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(signed) Lester Edelman
(date) July 16, 1976

Understood and agreed to

Brian E. Mitchell
(interviewer) 1976
Interviews: Lester Edelman

Interviewer: Brian Mitchell

Date(s) of interview: June 29, 1976 (1) July 8, 1976 (1)

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions):

The interview took place in Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester. Our meeting was relatively long and pleasant. Mr. Edelman was most cooperative and had done a good deal of preliminary preparation.

Background of interviewee:

Mr. Edelman is the Assistant Advertising Manager of the two Rochester Gannett newspapers. He also worked in the 1930's for the old Hearst Journal-American. He has participated in the United Jewish Appeal, Flower City Masonic Lodge, Brighton Political (Republican) Club and helped to found Midvale Country Club. He is a member of Temple Beth-el.

Interview abstract:

Mr. Edelman is an excellent source on a young Jew making a career in the news media. He outlined the successes and problems of working for the Gannett chain. Mr. Edelman was particularly informative in outlining his connections with Joseph Ave and his advertising successes. He is also an invaluable source on conditions at the old Hearst Journal-American.

Interview index (corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder numbers):

** Social history
* Family
** Demographic/residential
** Economic
* Political/civic
* Zionism/Israel

** Jewish community
** Community relations
* Religious life
* Jewish education
*** Anti-semitism

Interview log:

a) Corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder nos.
b) Including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s)--
Interview: Lester Edelman  July 8, 1976

I. born in Rochester, from Joseph Avenue
   a. predominantly Jewish; good place to grow up
   b. father from Russia, mother from England
      1. father left Russia for Boston; one of five children
   c. father left Russia due to persecution; fact that they
      were Jews a tremendous handicap
      1. father kept up only rare contact with his original
      family
   d. mother left England at six years; taught his father England
      learned early that education would be the key to everything
      1. finds it a uniquely Jewish trait, people had to
      respect the education

II. family life was very close, there was no television; phonograph record was a big event
   a. brother an engineer; sister's worked for Sibleys
      one widowed; brother and sister remain unmarried
      1. felt he was the "maverick" in the family
      2. still keeps in close contact with his brothers and
      sisters
   b. wife's background --- people more deeply religious
      1. "ours was a high school romance" -- parents thought
      that he was imposing on her
      2. parents from Rumania and had a totally different
      outlook
      a. difference; "my parents lived for us, her parents
         lived for the outside world"
      3. didn't approve of him as they regarded him as a
      dreamer
      a. married at 21; parents attitude changed over
      time
      b. as years progressed, developed a good under-
      standing with her parents

III. Religious Background; parents (his) belonged to an orthodox
     temple
   a. when he married and moved to St. Paul, he moved to Beth
     Joseph; he worked hard for the temple
      1. later joined Temple Beth-el; actively participates
         in temple affairs; particularly in the Men's Club
   b. allied to JCC - works out at facilities often

IV. Children
   a. deep attachment to his son; went to #8 school; started
      at Brighton Junior High and Brighton High (catcher)
      1. always wanted to be a dentist; kept a paper route
         throughout high school
      a. graduated Brighton High and went to University
         of Buffalo
b. was accepted at Temple and maintains a practice in northeast Philadelphia

b. daughter not sure of what she'd like to do; graduated from the Dental Dispensary;
1. didn't enjoy working as a dental hygenist; went to Temple to learn to teach it, met a dental student who was married and divorced
2. went to Toronto to become a teacher; finally went to U of R for her MA --- presently looking for a job
   a. "while your living, you do what you can"

c. both received a Jewish education; Harvey 37, daughter is 31
1. Mr. Edelman born 1911, wife in 1913

*** V. Demographic/ Residential:

a. heavy emphasis on furniture and appliances, lady's clothing, furs in Joseph Ave. commercial section
   1. Joseph Ave. could be considered Roch's first shopping center
   2. merchant unconvinced that advertising actually necessary
   a. advertising helped a great deal
   b. only went to businesses which could be actually helped by advertising because they were specialists
      1. prospered after WWI

b. area declined because people and character of the neighborhood; "people who just didn't belong" (Southern blacks)
1. area really began declining about 1960

END OF SIDE I

*** c. a great deal of discussion ensues on the particular stores that existed on Joseph Ave.
1. one example: Nusbaums' --- a general department store with an excellent rapport with the people
   a. today open a series of small specialty stores in the suburbs

2. Cohens restaurant --- immaculate, kosher restaurant practically every merchant ate his lunch there
   a. attracted gentiles from downtown as wwill therefore, background and knowledge of area has been a key to success
   b. Cohens's would even run adds to announce closings on Jewish holidays

3. most of the firms lasted only two generation because the neighborhoods have changed
   a. Monroe Ave has remained, but stayed only as a reasonable facsimile; still continued to solicit ads

4. Joseph Ave. had tremendous potential; many people made money and families lived well
d. stressed the need of a healthy downtown; Roch saved by Midtown Plaza

1. downtown will continue to serve as a center for major purchases
2. people are afraid to do downtown

END OF SIDE II
Interview: Lester Edelman  June 29, 1976

***
I. Professional:
   a. started as advertising salesman and wound up as Ass. Advertising Manager; career lasted 38 years
***
   b. originated as a worker for the Journal-American ('31-'37)
      1. tremendous experience --- didn't have the acceptance of Gannett chain and had the "Hearst stigma"
         a. Hearst chain originator of many of the greatest newsmen
         b. operations in Roch were very costly --- to sell newspapers would sell for wrapping fish etc...
         c. to get a job had to prove that you were the repositor of an original idea
   2. Gannett chain a conventional one to sell advertising; you needed a good idea
      a. being aware of what went on on Joseph Ave helped a great deal as you had to create your own advertising
         1. suggested that they circulate in the other papers to make sure that the ads would sell
         2. in another example, started a small liquor war in the 1930's
   3. worked for a year on the Cleveland News --- worked for the Hearst papers "because I wanted to be a newspaperman"
      a. one year later, returned to work for Gannett
   4. suggests that "you get off Main St" --- Joseph Ave small Jewish merchant specialists -- would run small, consistent ads and at the time was a perfectly respectable area
      a. being Jewish didn't hurt and didn't help --- felt that Jew "had to be twice as good to go half as far"
***
   1. honest with his advertisers --- always "spend your money like my own"
   2. would not run some ads -- would set up some ads on a wait order (eg: a snow storm)
***
   5. first obligation is to your reader --- the various managing executives all served nicely for their time (Gannett, Miller, and Newhart)
      a. radio was considered the death knell of newspapers --- much newspaper advertisement devoted to selling them
         1. television does entertain but it doesn't sell although their are some types of commercials which are effective
         2. anything that must be presented must come from newspaper
            a. one page advertisement costs $2000.
6. selling space has become a very sophisticated business today
   a. Gannett chain throughout the country --- prefer
to be called a "group" which does have some autonomy

7. Gannett keyed-up, methodical but very fair --- righteous, attempted to legislate morally
   a. spent $4 million in Philadelphia in 1940 to try for
      the Republican Presidential nomination
      1. as a great person, was gullible and made great
         mistakes
      2. the personality of Gannett was infused into
         his papers

8. advertising affected by business cycles --- warn the
   merchants that you must be sharper

9. every dream and wish for personal business career satisfied at the papers
   a. no problem with management just among the people
      that you worked with
      1. no problem in the business community -- Jewish
         highly respected
      2. there are Jews in the Gannett chain --- doesn't
         pay that well and there aren't that many people
         who have the burning desire to be a newspaperman

10. were given a 90 day trial period --- --- if failed, then
    you would be asked to resign
    a. everyone who was brought in over him, was always
       explained by the executive department with a careful
       explanation of the reasons for the move

II. Political, Civic, Jewish organizations:
   a. Brighton political club --- --- Brighton well-run by Repub-
      licans
      1. nevertheless, would split the ticket --- eg: FDR
   b. active in Chamber of Commerce
   c. active with Men's Club of Temple Beth-el --- belonged
      since 1951
      1. brought up orthodox but changed for convenience and
         because temple was run beautifully
      2. got Mr. Miller (headed Gannett Chain and former
         Chairman of AP), Miller had been to Suez as the guest
         of the Egyptians
         a. used the opportunity to speak on his position
            at Gannett chain at the request of Miller
      **
   d. helped started Midvale Country Club --- began golfing
      at 40
   e. tremendous worker for the United Jewish Appeal ---
      became interested when Hitler began his massacres
      1. wife also participated
      2. not the worker in it that he once was but maintains
         interest
      3. aside: wife Past President of Jewish Home and Infirmary
f. also belongs to the Flower City Masonic Lodge

* III. Contemporary Issues:
   a. contributed financially and befriended Israelis
      1. helped Israeli boy get into RIT printing school
   b. Israel tremendously important for morale --- Gannett papers always supported Israel

END OF
SIDE II
Q. Brian Mitchell interviewing Mr. Lester Edelman at the University of Rochester on June 29, 1976. This is our first interview. OK, to begin. We'd like to discuss some professional aspects first. Could you explain the nature of your occupation with the Gannett chain?

A. Yes, I started in it in advertising salesman and wound up the advertising manager, assistant ad director rather, of both newspapers in Rochester.

Q. That would be the Democrat & Chronicle . . .

A. And the Rochester Times-Union, yes.

Q. Times-Union, OK. How long have you worked for the Gannett chain?

A. 38 years.

Q. 38 years.

A. Yea.

Q. Now the rumor persisting is that you worked for another chain before Gannett. Could you get into that?

A. Yes, I took my basic training on the Hearst newspaper called the Journal-American. Which was bought by the Gannett company in 1937, and I had started . . . in 1931 I was a part-time worker, I was going to the University of Rochester Extension School at that time in the evening, and I worked from 1931 to 1937.

Q. Now Hearst's Journal had been established in the early twenties? It had been about town for about 15 years.

A. Yes, yes. They . . . they had a fifteen-year regime in Rochester and lost a lot of money.

Q. Could you describe what it was like to work for Mr. Hearst and his papers?
A. It was a tremendous experience because it was during the Depression, and men were plentiful with ability and jobs were very scarce. And the rumor used to be an optimist was a guy who brought his lunch because, you know, he wasn't sure he be there at noon. And there used to be some kidding about if you went to lunch and you came back there'd be another guy at your desk, he's your replacement. But, it was tremendous because of the fact that it was the third newspaper in town, it had the Hearst stigma, and it didn't have the acceptance. So. . .

Q. What were the other newspapers?

A. The. . . the Times-Union and the Democrat & Chronicle.

Q. Democrat & Chronicle, I see.

A. But, the people who worked there I feel modestly but truthfully had to be good because the. . . the paper had no acceptance. It had the Hearst stigma, and to get an audience you had to. . . you had to be fairly clever or you had to be a genius. And they. . . you didn't have the door open to you as you would today when you walk in and talk about, you know, I'm Edelman of the Gannett newspapers. Yes sir, come right in because. . .

Q. I see.

A. . . . regardless of television. You were brought up on television, the power of the press is still strong. And the fact that you have an identity with a major newspaper opens, I mean, every door for you.

Q. OK. What did you mean by the Hearst stigma? Could you explain that?

A. Well, Hearst had a horrible reputation in so-called society as a yellow journalist, sensational. In fact they. . . there was one writer described a Hearst newspaper as, if you can picture, a naked woman running down a street with her throat cut. This would describe the type of newspaper that the Hearst newspapers were. And it was the beginning point of many of the world's
Interview with Lester Edelman

A. (continued) greatest newspapermen and if you had... they had to resort to things that were really fabulous and it made a better newspaperman out of 'em. Anybody who worked for 'em because of the fact they had these shortcomings, they had to resort to your ingenuity.

Q. Did the Hearst paper significantly increase its circulation in the 15 years it operated in Rochester?

A. Yes, but it was very costly. They gave away premiums. They gave away prizes, and they hired circulation managers, of course, who were the proof where figures were good. They would... they would take thousands of papers down to Joseph Avenue and sell 'em to the fish markets and to the meat markets, they used for wrapping paper. So they actually were sold, but by the pound and not by the...

Q. I see. OK. Was it easier... was it easier to get a job with the Hearst paper than say the other papers in town?

A. Well, it was easier if... if you were not a conventional type of individual, if you just walked in cold and told 'em, you know, why you would make yourself available. But, what you had to do was kind of create a desire and walk in there and tell 'em I have something to... it goes back to what Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Q. I see.

A. If you went into the Hearst newspaper and asked for a job you'd never get to first base; but if you walked in and says I have an idea that's gonna help the Rochester Journal-American, the executive would listen because they were all eager to off-set this stigma and this unacceptance, which was causing a big problem.

Q. I see. What kind of control did Hearst have over his papers?

A. Very strong control, everybody feared him. And everybody... there was...
A. (Continued) to be invited to San Simeon where Hearst held...

Q. Right. His estate in California in the north.

A. And this was really the ultimatum. When an executive got an invitation he generally got a big promotion after that.

Q. Were the heads of the Rochester _Journal-American_ directly appointed by Hearst?

A. The publishers were generally after being scrutinized by some of his underlings. He would put them... the final OK on 'em. And they weren't necessarily all newspaper people. Like there was Dr. Meyer Jacobstein who would figure in Jewish history in Rochester. He was a former Congressman, a banker, and then made publisher of the Hearst paper.

Q. I see. Lend an air of respectability.

A. Yea.

Q. I see.

A. Yea.

Q. OK. Was the Gannett chain a bitter rival with Hearst?

A. They were very, you know, conventional. And, of course, they looked at us like, you know, the stepchild and the... in my selling advertising I'd go in and the advertiser would say you seem like a nice guy, but you should hear what the guy from the _Times-Union_ says about the _Journal_. And, you know, you're the type of people who represent 'em.

Q. Unbelievable. What kind of methods, techniques did you have to do to get the _Journal-American_ sold?

A. Well, to sell advertising, of course, advertising is ideas. And if you could get a good idea, and many times instead of a small merchant, who of course that I would call on, 'cause I had to create advertising. They didn't give me any accounts. But, being aware of what goes on on Joseph Avenue, which was actually the first shopping center in Rochester, if people want to think back
A. (Continued) on what a shopping center was, it was a strip of stores that went from Joseph Avenue from actually Nassau Street all the way to Clifford Avenue. And they were open like seven days and seven nights outside of the kosher places. . .

