you'd like to tell us and your...

AKG: July 24, 1926. I was born, we were living in, or they were living in Dorchester at the time, and I was born actually in a Boston hospital.

JSF: Thank you. Actually, you're an unusual subject for oral history interviews because you've both been a student and you've been on the Board of Trustees I think since 1976.

AKG: Correct.

JSF: So could we ask you about your student days first?

AKG: Sure.

JSF: OK. How did you come to Perkins?

AKG: I came to Perkins at age five in 1931. My mother had been approached when I was three and again when I was four by a social worker, Miss Ridgeway, who wanted her to place me in what we used to call the blind babies nursery. She thought it would be better for me and all that, but my mother didn't think it would be better for me, so I was not placed there. But once I became five, they told her number one, that I really did need to get an education and secondly that the government required that I go to school. So I did and I started at age five, which in those days was unusual. Most of the children that I went to school with started more like age seven. It varied a little. As a result, I was always the youngest in my classes while I was at Perkins. Strangely enough, the, well she was a child then who later became my wife, also entered that same year, probably the same day, although we didn't know it at the time, and she

was also five at the time, but we were both unusual in that respect. So that's how I came to Perkins and started in the kindergarten.

JSF: Why did you come so much younger than the other children?

AKG: I don't really know. I think it's simply that my mother was told I should come and she decided I should. I think some of our relatives, especially my uncle, probably urged her to do it essentially with the belief that I really should start an education and that I'd be better off if I were educated at the same kind of age levels as the children who were going to public school. So I think she thought she really... I don't, I don't think she thought she had a choice to tell you the truth. So she put me in at age five and I'm glad she did and so.

JSF: Ah. So now she was unhappy about the thought of you going to the Boston Nursery. How did she, how did your family feel about you coming to Perkins?

AKG: They didn't seem to be, it didn't seem to be a problem. In fact what happened is that I came to Perkins in September and I started coming home weekends and we were living in Somerville at the time and my mother decided, most of the -- both parents, but I think it was mostly my mother -- decided that it would be better if they, if the family actually lived closer to Perkins

so it was only the end of October when we moved to Watertown. I can still remember riding in the moving truck from Somerville to Watertown. That was kind of fun. So that's how that worked out and I've lived in Watertown ever since.

JSF: Wow. So did you have any expectations about what, what your experience at school was going to be?

AKG: Oh no, I was just, you know, five-year-old kid and I had no idea what was coming or what I, I still remember my very first day. We were in that little sort of vestibule area outside Anagnus Cottage (sp?) and I still remember I was lying on one of the benches just waiting for things to happen. I had no expectations, no anything. I was just doing what they told me to do, and I went along with everything. I wasn't concerned about it either. I wasn't afraid. I don't remember being afraid or anything like that. I just figured this was the next thing in life. I think I had a little bit of a feeling, now that I think about it, and that was because of a friend of our family who was an older student, probably oh late teens or twenties, he was an Armenian and the family got to know him, we being Armenian also, and he used to come to the house and he used to kind of talk about the advantages of learning and education and all that, and I believe I did have some excitement, some feeling of excitement that I was going to

embark on something new and I, I do remember that much about my feelings at the time.

JSF: So are there any experiences from, from that, those first few weeks that really stand out in your mind?

AKG: I remember when they taught me how to hold a spoon. I had apparently been brought up thinking you held it sort of in your fist, and then they taught me the technique of putting it between the index and the middle finger. I don't know why that sticks out in my mind, but it does, and I remember the first time they put me in a tub and I suspect they didn't know what kind of families people came from and probably put all the kids in a tub pretty early on. Other than that, we started kindergarten and my teacher was Miss [Burrell] and we did a lot of fun things. I remember we did musical things, beating on pans and all this kind of thing, and obviously beginning to learn a few things at the same time. Eating, I don't remember much about food or eating at that point. Later at my, in the third/fourth grades, I was beginning to have some problems with it because I just didn't plain didn't like the food and my mother spoke to Mr. Andrews who was the principal at the time about it, and he came and kind of observed for a few days in the dining room and he went back to my mother and he said if I had a

kid eating that kind of food, a child eating that food, I wouldn't want him to eat it either.

