

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Jay Shames

COLLECTION: 4700.2962

IDENTIFICATION: Board-certified physician in internal medicine and pulmonary diseases;
former president of Louisiana State Medical Society

INTERVIEWER: Trenton James

SERIES: Louisiana State Medical Society

INTERVIEW DATE: February 22, 2019

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-2019

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4980

Introduction; Shames born March 17, 1936 in Des Moines, Iowa to David and Evelyn Grund Shames; grew up in Madrid, Iowa; father ran a general store; describes his duties working in the store as a boy; they were the only Jewish family in Madrid; almost every Sunday they'd drive 50 miles to Des Moines to shop, see movies, eat in Jewish deli; mother was very fashionable, had great business mind, was in charge of the store's clothing department; early controversy over selling brassieres in the store, and especially displaying them in the window on Main Street; parents' education; moved to Orlando, Florida in 1954, where Shames finished high school; father thought they'd have a more Jewish life in Orlando; took road trip across country looking for a place to live before settling on Orlando, where father had many relatives; explains Bar Mitzvahs; Shames never made a Bar Mitzvah, but his brother Ervin did; hard to leave small school in Madrid, Iowa where he was class president; in Orlando, became president of a B'nai Brith youth group; going to orthodox and conservative synagogues with grandparents; as a child, his misconception that Jews spoke Hebrew when they got together socially; soon met his future wife Phyllis Glass, whose family had moved to Orlando from Thomaston, Georgia, so their children could have a more Jewish life; businesses run by Phyllis' father; he and Phyllis both attended University of Florida; Shames thinks that if he'd stayed in Madrid, he wouldn't have gone to college and would have taken over running his father's general store; or maybe his more business-minded brother would have run general store; his father bought a candy factory called Pink Cottage Candies in Mount Dora, Florida; Shames spent his summers during college years working at candy factory; describes candies and candy-making process; sold to Whitman's and Schrafft's candy; "Every Whitman's sampler had one piece of my father's candy"; Erv went to Harvard Business School, returned to run candy business, but left to become president of General Foods, Kraft Foods and other giant concerns; many of his school friends from Madrid went on to get college and advanced degrees; during high school, Shames planned to become an engineer; a

high school teacher noticed his aptitude for medicine, which would combine his science and people skills; so he aborted his plans to enter Georgia Tech in favor of University of Florida pre-med program; Shames was in Pi Lambda Phi fraternity; torn between his role as fraternity president and going to Tulane Medical School; enduring friendships with some of his fraternity brothers, especially Bob Salzman; Salzman might have helped him get accepted at Tulane Medical School in 1957; married Phyllis in 1958; mentions other medical schools where he applied; didn't know what kind of doctor he'd become, but thought he'd eventually return to Orlando; is still friends with Marshall Burns, his medical school roommate; his freshman year was the last one that the Tulane campus was Uptown; his second year, he and Phyllis moved into a furnished apartment on St. Charles Avenue; carpooling with other medical students; Phyllis worked as a secretary at the Louisiana State Mental Health Association; Shames' father helped him pay for medical school; three years at University of Florida prepared him adequately for medical school; wishes he'd stayed all four years before entering medical school; working with Dr. Robert Heath, who had discovered Taraxein; Heath was doing experiments trying to produce psychosis in monkeys and prisoners at Charity Hospital; "I was just in awe of the third floor of Charity Hospital psychiatry unit, it was just wild for somebody just finishing their freshman year."; Shames did his senior thesis on fluorescent antibody studies; worked with Fred Hunter on tagging antibodies, looking for a cause for hepatitis; Bob Sparks and Morton Ziskind also influenced him; was president of Pi Delta Epsilon, a Jewish medical school fraternity; civil rights activities during his time in medical school; when he went to Miami for his internship at Jackson Memorial Hospital, he never expected to return to live in New Orleans; during medical school, wore brown rather than white coats; working at Charity Hospital: "I thought that the state of Louisiana was very progressive in having a hospital like that, that was giving care to those people who could not afford care."; racial segregation at Charity; also did CBCs, urinalysis and stool exams for a local doctor's office; internship at Jackson Memorial Hospital; difficult period--he was working a lot and Phyllis was pregnant for the first time; during the time of the Cuban missile crisis, the ER was overrun by Cuban evacuees; internal medicine wasn't like he thought it would be, considered different fields; took an opportunity to work on a heart disease control program in the Public Health Service; did twin studies in Connecticut, which had the highest number of twins; births of his two children, Michael and Lisa; had regular hours and good pay in the Public Health Service, and time to explore Connecticut; officially he was a captain in the coast guard, which is part of the Public Health Service; this work improved his idea of internal medicine; Allan Goldman recruited him for new program where he'd split his time between Charity Hospital and Touro Infirmary; other options he considered; beginning of cardiopulmonary resuscitation; at Charity, there was more hypertensive cardiomyopathy and alcoholic cardiomyopathy, but not so much atherosclerotic heart disease; "So your experience of cardiac arrest was altogether different at the two hospitals. It was a nice blend."; Raja Dhurandhar came to Touro as a cardiology fellow, became Shames' best friend ever; Shames kept his Florida medical license, thinking he'd eventually return; during Shames' residency, he worked a little for Kaplan-Goldman-Weisler's practice and appreciated the benefits of a group structure; in Orlando, most doctors seemed to have solo practices; when they returned to New Orleans, they both appreciated the city more; better opportunities in New Orleans, including to be involved academically; Hans Wild and Morton Ziskind encouraged him to do a pulmonary fellowship; "I was enchanted with all the science and the modalities of making a diagnosis in pulmonology."; importance of physical exam; physiology of pulmonary disease; how computers changed ventilators; Shames was one of the early doctors doing critical care medicine; went into

