ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester 1926-1975)

Interviewee: Ruth Lebovics

Interviewer: Dennis B. Klein

Date(s) of interview: July 29

Setting (place of interview):

The interviews took place at the Center for Oral History of person to her faith and for her recollections of the honesty and compassion, mad and instructive.

Background of interviewee

Mrs. Lebovics was born in Rochester in 1903 and lived in the Joseph Ave. area for most of her life. For a short time she was involved in the Kolko Paper Company. In 1933, she and her husband went to Israel with the intention to settle, but due to increasing tensions and the imminent war, decided to return to Rochester. She has been active in the Beth Joseph Center, Yeshiva, and other Jewish community affairs.

Interview abstract

The interview offers insights into many aspects of the local Jewish community, particularly the decline of the clothing industry, the affairs of the shul in community life, the JY old and new, Zionist activities in the 1920s, and the contributions made by her brother Hyman Kolko to Jewish and secular life. Her experiences in Israel (1933-1939) permit a useful, comparative analysis of American-Israeli Jerry on the one hand, and, on the other, of Jewish life in Rochester in the 1920s and 1930s.

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

-Social history
-Family
-Demographic/residential
-Economic
-Political/civic none
-Zionism/Israel

-Jewish community
-Community relations
-Religious life
-Jewish education
-Anti-Semitism

Interview: loc-
a) corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and casset recorder
b) including references to others in the Rochester

--see following page(s)--
Q. This is Dennis Klein talking with Ruth Lebovics on July 29, 1976 at the University of Rochester. This is Tape No. 1, Side A. I thought we would begin with just a biographical sketch of your own life so that we could get a better idea of who we're talking with.

A. I was born in Rochester. Do you want the date?

Q. Yes, please.

A. July the third, 1903. And I lived in Rochester all my life until shortly after I was married. My husband and I went to Israel and lived there for close to six years, close to... from 1933 when we were married until 1939. We came back shortly before the outbreak of the war. And since then I've lived in Rochester.

Q. Since '39?

A. Right.

Q. What business associations have you had through this period? And when did you become involved?

A. Well, business asso. ... well, I... I haven't worked since after I was married.

Q. OK. Well, what... what position did you have before you were married?

A. I worked as Mr. Kolko's secretary, and I was also the bookkeeper. I was the only bookkeeper he had. He has many now, but I then he only needed one bookkeeper.

This is Hyman... ?

Hyman Kolko. Yea, I was the bookkeeper there.

When did you begin work with Mr. Kolko? We'll pursue this in greater...
A. Right after I was graduated from high school and I had a full time job in his office.

Q. What year approximately would this be?

A. Well, 19... 1921.

Q. OK.

A. '21. I think so. I think that's right.

Q. So then through the twenties until you went to Israel you worked with the...

A. Yes. Up until the time I was married. I also worked in Israel for a time, but I don't know whether that's...

Q. Well, what...

A. I worked for the government, for the Customs Department, the Director of Customs. That was the mandate then. It was Palestine, it wasn't Israel.

Q. Yes, OK. Fine. What schools did you go to?

A. East High School. That's all. I was graduated from East High School. I just had a high school education.

Q. Well, elementary school?

A. Yes. No. 9 School.

Q. No. 9 School?

A. No. 9.

Q. And was the junior high school a part of your...?


Q. OK.

A. That's right, I don't want to miss that.

Q. Well, that was kind of an unusual situation there, wasn't it? I think it was the first junior high school, or one of the first?

A. Yes, it was. It was. I think I was in the first class when it was organized.

Q. Were you aware of it being a new thing? You were in that first class.
A. It was a good feeling, that's all I can say. I don't know whether.
Q. This was seventh grade?
A. Yes, I was pretty young to be aware of any significance, but I know it was a
good feeling. And the classes all... we were all classmates that came
over from No. 9 School together. And I remember distinctly all of us went
back for a mass visit to one of our teachers in No. 9 School, Miss Iggy.
We were all of us very fond of her, and after we were already at Washington
we all decided one day to walk back to No. 9 School and go and visit her.
Q. Oh.
A. Yes, I remember that. I know that we were pretty much one class from No. 9,
there were others, too. They came from other schools. But we were all
together in one class, and some of them I... I occasionally run into now.
Q. That's interesting. Still today?
A. Yes.
Q. Then you lived in the Joseph Avenue area?
A. Yes. I lived in the Joseph Avenue area practically all my life here in
Rochester.
Q. In other words...
A. Yes, I was born... I was born on what was 196 Chadam Street. Chadam
Street is now Ormond Street, or there's no more Ormond Street anymore either.
Everything is urban renewal. But, then after... when I was married we
already lived at 246 Joseph Avenue. We lived there until we were married.
Q. Right on Joseph?
A. 246, yes.
Q. Right.
A. And then after I was married we very shortly; then immediately... there were there
nearly six years. When we returned we came back to 246...
A. (Continued) Joseph Avenue. And we lived with him until shortly before he passed away. And then we lived on Kelly Street for a short while. We had our own place then. And then after my father died we moved back into his home, the family wanted his home to remain intact and it was a good move for us. We stayed there until shortly before the urban renewal. We didn't wait until it was imminent. We knew it was coming, and so we bought a home and moved. But still in the area on Avenue A. That is our present address. We're living there for 17 years now.

Q. When did you move to Avenue A?
A. Seventeen years ago. Now it's 1976...

Q. Well, when would that be...? We can do our own arithmetic here.
A. Yea, seventeen years ago.

Q. OK. Right...OK. Avenue A I think is off St. Paul?
A. Yes. But, we are in the part of that between North Clinton and Remington Street, that...that...that area, yea.

Q. I see.
A. And we...we bought a cottage there seventeen years ago, and we're living there now.

Q. OK. Well, I'll want to explore a little bit at some point about that area of the community.
A. Yea.

Q. Since it was perhaps the most important one area, one single area, for Jews in Rochester. It was as much...
A. It was, yes. It was.

Q. Yea, OK. Before we do that though...
A. It was like a seed bed for...now many people moved away from it before us. We were probably among the last but...
Q. To move away?
A. There were some very solid families.
Q. I just talked with somebody, well a Jewish family that is still there today.
A. Yea?
Q. But there's not many.
A. Yes, there are... Yea, well we are practically still there, not on Joseph Avenue A, right in the general area. Yea.
Q. Right. Where urban renewal apparently didn't... 
A. Oh, yea, yea. Well, see urban renewal didn't come past Clifford Avenue. That's probably you may have spoke to some people who lived on Joseph Avenue past...
Q. Yea.
A. I know some people who live there, too. We have contacts with some of them.
Q. It was the Gitsin's.
A. Yes.
Q. The Gitsin Electric Company.
A. Yes, Mrs. Gitsin, she's a real stalwart.
Q. Boy, I'll tell you...
A. She's... you could interview her.
Q. I did.
A. Did you? The old lady?
Q. Yea.
A. Yea. She could tell you...
Q. Stories.
A. Oh, yes. And she's very keen on the intellect.
Q. Yea.
A. She's fine.
Q. Yea, and also her son, too.
A. Her son, yea, yea.
Q. Robert.
A. They can both tell you a great deal.
Q. Yea, they were very informative.
A. Because she came from Russia, she was an immigrant to Rochester. See, I was born here. Her, she... she's got some very good...
Q. A whole extra dimension. What about your parents? They weren't born in...?
A. No, my parents came from Poland.
Q. Right.
A. My father came to Rochester in 1896. And my brothers were all born in Poland. I'm the only one who was born here. I'm the youngest.
Q. OK.
A. And my brothers are all gone. I had five or six brothers. One of them... Harold when they interviewed his father was my oldest brother. And Hyman is the youngest. And then I came after Hyman.
Q. I see.
A. I'm younger than he, but he's the youngest of the brothers.
Q. Of the brothers.
A. Yes.
Q. So you were the only...
A. Yea, I'm the only girl and the youngest, yes. Oh, yes.
And what about your mother?
A. My mother came from Poland. My father came first, like many immigrant families. My father came first and when he had enough money he sent for the family.
A. (Continued) was a number of years. And they struggled.

Q. Well, what... what was his name?

A. Solomon. My father's first name was Solomon.

Q. Your mother's name?

A. Rose.

Q. And her maiden name?

A. Goldstock. Goldstock.

Q. Goldstock.

A. Yea.

Q. Now she was born in Poland...

A. Yes.

Q. ... too?

A. Yea.

Q. And your father and mother married in...

A. In Poland. Oh, yea.

Q. ... in Poland?

A. They had grandchildren when they came to America.

Q. Why did your father then come to America?

A. Well, he had... it wasn't for military reasons. It was for financial reasons. There was a lot of struggle. They were poor. And he saw no way out. And he thought that, just like many in his situation, that America is the golden land of opportunity, and he had an uncle in Rochester, the Nusbaum family. You know Beryl Nusbaum? I'm sure you know Beryl Nusbaum.

Q. Yea.

A. Well Beryl Nusbaum is named after his great-grandfather. And his great-grandfather is my father's uncle. So he had his uncle here in Rochester and aunt. And so he came to... that was the reason for coming to Rochester.
A. (Continued) He had someone to come to. And he lived with them for about four years or more.

Q. Alone?

A. Alone.

Q. He... he did not... he left the family back...

A. Yea, he left them in Poland. And he lived with them until he could accumulate enough money to send for them. And then he sent for them. When they came they came right to the uncle's house, too, 'cause he didn't have a dwelling place. And they all lived... that was typical in those days. I mean, nobody had very much but everybody shared.

Q. Yea.

A. And they lived there and little by little the boys went to school. They all went to No. 9 School, they were grown. The youngest of them I think was just barely Bar Mitzvah so the rest of them were pretty grown up already. As I remember this from their talking about it. And they all went to 9 School, No. 9 School and they learned English. And they got jobs, and ...

Q. Let me ask you a little bit about the Nusbaum family.

A. Yes.

Q. The relationship between that family and yours.

A. Yes, very, very warm relationship. Very warm.

Q. When did that begin, do you know?

A. Well, the very moment that they came. My mother, Aunt Beryl used to tell. Now she... this Beryl, Uncle Beryl, who was my father's aunt. It's his wife who was my father's aunt.

Q. OK.

A. She was my father's aunt. And my mother said she had two aunts, her own mother and my father's aunt. Her name was Gertrude. She was a very very good
Interview with Ruth Lebovic

(Continued) soul. And she was very good to my mother and the children. And... and... and... and gave her... it was a very big adjustment for my mother. You know, the children went to school, learned the language and... but for her it was a little harder.

Q. Right. I can understand.

A. And... and her... and her aunt, that is my father's aunt, was very, very wonderful to her. And they stayed with them I don't know how long. I really don't know. That is all... all I can remember from there when they were reminiscing.

Q. Right.

A. But, she was very, very kind and very good to her. And she remembered her with a great deal of love.

Q. Something... .

A. Yes. Now... now, their son was Harris Nusbaum. And he's the grandfather of Beryl. And he's Shep Nusbaum's father. Shep Nusbaum and Goodie Nusbaum.

Q. Right.

A. Howard Nusbaum. They're a large family. And their father was Harris Nusbaum. He was the son of the aunt and uncle. And my father and Harris Nusbaum, first cousins, they were always very warm friends. And I am very good friends with the children, who are in my age bracket. They're... .