JSF: Oh my goodness.

AKG: He was quite unhappy with it and he told them not to force me to eat things I didn't want and all this sort of thing. But that was a little later in my career, if you want to call it that, at Perkins. But I don't remember that anything was all that eventful. Things all seemed to be going well. I did go home weekends. Of course it was much easier because they were, did move to Watertown. We didn't have to take the T or any of that sort of thing; and I did complete kindergarten. They actually had, we used to have a little kindergarten and a big kindergarten, and so I graduated from little to big and I think that had something to do with the fact that I was younger than the other students. Now how many of them did the same thing, I have no idea, and big kindergarten was sort of an extension of the little. I don't recall that there was any major difference between the two, but as I recall it was enjoyable and I enjoyed playing with the other children and beginning to make friends and all and I'm sure it was a good thing. Then I moved on to the first grade, and that was, that had some exciting periods. This fellow that I mentioned earlier, Tad [Mookchian] was his name, he had shown me a little bit about using a Braille slate

and all this sort of thing, and once I got into the first grade and they started teaching us of course reading and writing Braille and I still remember the first time they taught me to write. I was in the washroom in our cottage and I can still remember jumping up and down and just saying over and over again, I'm learning to read, I'm learning to read, and I was just so excited about the idea of learning to read. I guess I must have picked up the idea that it was a very great and important thing to do and I remember that to this day. It was just so exciting. And in the first grade, obviously, we began the usual first grade kind of activities. I don't know why I remember it, but I remember we were reading something about a history book and I started calling it a hen story book because in Braille, the I key, the sign for I and the sign for N are somewhat alike. They're sort of reversed, and I must have gotten a little confused and I just thought the whole idea of the hen story book must have been kind of fun. And we were doing Wagon Puff and all this kind of thing. I skipped the second grade. They seemed to think that it would be a good thing for me to do, and of course that again brought me at the right level that I would have been at if I had been at public school because of the two kindergartens and the skipping the second grade. Plus they had counteracted the extra year in kindergarten. One of the things I remember about the third

grade, which really annoyed me at the time and still does a little bit. I had a teacher, Miss Nichols. She was, I don't know, she was a decent teacher. She was OK, but apparently I finished my work more quickly than the other students or than she expected it to be finished, and I'd sit around and I'd be bored, and I'd go and tell her, you know, I'd like something to do, and she just kept telling me well, it's up to me to find something to do. Well you know, I was a student, a kid in school trying to learn things and I remember getting very annoyed at the time that she, or the school, wasn't able to give me enough to keep me occupied and keep me learning at the pace that I wanted to learn, but I got over it.

JSF: Well, so did you find something to do?

AKG: I think sometimes I did, and sometimes I didn't because there really wasn't much beyond what she assigned for us to do, you know, things to read. I'm sure there were times when I picked up something and did some reading and maybe some writing, but it was very difficult because I really wanted to keep advancing in whatever we were learning, and without her giving me assignments and all, that was very difficult. So it's strange too because as I talk here some of these things that I hadn't really thought about for years do come back, so they obviously made an impression.

JSF: Ahuh. So among your fellow students, was there someone who was particularly memorable?

AKG: There were quite a few. My friend, [Atwari], he started the same time I did. He was a couple of years older than I. We were very friendly. I got to be very friendly with Dick Crane who just died recently. In fact, my mother used to invite him to the house sometimes to spend vacation weekends or weeks even because Dick had no real family in Rhode Island. His mother just didn't care to keep him and I don't know what ever happened with her, although Dick has written books and so you may or may not be familiar with; and he and I were great friends because we devised this baseball game with dice and we played that, and we formed a league and Dick made out the schedules and we had names of all the players and the whole bit, and that was all kind of fun.

JSF: Oh.

