

- Q. What time did you get there?
- A. I think, that's a question that I don't really remember. We were only seated for twenty minutes or so before the fire occurred.
- Q. Were you and your wife alone or were you with other people?
- A. No, We were with a group of people. We were with, uh, one fellow was going overseas the next day. That's why we went there. Because I was not a nightclub goer at all. I never drank and I don't drink now. Nor did my wife, for that matter. But we went to see this fellow off. But he was there with his wife and another classmate of mine who was there with his wife, and then there was another young fellow who was a friend of this person who was going to go overseas, who had come there with his sister, I believe, and another person; I think there were altogether eight or nine people. We were seated, and we waited a long time, to be seated. And we were finally seated around a very tiny table which was ordinarily supposed to hold two to four people, at the most. And we were all crowded around this little table on the balcony and, uh, as I said, we had been sitting down there for fifteen or twenty minutes; hadn't even been served yet.
- Q. Now, when you say the balcony are you talking about the Terrace of the Main Dining Room?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And what were the names, do you remember the names of some of the other couples. Did they survive?
- A. Oh yeah. Well, no, the young fellow and his sister died. They never even left the table.
- Q. And their names were?
- A. I don't know, I didn't even know them.
- Q. The soldier was leaving the following day?
- A. The soldier who was leaving, he and his wife and a classmate of mine and his wife apparently jumped over the railing and got out through the Kitchen.
- Q. Do you remember their names?
- A. Dr. Sol Davis, the other one was Rice, Ricky Rice and his wife.
- Q. They got out all right, they got out through the Shawmut Street side?
- A. They got out some way. I don't know.
- Q. You weren't practicing, Doctor?
- A. Oh, no, no. I was graduating. I was in my last year of Medical School.
- Q. So you were what? A year or two ahead of Danny Weiss?
- A. I think so. I'm older than he is.
- Q. Yes, because I think he was in his third year.
- A. Yes, I was in my fourth year. And I was supposed to graduate in two months, actually in January.
- Q. And you were where in school?
- A. I was in Middlesex University Medical School.
- Q. Your party intended, then, to have dinner?
- A. Oh, yes. We were going to have dinner, as far as I knew we were going to have dinner.
- Q. Did the ladies or the gentlemen have to check their coats?
- A. Oh, yes. We checked our coats.
- Q. Did just the men check their coats or did the ladies also?
- A. No, the ladies checked their coats. I don't recall whether they were wearing furs or not, but I think they checked their coats. Because my family went back to see if they could get any of my belongings, later on, and where I was burned on my back was where the coat was burned in the cloakroom.
- Q. How did you attempt to make your exit? In which direction?
- A. I didn't. They took me out four hours later.
- Q. And you never left the Terrace?
- A. I never left the Terrace. See, I got up when somebody said "Fire" and I got up to see what was going on, because I had been taught not to panic. And I could see a sheet of flame coming across the room.

And it was very hot and I put my hands up to my face, which saved my eyes, and the next thing I knew I was on the floor. I couldn't see anything, but I was on the floor at the Boston City Hospital basement.

- Q. Now the anoxia, was that caused by the smoke or a gas?
- A. No, a gas. the draperies. They were hanging from the ceiling, like ruffled draperies. Apparently produced some sort of poison gas and, uh, the gas was what was burning. Somebody had put on the exhaust fan and it just sucked the thing right across--didn't take more than fifteen seconds.
- Q. Now, I have interviewed a man named Henry Gaw. He and his wife were also on the Terrace, they had just been seated. Party of six. And Henry and his wife were lucky enough to get out and the other four succumbed. But they died on the Terrace.
- A. They died from the poison gas. I think that what saved me, probably, was that I stood up. I was above, uh, and I immediately apparently passed out. And then I was lying on the floor, so, as a result of that, I didn't keep on breathing in the poison gasses and the hot gasses. Although it burned my throat and my trachea and part of my lungs and that was the major cause of death in most of the people.
- Q. I have two questions I want to ask you. From what you tell me you feel that this gas, which was semi-anesthetic, traveled at a level, probably five or six feet above the dance floor and four or five feet above the Terrace, since you were raised two steps. So you feel you were anesthetized when you stood up?
- A. When I stood up I just passed out. Because I'm sure there was a lot of Carbon Monoxide there. And then when I passed out and landed on the floor apparently I was breathing better air. As a result of that I didn't die right there. As I said two or three people died right at the table; never got up.
- Q. But they were still seated?
- A. They were still seated.
- Q. So what I'm looking at is a stratification.
- A. Oh yeah, I think it was only a foot or so away from the floor, where the air was O.K. The rest was all poisoned air. And hot.
- Q. So, obviously, you weren't conscious long enough to see the behavior of the fire?
- A. I wasn't conscious for six weeks afterwards except for very tiny moments when I woke up on the floor there, and I could feel my skin peeled off my fingers.
- Q. Now, where were you taken? B.C.H. or the General?
- A. Boston City. That's where I remained and, of course, I had a lot of gripes about that. Because of the way the whole thing was managed. You see the Government and decided this was a marvelous test because of the upcoming War uh, to test out different kinds of treatments for burns. Every area had its own way of treating and there's no way.. hundreds of people died as a result of that. Because they had penicillin available and they weren't using it.
- Q. Well, the penicillin didn't get here for three days. Unfortunately, even when they were giving the penicillin three days later at the General, they were giving internally, I mean orally. They didn't know that much about it.
- I had a nice little diagram here of the Melody Lounge so that I could-
- A. I don't even remember what the place looked like.
- Q. I was trying to assess where, if you walked up the stairs to the Terrace, were you sitting to the left, to the right, to the rear, or what?
- A. As you walked up the steps I was on the left. In fact actually, the table we were sitting at was just overlooking the balcony.
- Q. So, in other words you were a couple of steps up, and to the left. And close to the railing?
- A. And Buck Jones was in the next one, above me. In fact I got very friendly with him with his, uh, agent, actually, who was his producer, Scotty Dunlap. Scotty Dunlap and I got quite friendly afterwards we corresponded and then I went to Hollywood several years later and contacted him and he was very nice to us.
- Q. Well, the P.R. man, I can't think of his name right now, he later became a reporter and wrote out of Chicago, he also wrote for the Boston Globe