Q. Now, through this complicated... .

A. Yea.

Q. . . . relationship... .

A. It's going down... it's gone down about four or five generations.

Q. That's right. So that we... it would back in Poland now, really... we're really talking about... .

A. Yea... yea... yea.
Q. We're really talking about an old world relationship here.
A. Yes, but the uncle and the aunt were here a great many years. They had left Poland long before because Harris Nusbaum, I think, I'm not 100% sure, I think he was born here. I'm not sure, but I think he was born here. Or if he wasn't born here he came as a very young child.
Q. So how long ago would that be?
A. Far back.
Q. It would be...
A. My parents... my father came here in 1896, and...
Q. Quite a few years before that.
A. Oh, yes. Sure, sure.
Q. In fact, one of the original Jewish families?
A. Yes, the Nusbaum's are one of the original Jewish families, that's for sure. And there were other Nusbaums too who were brothers of Beryl Nusbaum. There was Aaron Nusbaum and Meyer Nusbaum.
You heard of Bobby Nusbaum here in Rochester, his father... he's someone you should interview, Bobby Nusbaum.
Q. Yea.
A. He could tell you a great deal.
Q. We might have him.
A. Yes, that's obvious. He's... he's... he knows... if he is willing to cooperate...
Q. Yea.
A. That's... that's something, yes.
Q. Well, he'd have to have that.
A. Yea, he would be willing. He might... he might and he might... then again he might not. I mean, I wouldn't speak for him because I don't know him that
A. (Continued) well, you see. He... he's not related to us. He's a relative of our relatives.

Q. Right.

A. Because his relationship is through the father, our relationship is through the mother. But he could tell you a great deal if he chooses to.

Q. What... what business did your father...?

A. My father had a tailor's trimming store. His store was on Joseph Avenue. He sold all the materials the tailors need to put into...you see Rochester was a big tailoring city and there were a great many custom tailors, tailor shops, not now so much. But in those days they were very prevalent. And it was the main industry among our... the new immigrants especially. So he had tailor's trimming store. He sold all the linings and all the materials that go into men's clothing except for the cloth and buttons, all kinds. And he... the small tailors came to him and the big tailors came to him. He had... and... and my father was in business together with my oldest brother. They were partners. That's Harold Kolko's father.

Q. OK.

A. Was my father... partners with my father. And they... they ran this business. Kolko and Son.

Q. Yes, I think Harold Kolko, yes, he mentioned...?

A. I'm sure he did, yes.

Q. He mentioned that. OK. Now, as you said that Rochester was a... a very active clothing center during this period, do you have recollections of how involved the community was with clothing? Your father would, of course, be the link for you. In other words, was it always very active. I know that it went into decline.

A. Yes. Well, everybody used to have their suits made. My father, my brothers,
A. (Continued) always. They wouldn't think of going buying the ready-made suit. They went to the tailor's first. They were. . . had close connections with the tailors 'cause they were their customers.

Q. Right.

A. The tailors were their customers.

But even so everybody had custom made clothes. There wasn't such a thing as now. Well, I'm sure some men have their clothes still custom made and they can afford it.

Q. Right, that's very, very expensive.

A. If they can afford it, yes. There are. . . if they're inclined that way. But, you can be very well dressed in a ready-made suit, yea. And now it's. . . I can't speak 'cause I'm not familiar with any endorsements. But, along this prevailed. . . I believe. . . I really wouldn't say how long this prevailed. My husband when we were married in 1933, my husband already had bought store clothes, suits. Yea. He didn't. . . he didn't have them. . .

Q. So it was changing fairly rapidly. And perhaps explains the decline of. . . of clothing. . . at least. . .

A. As a. . . as a business, yea. The tailor shops. . . the tailor shops went down. Well the owners of the tailor shops. . . I could tell you the names of a great many of them 'cause some of them were our friends and they were associated with my father in shul, you know, in synagogue. And or they died. The older men died. The owners, there was a Mr. Suckle, and there was. . . there was Mr. Bloominstein. I even can remember what their tailor shops looked like. I. . . And they're all behind their homes, in big long. . . long. . . not like garages, but whatever. . . they were all very similar. You see them even now converted. You can see some of them converted into dwellings.

Q. Right.
A. In that general area.

Q. Large homes.

A. There were many that were on Rhine Street there, in Herman Street. They were all over. And people that worked for them were sort of looked after. They were... they knew and they... they were cared about, you see? And they were landsmen and they were greenhorns. They didn't know the language, so that they helped each other. They were kind to each other, and there was sort of a... it was more than just a job.

Q. Right.

A. Yea.

Q. Which contributed to that sense of a culture, of community.

A. Yes. As a matter of fact, this is one... I don't know if anyone... if anybody brought it out to you in... in the interviews that you've had so far. Many of the shuls, you know, shuls. The congregations, you know what a shul is?

Q. Yea.

A. You understand Yiddish at all?

Q. A little bit, a few words.

A. If I use a Yiddish word and you don't know it just say...

Q. OK. OK.

A. Well, many of the shuls centered around people with occupations. In other words, the tailors had their own and... and other occupations. There were a great number of shuls that are no longer in existence. The Rhine Street Shul, the Cazakin Shul that they called the Cazakin, the Cossaks. I don't know why they called it the Cazakin. And there was a Stible, and there were any number of them. Some of them centered around either people who
A. (Continued) were landslife, who came from the same town, or had the same occupation. They sort of banded together. And I know some of them looked down on the others, they thought that they were not so refined.

Q. Right.

A. Or, yea... yea. That... 

Q. Well, what shul did your family belong to?

A. They called it Nusbaum's Shul...

Q. OK.

A. But... because the Nusbaum's founded it, but the name of the shul is the Beth Haknesses Hachodosh, and it's still in existence on St. Regis Drive. They moved to St. Regis Drive. It's still... it's one... one of the... I think it's the only one of all the old shuls that's still in existence because Beth Haknesses Hachodosh is now a Conservative temple, no longer Orthodox. It's on East Avenue. No longer what it was, see? Leopold Street Shul is out of existence. Rhine Street Shul is out of existence. Vahakola Shul is out of existence. Morris Street Shul is out of existence. I can name... there must be at least ten or a dozen or maybe more. None of them are existing anymore, or they've merged with others. But, the only one that has... that is existing now and is really strictly Orthodox is the Beth Haknesses Hachodosh, which was Nusbaum's Shul. And which one of the founders was Harris Nusbaum, my father's cousin.

Q. Right.

A. And when my father came to Rochester this was already a thriving shul. And that was the synagogue that we always belonged to, and it is now... with urban renewal they... they got the money from the city and the shul was demolished, but they took some of the stained glass windows, they took the benches, whatever they could they did.
Q. Oh, well that's good.
A. That was Avi Nusbaum's work. He... he... if you could interview him...
Q. Yea.
Q. ... you could get a ... but he is a ... a... a man ... he's an individual with... by himself...
Q. Right.
A. And whether he'd be willing to come and talk to you is another thing. You may... you may if you get around him the right way, possibly. He's an old man, but he's very smart. He's very astute. And he's single-track mind. Well...
Q. Well, we'll have to get to him. If we have him on our list already, we'll have to certainly...
A. Do you have him on your list?
Q. See, we might.
A. Avi Nusbaum, yea. Well, he can... about the shul, yea. I mean...
Q. I'll make a note of it.
A. Yea, yea, yea. But he could tell you more about the shul 'cause his father was one of the founders.
Q. Right.
A. His father was an uncle of Harris Nusbaum. He was really one of the founders. His father and his mother were very, very involved in the community, and they were looked up to. They were rich people. And everybody in trouble went to them for help and they got it, too.
Q. Spiritual leaders.
A. They were... they were, yea. They were, his parents. And they... they... they lived on Hyde Park. Hyde Park was the aristocrats. I mean all the homes were like... They were, they really were. And
(Continued) they were up where the old post... where the post office is now on Cumberland Street.

Q. Yea.

A. Hyde Park. And that's where his parents lived and it was something of an adventure to even come up there. I mean...

Q. Yea.

A. Social positions, you know what I mean?

Q. It's interesting. That wasn't what... Was Hyde Park a... an Eastern European settlement though? Or was that...

A. No, it was a... it was the more wealthy Jews, those who could afford...

Q. That's be a German Jewish...?

A. No, no, no. They weren't the German Jewish. They were our Jews; they were the Orthodox Jews, but the wealthier ones. There were some wealthy ones, too. And they lived on Hyde Park and all their homes were really like mansions.

Q. Right.

A. Yes. And these were all very vrom people, I mean very religious people.

Q. Right.

A. And his parents. And I remember going there with my mother occasionally.

Q. Was the Nusbaum Shul... did that attract tailors or... you were mentioning that that was very...

A. There were some tailors. There were. There were, but it wasn't exclusively tailors.

Q. 'Cause I was...

A. There were because... because some of the people who owned tailor shops were members of Nusbaum Shul, like Mr. Blumenstein, Mr. Suskind. I know they were owners of tailor shops, not just tailors, they employed people. And they had large tailor shops. People worked for them. Everything makes in other words.
A. (Continued) mother in... a hundred years ago.

Q. So in... so in many ways this was almost an extended family?

A. Yes, in the shul it was, it was. It... it was. And they had their learning societies, too. This was, I think, very interesting. They had a group that met... they called it a Havashas; Rabbi Karp will certainly know what that is, Havashas. They came together and they studied Talmud every Friday night, not in the summer because the days were too long. But all... but the winter months no matter if it was a blizzard outside, after the Friday evening meal my father and my brothers would pick themselves up and go to shul, which was not very far. We always lived near a shul. That's one thing my father saw to it. If ever we had to move it had to be near the shul. 'Cause the shul was the very, very important to them. And they picked themselves up, and even other people who came from far away came on Friday night, and they sat together and they learned. They studied Talmud. That was Friday night, it was Saturday afternoon. And during the week every evening they'd come to shul for maharav, you know, the evening prayers, maharav, the evening prayers. Between there's a short interval, between the prayers and the evening prayers you have to commence when it's dark. So the interval between they'd also sit and learn. And this group was called the Havashas. And they... they... it was kept up for years and years and years. Way back every synagogue had their own Havashas, but as... as people died out... some of the people died, some people moved away; it dwindled down to the point that the only one that remained was in our congregation. And some of the others came to our congregation on Friday nights and Saturdays to learn. And this stayed together for a great many years, a great many years. And when they would finish certain tract of the Talmud, it was always a big event because that was... it was like a... it was like a wedding...
A. (Continued) a bris, you know. You're supposed to celebrate.

Q. Right.

A. It's a celebration.

Q. After going through that...?

A. That... that's right. Then they start all over again. But, it... it's part of the whole picture is to have a big party. And they they... one of the more learned of the men would deliver a real... they called it a... I don't remember. But, it was like a professor giving a paper.

Q. Right. On the Talmud?

A. Yes.

Q. Some interpretation?

A. That's... it wasn't just sitting down having a feast, they really make a feast. And only the people who were learning were invited, and then... then one of the more learned, or they'd invite a rabbi, to give a dissertation.

Q. Is that the reason why this did not go on inside the shul? Because only those who were learning... it would be a separate group?

A. Well, it was in a shul. It was all held... the learning was in the shul.

Q. In the shul itself?

A. And the party was in the shul.

Q. Ah, I see.

A. The party was in the shul. They didn't have too much kitchen facilities for cooking or anything like that. Now you have everything is so modern...

Q. Right.

A. Easy. It wasn't. So they'd cook and they'd come to our home and do the cooking and carry it over.

Q. Then they'd go back on Friday evenings to the... to the shul?

A. Yes. To learn. The party was never on a Friday evening, it was on a weekday.
A. (Continued) It was always because they had it so there should be no violation of the Sabbath in cooking or warming or anything like that was very, very Orthodox, very strict.