AKG: And there were a lot of the other kids that were, you know, we got along fine. We had the benefit of being able to do a lot of playing in the swings and the jungle gyms and all this kind of thing. Those were the days when children in many respects were freer to do that sort of thing. People weren't worried about lawsuits and insurance and all this sort of thing. Kids just went out and played and it was nice. And I don't remember

anybody getting particularly hurt. Later when I was in the seventh grade, I broke a couple of fingers but that was a different story. That had nothing to do with our playing.

JSF: Was that a good story? You want to tell it?

AKG: Well basically George [Cermus], who was again another friend of mine, he has passed away sometime ago, we were just fooling around and one night in one of the classrooms, and, I don't know, he had my hand kind of bent some fingers back, and I guess a little breakage, and that wasn't so good, and I still remember then going back to the cottage and we didn't know how bad it was or anything, and our house master, Mr. Donaldson, gave me some pain pills and various pills, but he didn't tell me that I wasn't supposed to take them all at once, so I just took them all at once. I didn't know. And then the next day, I can still remember, we were going to go to the hospital to see what was the problem and our music teacher, who was then Miss Johnston, became Mrs. Carr, whom I was always very friendly with, and I still have very good memories of her. But she asked me why I wasn't coming to chorus, and I said something about I had my fingers broken and her remark, oh do you sing with your fingers. Normally, she wasn't like that, and they did take me and it turned out that they were broken. I had a splint on and I still remember going out and we used to play football a lot

and some of the times I played center, and center snaps the ball back to other people, and I was doing it with one hand instead of two, and one of the principals or somebody came out and he was very unhappy when he saw me doing this, but we did it anyway. But we did a lot of things at that time. Of course we went on field trips. I remember one particular field trip, where the heck was it, I remember we went down into a dungeon and that was fun. Then we went to the Old Mill or where ever that was, and bought some pancakes flour and the teacher cooked it inside the pond and we had some pancakes, all these things kind of drift in and out. In the fifth and sixth grades, we raised chickens. Oh did we raise chickens! We had the hen house and, that was more in the fifth grade. Sixth grade we did something else which I'll get to in a minute, and that was, our teacher was Miss Evans. Miss Evans was a lady who I was told never got beyond the 11th grade herself, but she was a good teacher. She liked to do certain things a little differently and so we were raising chickens that year so that we could sell the eggs and make a little money. I never found, I don't remember whatever happened to the money we made; and the part I think I hated the most was going out before breakfast into the hen house and scraping the roof, a roost board which was a very odoriferous thing and we did all that. But most of the chickens part was fun. I did not like going out. We used to go from

house to house, door to door, one totally blind child, which on my team was I, and one of the kids that had some sight, and we'd knock on doors and see if people wanted to buy eggs and I just, I hated doing that. I remember Miss Evans used to call Hackets (sp?) Market to find out what the price of eggs was so that we could more or less be competitive and I'm sure the Hackets people got pretty tired of this every week and I have a feeling they gave us a higher price --

JSF: Oh.

AKG: -- than they should have so we would sell our eggs at a higher price, but we did get some sold, but the thing I learned from it though was keeping records, and I still remember we were taught to set up three columns on our Braille slates, date, dozen, amount, so that we could track by date how many dozen we sold and how much money we collected, and I thought, I found that was a very useful exercise in teaching, you know, sort of like a very early day spreadsheet I suppose, and that was very useful. One of the other things we did, I don't remember specifically which grade it was, fourth or fifth probably, if we wrote a perfect Braille paper on our slates, we were allowed to use the Braille Writers. This was before the Perkins Brailier, probably the old Hall Brailier, I'm not sure now which one it was. But that was a, that was kind of something to work toward,