Q. Sure.

A. . . . who would close for the Sabbath Friday night and then reopen Saturday night. So, in my going in cold and trying to sell advertising to . . . what they would do, we would be assigned advertisers who ran in the Times-Union and Democrat. The advertising manager would clip out the ads and say go down and see if you can get it. And after everybody had tried it they'd give it to a new guy, say, what can you do, see? He'd walk in and the guy'd say, you gotta be kidding? You're the eighth guy, you know, you got no circulation. I understand they're wrapping the fish in your paper, and you're dumping 'em over Niagara Falls. You mean you tell me you got so many thousand circulation and the Hearst people spend money and their readers are eager to watch for our message? Really, I . . . I'm not interested in the Journal. You seem like a nice guy, but really it's a waste of time. So, I would take the ads and I tell you I originally thought I wanted to be an architect, so I could letter and I had a pretty good idea of a video layout. And I would lay out an ad.

Q. Before you actually went to . . . ?

A. And then I'd walk in . . .

Q. That's interesting.

A. Well, he would look at it and he said to me, gee that looks pretty good. So, . . . and our rate, of course, was lower than the other paper.

Q. Sure, of course.

A. I says to him why don't you try it, you know, and I says, you know, it might be a good idea to repeat it in the other paper because you'd have the totally
A. (Continued) new market but... 

Q. So you were suggesting that they circulate in the other paper as well?
A. 'Cause I was afraid to gamble that we couldn't carry the ball for 'em alone.
Q. Sure, sure.
A. But this turned out to be a fallacy because in 1932 when liquor was legalized and, of course the Gannett policy was not to accept liquor advertising. So the Hearst paper was the only one that would take it. And I started a liquor war between some liquor stores 'cause there was no state control on prices. In other words, it was catch as catch can. And I went into everybody who had a liquor license, to people who would listen to me.
Q. Sure.
A. And I told 'em, I said, somebody's gonna be the Sibley's in the liquor business, whoever spends the most money will do the big job. And today Star and Wegmans are in the food business in a big way what I tried to do in the liquor business in the early thirties.
Q. That's interesting.
A. And I did start a small war which was to my advantage because I was working on commissions and they were running bigger ads.
Q. It raises two interesting questions before we actually get into the ... the Gannett area.
A. Yea, yea.
Q. First of all, how expensive would a certain section of your paper be, of the Hearst paper be, versus say Gannett?
A. Well, at that time we're talking a page ad was around $500.
Q. $500. I see.
A. Yea. Yea.
Q. And the second question is, who were the biggest advertisers?
A. Sibley's, Edwards, the department stores, Sears.

Q. I see. OK. Now it's 1937 and the Hearst paper sells out to Gannett.

A. Yea.

Q. What happened? What was the cause of it? Why did they do it?

A. Well, they did it because the... the bankers and the financiers were closing in on Hearst and...

Q. That was his period of problems.

A. Yea. And they had to close... they closed I think five... five Hearst papers at one time. And newspapermen were a dime a dozen. And I couldn't get a job. The Gannett paper didn't hire anybody immediately when the paper closed. I was offered a job. I went to Cleveland. I worked on on the Cleveland News. But they were very much interested in me because I did talk to some of the executives. And what they were concerned with, and rightfully so, was that it would look... it might cause a little unrest amongst the Gannett people if they thought they were gonna wholesale...

Q. Accept the Hearst paper...

A. ... people because somebody would fall by the wayside.

Q. Mr. Edelman, a curious question comes to mind. What made you go to work for the Hearst paper in the first place?

A. I wanted to be a newspaperman.

Q. And that was the way...?

A. That was it. And I...

Q. It's a good, honest answer, sure.

A. Yea, I wanted to get started in newspaper work.

Q. How long were you in Cleveland?

A. One year, and I hated it. My wife was very unhappy. So we came back in town
A. (Continued) on a vacation and then I was offered a job on the Times-Union, that I readily accepted. But it served its purpose because there was a cooling-off period, and then they were more acceptable. I mean the few people, a lot of 'em had left town and there was no panic among these people who were working for Gannett.

Q. I see.

A. That there was gonna be a wholesale hiring of Hearst people and they were all gonna be dumped.

Q. I see. Now the Democrat & Chronicle and Times-Union are referred to as the flagship papers of the Gannett chain.

A. Yea, yes.

Q. Is that your headquarters?

A. Yes, the corporate headquarters and where the chain originated. In other words, Frank Gannett started the paper. He... and he went to Cornell, of course, and they had a paper, he and some of his associates, in Elmira. But Rochester was 1918 when he bought the Times-Union.

Q. 1918.

A. Yes.

Q. OK. So this was well-established in Rochester before Hearst tried to come in?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. I see. OK. Can you explain to me how the... the advertising department solicits its patrons?

A. Yes. What you do, of course, there's an established group of advertisers. Your major stores who would just not exist if... they couldn't exist as well. But due to the newspaper strike in 1947 for three months, so it proved how important, you know...
Q. Newspapers were to the... 
A. ... newspapers were, yea.

Q. Sure.
A. So you have your... your regular advertiser, your bonafide who wants to advertise. Then of course you... you create... you create advertising if you've got a good advertising staff or you're a good advertising salesman. You watch and observe. You get off of Main Street because Main Street, of course, always got big rents due to the fact that people... the stores did business off of foot traffic, but downtown Rochester used to, you know, have the bulk of the...

Q. In... in the good old days?
A. Yea. How old are you? Are you a native Rochesterian?
Q. No, I'm from Boston.
A. Yea. Yea, so this was way before your time, but Neisner's who are locally based and operated started in Rochester.

Q. Forman's and so forth.
A. Yea. But, to... to live off of foot traffic is one thing. You do this with low-priced merchandise. But if you happen to get off of Main Street you gotta get people to come to your store you have to advertise. And what happened on Joseph Avenue, which was predominately small Jewish merchants, they were specialists. They would have a children's store. There was Pillings who went in the baby furniture business. And, of course, they would run small consistent ads. And, of course, geographically that was like the center of town and there was no... nobody was afraid to go down there. It was, you know, highly respected business area. And nobody bothered you, you know, where today the area is like a bomb, you know, you're afraid to shout...

Q. It's changed.
A. (Continued) And it prospered and grew until 1964 when the race riots happened.

Q. Yea, and then everybody moved away.

A. Well, they... actually in 1946 after the war there became an exodus because... am I skipping too much?

Q. No, that's all right. We can come back and fill in.

A. What happened was they... they prospered and grew and I developed a lot of advertising down there. And...

Q. You would almost say that that was your original base?

A. Yea, because they gave you nothing when... when you started with a paper as the last man they wouldn't give you any stores to call on or major accounts. You had to like prove your capabilities. They wanted new advertising. And to get new advertising you had to develop new advertisers. So you had to take people who were predominately in one paper and switch 'em to the other.

Q. Brings to mind an interesting question. Did the fact that you were Jewish help?

A. I would say it... it didn't hurt and it didn't help. It didn't hurt, it didn't help. I refused... this became another big factor. I had a lot of offers from predominately Jewish people who felt that the Gannett company would never make an executive out of a Jewish individual. There just weren't...

Q. This is something we can get into in a while.

A. There weren't any, and they says you're bucking your head against a stone wall. And I refused to accept that. I felt that if a Jew had to be twice as good to go half as far I'd be four times as good and I'd get there. And I knew that the... this was a fallacy because we live in a competitive world, and I would see all things being equal I shouldn't be selected because I'm Jewish.
Q. So it was as much your imagination and your go-getting ability...
A. That's right.
Q. ... that helped you make it?
A. I was offered more money, bigger opportunity at that time than I was getting on the paper, plus with the...
Q. I see.
A. ... qualified where you going? I says I'm damn gonna be a big shot with the Gannett and that's my dream. That's what I wanted to be, a big time newspaperman. And I wanted to earn it myself. And that was the only way I could get it 'cause I... I had no family ties. And I had to do it on my own. So I built a good reputation, and I worked hard and I was very honest with my advertisers. In other words I... I had a pet expression I said I'd always spend your money like it's my own. And the guy said, what did you say? He says well I don't know nothing about advertising. I says you don't know nothing about advertising, and if I become your advertising representative I'm gonna spend your money like it's my own. You're gonna let me in on the secrets of your business, what you do and if you have any co-op funds available. And then we're gonna establish how much money you can afford to spend for advertising. And when you run an ad I want you to be truthful with me, let me know if it pulls or if it don't pull and whether your business increased that week or if it fell down so we can grow together. And that's what we did.
Q. And did it work?
A. It worked very successfully.
Q. Were people agreeable to that type of situation?
A. Yea, because I was honest with 'em. There were times when I told 'em to stay out of the paper because, you know, on the inside I would never violate a
A. (Continued) confidence, but if I knew that Sibley's were gonna run a tremendous big sale, some little guy is gonna, you know, blow it.

Q. He just wouldn't make it.
A. Yea.
Q. Sure.
A. His $100 ad is gonna be down the drain.
Q. Sure.
A. And weather. If I knew there was gonna be a bad storm, weather is a big factor. And I used to have ads set up on wait order where they were like for snow shovels and...
Q. And boots and galoshes...
A. ... boots for ... And the minute we got the first snowstorm, you know, this is a tremendous factor. Timing, of course, is the key to successful advertising.
Q. I never realized you did that.
A. Yea, yea.
Q. Oh, that's fascinating. Wow. Would you say Rochester businesses or you actively were the ones who participated in the putting the paper ... I'm not explaining myself well. Do ... I guess I can phrase it this way. Did Rochester businesses actively seek advertising in the Gannett papers?
A. No. They had to be sold. The smaller ones had to be sold and cultivated and demonstrate that ... 'cause it's an intangible. You went to some little guy and you ask him to lay out $100, you know, for...
Q. That's big money.
A. That was a lot of money.
Q. Sure.
A. He says, gee, you know, at that time you could buy a beautiful suit for $50,
A. (Continued) and he says you know I just don't spend that kind of money. And my profits are not that great. I says, but you know, you gotta spend this money and they'll... they'll come to you.

Q. Are there standards or criteria that Gannett chain sets up?
A. Very, very high standards. We turn down billions of dollars worth of advertising. We had...

Q. What type? I'd be curious.
A. Well, where you knowingly know that they're gonna not be honest. In other words if a man is gonna exaggerate. If a man was gonna run a phony going-out-of-business ad. If a man had a fire sale and you knew his merchandise had all been destroyed in the fire and he brought in some cheap inferior merchandise. And anything you knowingly knew you would never do this. See, your... your first obligation is to your reader.

Q. Sure.
A. See, you can be an advertising man but your sacred trust is the confidence in your newspaper.

Q. Is this the policy of the Gannett administration as well?
A. Yes, very... and then, of course, we... at that time we used to turn out a lot of nightclub ads and theatre ads. We tailored 'em because they... the exposure. Of course, today you look at 'em and you they look like they belong in Playboy and they're running. We were always... it was called the family newspaper and if you're invited into somebody's home...

Q. Then you should be able to...
A. ... yea, you don't take your pants off.

Q. Right. Why... why the change? Obviously now...
A. Because things changed. Things change. Frank Gannett like was a died-in-the-wool Republican who thought the Democrats could do everything wrong and the
A. (Continued) Republicans no wrong. And then we were blessed with Paul Miller who came roughly thirty years ago, 1940. And heir to the throne, and he was great for his period. And then roughly ten years ago he brought in Al Neuharth, and you go through these changes. Now you're still... in fact there's a series running now, I don't know if you read the paper, but the Democrat's running a series of when you're twenty and then thirty and thirty to forty and from forty to fifty what happens in your life. So, this is happening worldwide in our history. It's happening business-wise. There was an exodus of... of close to a half million jobs in New York State, one of our Gannett editors is doing a series now which originates in Albany, "What's wrong with New York State?" They lost like half a million jobs, which is comparable to the whole city of Atlanta. And naturally New York State is hurting when you lose that kind of...

Q. Sure, sure.

A. But the merchants were very receptive. And once you... you got 'em going advertising become like a... it would be comparable to a junkie. The trick was not to let them stay out of the paper because then they'd feel that they could get along without you, once you get rolling...

Q. So the idea was to get and keep them hooked?

A. Keep 'em... keep 'em hooked. But you had to be honest with 'em, you had to let 'em know. And as they grew you grew with 'em. And...

Q. A couple... a couple of questions I think I should ask.

A. Yea.

Q. OK. First of all, were you hurt when radio and television began to come into Rochester?

A. Well, radio, of course, was considered the death knell of the newspaper before your time, but when you stop and realize how much space w
A. (Continued) by the manufacturers of radios to sell radios, and it never was its death. I mean radios... we were fascinated when the radio came out. You would sit there glued to your set. There was Amos and Andy, and there was Crosby and... and when these shows weren't on you just couldn't get people in your store, into a store or out of their house because they... they wanted to listen. They got hooked. And, of course, it was being of low-income, poor people, this was tremendous entertainment. You'd sit home and you'd get all of these great celebrities would come into your home on radio. But, so it actually did, but it was a myth. And when television came they said well now this is it, you know. And there were... there were executives who are comparable to ostriches. They said they're not buying a television because...

Q. It was a fad.

A. ... and they feel it was gonna hurt newspapers. I says, but how you gonna know what's goin' on with your competition? You gotta realize your adversary strength, his weaknesses. Plus me, being in advertising, I got to know who was spending their money...

Q. Sure.

A. I can see if I can find a flaw in it and... I'll tell you... and I'll tell you one of the... this was actually true. Of course, people were fascinated, and it is a miracle, and it is great. But when it became a factor in... in Cincinnati the water people were very much concerned. There were peaks and valleys in the water pressure, and they found out when the commercials went on that's when people go to the john and flush the toilet. And this became a reality. Now, you... you... you're old enough to know about T.V. You want a beer you wait till the commercial goes on. Is that right?

Q. True.
A. You want to if you want to go to the john that's when you... when you go. So, and some of the commercials are great. I'm not stupid, I think it's a tremendous medium. That's a... it does entertain. But it don't sell like newspapers.

Q. Is there a certain type of company that sells better on television versus newspaper?

A. I would say if you demonstrate an item you have a better chance of... of having good return. Like a snow tire. If you take a good commercial with a tremendous snowstorm and a big snow fall, and the people get in their car and the... the traction of the snow tire... I mean it's a... yes...

Q. Sure.

A. 'cause you see it. And there's been some tremendous commercials, but there's been some tremendous flops.

Q. Yea.

A. And, of course, competition will never like to see anybody dominate a market.

Q. I see.

A. So, if somebody's using it they buy it as a necessary evil even though they're... they don't think it's a great buy, but they don't want anybody to dominate it.