Q. Right.

A. But the party was a culmination when they finished one tract, one complete. 'Cause the Talmud is vast, but they studied. And they... my father and my brothers, and they... it was very much a part of their lives.

Q. Right.

A. Yea. And of those... now some of those members... men who had their tailor shops members of this... owners were members of this, too.

Q. Of this circle?

A. Yes.

Q. Of this learning circle?

A. Yea, Mr. Blumenstein, I remember him very distinctly, very learned man, very dignified, a real patriarch. And on a Friday night and Saturday dedicated to learning.

Q. And that went on for years and years?

A. Years. I remember it. I remember it because I grew right up in it.

Q. Right.

A. Yea.

Q. But... but you didn't participate?

A. No. The girls were left out of everything. Yea, that's very sad. It isn't like it is now.

Q. Yea.

A. That was a very sad that everything was concen... all the learning and all was concentrated with the... the boys... well, they were Bar Mitzvahed, they went to heder they went in one of them
A. (Continued) went to yeshivas, some. Not like now. Now it's... and...
and girls. I went to seder. You know what seder is? All right, it was after
school in the afternoon there was... there were many Hebrew teachers, molamet.
In his own home you'd have a group, and I think it was $.50 per week or a
dollar a week, I really don't remember what the fee was. I remember one teacher
was Mr. Leonson. We loved him, we really loved Mr. Leonson. He was a real
pedagogue, and he loved children, too. We liked him very much until he got too
sick to teach, and so he had to give it up. Mr. Leonson. There was a few
others, I can't remember all their names. But, I went to several seders. So
we learned. We learned to daven. We learned to, you know, say prayers. We
learned to read from the Sidur. We learned to write so we could write a Jewish
letter. I can still write a Yiddish letter, yea. But, we didn't go very far
into Hebrew grammar or certainly not the kind of education the girls get now.

Q. Right. The seder was for men and women?
A. Yes, it was for boys and girls, that's right.

Q. That was really the only opportunity for girls to...?
A. Well, the seder I went to I can't remember if there were any boys there or not.
It was so long ago in years. I mean if I'm 73 years old you can well imagine
it's so long ago I... I don't remember if there... but I think... I
think it was only girls, but I won't say positively.

Q. So again that really was the only opportunity for...?
A. Yea, yea. But I... the boys got more... they got more than we did.

Q. Yea, yea.

A. My brothers certainly did. I know they did.

Q. I think you mentioned that it was kind of sad that that was the situation.

A. Sure, it's sad, very sad. I feel... when I see the youngsters now. I mean
I see them, children... grandchildren of my friends. I don't have any
A. (Continued) grandchildren. But grandchildren of my friends, and I see the. . . the Jewish educations some of them get, I'm talking the Orthodox Jewish children, not the children that go to the temple because I don't think their education is adequate. And the after school, that isn't that good. But, I see the children who go to day school, like the Hillel School.

Q. Right.

A. And after Hillel School some of them. . . many of them go on further. They go to the academy for girls in Cleveland and New York and Baltimore. Like Rabbi Cohen's children. They are very well educated children. He sent everyone of his girls to Besiakov School in Baltimore. He sent everyone his boys away to yeshiva. Those children are very well education Jewishly.

Q. Right.

A. That. . . that. . . that's what I. . . that's what we didn't. . . that's what I mean.

Q. Yea.

A. I don't mean after school and temple, that's very inadequate.

Q. Right.

A. Or Sunday school, it's very, very. . . they're still not well educated Jewishly, really they're not. But. . . but I mean the type of education Rabbi Cohen's and others like him, Rabbi Hyman, and . . . give their children, Rabbi Chigers are still too young. I mean, they will get that education, too, I know they will. But they're. . . they're still in Hillel School. But after Hillel School their. . . their education doesn't stop, it continues.

Q. Right.

A. Now you see when we were growing up we did not have that. And then there's the NCSY which is wonderful. I mean this is a youth group, Orthodox.
Q. What is this?
A. NCSY. National Council for... no... NCSY. National Synagogue Youth... National Council of Synagogue Youth. This is a nationwide affiliation...
Q. Oh, yea. I think I'm aware of that.
A. ... of children... right. They're very active group at Beth Sholom, and they were active at Beth Joseph, all the... and they have national conventions. These children ages 8, 9 and 10 attend conventions, and they're very mature and they have very fine Jewish background. And they get a lot not just at home, but nationally. And they develop into leaders. I know two young men who got all their Jewishness from NCSY, they didn't get it at home. One of them is a fine rabbi now, and the other one is a doctorate in psychology, and they've all gone to Yeshiva University. They got it from NCSY.
Q. And that's... 
A. I can tell you their names. They got it from NCSY, they didn't get it at home because the homes weren't that Jewish. But this is... this is one of the finest achievements that... that the Orthodox community in America has done, is this youth group. More than their synagogues. I mean it's all right for...
Q. We'll come back to this NCSY later...
A. I really can't fill you out... I can find it out for you if you want it for... for your records. I can call you up and give you that. I can get it from Rabbi Chiger, 'cause he's very involved in it. But I... I know two very fine young men who comes from homes that are not particularly... the parents didn't observe... 
Q. Right.
A. And it was a very bright idea, but they were persuaded through NCSY to attend Yeshiva... instead of going to another college to get their
A. (Continued) education, Yeshiva University. Well, there they had contact with so many other fine young people from all over the country. And with NCSY they're so enthused with Jewishness and love of it that they are both very religious young men, and they both married very fine young women who are... who are professional background. They both have professions. One of them is getting his doctorate in psychology; he's a very... they're both brilliant boys and they are so very religious. And their parents have become religious because of them.

Q. That's funny.

A. And they're... they're really proud of them. One of them got all kinds of awards, awards at college. Regents Scholarship, you name it. They're... and... and I think they're... this religious stimulus that they got through NCSY and through their collegiate... college has made great mention of these two boys. They would just be... well, they would be fine boys, I mean, character-wise, but they would be mediocre. But a little... well, we call it a pinselyat, a little drop of Jewishness, it's in the blood of every single one of us, even... in the most... even the intermarried ones. There's a drop, there's a drop there. If it's awakened, it... it comes to life. The State of Israel did that for many negative Jews.

Q. That's an interesting concept of Jewishness.

A. Oh, yes. It's there. I've seen it. My husband has seen it. We've seen it where you think it was dead. Not dormant, but you'd think it was dead, and it got awakened. It got awakened through the State of Israel; it got awakened when these children went to college. Now, some of these boys and girls who get to New York, 'cause New York is such a rich Jewish Orthodox life, when they have contacts with other young people and came into their homes... because people... we learn more from our peers than we do from our family, you know.
A. (Continued) Family is one thing, our peers are another. And when they learn... and when they came in contact with it woke up in them... and they've been stimulated to... to... to the extent that we know of several who won't come back for Passover holidays to their parents because they won't eat in their parents' house because they have become kosher, and their parents are not kosher. Now they love their parents, and they do come home to visit. If they do, they just don't eat... very carefully what they eat. They won't come home for Passover. There are a number. And most of the parents are proud of it, actually... actually... But, you see, what I regret very much is we didn't have that in our youth.

Q. Yea.

A. We didn't have that.

Q. Were you aware that in your youth that you were missing something?

A. How could I be aware of it? I didn't see it.

Q. Well, you saw your fathers and brothers get up from the table and go to shul.

A. Go to shul, well that's right. Well, we enjoyed our Shabbat. I was happy. We had a lot... a lot of pleasure in our religion at home.

Q. Well, how was that... what would happen when... when your father and brothers went...

A. Yes.

Q. ... off to shul, I mean that was a...

A. Yea, yea...

Q. ... your family essentially?

A. Right. Well, my mother and I did have an older sister who passed away when I was 9 years old, I still remember her. But, we... I didn't feel...

C. What would you do?

A. I was always...
Q. At home. You would stay at home and your mother and sister and yourself would read...

A. Yea, yea, yea. Yea, my mother always in the... well, they called her the teitchomas. Rabbi Karp will know what that is. It's the translation of the Bible into Yiddish: for women. It's simplified with stories and allegories and all. It was called Senna Arenna, and it's... it's like a classic in those days. And that... and Friday night and Saturday she would... and sing it out loud, and we'd listen. We'd listen. Myself I never was inclined to do it, I mean, it was her generation that did it. And it was very much a part of Shabbas when she would read. It was like little parables and little stories around the stories, to simplify it so it was understandable to... to women who didn't study Talmud.

Q. Right.

A. Yea, that was the Bible, with all the stories of the Bible.

Q. So you would stay at home and read...

A. Yea, well I didn't read it. No, my mother did. I could read library books...

Q. Oh, you weren't together on this?

A. No, no.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. My mother. I could hear her. She was sitting reading it out loud. I could hear while I would read my library books.

Q. Oh, I see.

A. Right. And then I was involved in Young Judea and... and such things and friends.

Q. Right.

A. The Nusbaum girls, my cousins.
Q. My...my impression of this then is that the religious element of this was really quite small. I mean, Friday evening came along...

A. Oh, it was...well, we had...we had very lovely Friday evening. Around the table we sang mirot, always, every Friday in the evening. You know what mirot is? They're special songs that we sing on Shabbat.

Q. Right.

A. Special melodies. You hear 'em all over the world, you hear the same melodies. The same melodies we heard in Israel. Yea, no matter where Jews have gone. You...you pass by on a Friday night a window and the strangest part of the world and you can hear the same melodies that you can hear in Brooklyn or Williamsburg. Because these are traditional Friday night and Saturday...some are for Friday night and some are for used for Saturday. And there are songs for the third meal on Saturday, you know, in the afternoon there's a third meal?

Q. Right.

A. Some special singing for that, too. So that was lovely. We enjoyed that. Then there was the relaxed...sat around, talked. I mean they didn't dash off to shul immediately. It was...it was a time when the family were all together, no one was hectic, no one was in a hurry to go to work or go to business or go to schools. So it was very pleasant. I have very pleasant feelings about...yea...

Q. Well, that's...

A. I feel deprived now. I didn't feel deprived then.

Q. OK. That's what I wanted to establish.

A. Yes. I didn't feel that I was missing anything then. But, I...I know it now 'cause I see the way the children...for instance, of Rabbi Cohen or others...there are many others, I was just citing Rabbi Cohen, but
A. (Continued) there are others that right here in the community that I know very well whose children have a very fine Jewish background. And they are... these are stalwarts. They're strong in their Jewishness. They won't falter.

Q. When... when you went to shul, the men were downstairs and the women were...?
A. Yes, and the women were in the balcony. Oh, sure.

Q. Now, that you took for granted, too, I suppose?
A. Sure, right. We still looked over the balcony and saw everything that was going on.

Q. Right.
A. Yea. For us kids it was great.

Q. Now that's changed over... over the years?
A. Yes, but... 

Q. There's an effort to... 
A. Yes, but there... there... St. Regis Drive, Beth Haknesses Hachodosh, the Nusbaum Shul, they still have a balcony.

Q. I see.
A. Oh, yes.

Q. Now I know that I talked with some people about the Leopold Street Shul.
A. Uh-huh. They had a balcony.

Q. They had a balcony.
A. Oh, I remember.

Q. They also had efforts to... 
A. Later.

Q. Yes.
A. Yea, yea.

Q. That's right.
A. Yea, yea. Almost all the shuls with the exception of the Nusbaum Shul. They have never, never, never deviated. But all the others have made efforts to have mixed seatings.

Q. That's right.

A. Or put the women on one side and the men on the other side or the women in the back or this and that. As... as everything watered down, as... as our Jewishness watered down.