and I remember the day I did my perfect paper and from then on I was able to use the Braille Writer as well as the slate. We didn't want to forget that of course. And then that was kind of exciting. During all this we had a lot of sports activities, roller-skating, oh our own form of football, our own form of baseball, and I have to say, you know, obviously they were different from the games that the kids in the public school were playing, but we had every bit as much fun doing it as they did. We had the competition, we had just the whole idea of being able to get out and do things like that. We didn't think of ourselves as different or anything of that, so we had our games and we didn't worry about what the other kids were doing, and that was kind of fun. I think that was a very useful experience among other things. In the sixth grade, we raised two goats, Heidi and [Nichomus], and we went out and fed them and cleaned up a little bit. That was more fun. I still remember the time, the one time I milked one of the goats, and whoever did the milking got to drink the goat milk that night, and I think we strained it through cheesecloth which was probably not quite like pasteurization but then none of us got sick and it was fun. I really got kind of a charge out of that. I enjoyed that. At that time, I had moved from Anagnus. We used to go through to Anagnus Cottage through the third grade, and then I was in Potter Cottage through the fourth grade, fourth through six, and

at that time I had a matron, Mrs. Dart, whom I did not get along with too well. She was the one who caused all the meal problems by insisting that I finish this and finish that until Mr. Andrews told her to stop doing that, and I still remember one other kind of incident. We used to get, on Lincoln's birthday, we got a dollar, a [Blazedel] dollar, this was the middle of the depression. Most of us had never saw a dollar all at once.

JSF: Wow.

AKG: And we used to go to the company store and buy candy and so on. I still remember getting a lecture from Mrs. Dart on how we were wasting our money. I'm thinking, we get a whole lousy dollar and you're talking to me about wasting money. I think a lot of that was she was raising two children. I think she was either widowed or separated or something, and I suppose it meant a lot to her to see people spending a little money. I'm not sure. But we were very annoyed by it, and it was strange because when I went to Elliott Cottage in the seventh grade, she had moved on and was working there and in that cottage, we got along fine. It was just that she was not someone who should have been working with younger children. Once we got to the older, it was at that time that I was 12, and that was, that was no problem. We got along fine. But I remember being very annoyed by her lecturing us about spending our dollar, I mean

once a year we got a dollar. I don't know. And we used to have the, remember the Rosenbaum parties they used to give. Once a year, we'd sit in the oh, lower school hall I guess it was, and this group would come out. I don't know much about the group, but obviously it was a group that was getting together to, you know, do something nice for the children in the school for the blind, or probably the blind school, and they'd come out and they'd do a little entertaining. I think, I remember there was a harmonica, no, an accordion I think it was, and they did some music, and then they'd serve us ice cream and cake on our plate in our laps sitting in the hall, and that was fun. That was a nice thing. It was something they, they did and we enjoyed it. It was, you know, not a big thing I suppose, but in those days, we didn't get too many things of that kind. I mean we liked, I don't know, well, I still want the things that, as I think back now, I must have been crazy. In those days, they insisted on serving seafood on Fridays so that none of the Catholic students would be offended.

JSF: Yeah.

AKG: Because at that point, that was still a major issue, and one of the things they used to serve was oysters, and we all revolted against oysters and I know I was one of them. The fish they had was usually so full of bones. But the oysters we

didn't want, like at all, and later in life, of course, I got to love oysters in every form, and I must have been crazy in those days, but then again, it's one of those things that just comes to mind all of a sudden. So we got through the sixth grade and then we moved into what was the upper school, and that's when I moved into Elliott Cottage and again, we were doing more advanced studies all the time. I used to get the job very often when people came through on tours of reading. This was more in the Lower School I guess, of reading Braille to them. I was a fast Braille reader and they used to like to have me do the reading, and at one point, I remember they did a movie. They had a movie of this. People sat later, and I guess I hadn't done much to make my shirt look particularly good, but I had no idea, you know, this was going to happen all of a sudden, and I probably wouldn't have thought of it anyway. But we used to have some games where we would have math problems and see who could get them the fastest and that was one of my good subjects. But what I was going to say is once we got into the seventh grade, I had Dr. Waterhouse as a math teacher.

JSF: Oh.