The biggest example I had as advertising manager of the Times-Union to prove that television was overrated was the first Super football game, which goes back maybe five years, I don't know.

Q. Oh, even farther than that I think.

A. Maybe.

Q. Superbowls?

A. Yes. Super, super... what is it ten years?

Q. Yea, it's ten or twelve, sure.

A. All right. Times go so fast...
Q. OK.

A. Just... they started in October, November. And they were getting... they got up, I think, to $80,000 a minute at that time. Now they get I think $200,000 a minute or whatever it is. It was sold out by Thanksgiving. And everybody was eagerly awaiting this super... super game in January. And, I called a staff meeting of my men and I asked 'em to... after it was over... I went to... to a party on New Year's Day or that... that Sunday... it was on a Sunday.

Q. Yea, sure.

A. And this guy to get people there he had three T.V. sets, one in every room where he'd have the booze, you know, and walk around. He says don't think you're gonna miss the game, I'm realistic and every... there'll be enough television sets so everybody can see 'em in every room. So the next day I called a staff meeting and I asked how many watched the game, and everybody's hand went up like I was gonna give a bonus, you know. So then I says that's very interesting. Who sponsored it? What were some of the commercials? Well, this is where... somebody said some hamburg joint, I think MacDonald's was one of the sponsors. And there was a lawn cutter, there was some...

Q. But they couldn't actually remember much less the commercials...

A. They couldn't... they couldn't. And I wrote a... I got out a flier on this and I went to... and whenever I went to a major department store, which was really what I did, you know, as the advertising manager. Or when I went to an important advertiser and they said they were considering television, and they would discuss it with you. I says to him, you know, I want to tell you something. And I told 'em of my experience. And I says did you... did you watch it? They says yea. I said who were the sponsors? Well, wait a minute, Les, I gotta think. And they couldn't give me the answers. Of course, the
A. (Continued) biggest, "I Love Lucy," you know. Phillip Morris sponsored this program, and when it started you couldn't get a cab in New York or Boston or any of the major cities at seven o'clock or whenever it went on. Everybody went into a booze joint if they weren't home with their T.V. sets. I used to watch it. And it won all the awards. And at Christmas time the head of Phillip Morris got on television and he thanked everybody for helping them, but he said their sales were way off and they couldn't continue to sponsor it because the sales were not.

Q. Is that right?
A. He says, you know, we're not in the entertainment business.

Q. So I guess what you could say then is that there's a definite future in advertising, newspaper advertising?
A. Oh, yes. Yes, yea.

Q. OK. Let's go for a couple of other areas with the Gannett chain for a second.
A. Yea.

Q. Does it help to be the only paper in town?
A. No, it's tough. When I worked for Hearst it was an interesting experience to work in a competitive situation. Where you're the only one, of course, it's more of a sacred trust because you are the only one and they can't question you because. . . But you should be honest with them 'cause I consider it a sacred trust, and I told 'em. And I had people sit in my office when I'd get a phone call, and they says you operate like you're fifteenth in a fifteen newspaper town. You never say no or I can't or, you know, you say I'll try or thank you and you're very polite. I says, well they're considering spending money with us and I . . . I don't want them to think the attitude that we are the only one. I said if they get real tough, if some guy comes down to a knock 'em down, drag 'em out, and he says who needs you? Then I'll tell 'em the
A. (Continued) facts of life. But, never to a point that we're threatening 'em, you know? But, I... I'll just point out you gotta be kidding. You can buy. There's seventeen radio stations beaming into Rochester. There's four T.V. channels, but there's only, you know, two newspapers. One in the morning and one at night. And anything in depth you can't get it. They whet your appetite on T.V. but if you want to read the story in depth...

Q. They have a sixty minute spot and that is it, sixty second spot and that's all.

A. Yea. And even the news. Our sales have increased and our price has increased. We... the papers went from 3¢ to they're now 20¢, you know, for a daily paper.

Q. How much would a page cost, advertising?

A. Well, we're up to over $2,000.

Q. Two thousand, that's four times what it was during the Depression.

A. Yea, and of course the results are tremendous. The... the stores plan it. WHAM, which is the leading radio station, they claim 13% of the radio audience. We got 100% with the newspaper, you know? I don't know, a fellow your age, well educated, how important newspapers were to you in your growing up?

Q. That was... Have there been any changes in techniques or methods over they years?

A. Yes. Where you used to sell advertising to the merchant based on friendship, you developed a friendship and if they like the ball game you'd take 'em to the ball game, and if he like a dirty joke you'd tell him a dirty joke or, you know? It became a very sophisticated type of business. In other words today professional space-buyers are hired. There are very few small merchants...

Q. Is that right?

A. ... left. And people like J.C. Penny and the discount houses and Wegman's today, everything is very sophisticated. But your cost of advertising, as
Interview with Lester Edelman

A. (Continued) costly as they are you can't afford to buy advertising on a sentimental. ..

Q. That's interesting. .. that's absolutely amazing.

A. So, you have to qualify everything you say. And you have to produce otherwise you get off the schedule. So, it's very important that you go in well documented.

Q. And another thing in a peripheral area. How large is the Gannett chain?

A. Today it's up to 54 newspapers.

Q. Does that make it one of the largest chains?

A. It is the largest numbers-wise, but not circulation-wise because we have some smaller papers than Scripts-Howard, Knight. They might have fewer papers, but they have like. ..

Q. They're in larger cities?

A. They're in larger cities.

Q. OK. Are they concentrated primarily in the northeast and midwest?

A. What the Gannett?

Q. The Gannett papers.

A. No, they're all over the country now. Yea.

Q. I see.

A. It's a predominant chain.

Q. OK.

A. The name chain is not acceptable they like to be called a group of newspapers. They used to call it the Hearst chain. And a chain implies a chain, which is not, you know, nice.

Q. Oh, I see. So it's a group partnership.

A. Yea.

Q. I see.
A. And they do have a... an autonomy. In other words the Gannett company never ran as strongly as Hearst where Hearst had ultimatums and directives. Frank Gannett suggested, but he as strongly as he was a Democrat... a Republican, some of his papers came out for Democratic presidential candidates.

Q. Get into... get into that just a bit. Did you know Mr. Gannett?

A. Yes.

Q. OK. Could you describe him?

A. Yes. He was very articulate. He was very methodical. He was very business-like. Very little times he was keyed up. He had very little...at times when you'd see him relaxed. He would come to... I'd meet him, of course, in the elevator and he would come to our office once in a while to talk to the advertising manager when I was on the staff, and he knew what was goin' on. But, he was very... he was a very righteous person. Like his beliefs of liquor advertising. He felt that liquor was an evil thing and it was in the best interests of people. He realized the power of advertising and even though you said to him liquor consumption was great in Rochester without us takin' advertising, due to the fact that the income was high here and people could afford to buy booze. So it wasn't that kind of an item that people needed you, you know. In fact, the Whelly's from Genesee Brewery never really forgave us for fighting 'em all those years.

Q. Do you think Mr. Gannett used the papers to further his own goals, whether they be political or whatever?

A. There's a natural tendency. Of course, when a man gets in his situation, he... he was naive and like he was... he ran for President. He thought he could get the nomination for President. He's a target. There are people who know how powerful he was and influential and how much money he had, and they wanted a piece of the action, so they... they appealed to him and said you should
A. (Continued) be President. And this happened a retired automobile advertising executive who evidently was out of retirement money and saw a good horse in Frank Gannett told him how great he was. And, you know the flesh is weak, we all have ego.

Q. Oh, sure.

A. And so he spent about $4 million in Philadelphia, I think it was in 1940.

Q. '40 convention, sure.

A. And he bought all the elephants, somebody told him, you know, it's the symbol. He bought all the live elephants he could in the area and they paraded 'em and he... he did everything. He listened to people. These people are targets. I want to tell you something. Big people are gullible. They don't think anybody would have the guts...

Q. To stand up to them...

A. ... to sell them short and... and... and ridicule them or tell 'em anything that isn't true. So the bigger they are the bigger the target they are. That's why big people make big mistakes. They're very gullible. The little guy is... lives by his wits and he's...

Q. He's more cautious.

A. ... cautious and he's always afraid... They say never hustle a hustler because you know he knows the score.

Q. Do you think Mr. Gannett's policies affected the editorial positions of his newspaper?

A. Very much so. Yea.

Q. We talked about the liquor.

A. Yea, but I feel that news-wise they were never sensational, which is, you know...
Q. That's really what...
A. ... an important thing. See, a good newspaper's a watchdog in its community. And you... you gotta protect the people regardless of the fact that you might sell fewer newspapers, but he felt an obligation. He knew the... the obligation of the only paper in town. And it was in good hands. In other words I think if, with all due respect to Newhause who owns Syracuse both papers, they're cash registers. They're not inter... we're interested in Pulitzer Prizes. We're interested in awards. You see, we spend a lot of money on... on covering some of these features, you know, that... that are not...
Q. Features...
A. ... that don't have a bearing on... on your current...
Q. On cash receipts.
A. Yea. They cost money to get. Of course, now we're in an enviable situation with our group to use 'em. And a lot of the papers, so you pay for 'em once, and you can use 'em as feature in some of your other papers, some of 'em are acceptable and some aren't depending on your market in your area. Because some that we use here in the winter wouldn't be good in Florida. And... but vice versa, but...
Q. Sure.
A. ... if there's a world championship fight where they used to spend... send the sports writer, the sports editor from each paper, today we can send one guy and...
Q. Syndicate it.
A. ... and he can cover it.
Q. OK. Is advertising affected by business cycles?
A. Very much so. Except...
Q. What do you do to circumvent that?
A. Well, what you do you go to a merchant as things get tougher and you tell him he's gotta be sharper. After the war all you had to do is say now available, and there was such a vacuum created for cars and for major appliances that whoever ran an ad people flocked to 'em, and they paid asking price, there was no discount. They were happy to get 'em at any price.

Q. I see.
A. In fact, cars you... you paid the dealer under the table to get a car after the war.

Q. Is that right?
A. You're too young to know that but that was true.

Q. No kidding?
A. Yea. You... you paid under the table to get a new car.

Q. Oh, my word. Look, I want to ask one more... well, actually...
A. Are we drifting too much from...

Q. No, we're not. No, we're not. Any of this is relevant. So don't worry, OK? There's plenty of structure in this. OK. Two more questions, first question. Could another newspaper start up successfully in Rochester? Will Gannett remain the only newspaper in town?
A. I would definitely say that with a positive... they say youth is positive, well as an old guy I'm gonna be positive and say it's... it's out of the question. It would be a multi-million dollar mistake.

Q. Is it a lucrative partnership? Is it...
A. It's very... it's very costly, but it's very profitable. In other words, if you have good management you can make a lot of money.

Q. They're doing well in Rochester?
A. They're doing well, but... but they have to adjust their rates, and they
A. (Continued) have to pick their people.

Q. Are they doing as well as they ever were?
A. I would say yes in percentage wise, yes.

Q. OK. One more question then we'll move on to other topics. Can you explain your own association with Gannett? I mean take it chronologically from your origins in 1937 up.

A. Yea. It's just been a tremendous experience. Every dream and every wish that I had for my personal business career the Gannett papers were an outlet for my ability and it was a wonderful relationship. I was always treated with the utmost consideration, and I had a few personal experiences with small people which you'd have anywhere.

Q. Which we'll get into in a second, OK? Or maybe I could ask that now.
A. Yea.

Q. Now you're Jewish.
A. Yea.

Q. And it was tough for somebody who was Jewish to break into the newspaper world.
A. Well, yea.

Q. Could you discuss that?
A. Well, in the first place a lot of people ridiculed it. They ... what do you need the newspaper business for? You're never gonna own a paper and the Jewish theory was, you know, get into a business you can own or work for somebody and learn enough so you can start your own. And the newspaper business was so big and so gigantic. And when I was starting in it the Hearst paper was closing, you know, everybody was ... there was a pulling in and not an expansion. So they said it's out of the question, what do you want to do? I says well I like the business, it's fascinating, it's interesting. You meet
A. (Continued) a lot of new people and . . . and when . . . when you walk in here you are somebody. I was brought up very poorly and the guy from the paper, you know, people said send him in. I had no consideration because I was a guy from the paper.

Q. Right I see.
A. So I like it.

Q. So . . . so status played a good deal?
A. Yes. Yes, in my. . . and they. . . and I always let everybody know I was Jewish. I took off the Jewish holidays.

Q. Was there any problem, first of all, in your being hired because you were Jewish, or secondly did you encounter any bad, if you will, anti-Semitic experience?
A. No, never from . . . from people in management. Only from someone, some punk you worked with alongside of you might have been jealous or envious because you worked harder than he did. And you maybe made a better showing, or you might have, you know. . . but. . .

Q. What about in Rochester business community?
A. Oh, very well respected. You see, Jewry in Rochester enjoyed a wonderful reputation. We're. . . there's probably 20,000 per se Jewish people in Rochester, which is a very small percentage. But, I would say for the most part maybe 8% of them have conducted themselves properly and they were brought up properly so that they. . . you see the same people twice in Rochester. And this is how you govern yourself, you know you're gonna meet the same people over and over again. So the Jewish community, the people work together and they help. I. . . I was brought up. . . I hung around the YMCA. There were four Jews on the Central YMCA basketball team because the JY at that time didn't have a nice building, you know, the big one wasn't built yet, the one on Andrews and North when I was growing up.
Q. In 1930.

A. And we started hangin' around the YMCA and we wound up, you know. So, I never had a problem. I think this is a myth. I think it. I'm aware of it. I'm not naive. I know that there are certain companies. I know that certain retail... retailers, you know, never wanted to hire Jewish people, and of course they. A lot of 'em never succeeded because even though they got big they never got as big as they would have got because the Jewish people have a.

Q. A significant buying power.

A. Yes, and... no, they had a tremendous ability for retail business, buy and sell merchandise, this is like an in-born... like they became... they were good students, you know, they became doctors and they became.

Q. Very important, too.

A. ... lawyers and they became dentists because I'm reading... I'm reading a very inter... this is... if you talk about timing, The World of Our Fathers, by Howe.

Q. Howe.

A. My son who's a dentist in Philly sent it to me for my birthday, which was in March in Florida, and I started to read it. And it tells about the mass migration of eastern European Jews.