he was the front man, he was making the arrangements for Buck Jones and he had been running around , he was a free-lancer at the time. And the strange part about it was he was pulled out of the fire ; evidently he was at the steps of the Terrace and was dragged out on the street. A year, or two years later he, as a war correspondent, was on a freighter out in the South Pacific and a sailor walked up to him and said " are you Mr. So and so". He said "Yeah, how do you know me" and the sailor said "I'M the guy who pulled you out of the Cocconut Grove".

- Q. So as far as the appearance, color, direction, travel and rapidity of it..
- A. The rapidity was
- Q. Your'e talking from the time you stood up; the time you were aware and you heard someone shout "Fire" that it was like a fifteen second thing when you were down.
- A. It was
- Q. My question would have been-did you sense any change in atmospheric pressure but it happened so fast.
- A. It happened too fast.
- Q. You were anesthetized.
- A. I did see the wall of flame coming up.
- Q. You saw it coming from your right
- A. It was coming-no, I was facing the wall of flame and it was coming right across because I was on the balcony and I could look straight down .
- Q. You were looking towards ..
- A. I was looking towards the entrance or the end of the room.
- Q. Which end ? Where you came in? You were facing that way ?
- A. I don't remember where I came in but I know that if I were sitting on the Terrace it would have been off the right hand side.
- Q. On your right hand side ? And that's where the wall came from ?
- A. Yes.
- Q. So you didn't have time to see it swirl around . It made a circular motion.
- A. Well, it may have come up from the Lounge and then it came right down the room, the Main Ballroom and that's all I can remember.
- Q. Obviously you weren't an habitue of the Cocconut Grove ..
- A. I had never been there before.
- Q. That's a shame because Danny Weiss brought up something that has me absolutely baffled. He mentioned the girl in the fishbowl in the Melody Lounge and, evidently they had a series of mirrors that projected through a fishbowl and they had an entertainer in a swimsuit and she projected through into that fishbowl . The first I heard of it, and naturally being the Cashier there and having been the nephew of the owner he would be would be very familiar with it.
- Q. Not to belabor it but are there any other impressions you can give me that you can think of off the top of your head?
- A. Right at the time of the fire, you mean?
- Q. Yes
- A. Nope. That's all I can remember except, as I said, waking up for a few moments; apparently I had been given a lot of morphine, because I didn't have any pain at that moment, but I was blind.
- Q. As an accomplished Doctor, in retrospect, you said you had a degree of criticism regarding B.C.H. and their treatment.
- A. Oh, definitely; not B.C.H., but the Government. B.C.H. was just following orders. But I certainly have a lot of criticism regarding the Government allowing people to die.
- Q. Well, they had two government grants , one to the General and one to the B.C.H. and it was regarding two types of thick burns treatments, and the one that Cope had at the General involved petroleum loose bandage, blah,blah,blah.
- A. That's what they treated me with.