AKG: He was a wonderful math teacher because not only did he know his field, but he knew how to make it enjoyable and I think he particularly liked working with me because it was a subject I

was particularly good at and really enjoyed. During the period, we used to have lunch and we'd have about an hour or an hour and a half essentially to kill before our two o'clock class, and a lot of it we'd spend outside and he and I would get together and we would plan make-believe trips and calculate the distances and all this, and the amount of time it would take, little math games, and then he used to give me math, trick math questions which were very, very helpful, and in the eighth grade, he really began introducing me to algebra which you don't usually get until the ninth grade, and where that really paid off was the next year when I switched to Watertown High School, and there were enough adjustments to make at that point. I had already had enough algebra to cover what they taught for the first half of the ninth grade year, and that made it much easier to adjust and by the time the second half came, you know, I was all right. I was all set. And how that all happened, which it was kind of interesting. When I was in the eighth grade, a couple of teachers approached my parents and told them that, advised them that I should be moved to public school. They felt that I needed the competition. The classes were small at Perkins and they just felt that if I didn't have enough competition, I might just not work hard enough or something like that. My parents were a little skeptical. My uncle who was the more educated one in our family, my family, parents both came

over as immigrants, and, you know, didn't have much education. He had come over earlier, my uncle, and had gone to BU and got, got his degree and all, so they consulted him and he thought it was a good idea and essentially then we approached the principal in the East Junior High here in Watertown, the high school the first year of high school was done in the East Junior, the ninth grade, and then we switched to the high school; and Mr. O'Brien, the principal, he was all for it. We were going to start in the ninth grade which is is what we actually did. He said, this was the middle of the year, he said if he wants to come over right now, we'd be glad to have him and all that, but we all thought of, I don't know how much I thought about it because I really didn't know quite what was going on, I think, I mean I did but we thought it would be better to start off at the beginning of the school year, which we did. And, you know, it worked. I will never forget my first two days in public school. Monday and Tuesday, I remember Tuesday night in bed, my brother and I we had shared a room, and I know I actually kind of hallucinated.

JSF: Oh.

AKG: I pictured all these words going through my mind and my head and so on and so forth because it was just a major adjustment. You know this was before the days they had worked

out any of these systems and all this and everybody was very nice and all that. It wasn't that, but it was such a major adjustment, and once I got that out of my system, whatever it was, I'm not going to try to play shrink, it was OK. After that, I went back to school Wednesday and, you know, things worked out. I remember having one geometry teacher in the 11th grade who was just marvelous. He was, he had the knack of picturing things. We used to use the tracing wheels to make the different figures, geometric figures, and the problem was that it was a little bit like Braille in the sense that you drew on the sheet, but the figure came out on the other side of the sheet.

JSF: Yes.

AKG: But he had just this knack of being able to think backwards and do the drawings that I needed to see. That was terrific, and I had a lot of other good teachers. I remember I think I got a good mark in chemistry in the 11th grade because the teacher was impressed that I could do a lot of the math in my head. But I'm getting away from Perkins now and that's not what I intended to do. So that happened. Now once I did make the switch, I still kept in touch with some of the Perkins activities. I was given permission to come and use the pool periodically. I did, and for a while I took, continued taking

piano lessons at Perkins. Later I decided to go differently, but so that was good. You know Perkins was very cooperative with the thing. I remember one of my teachers in the eighth grade, Mr. DeMartino, who was the hygiene instructor and the gym teacher, in his classes, he'd give us sort of homework but, you know, he really wasn't much of a teacher frankly, so we would just start talking about sports or something like that, and that took care of the whole period. He didn't really much care about the rest of it, but he was the one who took me aside and said you're going to be sorry if you go to public school. It's not going to work out. You're going to be unhappy and all this kind of stuff and it didn't, he was partially sighted himself and I don't remember if he had attended Perkins as a student or what he did. But anyway. But anyhow, we did work closely with Perkins. I remember getting a few readers from Perkins. I particularly remember a Mrs. Putnum who was, I don't know what her official position was at Perkins. She some kind of student or social worker activity, but English lady, and she came over to the house a few times and did some reading, things of that sort. So that, that really at the end of the eighth grade ended my student days at Perkins. I still feel that the background and the training I received during those years made all the difference because I was able to come to public school well-armed with the techniques I needed. I had good Braille skills.