Q. Just about.

A. ... who came to America in the late 1880's and early nineties and then the early 1910 and what's happened to 'em. So you could see what happened here. They were taught to respect the law and their teacher and their parents. And these were tremendous factors in your entire in how you govern your own life. And authority... but, I... I was very proud of being a Jew, and I was also proud... of course, a lot of people said that I was... show case. They said
A. (Continued) Gannett hired you as the show case because you happened to be a terrific advertising man and you're a Jew, and boy this is a great combination. If... it would be like today you talk about hiring a colored person and then an insignificant colored person can... can get by pretty good today with a big company because they're gonna have a certain fraction... 

Q. A percentage basis.

A. Yea. So that... so that you have a great... fine, because you're capable. But I says they respect that. They pay me and they promote me accordingly.

Q. One more question. Are there Jews in the Gannett chain now?

A. Yes.

Q. OK. A significant proportion?

A. No, because the... it doesn't pay that well and there isn't that many people who have the burning desire to be newspaper people.

Q. There was something about the era you grew up in that newspapers...?

A. Yea, plus my own personal beliefs and my... my... I was... I was blessed. Like some people say they were cursed, I was blessed by wanted to be a newspaper man.

Q. OK. Could you briefly sum up your own rise from 1937 to the present?

A. Yea. I...

Q. In fact, before we start I suppose I should end side one.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview 1)
Interview with LESTER EDELMAN
June 29, 1976
By Brian Mitchell

Interview 1
Tape 1
Side B

Q. OK. This is Brian Mitchell beginning Side 2. Good clear reproduction. Go ahead.
A. Of course, when I went with the Gannett Company in 1938 I was hired on the Times-Union as an advertising man, and they had what they called the three-month trial basis.

Q. And you proved yourself or else.
A. And you got a letter confirming this that at the end of three months you will be a permanent member and your salary will be reviewed or you will be asked for your resignation. And I don't think it was thirty days we went... we had some kind of an office party, staff party and the advertising manager said, you know the letter I sent you? He says throw it away, tear it up, forget about it. He says, you're doing a great job and you're part of the team and you're gonna be there as long, and I hope someday you'll become an executive with our company because I think in a little while that you've worked for me you... you show the...

Q. So you had a great relationship from the beginning?
A. Yea, because I'll tell you anything you like, you come from a family of educators, I've always felt anything you like you can do twice as well with half the effort, you know. And I think you're blessed if you know what you want and can do it. And I have a son who's a dentist. He wanted to be a dentist when he was eight, nine years old. He used to make model airplanes, he was good with his hands, and I said Harv you stay with it and someday you'll be a good dentist. And he is.

Q. Right.
A. But, the... a lot of the kids who grew up with him never knew what they wanted and today they're a manufacturer's rep or they're going from pillar to post. But he went to Brighton High and Harvey worked hard. He was a paperboy and... but the kids who he grew up who I knew used to come over, you know, and the ones who wanted to be doctors are doctors. The ones who wanted to be lawyers, accountants, and they're all...

Q. They're doing...

A. They had a goal. You cannot... I had an appointment with you at two o'clock today. Now, I had to know how to get here, and I had to know... we discussed this here, where will we meet, the U. of R. is a big place. And we still, you know, we did regardless of the fact we didn't pinpoint, you know, wear the carnation or the blue suit. But, so... As I started with them, of course, I was anxious to prove to them that they had made a good choice. And, with the background I had I knew where to go and where to dig because a lot of their people on the Gannett paper had never worked for Hearst. They had been on the Gannett paper and they had enjoyed the acceptance and the respectability and the prestige of...

Q. And security, too.

A. Yea. So they didn't have to dig as hard, and they made their regular calls, period. But they didn't have to create. And I became a door-opener. And I... I knew people... I knew people who did a lot... that did big business that nobody knew about. You know, a fellow would sell appliances to all the union members. A fellow would sell silverplate, not sterling silver but sterling silverplate. He... he... somebody in the union was nice to him, he was a jeweler and he had a little notice, everybody who is... works in a clothing factory and is a member of this union gets a 10% additional discount if they buy their silverplate. So when there was a wedding or this everybody
A. (Continued) would beat a path to this guy's door. So I knew he had a lot of co-op money comin' because he never advertised but he was a big user. So I got him started in the paper. And his only ad, he got... went into the appliance business after the war, his first break in advertising was ten full pages. Everybody told me he... I better leave town because all he was gonna get was the dough out of it. And he didn't. He was doin' $15,000 a week. He did $80,000 that week. He wanted to know how long this was gonna go on.

Q. Wow.

A. So it was interesting.

Q. Oh, yea.

A. But, of course, as I did these things management perked up and wanted to know who Edelman was and what's he doin'? And, of course, I always tried to be dramatic in a nice dignified sort of a way, you know. And I... I made myself felt. And...

Q. What... what's your present position?

A. I just retired. I took an early retirement.

Q. I see.

A. My wife is ill.

Q. Oh, that's right, too, we discussed that on the phone. Well, previous to your retirement then?

A. I was the assistant advertising director of both newspapers.

Q. Of both.

A. Yea.

Q. OK.

A. And...

Q. Then you achieved your goal?
A. Yea, yea. And the reason I didn't become the top banana was because of age, you know, you start to taper off, but company never... they took care of me financially, respectfully, everybody they brought in to go over me was pre-explained by Mr. Miller or Mr. Neuharth so that there would be no, you know, well you're at a point of no return and who the hell owes you an explanation.

Q. So you always had a perfect understanding...?

A. Oh, a great relationship. And.

Q. That... that's very interesting.

A. Well, it is. And I tell people today, a lot of people used to kid me, the guys who became advertising managers for chains would come to Rochester and they'd say, hey, how come I see a Jew as an advertising manager of a major newspaper. You're a rarity. I travel all over the country and never met one. I says well it's rare, but it... I enjoy it and the company enjoys me and it's been a good relationship.

Q. I mean obviously you've done well or they wouldn't keep you in your position.

A. Yea.

Q. OK. Look, we're gonna shift a little. Are there any political, professional or civic organizations that you belong to?

A. Yes.

Q. OK. Could you outline them?

A. I belong to the Brighton Republican Club, I built a home in Brighton 26 years ago despite the fact they said that the, you know, Jews are predominately Democrats. I like the Town of Brighton, I wanted to bring my kids up there. And I didn't want to change it. They... they run a town and since then, of course, there's been a big influx of Jews to Brighton. And a lot of 'em are trying to make it over, and they're trying to... they're Democratically inclined. And when I ask 'em point blank, I said why did you attract...
A. (Continued) come to live there, bring your family up? Well, it's a great area. I said, why do you want to change it? They say, well they're still not doing as good as they could. I said it was good enough for you to come here let's keep it the way it is.

Q. OK.

A. And I...

Q. That raises an interesting question, and I've been asking you periodically, now you have a... a solid basis in the Republican Party. What made you become Republican?

A. Well, I think it was due to the fact that I never was solid. I split my ticket. I would vote for an individual.

Q. For instance, now this would be betrayal. Did you vote for FDR? Somebody like that?

A. Oh, yes. 'Cause he was... and now I'm reading in this book that he was not such a great friend of the Jewish people. Even though he was accused of being Rosenfelt and all these Jewish names, he... he stood idly by and could have done a lot to prevent what happened in Germany had he used his full power.

Q. OK. OK. Are there other organizations?

A. Yes. I was active in the... the Chamber of Commerce, which welcomes business people.

Q. Could you explain your position there?

A. Yes, we had a retail merchants group. And there was a representative from Sibley's, McCurdy's, the major stores, and I represented the Gannett newspapers. And what we would do, we would plan like Curbstone Art Festival and all these things.

Q. Oh. Oh, sure.
A. (Continued) And all these attractions that were in the best interests of the retailers. And this is how the Chamber would function. And then, of course, we'd try to get speakers and we would fight for parking with the city. We would put up Christmas decorations, Thanksgiving to Christmas, Christmas trees downtown and festivities to, you know, so... Then, of course, I was active with the Temple Beth El. The men's club...

Q. OK. I think it'd probably be a good time to be getting into the specifically Jewish associations. OK. So we will...

A. Yea.

Q. The first question is obviously what synagogue do you belong to? You belong to the Conservative element, Beth El.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. OK. How long have you belonged there?

A. I've belonged there since we built the house in 1950... 1951.

Q. OK. Is your background Conservative?

A. No. I was brought up Orthodox. I belonged to Beth Joseph Center previous to that on St. Paul Street 'cause I lived on St. Paul Street for 11 years. And I was active there.

Q. What made you change from Orthodox to Conservative?

A. Because the... the... the temple was... was run beautifully. I'd been there as a guest, and geographically it's in my backyard where Beth Joseph was...

Q. Across town.

A. ... would have been hard to get to. And my son was Bar Mitzvah, he finished his Bar Mitzvah lessons at Beth Joseph. He used to... he was a great kid, my son. He... if you ever get married and kids I'm gonna make you...

But, Beth Joseph was a great experience, and despite the fact it was Orthodox
A. (Continued)  my parents were never that strick. They says try to be a
  good person.
Q. Did they keep a kosher home?
A. No. And they did to an extent, but not strict. My wife's parents were
  strict Orthodox. And they had, you know, the dishes and everything was
  completely separate. And...
Q. Did your wife become Conservative with you?
A. Yes. And very happily so because she... she was very active. My wife
  was very helpful in my business career. In selling advertising you meet a
  lot of new people who come to town. A new manager of a store would come from
  New York and Chicago or Detroit or Louisville, and he'd be a young married
  guy like you or... and they... they'd have a baby or two and they wouldn't
  know where to live and my wife would befriend her and show her the different
  parts of town. And we'd have 'em over for dinner.
Q. Oh, that's nice.
A. What baby doctor to use and... so it became a great relationship. And a
  lot of our personal best friends were people that we met through business.
Q. Through business?
A. Yea.
Q. Could you... very briefly could you... who would you say your primary
  associates are? Are they business associates?
A. Yes.
Q. OK. They're people you met through business?
A. Yes.
Q. Did that include a broad spectrum of the community?
A. Yes, yea. Because they... you go in great depth. You go from department
  stores to ladies' shops to... to food business, distributors of major
A. (Continued) appliances, jewelers. And you hit all segments. Wholesale paper, car dealers, you cover the broad spectrum. But, of course, I educators... no. I've met a few of 'em who ask me to talk to their class, and I've enjoyed this. Here in fact somebody told me when I retired, they said, you should talk to people.

Q. I agree. Rather a fine... OK. We're gonna switch back to the synagogue aspect, OK?

A. Yea.

Q. Now you said you were active in Beth El's mens' club. mens' club, could you explain your activities?

A. Yea. Well, we would try to get speakers, and this is where I think it was a... we would try to get interesting speakers and get a good turnout for our mens' club meetings. And they would have bagels and lox Sunday morning and every now and then when you'd get a prominent speaker you'd have a big dinner. And it was at this dinner... Paul Miller at that time, Egypt and the Suez were big news and Paul Miller had gone to Egypt. He was friendly with some newspaper people...

Q. This would be like in 1956?

A. Wait a minute. Yea, yea. And when he came back, of course, he... I don't know whether or not you've ever met Paul Miller?

Q. No.

A. Probably read his articles, but he is like... he would be the outstanding newspaperman in the world, really, because, you know, he was head of the... Chairman of the Board of the Associated Press and the Gannett Company. And he's highly respected, he has an audience with presidents and kings and everybody. People don't realize how big and powerful and influential and great this guy is. Because, you know, he's local and he's... but, so the
A. (Continued) Temple asked me, they says, do you think you could get Paul Miller to talk at our opening men's club meeting in the fall, which is our big first meeting? And we want to start it off properly. Well, I was on his staff then, I wasn't an executive. And Rabbi Karp, of course, was the rabbi.

Q. I've heard the name.

A. And so I asked my boss, I says to him, you know, I know Paul Miller, I've met him at some of our functions, but I don't. I want to use protocol. Would you ask him if he would come to Temple Beth El and speak to the Jewish group and about his... and it's gonna be a hot spot because he went to the Arab... Q. He had actually been there.

A. Well, but he didn't go to Israel.

Q. He had gone to the Arabs.

A. Because he knew the Egyptian publishers and he went there, so he got their side of the story, but he's observant newspaperman. So it's gonna be... there'll probably throw, you know, some hot questions at him. But he loves us here, so he was delighted and he told me he would like to come to this meeting. And but he says one of the provision is he'd like to meet Rabbi Karp before the meeting.

Q. Sure.

A. So, I... so Karp came up to his office and we visited. And Paul Miller's father was a minister in Oklahoma. So, he had a good relationship with Rabbi Karp because they were both of, you know, religious... Q. The same type.

A. Yea.

Q. Sure.

A. And Karp was delighted with the opportunity to get to know him, and... and
A. (Continued) he came. And, of course, we sat at the head table, you know. And when we were havin' our dinner, between the dinner you visit, he says to me tell me more about yourself. I says to him it isn't fair, you know, I says I asked you here to talk to our group. And I don't like to use it as a personal push myself, you know.

Q. Right.
A. You're a captive audience. You know what he said to me? When will you have a better chance? I says, well you asked for it, now I'm gonna give it to you with both barrels. And one of the things I told him, I says you see this? We had about 500 people out there. I says, you know, they all think I'm nuts. Now we weren't drinkin' and, you know, . . . he says, like what do you mean? Because I says. . . because I work so hard and I'm not goin' anywhere. He says what do you mean by that? So I says they think the fact that I'm Jewish is a handicap, and you know that I work on commission and I'm making a lot more money than I make. And, you know, they just can't understand my eager-beaver. . . my love for the newspaper is based on the fact that, you know, they said it's futile. He says, you don't believe that do you? I says no, otherwise I would have left a long time ago. So he says I'm glad. He says I'm sure that when and if there's an opportunity for your talents the fact that you're Jewish will never be used against you. And he says I'm delighted that you, you know, . . . Well, we had a great. . . and that night when it was all over he says I want to thank you for your sincerity and your honesty. I told him everything, you know, I could that I thought was good for Gannett papers because this is my future. And I told him I felt I was a potential executive. And my timing, I conducted my personal life and my wife has, and we would be real assets in the Gannett company as an executive. Plus, I was well qualified. As he knew because some of these record-breaking things
A. (Continued) I had done. ..