Q. Do you think that that really is because of the watering down...

A. I think so

Q. ... of Judaism?

A. I think so. ... I think so.

Q. So, you kind of like that idea?

A. I like it now. I like it now 'cause I... I... I see the value... I see the merit in it.

Q. What...

A. I... I'll explain to you.

Q. That would be interesting because...

A. My husband even can give it to you even better. My husband's very articulate about this, and I've heard him expose it to many people because they... this... this is the... so many people are bugged on it. I really... I mean...

Q. That's right.

A. They're just plain bugged on it.

Q. That's what I'm hearing.

A. Yes, that's what you hear.

Q. Right.

A. And I'm sure you do, and it's prevalent.

Q. Yea.
A. It's prevalent.

Q. The feeling today...  

A. Unfortunately...

Q. Women's liberation and...

A. Right, right, right, right, yea.

Q. Sort of thing...

A. Yes. We come to shul, we come to pray, right. And when we come to pray we shouldn't be distracted. And I don't care what anybody tells me to prove otherwise, there is distraction when men and women sit together. I don't care what they say. I'm a women's libber in the sense myself. Since women's lib and in a remote sort of way I'm a little emancipated, too, because I'm not immune to what goes around me. I'm not an old fogy. And I assert my independence a little better now than I used to. But it... it's a little joke between my husband and I. But it's just more of a joke than anything. But, all right. I mean I'm aware of the merits and whatever there is in women's lib, and a lot of it I think is really crazy, but that's beside the point. We're not discussing women's lib. But, it's in the air, liberation, liberation from... from fanaticism. Liberation from being an old fogy, and if we live together we can pray together, and all these things. But I really believe this, truly, and my husband very emphatically. And my husband's a much more worldly person than I am. That when you come to synagogue to pray, to temple, you come to pray. If you really genuinely want to pray, concentrate on your prayers, and really know what you're saying... many people don't know what they're saying, they say the prayers, but it's note, they say them. But if you really... if you attend the synagogue because you need to pray and you want to pray, and this is where you pour heart out, that it is a distraction when it... it... I know it's
A. (Continued)  distraction. Even now I... where we pray the men and
women are separate. We belong to Beth Joseph Center, and they're separated.
But when a woman... I have to confess that when a woman comes in who is
very elegant, very well dressed, I'm distracted. OK. It's a woman. Now when
... when men and women are sitting together there's more distraction. It...
it's... it's human. And it is human. I mean, we are all human, Raphael and
all the way down the line.

Q. I think we can establish that.

A. That's right. That's right. And if we really and genuinely and sincerely
want to come to pray there should be no distraction. And that is the basis
of the separation. Now they make fun of it, they laugh at us about it, they
make jokes about it. Whom are they ridiculing? They're ridiculing their own
selves really, that's the way I feel about it.

Q. I understand. Some people would say, however, that there are certain things
we can overcome.

A. Yes.

Q. And this is one of them.

A. I'd like to see the people overcome their... their basic instincts.

Q. Right.

A. I would like to overcome some of my basic instincts, believe me, I would. I'm
aware of my shortcomings and my failures, but they're so instinctive they
come out of me before my reason takes over. And I don't know how true this
is, I only speak for myself. But we're all human and... and we want to
overcome these things, but do we? Do we really?

Q. And so you're saying that because of some things we cannot... let's establish
some kind of decorum here so that we can.

A. That's right. That's right. And in our synagogue there is a lot of decorum.
A. (Continued) I want to bring something out here. I don't know if it's beside the point, but I do want to put it on the record. Beth Joseph Center we had the women sitting on one side and the men sitting on the other side for years and years and years. Last year we put in what's called a mehitza. I don't know if you heard about it, but it made a lot of noise in the community.

Q. No, I haven't heard about it.

A. All right. What did we do? We put a curtain on a rod, a very... not just an ordinary... it was done by an interior decorator. It was tasteful. It was in good taste and it was... it was not offensive in any possible way. But it was done because one of these young men, I mentioned two young men to you who NCSY influenced and who've become very, very religious. Now one of them is now a graduate rabbi. We needed a rabbi for the summer because Rabbi Chiger gets a summer vacation, and we needed someone to take over. In previous years there were enough laymen in the synagogue who could take over his functions of reading from the Torah. You know, you must have a reader.

Q. Yea.

A. Have someone who does the praying. And there are certain functions that not everybody's educated enough to do.

Q. Right.

A. So there were two or three that could take those duties over, but they moved away. And one of them went away to college, and a few of them moved away.
Q. This is Dennis Klein talking with Ruth Lebovics. Tape No. 1, Side B. If you would go ahead now.

A. Yes. I want to make this not too late because I want to come to the point in relation to this separation and the difference it makes because I had a real observation there, and I wasn't the only one who observed it. I mean some others corroborated my conclusions in respect to this. It showed out... it showed on Yom Kippur. This is what I want to say. I'll go back. I wanted... we engaged him but he would come only under the condition that there would be what's called a mehitzha, a separation between the men and the women. Otherwise he wouldn't... he wouldn't come anymore for services. His parents came. When he'd come to visit his parents he'd go to another synagogue and it hurt them very badly. Since he became a rabbi and since he became inculcated with real Orthodoxy he wouldn't pray in a shul where there wasn't this separation. OK. So in order to get his services we put this up because he was a very desireable candidate. He was capable. He was able, a very personable, very articulate. He'd give lovely sermons, he davads, he's a good cantor. And he... he had everything, And he was very, very qualified. And he was the son of a member, and everybody wanted him badly. And his fee was only about $100... I mean it was the minimal fee for the summer. And very desireable. So a small nucleus of people got together and gave the money because they knew they could never get this out of the treasury because people were vehemently against it.

Q. Why against...?

A. Against putting this up.
Q. I see.
A. Putting up this was old-fashioned.
Q. So you were really kind of creating some...
A. Well, not ripples... we...
Q. Tension.
A. We were creating ripples, not just my husband and I. There were others. I mean we could never, never do it alone. There were... there were a handful of supporters who came across with the money. I mean this thing came to about seven or eight hundred dollars. And some of it was anonymous, and one of it came from someone who couldn't care less, but he did it out of respect, and he said it. Now that was more gratifying than any of the others that gave $100 and what. He sent it in, he says don't use my name because the other ones would have made mud out of it. But, he did it as a matter of respect and that was very gratifying. Very gratifying. And... and it was put up. But it created more than a few ripples. Two people resigned. It was... you'd think that the... the world caved in. And this is typical of almost the United States, the sentiment is... there... there is such intense feeling either way. And why is this? This is because as I said there shouldn't be distraction, that's the basic reason for it. And people should pray fervently and not be distracted. Now on Yom Kippur the services are very lengthy. Have you... are you familiar?
Q. Yea, yea.
A. Familiar to you?
Q. Yes, long, very long.
A. You sit all day and you're fasting and all. And the afternoon services there's a part of the services which is very... all the previous years was quite unintelligible to me, but it's in the prayerbook and you go along with it.
A. (Continued) It's the part where the kohanim, those who are kohanim...

Q. Yea.

A. The... the... well, if you go to temple I don't know if they have that part of the services, but they... it's a special service that they perform as it was performed in the time of the temple of King Solomon. They prostrate themselves and they say certain prayers. They get up, they prostrate again, and they recall the service that was in the temple when... when the temple existed in Jerusalem. It's a lengthy service and usually it's noisy because people don't understand it too well. Well this time this young man, who was assisting the rabbi... see, the rabbi was performing the services, he was assisting him. He got up and he explained it. And each time he told them what they were to say, and he told them read it in the English, you know, the prayerbook's in Hebrew and English. So they could understand. And he conducted with so much dignity, through this whole half-hour of this particular portion of the services, nobody got up and left their seat, the first time. There was no whispering. There was no visiting. You could have heard a pin drop in all the time. In previous Yom Kippurs people crossed the... because there was no barrier, the men came over to the women, wished them a Happy New Year and kissed them; the women go over to the men and kiss them, wish them Happy New Year. They bring their babies to see each other. They... they were visiting back and forth. There was no decorum, especially in that part of the service which is lengthy and not too understandable.

With this mahitzha that we had there, and his explaining the services, nobody, but not one single person got up. Nobody visited. And there was no whispering. There was no... dignified decorum. It was late in the afternoon, everybody was tired and headachey and whatever. It was the most respectful Yom Kippur that I've witnessed in all my life, and I've gone to
A. (Continued) I shul every year and I'm 73 years old. And I remarked that I noticed it. It struck me, and it struck other people, too. And they said, see? It's the mahutzha there, there's your separation. People know they're here for a reason, to pray, no visiting, no whispering, no walking around, no getting up, no this or that. There's the barrier there. And... and I think that some non-believers in this were at least grudgingly... grudgingly convinced. Because it's an emotional... it's a... a lot of it is emotion. It's real emotion.

Q. Boy, I'll bet that could have caused very large ripples at that point?

A. It did. It did. It did.

Q. Yea.

A. It did. My husband took a lot of flack, but he took it. He took it. He took it and he gave back. And I think he educated a few people. He educated me, too. And I was always for it, but I didn't understand it as deeply as he does. And he was... believed in it so hard, and he convinced and he worked at it, and it's remained. It came to a head. It came to a vote, and it came to what you would call a... a confrontation. And it prevailed, of course with the help of the rabbi.

Q. Yea.

A. Respect for the rabbi, too. Matter of respect. But it came to confrontation. And it prevailed, and nobody is unhappy about it now, nobody. Those who said they're not coming anymore to services, they're all back. They're coming. They're there. And it's not an eyesore, I assure you.

Q. Yea.

A. A detractor. But what I'm... what I'm meaning to bring out by the whole thing is that it is basic, and people can't see it that way. They just can't see it. They feel it's old-fashioned. It isn't. If they really are
A. (Continued) reverent about coming to synagogue. There isn't very much reverence anymore. It's fashionable. Your friends belong, you have to belong. It's a thing to do, and of course Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur a Jew has to go to shul and this and that. But, if they really feel reverent about coming to shul and all they really want to pay attention to prayers they're saying, they really want to commune with G-d, there should be no distraction, and there isn't. And that's all there is to it. It isn't a matter of being old-fashioned or being . . .

Q. Conservative or something?

A. Or that's . . . or Reformed or what?

Q. Yea.

A. That's right.

Q. You mentioned that this is taking place in the Beth Joseph Center.

A. Right, yea.

Q. This is distinct from the . . . the Nusbaum. . .

A. The Nusbaum, there's no problem there, it's there all the time. The separation is there all the time.

Q. If you feel that strongly about it, why didn't you stay with the Nusbaum?

A. We don't live in that neighborhood. We would definitely stay with it. My . . . we are members of both, we pay dues to the Nusbaum shul, we pay dues to Beth Joseph. I'm a member of the Sisterhood of Beth Joseph and I'm a member of the Sisterhood. . . so my husband and I both give our financial support. . . And my husband is on the Board of Trustees at the Nusbaum. . . we go to their meetings, but he doesn't. . . he's not as active with them as he is at Beth Joseph. At Beth Joseph right now he's the president, all right. But, even before he was the president he was just as active then as he is now. I mean, he. . . he's always been active. . . But, he's very concerned about the
A. (Continued) Nusbaum Shul. And we do pay our dues there, both he and I. And... and... and we go... he goes to the meetings, I don't. I mean it's a little bit too much for me, but if we lived there, surely. But we... we have our own problems with not being able to move; we would move, but we have to remain where we are for... for family reasons.

Q. Yea.

A. And so that moving would be out of the... but we were to move we would most surely go there 'cause our friends are there; although we have friends here, too.