I had learned very good basic math skills, all these kinds of things that were so helpful later on, and I to this day would recommend to a lot of people, and I have over the years, get that background at Perkins first. Then if you want to go on to public school and of course the public school made it, that training was very helpful in terms of college later, but, and of course, so did all the basic skills that I learned at Perkins. The big thing I missed at public school was the socialization part.

JSF: Yes.

AKG: At Perkins, I was able to play the sports and all that. When I got to public school, my first gym class, they were going to play baseball. So my job was to end up holding the watches and things like that. Now obviously that was a disappointment.

JSF: Yes.

AKG: And there were things, it's like singing in the chorus was great at Perkins, not that I couldn't have done that in high school, but somehow you just don't get, I didn't get involved whereas at Perkins, it was just expected in those days. We used to do some of the Christmas concerts in Jordan Hall and they got, you know, front page publicity in the Globe or whatever the

current papers were in those days, and all that was really kind of fun.

JSF: Well do you think your teachers were right? Was it...

AKG: Oh absolutely.

JSF: Was a good move for you to go to the public school?

AKG: Absolutely. It was the right move. I can't compare it with how things would have worked out if I had stayed at Perkins. I suspect that things would have worked out pretty well anyhow, but yeah, I'm very glad that they gave my parents that advice. I think they really thought it would be beneficial and I'm sure it was. Competition I think was very helpful. We had some very bright kids in our classes at public school and I think that that helped. It was a big motivational kind of thing, and, and, I'm thankful to this day that that happened. But again, I have to give Perkins a great deal of credit for the grounding they gave me that made it possible for that to work, and I think the socialization I did learn at Perkins. I know there's always the issue of the segregation aspect and all this kind of thing, but at least it, you know there were a lot of friends. There were a lot of activities that you could participate in and I think all of that was extraordinarily good background. So that's what happened there.

JSF: Well good. Thank you. Is this a good time to...

AKG: You want to move on?

JSF: Your work --

AKG: Sure.

JSF: -- as a --

AKG: Yeah.

JSF: -- member of the Board of Trustees?

AKG: Yeah.

JSF: What I'm going to do is switch the tape.

AKG: OK. All right.

End of Tape Side A

AKG: Never thought of as anything that would happen or that I'd be interested in, but then I was notified that the appointment had gone through. Michael Dukakis was the Governor at the time. My only experience with the trustees when I was at school, I think once they asked me to go into the Board Meeting to report to the trustees on the sales of our eggs, and, you know, I just went in and this group was there, and I didn't know any of them, the Saltinstalls (sp?) and you know the whole bunch, and I made

my brief report and, you know, I suspect none of them really cared very much, but they were very polite and all that. So that happened. So anyway, I got sworn in by the Governor and started attending meetings, getting a little background. I, I knew in a lot of respects that probably I was put on the Board almost as a token. You know, they decided it was, it would be a good idea to have a blind trustee. Now what I found later, and I was really amazed at the time and in some ways I still am, that I was the first blind person ever to be placed on the Perkins Board of Trustees. Now here's the school that was there for almost 150 years at that time and to think that not one blind person had been put on as a, on the Board of Trustees, that was just appalling for me. So I decided OK, maybe, maybe they're thinking me, of me as a token. Maybe they weren't completely. I don't know, I'll never know that, but I decided at the time I'm going to do everything I can to make a significant contribution so that I will be, you know, a real member. At that time, I was working at John Hancock and I was able to get the time off to attend Board meetings and that sort of thing, you know, as long as I get my work done, and they didn't say, and then the Chairman at the Hancock was very supportive of that sort of thing. He and I had worked together on some other things, and so that, and I had already been on the, a member of the Board of the Mass Association for the Blind