Q. Had come to bear fruit. ..

A. Yea, and I got notes from him. So, the next morning, of course, my boss wasn't in. I come in and I went out to. . . when I come in at noon the secretary says, you know, Mr. Mahar wants to see you. So, he says to me, sit down, what'd you tell Paul Miller last night? So I says I told him the facts of life as I know 'em. He says you did a great job. He was tremendously impressed. He told me this morning, he says, he wouldn't have missed it for the world. He enjoyed talkin' to the people about his European. .. his ..

Q. The Egyptian experiences.

A. Yea, but he says he enjoyed talkin' to you and learning all about you. And he says you're a great guy and, you know. And he says it was a rewarding experience and he was delighted with your answers and your knowledge of the newspaper business and of Rochester, your attitude and everything. And, he says, you. . .. you did. . .. you did yourself. . .. you did great. You did yourself a lot of good last night, you know? And shortly afterwards I was made assistant advertising manager and then the advertising manager. But, I've conducted myself. . .. See, it's one thing to have a door open for you. It's a lot. . .. I've got a lot of people jobs because I was in a position . . .

Q. To do that. Sure.

A. Stores, I know people. But, it's important that when the door's open for you you're on your own then that you carry yourself properly and not take advantage, you know.

Q. That you live up to the. . ..

A. Yea, that you live up to the. . .. the demands and the expectations.

Q. Sure.
And in other words in newspaper you're workin' seven days and seven nights. People said you gotta be kiddin'. I says no. You're a target when I go to play golf. I even helped start Midvale Golf and Country Club. I was a non-golfer, you know. I was like 40 years old and I started to play golf because the... I... I never had the means or the time to play golf, but I... I felt that this was the time to do it, and I did it. And we gave up vacations to help start this golf club where we used to go to the mountains occasionally, you know, or as you would do. We decided to spend our total entertainment money that year to start this club. And get with it. So that makes me a poor golfer because I started late, but it's one of my activities, you know, the golf club. Golf, of course, you know how they define a golf club?

Q. No.

A. An office with trees where you try to increase your income and lower your score. It is a tax deductible item for accounting because you do business on a golf course.

Q. So you were involved in beginning. ... what is it called? Midvale?

A. Yea, Midvale Golf and Country Club. And I'll tell you an interesting thing about the Jewish aspect of it in Rochester and how well it's known and how well I was known. When I was... when my... I was interviewed when my appointment was made by a reporter who didn't know me too well. He knew me, but I mean he didn't grow up with me. And it was interesting. In this story and my picture, when they listed my activities they started in with a member of Temple Beth El and the Chamber of Commerce, Midvale Golf and Country Club, the Masonic organization. ...

Q. Sure.

A. And everybody, it's amazing, called me and says we're so proud. I says I am too. They says we're proud that you listed Temple Beth El first so people
A. (Continued) will know you're a Jew and you're not ashamed of being a Jew. I says well I did it and I'm glad that the reporter didn't screw it up.

Q. Yea, yea, yea.

A. Writing the story, it could have been last.

Q. Sure.

A. I was delighted that it ran that way, but this is how people's minds... you're a constant target, see? And especially when you are the only one. And I had tremendous letters from Mr. Maurie Forman and Jewry as well as Gentile when my appointment was made. And they... they... it was met with good acceptance. They felt I was deservant of it, Jew and Gentile.

Q. I want to ask you another question along the line of organizations. Are there any other organizations that I don't know about that you participate in? Specifically Jewish organizations? Connected with Beth. El or otherwise?

A. The UJA. I was a tremendous worker in UJA.

Q. Could you explain? OK. First what the UJA is.

A. The UJA is United Jewish Welfare Fund of Rochester. And what happened with Hitler and started to...

Q. This would be in the forties, late thirties and forties.

A. Yea. My earning was very minimal, but it was a great cause being a Jew in America and they needed workers. They needed people to go out and solicit. And I went to meetings and I felt what I couldn't give financially I would give of myself and my selling ability to, you know, other people. And to try to get 'em to increase pledges and do this here.

Q. Sure.

A. So I became an important part of UJA in Rochester, and my wife did, too. All our years, for many, many years.

Q. Now what would you... what specifically would you do in the community?
A. Oh, you'd go to meetings, you would take assignments, you'd go call on people like you would to sell advertising or insurance. And you'd sit down with them and you'd argue with 'em and you'd sometimes embarrass 'em to try to get 'em to up their pledge.

Q. How was the reception in Rochester community?

A. Oh, great. The UJA does well you get three to four million dollars in the Rochester market.

Q. I see.

A. Which for a minimum amount of Jewish people is a lot of money.

Q. I see.

A. So it's... it's a good sum.

Q. Do you maintain your association with it to this day?

A. Yes, but I'm not the worker I was because there's a lot... a lot of new young people and due to my... my wife's illness...

Q. Your wife's illness, sure.

A. She was the president of the Jewish Home & Infirmary, which is the highest honorary Jewish woman's job in Rochester.

Q. Of course.

A. And, of course, I'll tell you another little sidelight about my newspaper connections. A lot of organizations sought me out and wanted me to make me an officer figuring they could get more publicity because of my newspaper background, which was a fallacy because the newsroom runs the news regardless of whether you're an executive or not... .

Q. Oh, on the basis of news... .

A. Not on the basis of you're an executive and you're a member of the organization. But it was interesting. My wife says to me, boy, she says your job is great, she says, I'm happy. But, she says, some of these people they want to make me
Interview with Lester Edelman

A. (Continued) this and they want to make me that. The first thing they do, she says, they're so stupid instead of getting you in and then telling you they say boy we know what you can do for us with the paper. Your husband's an executive of the Gannett Company.

Q. Ah ha!

A. And she says please forget about it, you know, if you want me for me and what I can contribute, fine. But, if you think I'm gonna become publicity chairman you're crazy because I... I can't do as well as a stranger can do.

Q. OK. Now...

A. Is a little over fifty years old and it is all Jewish Masonic Lodge and done a great job in Rochester. Every prominent Jewish individual, as well as many other people, have become affiliated with it. And Masonry is the most respected organization in the world. They don't solicit. You must ask to join. And you're carefully screened and scrutinized. And if you have any kind of a criminal record or anything, it's... it's just taboo. It's one or two blackballs will keep a man out, which is very rare for an organization. They generally have looser standards so they can get more members.

Q. Sure.

A. But Masonry, I don't know how many of our presidents, every... and the King of England, the kings are... Masons are worldwide. It's the most respected fraternal organization in the world.

Q. Why was there an exclusively Jewish organization?

A. Well, they started this lodge because fifty years ago there were certain country clubs, like the Irondequoit Country Club, which is the predominately all Jewish country started because the German Jews at that time were successful in the clothing manufacturing business here and they couldn't get into Oak Hill or the Country Club of Rochester because they were Jews. So they... they did
A. (Continued) the next best thing, they started their own club.

Q. Yea. What is the Jewish reaction to Oak Hill, for instance, today?

A. Well, 'l... I get kidded. I go to Oak Hill, and I've been to clubs all over the country due to my newspaper background as a Gannett exec. I went to clubs that they claim no Jew's ever been in and are still taboo. And I laugh, I tell 'em well I was there. They said well they don't know you. I says, whether they know it or not I was at the Lake Placid Club, I was at ... and they... they sent me home on the Gannett plane so I could get to services for the high holidays. We were having a meeting and the high holidays started and the Gannett plane flew me home so I could go to services. I wouldn't say they're anti-Semitic, would you?

Q. No, in fact. ...

A. In fact, ... and then I was in the Atlantic City are, Paul Miller says to me I understand a lot of people are asking me what you're doin' at the meeting. You know, this was like at four o'clock. I said in an hour from now I'm goin' into Atlantic City to go to services because Rosh Hashanah services start, but I wanted to catch our meeting and I'll be there for the services tomorrow and then I'll come back to our meeting. I'm gonna swing. He says I'm proud of you, you know. So I says you'll never be embarrassed. And he... he says Koufax don't pitch and Edelman don't pitch. You remember Koufax wouldn't pitch in the World Series?

Q. Yea.

A. So, people really who try to hide the fact that they're Jewish or think it's hurting 'em, they're... they're ridiculous. They... they don't have the ability.

Q. OK. I want to ask you a couple questions on contemporary issues. And then we'll take up the personal aspects of this next time.
Q. Can you think of any way you've contributed to the State of Israel? Do you do so financially or . . .?
A. I've done it financially and I've befriended some Israelis. I have a . . . I'm gonna bring it next time we meet. I befriended a Jewish lad who looked confused and he spoke with a foreign . . . he was lookin' for a direction, but I was the aggressor. I saw he was lookin' around and I was walkin' down Main Street, and I found out he was an Israeli. And he had come to try to get into R.I.T. printing school. His family were printers years ago, and they killed off everybody but his mother. And he came from New York, and when he had the number on here from the concentration camp and he had no high school equivalency so they couldn't accept him. So I went to bat and I got him in R.I.T. and he graduated with honors. So I've helped people as well as given of myself and whatever contributions I could over the years.

Q. Have . . . have you been to Israel?
A. No, unfortunately now that I want to go my wife is not able to.

Q. I see, well that's understandable, something that cannot be helped.

A. And I just had an Israeli living with me four years a student. So he's now in Hawaii. His parents came here and they kissed me and they came to visit us. We could have such a great time in Israel because I've built . . .

Q. You know enough people.
A. And . . . and I've built like a family of strangers . . .

Q. Sure.
A. Like . . . so I . . . I've helped people firsthand because I love people, and I like people. And that was another thing that the newspaper gave me an
A. (Continued) opportunity to do. The power of the press is power in many ways not only from a standard of publicity and makin' itself felt in the area, but it opens doors. And when you went to somebody you could do things for people because people felt you would be obligated to them and you represent the paper and maybe sometime they could make a demand on you.

Q. Do you think it's part of your Jewish heritage that... that this serviceness... servicemindedness on your part is so apparent?

A. Well, I was brought up very poorly and we never were in a position... my family were so poor that they needed help, that when I got to an element where I wanted to help people I... I wanted to be the helper more than the helped because, you know, it's so much nicer to give than receive.

Q. Sure, sure.

A. When you're little, of course, you say what have you got for me, you want to get. And people can't understand when you say well, I'm gonna do this for you. Guy says boy that's great, why don't you do it for yourself? I says because it means more to me to be able to do it for you, you know?

Q. Sure. OK. Look, I'm gonna ask you a couple of hypothetical questions.

A. Go ahead.

Q. First of all, can there be Jewish survival without Israel? Jewish survival in general without the State of Israel surviving?

A. There could be as there has been in previous to Israel. But I think it would not be as strong as it was previously. It would look like we had passed up our great one... our great chance and we now have to assimilate and forget about it.

Q. Is Israel important for morale?

A. Oh, tremendously so, yea. Yea.

Q. Has the Gannett paper always supported Israel?
A. Yes. And UJA, people would come from all over the country, they work in teams wherever. . . In other words, they have a drive for a month in Rochester so they would send in pros, this is a highly promotional, money-raising, . . .

Q. Sure.

A. . . . professional way of doing it. So, people had worked in Philadelphia, Detroit, or Boston knew what was goin' on. The local people accepted what we got and says your paper's doin' a nice job, you know. But never enough, never enough. But the outsiders says, gee, your paper whether it's your fault or 'cause you're a Jew or . . . I says no. They did this previous. And Frank Gannett was one of the big contributors when . . . when UJA first started in Rochester they set a goal and they were gonna fail. And Frank Gannett gave the differential between the goal and what they had so they could go over the top.

Q. Oh, I didn't realize that. That's interesting.

A. Yea, yea.

Q. OK. Another ques. . . oh, that is interesting. Another question. What do you think of Golda Meir?

A. Fabulous woman and talk about woman's rights, I think she's done more for women in the world.

Q. Did you go to the dedication of the Bernstein Chair here last fall I think?

A. No, no. My life has changed completely. Since my wife's illness my time is not my own, my life is not my own. Everybody says since you retired. . . But she was. . . my wife was such a vivacious and effective person. And she was stricken four years ago with this horrible Parkinson's disease.

Q. Oh, sure.

A. And, she's just not herself. She needs help. I don't leave her alone. She
A. (Continued) depends on me, and even my ... she just don't have confidence in anybody. She's lost all her spirit and she's depressed. And, it's like a nightmare.

Q. Well, I... This is Brian Mitchell. This will be the end of Side 2. Thank you, sir.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview 1)
Q. ... six at the University of Rochester in connection with the University of Rochester Oral History Program. OK. Well, we'll try again. This is incidentally it should be noted our second type... second tape. We won't say anything more about it. We're gonna start with a few recapsuling of what we had been discussing, which was personal history and personal recollection and so on. OK. To begin, Mr. Edelman you are a native Rochesterian?

A. Yes, I was born and raised here.

Q. All right. Is it also true that you are from the Joseph Avenue area?

A. Yes.

Q. Could you very briefly describe Joseph Avenue?

A. Well, Joseph Avenue was very strongly predominately a Jewish area. Built up of small merchants, but the streets that were off of Joseph Avenue where I was brought up and where our friends and neighbors lived it was as I mentioned predominately Jewish, but there were Italian and Polish, a few Irish, colored people beginning to come into the area.

Q. Was it a good place to grow up?

A. I think it was good as I look back now because people had to depend on people and they became friends. They couldn't afford vacations or travel or country clubs, so you had to make your friendships and your associations with people in the same places.

Q. OK. We'll shift back. OK. So, shifting back then. In an attempt to recapsule what we've lost in the original tape, your father was originally from Russia and your mother was from England?

A. Yes. Right.
Q. Could you explain first of all where your father landed when he came from Russia and why he left Russia?
A. Well, my father was one of three sons, he was one of three sons and there were two. He had two sisters, so there were five children. And their father came from Russia to Boston. I guess they all naturally had to go through New York, through Ellis Island and then they branched out and he went to Boston. It was either that they had friends or relatives who preceded 'em, and this is how most of the immigrants when they come over made their selection of where they were gonna locate 'cause they looked for guidance. They didn't have the language. They had no money to speak of so they were... they were hemmed in really, and they had to look for friends or relatives to get 'em started in their...

Q. Sure.
A. ... country. And I assume he left as everybody left the European continent to come to America. because of the many stories that were told about how wonderful the opportunities were, and secondly there was persecution in the ... and there was the fear that they lived under, and from even though he was young, he was thirteen, he recalled and he would tell us stories about the Cossacks and the Troikes and the bitter winters and the fear and hung over 'em all the time and the uneasiness. And the fact that they were Jews was a tremendous handicap even back in those days, which was in the 1880's, 1890's.