Q. So that means that on the holidays you can't drive?

A. Oh, no by no means at all.

Q. Right.

A. No, no. We never drive on Saturday or the holidays.

Q. Right.

A. No, no.

Q. So you've maintained your level of observance from... from youth?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. To the present day?

A. Oh, yes. We have. My husband... my husband's family... my husband has some of his family who are even more observant, if we can say that, than he is.

Q. Yea.

A. And he is... their... and they have very fine, very fine children. No... no generation gap there either; no generation gap. He has a niece there with eight children, absolutely no generation gap. Children are... they're fine children and they... they're... they go along with the parents; no problem there that so many Jewish parents have now.
Q. Yea.
A. Which is unfortunately very prevalent.
Q. Was. . . was Yiddish spoken in your home?
A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. My parents spoke English, too; but in the home we always spoke Yiddish.
Q. Yiddish was the only language used?
A. Yes.
Q. As far as you can. . .
A. Yea, yea. No. . . yea, that's right, the only. . . the only language. Yiddish and English, yes.
Q. English, too?
A. English, too. Oh, yes, yea.
Q. I see. But, you learned. . . well, I was assuming you learned the English in the home as part of your growing up. I mean. . .
A. Yes. Well, school, school, sure.
Q. They did have programs at the schools, the No. 9 School, to . . . to teach English. Especially to . . . to older people.
A. That's where my brothers learned. My brothers. . .
Q. I see.
A. All my older brothers, 'cause when they came from Europe they didn't know any English.
Q. OK.
A. And they all speak English well. They read the newspaper, and they didn't go to high school; but they. . . they're pretty. . . my brother Hyman went to high school. He. . . he was the only one who had high school education.
Q. Right.
A. He was graduated from high school, and he was . . . had a lot of distinction
A. (Continued) there. He was editor of the school paper, on the debating
team and what... he was very outstanding in high school.

Q. Yea.

A. But, my other brothers didn't go to high school. They got their English
education at No. 9 School and they all...

Q. That's a different situation for you and your brothers. You learned it because
you were born here in Rochester...

A. Yes.

Q. ... you grew up with it.

A. Yes, yea.

Q. You had both languages.

A. Yea.

Q. Do you command Yiddish as well as your command of English, I would assume?

A. Well, not as well because... I... I speak it very well, and I understand
it very well when I hear it. But, unfortunately, I don't read the Yiddish
newspaper. My husband holds it against me 'cause we... it does come in the
mail. We get it from New York.

Q. From New York.

A. My husband is an avid reader; he can't read anything else. He reads in
Hebrew and he reads in Yiddish and he reads in English. And he devours
everything that comes to our house and that comes to all his friends. His
friends are always piling stuff on him. Here, read this; read that, because
they like to talk with him about it afterwards.

Right.

So he's an avid reader. But, he holds it against me that I don't make
enough to read the Yiddish paper because there's a lot in there that
we can't get elsewhere.
A. Of real value, not only news but literary and news from Israel. Things that you even don't see anywhere else, it's in the Yiddish press. And occasionally he interrupts my reading to read it to me and I've got to listen, 'cause he feels this is important and you've gotta listen. So he reads it to me in Yiddish. But he holds it against me that I don't make the effort. It comes hard to me to read in Yiddish. It goes very slowly, and I don't have that patience.

Q. Yea.

A. I... I'm a rapid reader, and if I can read fast, fine, but if I can't read fast I don't have that much patience.

Q. So, what you're saying is that your exposure to Yiddish has always been to the vowels and to the ears and not through the...

A. Yea, yea... not through reading.

Q. ... reading process?

A. No, but my husband has it all the way.

Q. OK. Was there a Yiddish press in Rochester at one point?

A. I can't remember but there was a Yiddish library. I remember it very well. I remember my mother, Alayshon, taking me there. It was on... it was not far from the JY... the old... the old JY. Not the one that was recently sold...

Q. On Andrews, yea.

A. ... but the old JY. That... I have very good memories of that old JY, always spent some very happy years...

Q. Well, tell me about that if you could...

A. Yes, I would like to tell you. I have in my mind 'cause I was thinking what am I gonna talk about except what you ask me? But I do want to speak about the JY 'cause...
Q. Good.

A. It was a very large part of our lives.

Q. This is the one on Franklin Street?

A. Franklin Street, the old... the very first one. It was the very first one. It was very much a part of my... our lives. We joined the women there... they had a women's branch like, all right, we were members. That entitled us to whatever we wanted to have there. There was gym, there was this, there was that. I was interested in the literary class. We had a very fine literary class, and it was very large attendance. Oh, I don't know, sometimes there was maybe 30 people there. We met every Monday night. And it was a very fine class. It did a lot for me, and for all of us. And not just... it wasn't like high school, it was different. It was better. And we had... there was a professor... I can't think what they call him again... Shaddy... we for... Professor Shad. He was expelled from the University of Rochester because he was too radical for those days. He was a Socialist and a radical.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yea, he was expelled. Professor Shad. Some of the old-timers may still remember him. Oh, he's long since passed away because he was an older man when we were young. He led this group, very fine instructor. He at that time was no longer associated with the University of Rochester. And I guess he had other connections. Well after he passed on there was another teacher. I don't remember him as well as I remember Professor Shad, but this class did a great deal for us. We went there I don't know how long, five or ten years. Maybe up to the... I can't remember how long I attended. But it wasn't a year or two, I know. And it developed socially, too. I mean, it was a social group. He had a farm, he invited us to his farm for picnics...
A. (Continued) every summer. And there were married people in this group, too, with small children. And there were young people like myself and my friends. And we... we went every Monday night, rain or shine. And this was a wonderful thing that they had. All right, that was one thing in the JY. Then... then they had every winter they had a series of lectures that was free to the public, and you didn't have to be a member. And they brought all kinds of speakers. There was Maurice Samuels. You heard of Maurice Samuels?

Q. I haven't.

A. No, but I'm sure Rabbi Karp would know 'cause he was a Zionist orator. He was a catalyst. He was really a very, very outstanding brilliant man. And some of his books are worth reading. He's written any number of them. Maurice Samuels, Rabbi Hillel Silver, Steven Weiss. There was... every winter they'd bring them.

Q. Steven Weiss came to...

A. Rochester, the JY. I remember him speaking. I even remember what he did once.

Q. That's something.

A. Well, I'll come back to that, it was very... it was very wonderful, very warm. And there was also Trudy Rice Rozmarin, I think she's still living. She's a pretty old lady. She was a brilliant lecturer. There were others...

Q. Oh, I know her name, yes.

A. Trudy Rice Rozmarin. Every winter...

Q. She's written a lot about psychoanalysis.

A. Yes, she's a brilliant woman. And she'd not only give a lecture, but there was always a discussion period afterwards and the people were very alert to what was going on. And discussions were sometimes even more weighty than the lecture.
Q. Is she still alive?
A. She's alive. I saw her name in... in... somewhere in the Jewish press, wherever it was.

Q. She wrote something about Freud and the Moses and monotheism.
A. Yes, she has a very, very analytical mind; brilliant woman. So she'd come every winter. Every winter they'd bring these same people, and you'd compare 'em from the winter before. And these lectures were fabulous.

Q. That's something.
A. They... they gave you a lot of...

Q. Your memories of this are sharp.
A. Well, because they meant so much to me. They meant so much to me. These were my formative years. We were... we were growing up and I went with my friends. We wouldn't miss it no matter how the weather was.

Q. Was it during the war, after the war?
A. Well, it had to be before I left for Israel. And we were married in 1933. It had to be between 1920 and 1933.

Q. So in the twenties.
A. 1920... or it could have even been while I was still in high school. But, I... I'm not sure. I think it was after I was out of high school in 1921. So it must have been between then and 1933. 1933, see, we left and went to Israel. So, it had to be in those years. And there was... there were others, others. And they'd bring practically the same people every year. Steven Weiss I remember once when he was speaking he was on the platform, and he wanted to warm up to his audience so... and there were other people on the platform, dignitaries. And well, he says, you want me to sit up there, he says, I'm going down where the important people are. And I got off the platform and stood down on the floor and talked to the audience, yea.
Q. Yea, he... now when did he come? Do you know when he came?
A. The date?
Q. A year? Or would that be asking too much?
A. I couldn't possibly... I couldn't possibly...
Q. But you remember him...?
A. Distinctly. I remember him... He... he just turned you inside out. He was a fabulous speaker, very warm, Zionist speaker. He... he was tremendous. He really stirred you. You came home and you were stirred. You were stirred for days. He did that to you, Rabbi Hillel Silver did that to you. They... you felt stirred. You felt elevated and lifted for days afterwards. He was an extraordinary speaker. And not once, many times. All these people came to the old JY. They'd have these lectures. Not every week or every month, but strung out over the winter. And Maurice Samuels he was a big hit, they packed the place. They'd pack it. You couldn't... you couldn't get a... a pin whenever these speakers came. And they were very meaningful.
Q. You mentioned the Yiddish library. That was...
A. Yes, that was... they had only Yiddish books. They had a librarian. People drew books. I never did, but I used to go there with my mother, Alayshon, who was active in Jewish National Fund. And she'd... their meetings were held there. They'd give them meeting rooms there. And so when she'd go to the meetings I was a little girl and my brothers were all grown up, and she couldn't leave me at home, no babysitters or what. She'd take me with her to the meetings. So I'd go there. So I'd roam around and look at the books and all, but I never read the books, but I'd sit there and feel good among a lot of grown-ups. I got attention and so I remember going there. It was pretty comprehensive library. And when it closed I don't know what they did with those books.
Q. You don't know?
A. I don't know.
Q. I'm wondering myself.
A. I... I don't know. There were a great many Yiddish books. So many things went down.
Q. Yea. What about Yiddish theatre? Did that...
A. No, they'd bring Yiddish movies here.
Q. Yiddish movies?
A. I don't know of any Yiddish groups who... wait a minute... there... I'll tell you who could... unfortunately he's gone now... Newman... he was a real Yiddishist. There are some people in this community who were Yiddishists. See, we weren't. We were more... the Yiddishists were more in the radical move... of shall I say Socialists. We were Mizrachis. We were always Mizrachi. We were Zionists, religious Zionists. Mizrachi is religious Zionism. Our family always... and we are to this day. The Yiddishists were more Zionists in like Poale Zion, Shulmtezion. The left, they were the left. We are the right and they are the left. And they... they had an active group on Buchan Park. They... what did they call it? That was their clubhouse, Buchan Park. That... some people here in this community...
Manuel Hoffman. Did you interview him?
Q. Oh, yes.
A. Oh, well then he... he should have... I'm sure he gave you that.
Q. Good. Just before you left for Israel they... they... the JY on Andrews Street?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Do you recall what kind of an impact that made on it had...
A. We left in 1933. The impact I wouldn't know until we returned because I... I don't remember the new JY before I was... or after I was married because I left. When was the new JY...?

Q. I think it was started... I think they started building it in about 18... excuse me, I mean about 1928 or '29.

A. Well, you see then I... you see and I was getting ready to be married.

Q. Right. But it really wasn't completed until 1935 and...

A. Yea.

Q. And that was already after...

A. Yes, yea. I knew it when we came back. And to me it was, oh, fabulous, just absolutely fabulous because it was a very big change from the...

Q. I'll say, yea.

A. Yea.

Q. The old JY was quite small.

A. Quite small, but it... every inch of space was used very, very judiciously. It was... wherever you turned there was activity. There were all kinds of activities. Lots of sports, they had a swimming pool, they had a gymnasium. The gymnasium was also the auditorium.