since 1959 and the National Braille Press since the early seventies. So this was my third Board assignment, and I was made Chair of the Benefits Committee because I came from an insurance company I suppose. We had a two-person committee at the time, and we still have a two-person committee, Loretta and I have been on the committee for all these years, which reminds me I have to return a call from her today, and I was determined to really make sure I read the material before the trustees meetings, in those days, I had to have my secretary read it because we didn't have scanners or any of that big stuff. Now I still get reams of material but I get some of it electronically and some of it I'm able to read with my scanner and it's all so much easier. But I was determined that I was going to really get in and do this thing right and get involved in the discussions of budgets and plans and during my tenure when a Program Committee was put together, I was put on that with the idea that I was more familiar with a lot of the programs than some of the other trustees, which I think was probably true, and also when we formed a long range planning committee, and we did it back then in those days too. I was placed on that and that tied in well with some of the work I was doing at Hancock at the time too because I was in corporate planning and analysis at that part of my career, so that all worked out very well. I think the trustees, you know, the acceptance was good. I

certainly found that many of the trustees knew very little about blindness. They were not quite sure how to approach or deal with a blind person. They were very friendly. I don't want to give the wrong impression. They were very friendly, they were very helpful and I was immediately made a part of the group and all that. It was a good transition, and we got going on a lot of projects and it was helpful I think that I was a member of the Alumni Association which I hadn't joined for many years. It was only after I got married. My wife had been fairly quite active in that group and she got me active and I would become President and all that sort of thing, and I think they liked that connection as well. And as far as the work that the trustees went, I was able to grasp what was going on. I was able to learn. Actually, I had a head start on a lot of the learning, of course, because I had had the background and I knew people there and I knew some staff people and all this. When we changed directors, Ben Smith was still director when I joined the Board, but one of my very first meetings was when we were reviewing the credentials of Chuck Woodcock who later became director in '77 through about '85 as I recall, and got involved in all those selections, we got involved in a lot of projects, and I participated actively in all these things. I made my financial contributions. Obviously I was not in the same league with a lot of the trustees. It was, it was essentially still

primarily a Boston Brahman kind of group, and there's still some of that in the group, but not as heavily and, you know, it's been fine. I mean that was a good group. They made significant contributions to the school not only monetarily but through contacts, through all kinds of activities and participation in the program development and all, and so my work on the board I think has gone well. It's only recently that we finally added a second blind person to the Board, Paul Raia, and he will be a good trustee, and some of the people we're thinking about adding now that we have the possibility and the ability to expand the size of the Board, we wanted two other blind people involved who will be at least considered, and I think some of them will be elected. So I think that's all for the good, and I'm not suggesting that anybody should be put on just because they're blind, but they shouldn't be kept off for that reason either. And I think we've made a lot of progress in that sense. I think the Board activities have been educational for me but I think I have been able to make a contribution. I remember when we used to each year have to approve the price of the Perkins Brailier which was always going up, and I was one of the few people who tried to convince the Board that maybe we need to increase the price some but you've got to think of these people who need the Brailiers and they can't afford them if you keep doing this, and I tried to, I tried to advocate the position of the blind

consumer because nobody else was there to do that, and I think that helped. I didn't win every argument by any means but it was my, I really felt the need to make them more aware of some of these issues, and also as time went by, I made some attempts, and I think successful, to make them aware of some of the improvements in technology which are making the blind more able to do a lot of the kinds of things that they weren't able to do that we weren't able to do before, and I think they've found all that of significance. So I, you know, I don't pretend that I changed the world of the Board of Trustees or anything like that, but I think that it was a real contribution there and I'm pleased basically. I didn't win everything I might have wanted to do or accomplish everything I might wanted to do. I don't plan to stay on the Board that much longer. I think it's time to get some younger people in there, new blood and all that sort of cliché stuff. But I'm pleased that it happened. I'm glad that I was appointed. I'm glad that I accepted the appointment. I think that it was well past high time that that should have been done with someone. I'm sure there were plenty of other people who would have been very capable trustees, people, you know, my predecessors, but for some reason it didn't happen with them and it happened with me and I had no idea why particularly, but there it is, and I think it's, it's been good. I think it was good for me and I hope it was good for the school.

JSF: I'm certain it is.