Q. OK. Your father... your father and his father and brothers and sisters and so on landed in Boston. Now if I'm correct in my recollection your father was the only one who came to Rochester? He came to Rochester for a specific reason. Would you give us that briefly?'
A. Yes, because evidently somebody who he knew or knew of him married... was happily married and said that there was a sister available, and he thought
A. (Continued) they would make a good match if my dad met his sister-in-law, his wife's sister, who turned out to be my mother. And so he left Boston and came to Rochester, and of course they got him a job in the tailoring industry which was most.

Q. It was a difficult place to work.

A. It was very difficult due to the fact there was no unions and they did take advantage of the people who couldn't speak English and who were more or less dependent on them for a living.

Q. One... one of the questions we had considered was the fact that after all it was your father who came on to Rochester alone. Did he keep in relatively close contact with his father and brothers and sisters in Boston?

A. Very rarely. Very rarely. That was a big deal in my life the first time I went to Boston and met my aunts and uncles and part of the... the strong part of his... of his family, 'cause they were all there. Whereas my mother's family were here, and mother come from England so she had a totally different background.

Q. Could you explain briefly about her background?

A. Well, mother was six years old when her father brought her from England.

Q. OK. OK,

A. And she did everything she could to teach my father English and American... to help Americanize him. (Sneeze.) Bless you.

Q. Excuse me, again. Thank you. It must have been relatively easy for your mother to assimilate to... into American culture?

A. Oh, yes. Yea. And she... she learned early that education would be the key to everything. And despite the fact we had no money and she insisted and made sure that, I'm one of four children. I have a brother and two sisters. That we all studied and did our homework and got an education. And then the
A. (Continued) . . . we would really have a tremendous advantage in this country.

Q. Our last. . . I'll ask you the same question I asked on the original tape. Do you think that's a uniquely Jewish trait?

A. I think so. As I mentioned whether it's recorded or not, I believe that Jewish people were handicapped because of the persecution that they suffered and the fact that they were a minority. And they were taught that if you got an education people had to respect the education like they do in the Army. They respect the. . . I know people in the Army hated their commanding officer, but if he had captain's bars or a major or a lieutenant they had to salute 'em and they had to respect the position. The same thing would hold true in civilian life. If you became a doctor, a dentist or a lawyer or a professional man, they had to respect this advanced education you had. I think it's one or two percent. I don't know what the percentage of professional men is in American industry or American enterprise, but I know it's very . . . one or two percent, it's very small.

Q. OK. Could you. . . before we get into the actual neighborhood material could you begin to discuss what your brothers and sisters did? What family life was like, those type of questions?

A. Yea. Well, family life was very close because of the fact that. . . and you had a better chance to learn what your brothers and sisters and parents, there was no television. There was radio. Radio came out when I was a youngster. But, the phonograph record, that was the big deal in our life. Dad. . . Dad loved the cantor's praying during the high holidays and that was his . . . any few bucks additional that he had he would go to the Hoffman Music Shop on Joseph Avenue and buy records of the great cantors and play 'em over and over again.
Q. I see. Yea.
A. On the recorder. But we would... we would visit and talk. And of course we all had different aspirations. My brother would wanted to be an architect. He wound up engineering. And my sisters, of course, they took any job they could get. They both wound up working in Sibley's Department Store. It wasn't so important they feel... felt at that time for a woman to get...
Q. So if there could be any education it was given to the men?
A. Yea, yea. And my brother is retired. He's a... he wound up with... he worked for Ritter Dental designing dental equipment. And he... he worked for Stromberg-Carlson designing telephone equipment and then General Dynamics took over Stromberg and he worked on the F-111 airplane as an engineer.
Q. Oh.
A. And then there was a big shake up, you know, with General Dynamics. They kind of went down the drain. And he took an early retirement. My sisters, one is married but a widow. Her husband died and has a son who won many scholarships. He's a full professor at the University of Cincinnati. And...
Q. What... what field?
A. In... he... it's in edu... education. And my other sister, she had a young romance and the guy died and she never remarried, so she lives with my brother, who never got married. But, our people taught us to repect the law and your teachers and themselves, and there was a lot of love and understanding and concern for everybody in our family.
Q. Your recollections then are warm?
A. Yes. I was a little bit of a maverick. I kind of was... did things that they didn't do. Like I hung around the corner and played cards with the guys. And I... I kind of went my way. I knew what my path was and what I wanted, and I felt as long as I kept my nose clean and didn't get in any kind of trouble
A. (Continued) with the law or the authorities at school that, you know, it would work out all right.

Q. OK. Well take a... Do you still keep in close contact with your brothers and sisters?

A. Yea, yea. Of course, mother and dad passed away, but there is a closeness. They live in the same house in a double house not far from where I live. They’re in the city, I’m in Brighton. But they are very much concerned as I am about them. And we still help each other every way we can, and we do what we can and we remember everybody’s birthday with a card and a little gift. And, getting together for dinner on a birthday. And it’s a good strong family relationship.

Q. Sounds very... OK. How would you contrast the family relationship that you have with your own brothers and sisters versus your rela... your relationship with your father’s side, what’s left of your father’s side in Boston?

A. Well, I really... I think you’re a product of your environment. I think father and mother taught us, but the way we lived, of course, my dad was totally away from his original family. But I think my mother and dad were a good combination. Of course, they would argue and it was always due to... there never was enough money. But there was more than that it was compensated with love and, you know, understanding. But now my wife’s background is totally different. Her people were more deeply religious and I can see the difference.

Q. I see. That’s a good answer. I see.

A. I can see the difference in her... in her and her sister and her brothers, her two brothers are dead and their parents are dead, but our was a high school romance, so I could... I was very... I could watch and observe and compare.

Q. OK. Go on.

A. And, of course, they... I was a little different than her brothers, so her
A. (Continued) parents looked at me a little different. And, of course, we were so young they thought I was imposing on her, you know, going to high school she couldn't do her homework. So I would try to help her with her homework and then we'd do our own personal homework. Young normal healthy people.

Q. Yes. OK. Look, we can get into your wife's side and so on. First of all, where were your wife's folks from?

A. They were from Rumania.

Q. Really.

A. Both from Rumania. And they were married in Europe, so they had a totally different concept. In fact, one brother and sister were born there and when they... they brought... they brought 'em over. Of course, my wife and her younger brother, who was killed at 19 in an auto accident, were both born here.

Q. I see. I see. What was the difference in their outlook?

A. Well, it's simple. My parents lived for us and her parents lived to impress the outside world. They were more concerned with what would happen at the temple and with their friends, really, it's fantastic how first things first.

Q. Yea, I... OK. You've left out a few questions. Let's see what I can ask you. OK. About when did they come over?

A. They... they evidently came over in the early 1900's.

Q. Was her father a tailor as well?

A. Yea.

Q. Did he know your father?

A. No, not before we... .

Q. OK.

A. They worked in different... .
Q. Can I... can I ask you a question...?
A. Yes.

Q. Did they approve of you?
A. No, they looked at me because I... I... I only had dreams and ambitions and I was goin' to U. of R. nights and workin' at Mohegan's which was a chain food store similar to Wegman's, but on a smaller scale during the day. And I made $18 a week and I worked from seven to seven. And they... they kind of looked at me like, you know, you're bothering her. And what are you wasting her time? And she's too young and you're too young and this whole thing is like, you know, ridiculous.

Q. When were you married? How old were you?
A. I was 21 when I got married. And I'll never forget her father, says I'll never worry about my daughter, she's in good hands.

Q. Oh, what a nice thing to say.
A. Yea, so I proved myself.

Q. So her father changed over time?
A. Yea, yea. I got a job on a paper and I worked hard, and I started in on commission and I... but I was... I really modestly but truthfully I conducted myself, you know, 100%. I was very much in love and I didn't want to do the wrong thing, and I was starting... I could begin to see the door open in my newspaper work and I... I... but, you know, it looked like things were gonna happen the way I wanted 'em to happen, and this I think is a real...

Q. As the years went by did a good relationship continue with your inlaws?
A. Yes, yes. We developed a real good respect for each other. I knew their limitations. I knew their thinking. I knew their background. I accepted it. They knew mine. And they accepted it. I wasn't as deeply religious as
A. (Continued) they, and they accepted me despite the fact I... I always
did fasts though during Yom Kippur and during the high holidays I observed
'em, but ... My parents more or less taught me, you know, if you teach...
if you treat people decently and conduct yourself properly it isn't necessary
to be in synagogue 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Q. Right.

A. And they felt the other way. That you gotta go to synagogue and you gotta
pray properly and you gotta do this here. Then I guess anything you do on
the outside is secondary.

Q. Yea. OK.

A. Karp would get a kick out of that.

Q. Yea. I imagine he would. OK. Oh, let's see. Where should we proceed?
Be an interesting question. ... series of questions to get into the religious
issue you're raising, and then we can focus back on your lives. Proceed that
way I think. OK. What temple did you affiliate yourself with? What temple
first of all did your parents affiliate themselves with?

A. Well, they belonged to a temple... Orthodox temple, you know, in the area
there. There were many of 'em. And anytime there was a fight they would
branch out and start another one. And so there were many synagogues, many
little temples.

Q. But you had an Orthodox background?

A. Yes. Basically, but didn't practice it 100%. But, I only knew of it. I
didn't know Conservatism or Reform Judaism. I mean, this was like another
world. But, when we got married and we moved out to St. Paul Street eventually,
there was Beth Joseph. That was the first temple that we joined as a husband
and wife. And it was Orthodox, but it was... the rabbi, of course, was
a modern rabbi and he accepted me and I worked hard for the temple. We were
A. (Continued) members there for 11 years, and I helped raise money. And I liked it. And I liked it because, see, he respected my thinking and he didn't try to browbeat me into doing everything that the Orthodox do.

Q. Performing rituals and so on.

A. Yea. The most interesting thing was when we built our home in Brighton 26 years ago, and we still kept our membership at Beth Joseph 'cause our son was gonna be Bar Mitzvah there. And this is where he studied. So, we went to services on a cold, mean, winter's Friday night. And after services they generally had tea and cake, you know, and the rabbi called me, Rabbi Stitskin, and he says Lester do you have your car here? I says yes I do, rabbi. He says that's fine because we have a visitor who's staying at the Sheraton Hotel, which is not 111 East Avenue. He says, will you drop him off on your way across town? I said, I'd be delighted to. And I says, rabbi, you know, it's nice that you know me and I know you. I didn't have to lie to you because it was really... it's illegal to... to drive to temple, to an Orthodox temple on a Friday night, see?

Q. Of course.

A. So I says, it's nice that you know me and I know you. I didn't have to lie. You know I didn't walk from Brighton here. And secondly this poor guy would have had to take in a cab, so it worked out to everybody's advantage that we were honest with each other and you're understanding.

Q. He sounds like a nice fellow.

A. Yea, yea. He says I don't care how you come as long as you come.

Q. OK.

A. Which is, you know, the way it should be.

Q. Now when you moved to Brighton did you switch... switch?
A. A year later, yea. I joined Temple Beth El.

Q. And you still maintain an affiliation?
A. Yes. We're still members there.

Q. OK. Do you actively participate in the activities of the synagogue?
A. Yes. I was active in the most active, of course, in the men's club, which was more to my.

Q. We spoke about this...
A. Yea, that's where Paul Miller spoke after he come back from his trip to Egypt. And Rabbi Karp had an opportunity of meeting him before his visit there to talk at the men's club. And we had a good audience, 500, and they challenged him, you know. He says any answer I don't have Les'l' give you.

Q. OK. I think it also should be mentioned that you have an allegiance with the JCC.
A. Yea.

Q. Could you outline that a bit?
A. Well, that of course is a physical fitness program, stay in shape. I like to... I worked so hard all my life I was never really had a chance to take up any of these activities. As a kid I did.

Q. That's a problem I'm facing now.
A. But, I started to play golf at 40. Taught myself golf.

Q. Yea, the reason for that we outlined last time.
A. Yea. But, the JCC, of course, I spent a lot of my youthful years at the YMCA. And, of course, then I had time and the JCC became a bigger factor. And then, of course, since they built the new one recently, the facilities are excellent. And I go there for swimming and I don't do too much other outside of swimming and I'm not a handball player. I used to be, but I gave it up and I never started again. So, but it's more of a winter deal. Previous to my
A. (Continued) goin' to Florida it was more important to me because all of

... all summer I'm at Midvale playin' golf. I spend all my leisure time.
And I don't even go there, but I do go there in the fall. And on a nasty day
I go there to swim and maybe take a steam bath.

Q. That sounds very pleasant. OK. I'd like to ... to shift a little bit and
consider your children. OK. Now I know there's one son who's a dentist.
Could you outline his background?

A. Yea.

Q. His philosophy, bringing him up and what he did when he went to school and so
forth?

A. Yea. Harvey was always, I think I told you if you ever have a son I would
... you're a friend of mine I'd wish you had a son like Harvey. Harvey was
the kind of a kid you could talk to, but you didn't have to pound. You suggested
and he took it from there. And he went to No. 8 School on Conkey Avenue as
his first school 'cause we lived on St. Paul Street. And then we moved to
Brighton and he started in junior high school there.

Q. Did he go to Brighton High?

A. And then he went to Brighton High. And he loved baseball. And he ... he
was a bow for the infield and outfield so he became a catcher, and a good one.
He had good team spirit. And the coach always told me, he says, your son's
enthusiasm is just fabulous. And he wanted to be a dentist when he was about
eight or nine years old. He was makin' model airplanes during World War II.
Of course, airplanes became a big thing. And this was his hobby. He had a
... he got a paper route when he was thirteen years old in Brighton. He
carried the Times-Union for five years, till he graduated high school. And
he was very conscientious, 'cause he watched me put the lawn in so he didn't
have to be told not to drive his bike over anybody's lawn. And he knew he
A. (Continued) wanted to be a dentist, and he did everything necessary to achieve this. Of course, naturally being young he thought he could never achieve it, it would be too tough. But, I exposed him to some dental friends of mine and I says they're not supermen, you take course by course, grade by grade, year by year and this is how you become anything. And he went along. He graduated Brighton High and went to the University of Buffalo and learned that the high school counselors, guidance teachers, even though you know what you want don't give you the proper subjects. And you, you know... anyhow he... he... after being in Buffalo... you have to apply to dentist school, I guess, in your second or third year. You have to apply to five of 'em. And they don't tell you where you're accepted or rejected but you have to make the five trips. So he went to Tufts of Boston and he went to Western Reserve, I guess, in Cleveland. And he went to Temple in Philly, and he went to two others ones. Well, there was one in Buffalo. And of course this was very costly, you know, and demanding.