- A. As a matter of fact, that was the best way.
- Q. Well, you didn't get the gentian violet or the triple dye...
- A. Oh, no. See, there were groups that got triple dye, groups who got gentian violet, there were groups who got relatively no treatment at all.
- Q. So you got the Cope treatment?
- A. I got whatever-I got the treatment, ah, with vaseline and boric acid ointment and the bandages and wrapped up . I didn't move particularly on my own for four or five months
- Q. In 1959 I got exactly the same treatment at the Mass. General. Both hands.
- A. Yeah, because that's not a bad treatment. Now they have different things; because I was the burn expert when I went on my internship .
- Q. Is that right?
- A. Oh, sure. So they always called me in because of the burn treatment.
- Q. Now you have startled me because I was under the impression that there were two definitive types of treatment; one being exercised only at the General, one being exercised only at the B. C. H.,so you've opened up an entirely new vista. I do know that, whether they were alive or dead ,that Boston City Hospital, for an hour and fifteen minutes,was receiving a casualty every eleven seconds which, when you stop and think about it ; no way in the world you could be prepared for that.
- A. Oh no, they weren't prepared for it. And that's it. The Government seized on that opportunity to develop some treatment for burns.
- Q. For World War II.
- A. Anyway they were using this as a testing ground and there were a lot of people who died because I went back and I checked on a lot of things that had gone on, and there were people
- Q. Well, I had a very dear friend , she wasn't my dear friend until I came back from the Navy after World War II; her name was Dotty Miles..
- A. I know Dotty Miles, my wife and I were friendly with her , in fact my wife's maiden name is Dorothy Miles. We got friendly and corresponded for a while. She was a singer.
- Q. My Dad was the one who pulled her out of the fire and they became as close as father and daughter, as a matter of fact, until the day she died she bore the marks of his fingers on her wrists and then she stayed here in Boston because Kazanjian was patching her up.
- A. She was a really nice lady.
- Q. As a matter of fact, she was within a couple of weeks of my age. I was in the Navy but she was in the last day, last night of a three week engagement. A very talented girl.
- A. A very talented girl. My wife got friendly with her, too. This is my second wife. My first wife died.
- Q. I know that.
- A. Also Clifford Johnson and I were room-mates for a long time. And I couldn't stand the smell and they finally moved me someplace else. But Clifford, you know, married his nurse...
- Q. I know.
- A. He died in a fire . which was pretty terrible.
- Q. That picture in Life magazine was one of the worst I've seen.
- A. He was on a Stryker frame and they had to turn him and....anyway when I went away on my internship I was bleeding all the time. Everytime I scrubbed for an operation my gloves were full of blood. My father hired private nurses to take care of me; spent some fifty thousand dollars in those days, and when they finally settled the estate of the Cocconut Grove I got a hundred dollars. And the lawyers got all the money. Whatever money was there.
- Q. There wasn't an awful lot of money.
- A. Well, a couple of hundred thousand dollars.
- Q. Yes, as a matter of fact the major amount they realized was from the cache of illegal booze
- A. Right. When they broke through the wall

- I knew all about that.
- Q. The other thing, when you say your Dad picked up the tab, I have read, and I don't know how factual it was at the Mass. General, the Doctor in Charge of the Mass. General forgave all medical expenses and the doctors followed suit, to any of the victims of the Cocoanut Grove
- A. Well I don't think we had to pay for the hospital but we had to pay for all the private nurses and in those days it was relatively inexpensive compared to now but, still, it was a lot of money. Fifty thousand dollars.
- Q. And also an awful lot of nurses do not want to take burn patients.
- A. No, because it is total care.
- Q. How long were you incarcerated?
- A. I was in the hospital three months, four months and then I was at home for another three or four months.
- Q. Now did you have to go back for skin graft touch-ups, etc.?
- A. Ah, they did some grafts that I wasn't too fond of because the grafts rotted away. They didn't do it right. The fellow who did the grafts was a regular surgeon who didn't know anything about burns and didn't know how to do a full-thickness graft and he was drunk all the time. He later committed suicide. He was a talented man but he threw himself in front of an M.B.T.A. train, about ten years later.
- Q. Do you have any personal knowledge of any other Cocoanut Grove survivors.
- A. Yeah, there was an Izzy Cohen. I don't know what happened to Izzy Cohen, but he was badly burned about the face and the head, and there were a couple of other people. We used to go back for therapy, you know. Izzy Cohen was from Dorchester and his father owned the old Blue Hill Bakery and when his father died he took over the Bakery.
- Q. Now do you think there's an outside possibility that in the records of the B.C.H. that there might be something I could dig into?
- A. I think so. I did run into a photographer who came to the hospital and asked permission to take pictures and actually took pictures. I saw a picture of myself after I was first admitted and, of course, my face was out to here and terribly damaged. He took a lot of pictures. He later died too, I can't remember his name
- Q. Well, I've been in contact with Bill Ennis, who was the first photographer from the Boston Globe.
- A. This guy was a medical photographer from the Beth Israel
- Q. Re the Boston Globe and TV....
- A. I have my own TV show. I do a Cable television program for nine years now, on psychiatry. We're pretty well known, about fifty thousand every week.

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" What I did, a month after I got on my feet was go to a nightclub"
Dr. Joseph Dreyfus

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