private practice with Kaplan-Goldman-Weisler while still teaching at Tulane and running pulmonary disease department at Touro; involvement in medical organizations stemmed from desire to maintain what was special about doctor-patient relationship; became president of Orleans Parish Medical Society in 1987; was in awe of Louisiana State Medical Society leaders; names some of the leaders he admired; fell in love with organized medicine, especially after seeing debates on the AMA floor; eventually became president of Louisiana's delegation to the AMA; integration of Touro Infirmary in the early 1970s; Louisiana's care of indigent patients; size of wards at Touro and Charity; before Medicare, indigent patients in Uptown New Orleans sometimes paid Shames in apples, oranges or chickens; changes when Medicare and Medicaid started; HMOs and PPOs came in while he was president of Orleans Parish Medical Society; managed care introduced while he was president of Louisiana State Medical Society in 1995; Orleans Parish Medical Society formed Delta Health Network, a group of physicians that could form a PPO; Louisiana State Medical Society developed an insurance program called MD Health Shares; "I don't think we had any idea of how much it cost to run an insurance company and how fast a catastrophic illness will wipe out whatever funds you had."; MD Health Shares ran out of money; moving the LSMS domicile from New Orleans to Baton Rouge; prescriptive rights for advanced practice registered nurses; worked on Access to Better Care [ABC] plan; problems of Medicaid costs; ABC was a voucher plan for Medicaid patients; meeting with Governor Edwin Edwards regarding ABC plan: "His shock that the doctors of Louisiana would do anything to help indigent people was just annoying."; Bobby Jindal, who was the secretary of health at that time, showed more interest in ABC; despite the Charity Hospital system, Louisiana still ranks at the bottom for access to care; in 1976, Shames left Kaplan-Goldman-Weisler and went into practice with Tom Oelsner; since then, they've built a ten-man practice in various specialties; explains weekend on-call system they devised; after Hurricane Katrina, stayed in Houston, Baton Rouge and Mandeville before returning to New Orleans; his seventh floor condo was undamaged; New Orleans was shut down, no electricity and under martial law; had special physician badge that let him get into his office in New Orleans; effort to get Orleans Parish to reopen at least one hospital; reopening office and Touro Infirmary; lost several doctors from his practice and many patients who didn't return to New Orleans; before integration, Shames treated patients at Flint-Goodridge and JoEllen Smith hospitals; since retiring in 2008, Shames has had leadership roles and rewritten bylaws for several organizations; switched from tennis to golf; travel in retirement; annual educational visits to Chautauqua, New York; involvement with American Society of Internal Medicine; comparison between American Society of Internal Medicine and American College of Physicians, which merged in 1997; Shames has tried to represent physicians in private practice, as well as academics; Shames was named laureate, then master, by American College of Physicians; last year the Louisiana Chapter of the American Thoracic Society selected Shames as the national outstanding clinical pulmonologist; concerns about how fragmentation of care affects doctor-patient relationship; medical schools no longer expose students to private practice internal medicine; value of primary care doctors; Shames was the first Jewish president of the Louisiana State Medical Society, as far as he knows; second Jewish president of Orleans Parish Medical Society.

TAPE: 1 (T4980)

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OTHER MATERIALS: Curriculum Vitae ; Newspaper article ; LSMS President's Speech 1994 ; LSMS President's Speech 1995 ; Past President's Report (from Journal) ; Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: None