Q. Sure.

A. It was like a $200 deal every trip he had to make, plus time consuming and the frustration of not knowing. Then, of course, you're in the driver's seat. You begin to get accepted at all of 'em, and you make the decision. But, he told me when he came back, when it was all over that he hoped that Temple would accept him. He hit it off with whoever interviewed him there, and he hoped that that would be. And he did have a choice. He could have gone to Tufts or Western Reserve, but he picked Temple, which is what he hoped he'd get in. And, he worked hard and he lived very meagerly because I was, you know, our income was limited and I was helpin' him. And he worked for the Brighton Highway Department diggin' ditches, at the University of Buffalo. So, for close to eight years, three years, three and four. Three years... he
Interview with Lester Edelman

A. (Continued) ... he made Buffalo in three years. He came to the U. of R. for physics one summer. That was the only subject he was short to get into dental school. And he did that. That was a nightmare because you don't know where you're goin'. You've had physics I'm sure.

Q. Yes.

A. And there are no answers. So they either tell you you made it or you didn't make it.

Q. Yea. I know.

A. And he would drive me to the club and he was gettin' whiter and I was getting browner, you know, and I was trying to be encouraging to him. And he says Dad it's easy for you to say. I says, look you're gonna get in.

Q. Yea, you're a little bit darker than I am right now. This is ... OK.

A. And my daughter, of course, she totally different. Six years difference in age and 600 years difference in their thinking. She was kind of a maverick. Maybe it's because of me. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do. And then, of course, her brother got into dentistry so she thought it might be nice to become a dental hygienist. And she went to the dental dispensary and graduated with honors. And then practiced at it a very small time and didn't like the work at it. So she thought she'd like to teach it. So, she went to Temple where her brother went and re-enrolled when I thought she was all through her education for further education. And she met a dental student there who we helped educate. He was two years more to go and they got married, and we helped him become a dentist. And then he was committed to the Air Force and he became a captain and a doctor. Then he didn't need a wife, so ... 

Q. Oh, dear.

A. They lived together about six months. He was stationed at George Air Force Base, which was magnificent. I went out there and it's ... they train the
A. (Continued) phantom jet pilots there.

Q. Where. . . whereabouts is that?

A. It's in California. It's just the beginning of the Mohave Desert, the end of the Sierra Mountains. It's actually gorgeous. They only have 6,000 troops there, and it's run, you know, top level because of the fact they train these phantom jet pilots.

Q. Yea.

A. And they live high off the hog. You know, he was a dentist. They go from 8 to 4 and they had like 16 dentists, and you know they had an officers club and golf course. And I went to see him and he says to me, you know, it's like prison. I says, Steven, prison! Were you ever in prison. I've been in Attica. . . I think I told you to Auburn and Attica teaching with Dale Carnegie. And I says to him, you gotta be kiddin'! My son went in the army two years. And he accepted it. He was at Fort Hood, Temple, Texas, First Armored Division. Biggest armored division in the world, thirty-five miles of armored equipment. That would be like from here to Batavia of tanks and trucks and he was fascinated 'cause he worked for the Brighton Highway Department, mechanical equipment. And . . . but he accepted all these things. It's amazing the difference in people. Sue's husband thought this was an invasion on him. He couldn't understand why the pilots of these jets, that handled this tremendous equipment and he was a captain. He says why should they be a captain? I became a doctor and I'm a captain and they should be like lieutenants. And this is so wrong. I says to him enjoy your . . . your rank and, you know. . .

Q. There were a lot of. . .

A. They're entitled to theirs because they. . . you know what the washouts are before a guy becomes a jet fighting pilot, a jet fighter pilot? I says, you
A. (Continued) know, this is a tremendous challenge to a guy. He's gotta be physically and mentally alert like a dentist has to be. To be a dentist you have to be a brain and a mechanic, you know. More so than a doctor.

Q. Sure. Sure.

A. But, so she came back home and they had no children fortunately and the chemistry changed. She... after they're married they think differently. And her mother was... her mother feels that this all helped her get sick, which you know is hard to accept. But, anyhow, I set her up in an apartment. She was... then she said she can't be a dental hygienist, it's just wrong. And she's... she's totally alienated and she's like gun shy after being married to a dentist and it's hard work. She wants to get into teaching. So, she went from pillar to post and then she said she needs a Masters Degree. Oh no, two years ago she met an Indian woman who sold her on becoming a Montesorri teacher. So she went to Toronto for a year, University of Toronto, and graduated with honors.

Q. Sure.

A. The best job she was offered was $100 a week out of town. So she never took it, of course, because...

Q. That's too bad.

A. So then she says to me I gotta get a Masters Degree. This is my last request. I gotta go to the U. of R. for a year. So she just finished and she still has no job, you know what the educational field is.

Q. Indeed I do.

A. So I hope... but I've done what I can and it's been a tremendous challenge because at my stage, I know, I should be coasting. Instead I'm worrying about sweatin' out her marks for the fourth time.

Q. Well, just... just...
A. She's got four degrees and...

Q. Well, I... I have, let's see, I only have two and I'm workin' on my third and I still don't know if it'll get me a job, sit back and take it easy. Not much else you can do.

A. But I... I feel that while you're living you do what you can for 'em. And they're both different people, and she's a good kid basically even though she thinks differently. She's not asking to become anything that's bad. So I figure... I'm not worried about what I'm gonna leave her. People need help when they need it. And I helped Harvey when he got started with his office, you know. And their lean years till they get rolling. So I figure it's better to help 'em when they need it and they're... Now Harvey don't need our help anymore. He does very well as a dentist. He works hard but he does well financially and that's what it's all about.

Q. Now he's located in Philadelphia?

A. Yes.

Q. In Philadelphia proper?

A. No. No, northeast. His office is in northeast Philly. He's not in the central city although he worked there when he first became a dentist. He opened up a practice in the northeast and it was very lean years. So he went to a clinic comparable to the dental dispensary from 8 to 11 and he made $150 or $175 a week five days a week. But this was... and then he built a practice. He had patients in the afternoon and evening until his practice became good enough where he could drop this. But Harvey always did things even though they were unpleasant and it was an imposition and it was tough, he knew it was part of the deal. He made the decision to stay in Philly.

Q. Yea, it must have been tough with his family here.

A. Yea, he could have done better here because we know a lot of people. And...
A. (Continued) but he...

Q. What made him stay in Philadelphia?
A. He married a girl from Philly.
Q. OK. That'll do it.
A. Anytime you can compete with your daughter-in-law there's something wrong with your daughter-in-law.

Q. OK. OK. I had a... I had a line of questions, with that one you made me forget. OK. One other set of questions I'll ask and then we'll go on to something else. Did you give them a Jewish education?
A. Yes, yes. They both went...
Q. OK. What was your philosophy behind it?
A. Well I figured that you... when children are small they're not supposed to be able to think for themselves as to what's good or bad for 'em. So if you do what so-called society has kind of programmed, then when they get older they can make that decision whether they want to continue it or not. And it's amazing because Harvey, of course, joined a temple in Philadelphia on his own and so evidently he enjoyed what he was brought up doing. And my daughter, of course, she... she's not in a situation where she would join a temple. She is less aware of it despite the fact she had five years and became Bat Mitzvah and studied religiously and did everything. But it was like an ordeal with her. The day it was over she wanted no part of it.

Q. OK. And the other thing I'm curious about is ages. About how old would your children be?
A. Well, Harvey is 37 and she is 31.

Q. OK. Also raises an interesting question in getting back to your own personal history as far as ages go. When were you born and when was your wife born?
A. I was born in 1911 and my wife was born in 1913. I just turned 65 and I feel
A. (Continued) like 35.

Q. You seem kind of sprightly. OK. The other thing that I really wanted to get into is demographic, residential, neighborhood stuff that we said we'd hold off on for a while. Specifically, . . . OK. Then specifically when you work for . . . in the advertising . . . as the chief advertiser of the Gannett Press, your focus of interest was originally the Joseph Avenue section, so you have special insight into that area. What I'm hoping for is for you to just sort of talk about it. Did you have a detailed idea of what businesses were there, what people were there, what it was like? You can approach it any way you'd like. If you'd like me to ask a series of questions, that's OK, too.

A. Well, Jewish merchants were very strong and independent with heavy emphasis on ladies clothing, furs, shoes, and then there was furniture and appliances and . . .

Q. Before we continue.

A. . . . and some of 'em were very, very successful. They did a big job, and I don't know whether or not I mentioned it, but my comparison. . . . I never thought of it then because so-called shopping centers were born after World War II in the outlying areas. But I would say that Joseph Avenue could be considered the original shopping center because starting from Nassau Street to Clifford Avenue were these tremendous varied types of stores and merchants who were open . . .

Q. Did they compete directly with the Main Street, Sibley's, McCurdy's, Forman's?

A. They. . . they really didn't. The element of person. . . . Of course, at that time it was unheard of for my parents to have a charge account at Sibley's or at Forman's, you know, their income just didn't warrant it. And they. . . they went to stores who knew them and they knew. . . . and if they didn't have
A. (Continued) enough money the merchant would say take it out and pay me when you have it, and that... So there was tremendous trust and a wonderful relationship between the small merchant or the independent merchant, some of 'em became bigger, and the people. I know there was a company called Ross Furniture Company on Hudson Avenue, not Jewish, but my parents bought everything there. And they constantly were in hock and in debt to this company. And I'll never forget my first sled. I went there, they says pick it out and tell 'em to put it on the bill, you know. And I think I got a Flexible Flyer, which was, you know, like the Cadillac of sleds.

Q. Sleds, sure.

A. Yea. And I... oh, I was thrilled beyond belief. 'Cause I was never able to get a new bicycle. I always had old bikes and I used to assemble 'em and put 'em together, and when they got good enough then my father would sell it. Start over again.

Q. So it was quite a thing?

A. Yea.

Q. But I guess the point behind it all then is the fact that people would have established, well established, personal relationships so that the credit structure was such that they knew they'd pay. There was a trust there and that was it.

A. Yea, yea. But I had the enviable situation, of course. The Joseph Avenue merchants, of course, looked at me in awe, the guy from the, you know, one of the kids who grew up in the neighborhood was now representing a newspaper. But, of course, they says, you know, advertising isn't for us. It's for Sibley's or for Forman's or McCurdy's or Sears. And, you know, you're a nice guy but don't bother me. But some of them sold themselves short. I knew that they had specialized businesses like Brodsky who were in the fabric business,
A. (Continued) who did a tremendous job. And I says to them, you're doin' good but you could do so much better if you would advertise. And I finally convinced 'em and they found out. And the first thing they would all say is how long has this been goin' on? They... they... their business increased.

Q. OK. It raises a very interesting question were there... were there any examples where the business wouldn't increase?

A. Well, no because I wouldn't go on anybody... in other words I won't go to a Mom and Pop grocery store who I didn't think should advertise. I only went to people who were specialists.

Q. And who could benefit...

A. And who could benefit and had something unusual to offer. The run-of-the-mill store on Joseph Avenue I would not even go in and say hello to 'em. And we started a Joseph Avenue Merchants Association, and we did many things, you know. And, of course, after World War II they prospered because there were some furniture stores and appliance stores and clothing stores that... and they really did a fabulous job because they had good credit, they had good tie-ups. And as merchandise became available people came down and shopped and knew they could get it. But...

Q. Now this would be people outside the Joseph Avenue area?

A. Oh yes. From all over.

Q. What happened to the area?

A. Well, like my favorite expression, nothing's forever. Of course, people... people are the answer to everything. And the people who became successful start goin' off to Monroe Avenue. But what discouraged them from staying there or from... or what encouraged them to look elsewhere was the tremendous influx of people who just didn't belong. You know, they just didn't fit in.
Q. Who specifically?
A. The blacks. They came up from the south. The... the native blacks were wonderful because they... they knew us and we knew them. And they knew what their lot was in life, and they had jobs or they... they didn't expect handouts, you know. There were only I would say maybe seven thousand, there probably were 3500 in the Joseph Avenue area, Ormond Street, and there were probably 3500 on Jefferson Avenue. And they were two totally different types. But they kind of minded their business, there were no problems. But, when they start coming up in droves from the south and the Gannett Company had a pet expression. We used to run ads, called Rochester "the city of the skillionaire." The skillionaire was a word that was phrased by an advertising agency. It meant the skilled worker who made higher than average income, so he was called like... like not a millionaire, but a skillionaire. A skilled worker who made better than average earning. And this was too... well, these people didn't fit in. They... they couldn't read or write. They couldn't adapt to the habits of... they couldn't get jobs at Kodak, Bausch and Lomb. And, of course, it was... it was just like you transplant a tree, you know, and I wouldn't blame the people. I was blamin' the circumstances, but the results were chaotic. What they did to a nice area was just, you know. Call it what you want they still... somebody's gotta be blamed. And that's when the whole... if somebody pulls a trigger he's the one, you know, with the smoking gun in his hand, he's the one who's accused, he's gotta be charged with the crime. And it just became unbearable. And they finally in '64, did I say, the riots?
Q. Mmm-hmm.
A. And then, of course, that ended everything.
Q. Was it... was it... was the area changing say as early as the fifties?
Q. I guess what I'm asking is what... was there a point when you woke up one morning and said well the area is starting to go?

A. Yea. See, I could appreciate it. Now my parents and my brothers and sisters who were still home couldn't see the difference, but as you say you're so close to the forest you don't see the trees. But I would come from St. Paul Street where we lived to visit them, and I could see. And as I sold advertising and started to walk down there I could see the difference. And where I used to go at night to... because a lot of these merchants would be busy during the day and say see me at night, this was no imposition, I was happy as long as they were willing to advertise. And there was never a fear of anything, you'd walk all hours of the day and night. But, gradually you begin to... we'd begin to run stories in our paper of people who weren't as fortunate as I, and you began to turn around when somebody came toward you, or you know. And then there was a gradual deterioration.