AKG: Well, I don't know. One likes to think so anyway. And it did put me in touch with some very interesting people, and I think gave them an opportunity to see aspects of blindness that they wouldn't have seen otherwise, just the very fact that I was there using my equipment and doing this and that and getting around with the dog and so on, and at that time, of course we were going through the transition to a different student clientele as it were with more of the multi-impaired and so on, and I think it was important that they understood that these people also needed education; and the other thing that I found I had to do was talking to the, convincing the alumni. A lot of the alumni began feeling almost ashamed to say to people that I attended Perkins because people began thinking of Perkins as a place for multi-impaired and so on, and I tried to point out to these people you know if people had taken the attitude toward us that you are not taking toward those people, we would never have gotten an education, and I think that did get across to a lot of them, so we had to kind of work that side of it too. I don't know that there's that much more to say about my Board experience. It's been good. I got involved in all sorts of things and I'm still involved in all sorts of things. I've just been appointed to a couple more committees as we've redone the

committee structure and will continue to get involved in a lot of the major discussions, including of course this whole new strategic planning effort and I did have some good background in that from my Hancock days and from having done this same sort of thing at Mab and the National Braille Press as well as at Perkins. So I've tried to keep involved in that. So, what else can I tell you.

JSF: Well maybe a couple of wrap-up type questions.

AKG: Sure.

JSF: If Perkins suddenly had unlimited financial resources, what changes would be made?

AKG: What changes would I make... I would like to see us do more in the field of working with the elderly blind. It's most rapidly growing segment of the blindness population and in many respects, it's underserved. There are ways of serving, and I think we have to look at different ways, whether we work directly with the elders or whether we work in conjunction with organizations that are already doing so to introduce them to the needs of blind elders, you know, both ways of doing it. And for this particular reason, I must say, I'm particularly glad that Paul Raia is now a member of our Board because that's the field that he specializes in with the Alzheimer's Association and all

that, so that's one of the things I would very definitely like to see us do more of one way or another because there is this, there is this need and I'm afraid a lot of the blind elderly population are not adequately integrated into the elder services that are available to the general population. So, which way we went about it, we'd need to look at, and, you know, we do certain things at Perkins already. We have the Outreach Program and we do some training of elders in their homes and all that and that's all fine, but it's kind of a drop in a big bucket, so I would like to see much more done there. I would like to see us able to perhaps work more, right now we, we work with people up through age 22 and then we kind of skip until we get to the elderly population where we do some services as I mentioned. Now obviously the Library continues serving people. But I think there are some needs in the population, let's say 22 to 60 or 65. A great deal more work in the area of job training and job placement. A few of us on our own have tried to put together some programs on this kind of thing, you know, and we really need to do more on that and I hope we can, but I think, I would like to see the school able to do much more there than we have been able to do before, and that does take money, it takes specialization and it takes a real commitment to do that kind of thing. Those I think are two of the things I would really like to see if we had these unlimited funds.

JSF: Great. Well that is vital. Is there anything that, what do you know about Perkins that might be surprising for people who know it?

AKG: Surprising for people to know. Hmm, good question. I think people should know and might be surprised to know that the children, that the people who attend the school by and large don't want to leave it. They, many alumni that I've met over the years, and I still see it happening as kids graduate, they look back to their Perkins experience as probably the best years of their lives. This is when they had friends. They were on an equal footing with everybody around them. They had the support services that they're never going to get once they're out of school. They were able to be on stage doing plays, doing music, doing all this kind of thing in the right atmosphere, whereas once you get out into the world, yeah, a few people, very small minority, are still able to do some of that, but Perkins was the place where they had their best years, and in a way that's sad. You know, it's not only surprising I think but it's sad because it says something about their later lives which is a little disappointing, but I think a lot of people would be surprised. I think people kind of think yeah, everybody wants to get out of school and you get a school like this and, you know, with all

the restrictions and so on. So that's one of the things I think would surprise people.

JSF: Great. Thank you very much. I really appreciate you taking the time to, to...

AKG: Oh, it's kind of nice to go back and think about some of these things.

JSF: Well great. Well I, this was very interesting to me and I think it was enjoyable for you.

AKG: Oh yeah, yeah, it was.

JSF: Great. Well, thank you.

AKG: Now I got to go get that stamp.

JSF: Oh, all right.

AKG: Go do that.

End - Albert K. Gayzagian