Q. I didn't know they had a swimming pool at the old JY.

A. They did. They did. I never used it but it was there. It was there. They had charge of a swimming pool way down somewhere beyond the... yea... we could smell this steam and what... in the auditorium. And the auditorium where all these lectures were held was the gymnasium. It was the gymnasium. There were the basketballs there...

Q. Oh, yea.

A. All there. Took the seats away and they had basketball; put the seats back and you had your Trudy Rice Rozmarn lecture.
Q. Oh, yea.
A. I mean this was all purpose. They did a lot... they... lot of social events, too. Parties and what... it was very, very meaningful to our... in our life. I don't know what to compare it to. And then Young Judea, I'd like to tell you about Young Judea.
Q. Yes, I'd like to ask you about that.
A. Yea, very... now see... how long can you stay?
Q. Well, I can stay, but what about yourself?
A. Yea... well, I can stay until about, say, quarter after four. I have to pick up my son at Hochstein School at four-thirty.
Q. All right. Whenever.
A. Yea. But, I... I could stay on if not for...
Q. Well, we can always meet again, too.
A. Well, if you... if you wish...
Q. Well, there's some questions here to pursue.
A. Yes. If... if you wish.
Q. Well, tell me when...
A. Young Judea, yea. Well, we still have time. It's only quarter to four.
Q. Right.
A. Young Judea was very meaningful to me, very meaningful. Not only for the friendships, I mean, that friendship was only secondary. They... I... I shouldn't even say not only for the friendship. That really was secondary. But it was meaningful to me because there was my Zionism... I had it in the home, but there was really my Zionism and it came in the early... my young years, early years. I can't remember how young I was when I joined. I might have been 12 or 13 years old. I was pretty young, wasn't I my friends. And the groups were girls groups and there were boys groups and there were many
A. (Continued) groups. There were a great many groups. We all had Hebrew names. I don't remember 'em anymore. The Hadima group and the this group and that group. Each group had a name. And we had a leader. And at every important holiday like Succot, Purim, Chanukkah and all, all the groups would get together at the JY and have, I don't know what you would call it, a jamboree or celebration or what. Then it was something. Singing and dancing and competitive and debating and you name it. It was wonderful. And it was lots and lots of fun. And I remember then that Philip Bernstein stood out then as a young... or he was a leader or he was in one of the Young Judea groups. Now I don't remember if he was a leader of a group or a member of a group. But I remember even then... 'cause he's a contemporary of mine.

Q. Right.

A. I don't know whether he's a little younger or older than I, but we're more or less perhaps the same age group, maybe a year or two. But I remember then that he stood out. I remember him making speeches and asserting himself. And the leadership. I remember then. I've always remembered that of him whenever...

Q. He had that kind of appeal?

A. When he was a youngster. We were all adolescents then.

Q. Yea, that's right.

A. Yea. Yea.

Q. That's right. He would be in his twenties himself.

A. At that time.

Q. That's just about right?

A. Yea.

Q. Would you say that?
A. Yes, well he's in his seventies now isn't he?
Q. Yea, yea.
A. He's retired.
Q. Yea, that was just about right.
A. He's in his seventies. Yea, well he might possibly... he wasn't... he wasn't in the... the same class as I was in high school. But he might be a year or two older.
Q. Right.
A. Perhaps.
Q. Now, what was his position...?
A. In the Young Judea?
Q. ... in the Young...?
A. That's what I was saying. I can't remember if he was a leader or if he was just a member. But he was outstanding. He always... he was always took the platform. He was always making speeches.
Q. Was he at the time studying for the rabbinate, or was he...?
A. I don't think so because we were all adolescents then.
Q. That's right. That's right.
A. I hardly think so. He might have been in high school then.
Q. I see.
A. 'Cause... 'cause that's where I was then, in high school.
Q. So this is really before...?
A. He went away to study then that was over. Young Judea was young, really young people.
Q. I see.
A. Later I became a leader of a group.
Q. Right.
A. When I became old... our group sort of dissolved, some of the girls got married young. I didn't marry so young. Some of them married very young, some of them moved away to other cities and what. So our group more or less after a period of time dissolved. So I was asked to lead a group of younger girls, which I did.

Q. I see.

A. What capacity did you have?

Q. Just sort of be a leader and... I didn't teach them anything. Just... there was an older person sort of like chaperoned them or keep 'em together. I really was one of them.

Q. Now the group itself wasn't very large?

A. No, no there might have been about ten girls or so.

Q. Right.

A. And we'd read Zionist books, discuss things. It wasn't terribly serious, but it was Young Judea.

Q. Was Elizabeth Schwartz a part of that?

A. Yea, I think so. I remember Elizabeth Schwartz from high school. She was at East High School when I was there. And if I remember, I can't remember if she was in one of my classes or not. But she and I were contemporary in East High School. And she remembers it, so do I.

Q. Yea. Well, I talked with her and she...

A. You've spoken with her, yes. Yes, we were contemporaries in East High School at the same time. And I can't remember if we... it was so long ago, if we were in the same class or what, but when I... I hadn't seen her for a great many years and when not too long ago she and I both recog... recalled the long,
Q. I'll bet.
A. Yea.
Q. You should have put that on tape.
A. Yea.
Q. Yea.
A. Yea.
Q. The Young Judea as you said was Zionist, but this was Mizrachi. This was a ...
A. No, no it wasn't Mizrachi. It was just simply... it was what you call general Zionism.
Q. General Zionism.
A. It wasn't... we didn't have a young Mizrachi group then as we do now, no.
No, we didn't have Mizrachi for young people. My parents, they had... they had senior Mizrachi. Then they had later... now they have several Mizrachi groups in the city, the women... well there's two branches of ladies Mizrachi.
And when Mr. Hollander... probably you've heard him mentioned in many of your tapes... When he was alive he was the real backbone of Mizrachi here. Very, very active. They had an active Mizrachi but so many of their people have died... Mr. Hollander, Mr. Becker, there were others. Spreen... oh, there were others. Any number of my brothers also. All of these...
Q. So these were general Zionists?
A. General... no, no. Mizrachi... Mizrachi, no.
Q. Yes. I mean the Young Judea was.
A. Young Judea was general Zionist.
Q. Now did that interfere with your own Mizrachi inclinations?
A. No, no. It didn't interfere with that, no. It didn't interfere at all. It was very meaningful to me. And it was very pleasureful. And there were friendships. And there was Zionist feeling. And then there were Zionist
A. (Continued) lectures. I remember and I don't think this is connected in any way with. . . with Young Judea. But, I remember when Jabotinsky came to Rochester. He was a speaker. I heard him. I was a very young girl. I could have maybe been ten or twelve years old. And I was very young but I was so impressed. He spoke in Convention Hall, you know where that is now? Where that armory on Clinton Avenue?

Q. Oh, yea.

A. That big building. That was then called Convention Hall. It had biggest. . . it was the biggest hall in the city, the biggest capacity. He came and it was filled to the rafters. And he lifted people out. He was very emotional. I remember. . . I don't remember what he said, but surely it was a very fiery Zionist. . .

Q. I bet, yea.

A. My brothers. . . I remember one of my brothers took me. But I remember hearing him and I remember myself that this is a very special occasion. I remember feeling that this is very special. And also my father, Alayshon and I went to hear Chaim Weitzman who spoke at the Lyceum Theatre. The Lyceum Theatre is where Forman's is now. That came down that building.

Q. Oh.

A. Yea. There was a Lyceum Theatre. He spoke there. And he was a very cool and rational speaker.

Q. Right.

A. Very impressive and he appealed to your reason, no emotion. All reason. Very impressive. My father was very impressed. And he never went to speeches or lectures. This was out of his. . . but he wanted Chaim Weitzman. He wanted to come and. . . he felt that this. . . he wanted to honor him by his presence.

Q. This is still the twenties? Still in the twenties?
A. Yea sure. Or it was... might even before that. I was in high school.
Q. And they all came to Rochester? These are very big names.
A. Yes.
Q. For Zionist purposes?
A. Yes. To rally. And also Shamaryahu Levine. He was in a class all by himself. He was the orator of the Zionist movement, I think in the whole Zionist movement there was no one like him.
Q. Right.
A. He took people right out of themselves, brilliant, fiery orator. Very handsome man. And he spoke in Yiddish so if you understood Yiddish and you could follow him. He was very, very moving. Very... He did a great deal for stirring up people to Zionism... to Zionism. Schmaryahu Levine. And I also heard Shifkin, he was here with his daughter. He came for a Zionist convention. And I also heard Chaim Nachman Bialik at a Zionist convention in Buffalo. This was already shortly before I was married, maybe a few... only a few years before I was married. A Zionist convention in Buffalo and I went to the convention. And he spoke in Hebrew. We couldn't understand him, but it was... you felt his presence by just being... because you knew he was a very... very great poet and...
Q. Now a question I have to raise is about was Zionism represented at this period? This was definitely pro-Palestine. It was for the land of... of Zion.
A. Everything was for the land. For the Mizrachi it was a fulfillment of prophecy, which it is to us now, too. Fulfillment of G-d's promise to the Jewish people. Not just political, religious.
Q. Religious. But my question is isn't it primarily religious? Which is to say that many Orthodox Jews don't believe that Israel today, even today...
A. Right, yea.
Q. ...is a fulfillment.
A. Yea.
Q. That is to say there isn't...
A. It isn't religious enough.
Q. Yea.
A. Yes, well they, you see, we...we hope for it, and we strive for it but we feel one step at a time.
Q. Yea.
A. We don't feel this is not a fulfillment. We do feel this is a fulfillment. My father was a very ardent Zionist and when the State of Israel was created in 1945?
Q. '48.
A. '48. I think my father was still...he said he's so happy that he lived to see the day. I mean to him it was a very great day.
Q. So there was a fulfillment there?
A. For him. He was a very ardent Zionist. And he fostered in us...and when we pray we always say "next year in Jerusalem." I mean it's meaningful to us.
Q. Yea.
A. It isn't just a...
Q. A saying.
A. Yea. But there are, as you say, there are many Orthodox Jews who feel that it isn't, we haven't reached that perfection. But we are not of that...they are way over to the right, yea.
Q. From what you're saying there was a great deal of Zionist activity, Zionist discussion. ...?
A. In the city here? Oh, yes. There was. There were all kinds of groups. There were all kinds of rallies. There were all kinds of fundraising campaigns. You see, it wasn't . . . there wasn't the UJA then, you know. People gave. There were. . . My mother, Alayshon, was an old lady and was sickly. She had her route to collect the Jewish National Fund boxes. And to her that was a very important part of her life. She was active and my mother was a very active woman organizationally. And she raised a large family and not with any of the conveniences that modern women have now. And not with any wealth either. I mean we were just only an average . . . but she managed to go to meetings. Not only Jewish National Fund, collecting boxes, but they had a society. They called the Homazion Society, salvation of Zion society. And they raised money, they had package parties and they had picnics. And they raised money and they took all their money and sent it to institutions in Israel. That was their project, you see? And they schmed and they had raffles and they sold tickets, and they sold picnics and they sold little ribbons. And you name it, flower day and tag day and they were very active. All the other ladies, older ladies. These are all older ladies. Some of them didn't speak English very well, but there their feeling for Zionism was. . . was. . . was amazing, really. And they. . . they raised a lot of money, and all that money went directly to institutions like in the Old City of Jerusalem. Orphans' homes, old age homes. They had a list of institutions. Homazion. And I remember Mr. Hollander, his wife, she was one of the. . . later when some of the older ladies were already gone, she took over and she was the president of this Homazion Society. And Mrs. Berman, Rabbi Berman's wife.