Q. When was the mass Jew... well, I'll tell you what, we'll switch onto Side 2. This will be the end of Side 1 then.

A. Yea.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview II)
Q. OK. This is Brian Mitchell. We're opening Side 2 with our... on our interview rather with Mr. Lester Edelman. That should be good. OK. When do... if you had to pinpoint a particular period when the mass Jewish exodus began from the Joseph Avenue area about when would you say it was?

A. The late fifties to 1960. The riots were in 1964, but by then it was already at a boiling point. I'd say 1960, early 1960.

Q. OK. There's one general question I'd like to ask, Mr. Edelman, and then you could just sort of take it because it's one of those general questions that you can deal with. We'll pretend that it's back when you're first starting and you're walking down the street, down St. Joseph Avenue.

A. Yea.

Q. Could you describe what's there?

A. It was alive. It was interesting. It was challenging because you had to kind of pick out of all these stores who you felt was a potential advertiser and who would benefit from advertising.

Q. OK. Could... could you outline some of the stores?

A. Yes, yes. There was Harris Nusbaum, which was run by the Harris Nusbaum family. They were deeply religious, they closed on every Jewish holiday, even though they were minor. A lot of Jewish people weren't even aware that it was a holiday, but they would close. And, of course, they closed for the Sabbath, which was very unusual. They would close Friday night, open Saturday night. But, they... they had a tremendous specialty store of clothing. And they sold clothing for all members of the family. And it was well run. They had name brands, they extended credit. There was no Master Charge or
A. (Continued) any of this, but they knew who you were and you could have credit. And everybody clothed their children there, and they bought their bridal outfits there as they got married, and they charged and they paid. And the family prospered and grew. And I developed them into an advertiser.

Q. Now what's happened to them?

A. Well, of course, the... some of 'em are dead. They opened up stores under the same name. There's one brother at Southtown, there was one at Bull's Head. And one in Newark, so they did stay in the same field, but in totally different areas. And in smaller specialized parts of the business where they had this master department store, they now open up... one's got a bridal shop and one's got this...

Q. I see.

A. It's changed. But getting down it was... it was very interesting because I grew up and I could watch their progress and growth. And they, too, were not aware of what they were doing, but I had been in other areas of the city and knew no such thing existed. There was Lawrence's Herring Store, an appetizer store. He had imported herring and sardines and salmon and all these things. And nova and lox and things that nobody else had. And I told him he could afford to advertise because there was a demand, there was no store like Wegman's that had all these specialized items in their Gourmet Department. And, of course, Cohen's Restaurant, I think I mentioned, was the focal point.

Q. What was Cohen's Restaurant like?

A. Cohen's was fabulous. Cohen's was run by Jack Cohen, who was the son of the owner, the original. His parents started it and then they died off. Jack ran it very meticulous. It was immaculate. It was a kosher restaurant to the extent you couldn't get dairy and meat together because it was... and
A. (Continued) Passover he served Passover food. You had matzohs and not bread. And it was a great place to... practically every merchant ate there because it was, you know...

Q. It was the focal point.

A. Yea. And like somebody would tell me, Eastview Mall has 3,000 employees there and they were contemplating a restaurant. And... and in their discussion the guy who wants to rent the place says you start off like 3,000 built-in people who gotta eat, they work here. And that's what Cohen's was. But, Cohen's attracted people from downtown would there because everybody, Gentiles, heard about, you know, corned beef sandwich on rye and...

Q. Which is good food.

A. Yea. And bagels and lox and cream cheese and matzoh ball soup and they wanted to try it. Then, of course, I worked... I was a minority in a newspaper with predominately Gentile people, I would take people down there. And they said, hey, this is good, you know. And, you know, they'd kid me about it. But, so my background and my knowledge of the area and knowing became very... very strong point in my success because when I'd go to Cohen's they knew I'd be there and they would say has Edelman been around, you know, I want to run an ad, if I'd miss them in the store.

Q. Would Cohen's ad... advertise?

A. Yes. I got Cohen's to advertise, I told 'em. And very important, they would run ads when they were closing for the certain holidays they would close, like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, the high holidays 'cause they didn't want to disappoint the Gentile people who might come down from downtown.

Q. I see.

A. So it became a... it was amazing. I think, you know, Central Trust had a wonderful slogan, why they stopped using it I don't know. It was "Big
A. (Continued) enough to serve you, and small enough to know you." And that's how Rochester was, and that's how Jewry in Rochester functioned.

Q. I see.

A. Big enough to serve you, and small enough to know you.

Q. It's an interesting analogy.

A. And it . . . it was . . . everybody seemed to know when a Jew passed away everybody seemed to know.

Q. Everybody seemed to know.

A. That Parsky, you know, they would always get Parsky's, the Jewish funeral home, and they would always say, you know, well, you know, we're all gonna wind up with Parsky, what's the big deal? You know.

Q. OK. What were some of the other stores? What was it like?

A. Well, there was Ernie Wolk. Ernie Wolk had a furniture and appliance store and he sold tires. And it was a real mad house. Ernie Wolk was not a conventional merchant. He was a discounter and he got good brands and he sold them. And the only thing people used to complain, you know, you get a good buy but the service is lousy. Well, they never realized you can't get both, see? If you look for a discount you gotta . . . and it would be amazing. I'd be waiting . . . he never believed in advertising, he didn't think he needed it. But it would be amazing, somebody would be standing there and say I bought a range from you and the door fell off but nobody'll fix it and I can't use the range, and the range is important, you know, this is like the center of the kitchen, how can I cook? And Ernie'd say, I'll take care of it Mrs. Cohen or Mrs.. . .

Q. Sure.

A. Don't worry about it. And while somebody was complaining and they were screaming there would be eight people waiting to buy, which was fantastic.
A. (Continued) Here they'd hear this complaint and still they're waiting to buy at a discount.

Q. Oh, wow! Huh.

A. So it was...

Q. Why do you think people... was it that discounted that much?

A. Yes.

Q. Yea, I see.

A. And good brands. He had good brands and he... he eventually took care of it. But he... he felt that, you know, be patient with me, you know, you can't have everything. And then, of course, he sold the store to Rothman and at the end of the war... at the end of the war he got sick and Rothman bought it. And Rothman built it even bigger 'cause the timing, you know. Then, of course, there was Itkin's that became a store similar to Nusbaum's. And I gave 'em a slogan, "It can be gotten at Itkin's." And...

Q. Was it a slogan that... that paid off?

A. Yea, they... they used it in their advertising. Eventually, as the area went bad they were one of the last hangers-oners. Some colored guy got a small loan, you know, they wanted to encourage them, and bought it. I think it's gone now, but this happened. Then there was Yalowitz' Drug Store, which was another landmark. Yalowitz, of course, Charles Yalowitz was one... one of three brothers who were pharmacists.

Q. Right.

A. But they never could get along so they branched out, each one had his own store. But Charles and his wife were fabulous, fantastic people because he was a professional man and as the immigrants in the early 1900's they tell me, you know, came over he would send money... he had a postal substation in his drug store...
Q. Sure.
A. And he would send money orders to Europe for 'em and he would read their. . . he could read Russian and Hebrew, and he would. . .
Q. Well, he was like a clearing house?
A. Yes. And he was fantastic. And he taught his wife pharmacy. She would compound prescriptions, I'd see 'em, which she wasn't supposed to do, but she. . . she learned and he would watch her. But, they were exceptional people. And this was another important point and affected a lot of lives there. And there were many people tried to start delicatessens similar to Cohen's, kosher.
Q. But Cohen's always held on?
A. Cohen's was number one, stuck out like a giraffe. And people started. . . they would have a little glory and people would go there out of curiosity and then say it's dirty, it's not like Cohen's. Everything, you know, it's like everybody used to compare our paper to the New York Times, which would infuriate me because the New York Times is really a daily magazine of international . . .
Q. Repute. . .
A. Yea, and here's a local paper full of local people. So, you know, I used to kid people when I'd go to a cocktail party and they'd get a little and I'd have enough whiskey in me and they'd tell me about your G-d damned paper as compared to the New York Times and I. . . I had a stock. . . and people used to. . . I'd say to 'em, I didn't know you read the New York Times. Why? I'd say they don't have a comic strip in there. I thought you only bought a paper for the comics, you know.
Q. They kind of kept quiet after that, huh?
A. I would put 'em in short pants. I'd tell 'em.
Q. OK.

A. And, of course, some of these people became second generations of children took over, you know. And that's as long as it really lasted. The... the grandchildren couldn't because the area deteriorated.

Q. Most of these people then moved out to Monroe Avenue?

A. Yea.

Q. OK. Two questions, one relates to you and one relates to the people, let's do people first. Did many people move out to Monroe Avenue? Is Monroe Avenue an area that's comparable to the old Joseph Avenue?

A. No, it's a reasonable facsimile, you know. They tried to emulate it, but there wasn't the closeness and there wasn't the... the reason to start it. They went up there and, you know, they went through necessity. They were lookin' for another location that they thought would have potential...

Q. And drawing power and so on.

A. Yea. Yea.

Q. OK. They actually moved to Monroe Avenue when a lot of the old Park Avenue Jewish sections were moving out to Brighton.

A. Yea. Yea.

Q. That's interesting. And the second question I wanted to ask about Monroe Avenue would you begin to solicit ads from Monroe?

A. Yes.

Q. Was that...

A. Yea. As the area changed, of course, but by this time already I was more or less in... in management and I knew where to send the men.

Q. Did you like that better? To be in management? Or did you like actively seeking...?

A. Oh, this was my dream come true, to be the advertising manager of the flagship
A. (Continued) Gannett papers, you know, this is something that I dreamed of and people asked, they say it'll never happen, you gotta face facts and what are you reachin' for?

Q. You're laughing at them now.

A. Oh, yea.

Q. OK. If you had to characterize Joseph Avenue very briefly in one or two sentences say when you started working for the Gannett paper, how would you have characterized it? You said before it was warm and friendly.

A. Yea.

Q. Is there anything you wanted to add?

A. With tremendous potential.

Q. Yea, do you think it lived up to its potential?

A. Yes, it did. It really did because a lot of people made a lot of money there. And a lot of families lived well, and a lot of people who were in business worked hard, but there... there were payoffs and rewards for their efforts. And it's... it really was, as I mentioned, as the area changed people stopped comin' down there to shop because they were afraid. And... and then the new bright, big sparkling shopping centers sprung up, so...

Q. What's your opinion of shopping centers?

A. Well, of course, they're... they're a miniature downtown, but you always gotta have a healthy downtown. My analysis always was that I compared the city and shopping centers and towns to a hand. And a hand would be the central city, core, and everything else is a finger. And you can chop off a finger and everything else will survive, but if somebody loses their hand all the fingers die and that's why you gotta have a healthy downtown.

Q. What do you think the state of Rochester's downtown is?
A. It's too bad. There's been millions and millions spent to maintain it, and to step up... Midtown Plaza was really the saviour of downtown Rochester. The McCurdy's and the Forman's who had the vision roughly fifteen years ago to build Midtown, which was at that time a pioneering move...

Q. It was one of the first...

A. Bold step. It was a forty million dollar gamble by two private families, and this was a tremendous... and this was really what saved downtown Rochester.

Q. What would you say the future of downtown... is it getting better?

A. Well... no, no. It's gonna continue to be... for major purchasing there's no substitute for downtown Rochester. If you want furniture you should go downtown to Sibley's or McCurdy's. Or even a suit of clothes, the branches have 'em, but not in the depth, you know, that you find in downtown. I would say for an important purchase a person should shop downtown. Outside of that you can go to the shopping centers like Eastview Mall, Greecetown Mall, Long Ridge and get everything else you want.

Q. Is Rochester's downtown section healthier do you think than other cities of comparable size?

A. Yes, healthier due to local strength.

Q. It seems there's been a lot of interest, renewed interest, just since I've been out here in downtown.

A. Well, because the banks and the stores have been... they're... they're putting their best foot forward, but again there... their... they're becoming victims of the... of the people. And people again that spoiled Joseph Avenue are spoiling downtown. I used to enjoy goin' downtown at night. I was... belonged to the Rochester Club, we'd have an early dinner and go to a show. And then it's unheard of. The Rochester Club is... you know, was the club to belong to, and it's dropped off to nothing. It's just
A. (Continued) hangin' in there for life. People just are afraid to go downtown.

Q. There's really nothing to bring them downtown?
A. No.

Q. Just the Eastman Theatre.
A. Yea, and we had dinner Saturday night at the Rascal but it was early because my wife, of course, is ill. We never ate that early, but we went at six o'clock and it's right next to... the Rascal is a fine restaurant opposite the Eastman.

Q. Yea, I know... A.
But, Off Track Betting is next door and it was very heavily congested with people that I wouldn't say they're... you know, they were real desireable and I... my wife... I had to use a wheelchair. I parked, you know, but it was not a pleasant experience.

Q. Not someplace you want to take your wife.
A. But, I wouldn't have done it except I... I just didn't want to take her to our Midvale Club because they had a big party for the holiday and there are too many people and she'd be overwhelmed, you know. But downtown... she... she mentioned... she says I never saw it so empty, you know. And this is really a fine... fine restaurant. And...

Q. What... what do you think of the future of downtown?
A. I'm worried... I'm worried about it. I... I'm worried about it. Outside of financial institutions who don't depend on, you know, foot traffic and people, they do a lot. Now Gannett Company, you know, are moving.

Q. They're moving?
A. Corporate headquarters have leased two of the top floors of the Lincoln First. Because they've outgrown the building which is fifty-some-odd newspapers...
A. (Continued) they... they want to be away from these papers. They all used to kid me when we had meetings with the out of town papers, how can you work under the gun, you know, with the corporate... Paul Miller and Al Neuharth would come down and visit with us. To them it was, you know, but I was on a first-name basis with these...

Q. Sure.

A. ... so it had its advantages. And I always liked it. I'm enough of a... a ham, kosher ham, to... to... to do something. And it would be acknowledged that day. I mean they'd get the paper edition by edition and if I had an exceptional, outstanding advertising achievement the phone would ring, Les what the hell you doin' in the office? After a job like that you should be out at Midvale playin' golf or over the Rochester Club celebrating! That's great. Here if the paper in Pensicola does something till they send the copy to Miller and Miller then by this time might be in Hawaii somewhere, so I... I loved this. I wanted to be under the gun because I... and I wanted recognition for my achievements fast.

Q. It was... it was ideal then for you to work for the flagship papers?

A. Yes, yes, yea.

Q. Of the group?

A. Right.

Q. OK. I got it. OK. Say that's probably a good place to end the interview. Thank you, sir.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview II)