Q. Right.

A. Rabbisha Berman, she was the Homazion. . . now it's no longer in existence because all these ladies have died out. So the younger women are either
A. (Continued) Hadassah or Pioneer Women or other groups. But this particular group Homazion Society and they met in the Hebrew... in the Yiddish library.

Q. Right.

A. Yea, that was their meeting place. And there were other organizations my mother was very active... There was the Bikahollen Society. That was for sick. See, there was no welfare like there is now. I mean there were no organized... no Social Security...

Q. Right.

A. There was no Social Security. There was no unemployment insurance. There was no security for people who were out of work. And during the Depression years there was tremendous poverty, tremendous poverty. And so there was this Bikahollen Society. They'd come to my mother or they'd come to other women who were in this organization, and they'd tell them the father is sick, the children are sick, there's no money coming in. There's no one to pay the doctor, there's no one to pay for the medicine. That was the situation. And there really was a lot. And there was an organized charity here. It was called the Associated Hebrew Charities. There was two. There was one for the Orthodox community and there was one for the German. You probably probably have this by now in the background... And the people had to come to the office and apply for help. And help was forthcoming, but it was minimal and it was degrading, both. And it was minimal because there wasn't that much money. I mean they... they'd have... they'd have fundraising affairs. They'd raise the money through fundraising affairs, but they had only that much. So they couldn't meet the needs. So, in the Bikahollen Society the ladies would do... It was certified someone was sick and there was no income, so, paying for the medicine, pay the doctors, get them
A. (Continued) food. And it was tried... always tried to do it quietly, no fanfare so the people won't be embarrassed. It was dealt through a third party. It was always done so no one would be embarrassed, no one would be humiliated. Sometimes clothes, sometimes money, sometimes food or medicine, or they could get them services of a doctor free. Or if they couldn't they would pay the doctor, whatever. And there were a group of women, my mother included, and people were helped that way during the Depression. It was very... I remember another project that my mother, Alayshon, had during the Depression. There were... a period where it was very bad, most of the people in the clothing industry were out of work. And there... there just... some of these people were in very great distress, and a neighbor would come and whisper to my mother this family will have no food for Shabbas. They don't have the money to buy any, there is no food for Shabbas. So my mother heard about it. She got hold of some other women, and they went to their own butcher and they went to their own fish store, they says now look there's people who don't have what to eat, we need a donation. So the fish man would give them... 

Q. You're kidding? He would give them the... 

A. Yes... and after they'd gone to the fish the butcher would give them a big... not just a pound of meat, you know, they... people were generous, they were generous. And the bakery would give. And then my brother Hyman always had very close connections with the Hart stores. The Hart stores were predecessors of the Star Markets, supermarkets. Alfred Hart. 

Q. Oh, yes. Right, Alfred Hart. 

A. I'm sure you heard... Well, he and my brother were very, very close friends 'cause they were both founders of the Children's Home, Home for the Aged, and they were good friends besides. So he went to Mr. Hart and he said now look
A. (Continued) there are people in this community who really don't have anything to eat for Shabbas. So Mr. Hart came across with hundred pound sack of flour, a hundred pound sack of sugar.

Q. Wow.

A. A hundred pound bag of rice.

Q. He would give this much to... of themselves.

A. Rice... people, yea. And where... and we had a big store on Joseph Avenue where my father had his trimming store, you know, his business. There was a large basement there where they kept the merchandise on a shelf. It was a very finished basement, it was part of the store because they kept merchandise there. They emptied out the tables and the shelves and they brought all that groceries down in the basement. And my two older brothers... my brother Hyman gave 'em the bags, paper bags, and they took a scale and they measured out. They weighed up rice, ten pounds of rice... not ten pounds, say five pounds of rice. A pound bag... five pounds of sugar, five pounds of flour, staples, all staples. And a little package of meat, a little package of fish.

Q. The spirit of that is...

A. And on Thursday afternoons they'd leave it... not in the afternoon, in the evening after dark, always after dark on the back porch somewhere where nobody knew who brought it. It was always left there without anybody rapping on the door or ringing the doorbell, it was just left there. So they'd go out and they'd find a package of food for Shabbas. But there... there was... this went on... I don't know, maybe a year or two, when there was a very bad period. When there was no work and there was no things like unemployment insurance, no compensation and the charities couldn't cope. The need was very great and they just didn't have enough in the way of money... and if they
A. (Continued) would give a family say a dollar or two limit, dollar or two was a lot of money, maybe like twenty dollars now or maybe more. And if they'd give 'em a dollar or two, let's say ten kids in the house, people had large families, so what should they pay the rent? Or... or buy some fish for Shabbas or what?

Q. Right.

A. So, it... this was... it was a couple of years this went on like that. And when the need wasn't so great anymore it was discontinued.

Q. And you were... you left for Israel in 1933, so that your recollection of this must have happened before 1933?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, because this all happened before.

Q. Before '33?

A. Oh, yes. Quite some years before '33. This could have been in the early twenties or maybe even...

Q. Before the Depression?

A. Oh, I think this was before the Depression. When was the Depression?

Q. Well I think the Depression really became critical in the early thirties.

A. Well, then this was long before the Depression 'cause there was a lot of poverty. There was a lot of poverty even before the Depression, especially in the clothing industry. Get a slack season... see, it was a seasonal business and there was what they called slack where there was no work, so everybody was laid off. And it wasn't like now. I mean people are not suffering for lack of when they're out of work... I mean they...

Q. Yea, well they're... compensation.

A. Unemployment... unemployment.

Q. Right.

A. And there's unions... unions... all... all these things did not
A. (Continued) exist then. But this is long before the Depression, this is not the...

Q. I see. OK. So we're earlier. But still as you say poverty...

A. I was in high school then, so it could have been even before the 1920's. It could have been 1916, 1917, 1918 something like that 'cause I remember I'd come home from high school and I'd go down to the basement and help measure in the bags and...

Q. Of course we're talking about years now at the height of immigration into... into America. There was a great number of Jews from Eastern Europe...

A. Yes.

Q. ... at this period that we're talking about.

A. Yes.

Q. Who would be coming to America and to the Joseph Avenue area...

A. Right.

Q. ... primarily.

A. And... and some of them... there was a lot of poverty for some of them.

Q. Exactly, some of those...

A. They didn't get jobs right away; they didn't know the language right away. And they had to depend on the kindness of... of strangers. My parents had to depend on the kindness of relatives. There was an aunt and an uncle.

Q. Right.

A. Took care of them, see? And my brothers and all... they really took care of them, and there was a close... it was a blood relative, not everybody has a blood relative, although most people gravitated to landslife. So... so they... they helped each other the best they could. They shared. So they slept on the floor, they all slept on the floor. And they... they made out.
Q. Right.

A. They made out. Some of these people are very prosperous and what. . .

Q. That's something.

A. No. 9 School. . . No. 9 School bred some very outstanding people. Dr. Meyer Jacobstein. Have you heard his name mentioned in any of your interviews?

Q. I don't think I have.

A. Congressman. I must. . . I must recollect. . . this was very outstanding to me. He started at No. 9 School. He became a Professor of Economics here at the University of Rochester. He ran for Congress, he was an outstanding Congressman. He was a Zionist. He was an outstanding man. How I remember high school graduation, East High School graduation, whether it was mine or someone else when he was invited to come and be the guest speaker. And I remember Mr. Wilcox, the principal who himself was a very outstanding man, saying quoting some outstanding educator, I don't remember who he was quoting, but he said that when a school turns out one leader of men it's worth the total output of educating all the people that ever came through that school. I mean that was a thought, not in those words.

Q. Yea.

A. And he was alluding to Dr. Meyer Jacobstein, who was the guest speaker. Now he was a product of No. 9 School. And he came from a very, very ordinary family.

Q. Was he in your class?

A. No, no he was older than me, older than me. I . . . I only remember him as a member of Congress, coming back to Rochester and speaking for Zionist causes. And I remember this allusion that Mr. Wilcox, the principal, made to him when he introduced him as the speaker at East High School, with pride that he was a product of East High School.
A. (Continued) High School. And he went out into the world with such distinction. And he was now honoring our graduation with his presence.

Q. That's something.

A. He was a brother-in-law of Louis Lipsky.

Q. Yea.

A. Yea. Louis Lipsky's sister was his wife.

Q. Oh. Right.

A. And... and until not too long ago his wife, I think, was in the Home.

I think so. I think she's already passed away, but he... he was a very, very outstanding product of the Jewish community of Rochester, Dr. Jacobstein. We were all very proud of him. He was on the national scene.

Q. That's right.

A. Yea.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview 1)
This is Dennis Klein. Today’s date is August, 1976. We’re talking with Ruth Lebovics at the University of Rochester. And this is Tape No. 2, Side A. I think we should begin with your experiences in Israel. You... you left for Israel in 1933.

A. 1933, yes. Very soon after we were married. Yea, we... we lived in Haifa.

Q. Right.

A. And I worked for the government, the British Mandate. I was a stenographer, secretary in the office of the Director of Customs. British. They were all British. All the senior officers were British. And it was very interesting. But, and there were... there were Arabs, Christian Arabs. There were Moslem Arabs. There were a number of Arab girls, stenographers like I, very well educated. They were all Christian. And we had very good relations. We were friendly. There was one large office and everybody worked in this huge office. Everyone had their desk and their typewriter, and there were very friendly relations. We visited each other. We had parties and after I left the office and our son was born, they came to visit me in the hospital, brought me gifts, the Arab girls. We once had tea in their home for one of the Jewish girls who was going to be married. So there was very good relations. And after we left the country, so I... I can only speak that. But I know that... that we were very good friends.

Q. did you decide to go to Israel? first place? Well, I... my husband and I are both Zionists. When married my husband wasn’t tied down. In other words he didn’t have at the time or a business. And we had to establish ourselves
Interview with Ruth Lebovics

A. (Continued) somewhere. I mean we had to establish ourself either here or elsewhere, and we felt if we're gonna start out from scratch and establish ourselves, we would prefer to go to Israel. And so that's what we did.

Q. All the Zionist activities in the twenties of course. . .

A. Oh, yes. Motivated. . .

Q. Might have. . .

A. Oh, no question about it. We. . . we wanted very, very strongly to go. And our family helped us. We got help from my husband's family, from my family because we couldn't do it entirely on our own. I mean, we weren't that resourceful financially. So we. . . we. . . with our wedding presents and the little loans that we were able to go. And when we came there I won't say otherwise, it was a struggle. But, we took it in stride and at no time did we feel discouraged or want to come back at all. And we didn't have the same standard of living that we had here, but we met some Americans from time to time and they asked us how do you like it. And I says in quantity we have less, in quality we have more.

Q. Were there other people from Rochester that you met or went along with?

A. In Israel? No, no. We went entirely on our own. But, we. . . I did have relatives there. I had relatives in Tel Aviv, close relatives. They're from Poland. I hadn't even met them before, but we had close ties to them through correspondence. My aunt and her children.

Q. Before you went?

A. Yes. Yea, and since my earliest childhood we've kept in very close touch with. . . and they. . . they weren't there to meet us at the boat 'cause they left. . . lived in Tel Aviv. But soon after there was a good relations. . . warm relations. We. . . when my husband used to go. . . later my husband
A. (Continued) established a little business and he'd go to Tel Aviv to do his buying there, he always stayed with them. They were very good to him, gave him business advice and all kinds of help. And they'd visit us in Haifa from time to time. And we... I... I felt I had a good anchor in my relatives there. And there were friends. There was someone who should be mentioned 'cause he was a former Rochesterian. That's Jack Sussman. He went to Israel long before we did as a young boy, he was an ardent Zionist, he was a young kid. And he struggled there, but he achieved. And when he heard that we were coming here... he... he was there at the boat. We... we didn't let him know, but he was there and he took us to his home. He made us stay in his home for a week. He... he... he gave us our bearings and he gave us a lot of help and advice, very, very good to us. And later got... had a very big position with Hadassah. And he was the guardian on Mt. Scopus during the time when... when it was out of bounds. He represented Hadassah, and he stayed up there all the time. And he communicated by... what it Morse Code or what? Down to the city with his family... he was a really a habenta Zionist from... from his infancy. He... he's a cousin of Ethel Simon. He has relatives here in Rochester. He was one of the real dedicated settlers.

Q. He... he, himself, is not from Rochester though?

A. Yea, yes. Born in Rochester. He was born in Rochester. Goodman Sarachan and... he's a first cousin of theirs, he's got quite a few relatives here. Well, he... he was very nice to us in the beginning. Afterwards we didn't see so much of him, but he... of his own... I mean we didn't anticipate seeing him and didn't have his address. We didn't count on that at all. But he heard we were coming; he was there in the port. And he knew the ropes and he knew the officials and he...
Q. Isn't that something?
A. And he... oh, he was wonderful. He just smoothed things for us very well... much. And then we made friends. And my husband had business associates. And we... we got along. In the beginning my husband taught, he gave lessons. You know, Americans are always in a demand, at that time especially, for English lessons. People were very avid for English. And so he taught and I got this job with the government. And I worked for them until our son was born. And then my husband established a business which would have been all right, but very shortly after the business was established the riots broke out in 1935. And it wasn't safe to travel, it wasn't safe to go to Tel Aviv. There was a... there was... business was affected. There was a period of shall I say insecurity. And being this was a new business it was more affected than others. And he struggled. He struggled for a number of years at a loss, business was always at a loss. And help came from the family and from home. We... we were depleting our own little resources, and the family kept clamoring for us to come back and we didn't. We did not want to come back. We just did not want to come back.

Q. Why... why was the family clamoring that you should come back?
A. Because the war was imminent. The war was imminent. And my mother passed away and my father was alone at home. He was old and he was sick, and I'm the only daughter. They wanted me to come back for family reasons, financial reasons. They were helping us financially to stay there, the business was going under. There were riots there and they sent cables: "Come home." And we didn't want to come home. And our son was sick. We have... we have a handicapped child. He was handicapped then, he's handicapped now. And the family didn't know that, they only knew... realized it until we eventually came back. But, that was one of the important reasons for our
A. (Continued) returning 'cause the pediatrician felt that we could do a lot more for him here. OK. That was one reason and the business going under, and we needed help from home. And all right after a point you do just have to be sensible. And then the war was very imminent. We were told over the radio and in the newspapers to stock up on flour and sugar and sardines. Staples at home because it was. . . this was May. War broke out in September. The Second World War. And it was in the air. People were storing, and they were hoarding and everything. And the letters came from home. And my brother Hyman said there's no question, I'll send you the money and you'll just come home. OK. So we just put ourselves together and we finally decided. Since the child was sick, my father was alone, everything else, so we came back very reluctantly.

Q. Because you felt that these years were very important for you?

A. They were, they were. They were very rewarding. We really wanted to stay there. It didn't matter to us that we didn't have all the comforts or as much as we had here. We really like it and we wanted to remain. We wanted to live in Israel. But, just only about six months before we returned to America we sold our suitcases, and we sold. . . I had a wardrobe trunk that was given to me as a gift. I sold it to some Americans who were returning, never thinking that we would need it. And when eventually we did go back we had to go out and buy some secondhand suitcases just for our own luggage. So we really did not think of returning. But everything came together, and when we had . . . we were told to stock up on food, the war was coming, the child is sick, my father is alone, and the business is not going well. . .

Q. Sure.

A. After all, we had to have some. . . so we reluctantly went back. And when we came back it was a more difficult adjustment for me after we came back
A. (Continued) than we went to Israel.

Q. Isn't that something? Now why was that? Is that possible for you to define?

A. Well, I... I wish I could analyze it. For one thing I felt very let down, I felt very defeated. I was ashamed that we came back, that we couldn't make it there. I felt what kind of a Jew am I that we just couldn't make a go of it? So many other people are struggling there, they're staying and they're doing and all this and that. That was one thing. And we were much more serene there. And when we came back I found that everything was so hectic here and so noisy. The noise bothered me. Maybe that's me personally. I mean there's a...

Q. Noise is always here but... 

A. Yea, I just...

Q. ...you just become more aware of it...

A. I... for me... if I had to go downtown, Main Street, to do some shopping. Occasionally I had to go downtown to get something, not very often, it was an ordeal. Now it isn't anymore now, but for the first year or two it was an ordeal. The traffic, the commotion, the sounds, the crowds, the everything was... was so overwhelming that to me it was not only exhausting but it was awful. It was almost like a trauma. Now whether it related to me personally, and perhaps other people didn't feel it. It was terrific change.

Q. Of course Tel Aviv itself is a large city...

A. We didn't live in Tel Aviv, we lived in Haifa. There's traffic in Haifa, there are busses, there's everything else, of course. Not like now. In all these years... we came back in 1939... 19... it's practically 40 years, nearly 40 years. They've got all that bustle there, too, now. But when we were there it was relatively serene.

Q. I see.
A. And it was... it was an adjustment in other ways, too. I felt people here are so materialistic. I went into the grocery store -- I remember this incident very well -- and the fruit and vegetables, and the woman came in there, she wanted some brussels sprouts. And there is no brussels sprouts. Well, to her it was a tragedy. What! No brussels sprouts! I'm expecting company, I've gotta have it. And it was a... and I stood there and looked at her. My goodness, that's the only problem in the world that this woman could think of. There in Israel people are struggling. I always was making comparisons. Another thing, when we came to... back here we stayed for a week at my husband's sister in Brooklyn, we stayed at her house. They're prosperous, they're wealthy. They lived in a very fancy apartment and they made us very comfortable. They had a child slightly younger than ours and he was still having nursing... having a bottle... having a bottle. So she took that bottle under the hot water faucet and she let the hot water run to warm up the bottle, and I stood there and I thought I would die. It hurt me so to see that waste of water. I was probably just as wasteful myself before I left America, but in Israel water is so precious and so important. And you pay... our water bill for the whole section, not just the city, but for the whole section was the biggest water bill. The water collector told me. They come to collect at the house for the water bill. And I was very strict with water. Saved the baby's bath water to use it to wash the diapers. You... you were... or you saved the baby's bath water to use to mop your floor. You did not wastewater. And as thrifty as I was he told me that I had the largest water bill of the whole area there because certain standards you cannot eliminate. And with all my thrift. But when I saw her heating up the baby's bottle with hot water running out of the faucet, it hurt. It was painful for me to see that. How can people be so wasteful? But after
A. (Continued) you're here for a couple years you become wasteful yourself. It's just... it's just... but there everything has a value, not just only water, everything.

Q. You became critical of American culture in general.

A. I did, I did. I really did. I really did. I was very critical of their standards. If this is so important, if you don't have brussels sprouts for your company, that is a tragedy. She really made a tremendous fuss over it. What... here some people come to the grocery store and they have to buy their supper and charge it. In the grocery maybe I could buy... I used to watch it sometimes, was a little reluctant to extend any more credit because they owed so much from before. And people... it was a hard life then. Not for everybody, but for many. Some people lived in luxury even when we were there. We even had some relatives in Tel Aviv who lived in great luxury. But you saw a lot of poverty, a great deal of it. And people made do with so little. They thought that as an American we... we were... because gifts would come from the family. I know when we... when our baby was born they sent us a bathinette. The kind of a bath that you fold up and you fill the water in. I don't know... I... I... whether they still have 'em. But, in those days it wasn't seen in Israel yet. Folding business that you can put a cover on top and you dress the baby, you lift the cover and you fill it up with water. And the water comes out underneath. Well, all the neighbors came to look at it. To them it was phenomenon. They didn't see anything like it. So they thought we were really very... doing very well and we had rich relatives who could send things to us. And toys for the baby and things like that. So there was... there was a lot of poverty.

Q. One... one thing that's curious to me about the experience in Israel and
Q. (Continued) the comparison with American culture is that... I... I know that a lot of people who are Zionists have a kind of admiration for the way the... the Israelis can survive and their... their priorities.

A. That's right.

Q. But, there is nothing really Jewish about that. I mean there is a standard of life, there is a culture there; no question about that.

A. Yea.

Q. But is that a Jewish... you see... component to that? Is one being a better Jew by living with less money, for example? That type of thing.

A. Yea. For some it definitely is. I can't speak for everybody. I... I don't think that we... we're motivated the way we are because this was necessarily a religious principle, although it is. There's... we're taught (Hebrew phrase) be happy with your lot. That's one of the... who is a happy person, who is... who is content with his lot. And that's a proverb that's gets drilled into you. OK. That's part... that's a fundamental of our religion. To be content. But Israelis I think now the standards are very different for many Israelis. They're materialistic the way we are, and they've got to have. I know... I know from some of our relatives who are there... I know they're just as... they have their rat race like we do. We didn't see... we saw very, very little of this when we were there. Those were years of struggle. But now that so many years have intervened and there... they're luxury-minded, and they're materialistic.

Q. Now is that a disappointment for you as far as Zionist, Jewish...?

A. Sure, it is. It is. It is. Because... it isn't the way it started out. It isn't the way... but people are human, I suppose, and they... they travel to America. Americans come here... they... they... they... now the space... time and distance isn't like what it was when we lived
A. (Continued) there. It took thirteen days for an airmail letter to come. And there was no such thing as telephone communication. And there was no jet travel. You came by boat. It was 21 days on the boat so that the things that we have are the good and the bad. Didn't get over there that fast. See, now it's different... it's just like going to...

Q. Very close.

A. ... Canada or going to Florida. So many people say why should I spend my winter in Florida? It costs me the same and I can enjoy it more in Israel.

Q. Right.

A. So...

Q. The world's gotten so much closer. Yea.

A. So small when we were there. But, when we were there it was different. And there was a large difference between life there and here. And we found it pleasanter there.

Q. What about the kind of criticism, one of materialism. For example, can... or do you have that kind of reaction to Jews living, for example, here in Brighton? Or in, you know, very...

A. Well, most of the Jews we know are materialistic.

Q. Are?

A. Yea, sure they are. They strive for better this, more that, more of this and more of that. But we know some people who... who have quality in their life.

Q. The question is...

A. Not... not necessarily quantity. We know some people, and they really have quality. Qualities you can see religiously, culturally...

Q. I see.

A. And... yes, we... some people whom we admire very much for
A. (Continued) their values. And they don't let the materialism intrude on their way of life or on the way of life of their children.

Q. Jewish or non-Jewish?
A. Yes.
Q. It has nothing to do with really... with the religion?
A. Well, those I'm speaking of are Jewish.
Q. Are Jewish.
A. They are Jewish, but we... we respect them. We admire them for the way they live, the way they bring up their children. And there... there's no generation gap, not at all. They're proud of it.
Q. Do you feel closer to these people as Jews for this reason?
A. Certainly, absolutely.
Q. OK.
A. Absolutely. My husband has some relatives there whom he loves, and we... I do, too. Now we don't live the way they do. There's... there's no radio. There's no television. It's to them superfluous. And they're not such... they're not Zionists either because Zionism has to achieve the degree... I mean they're... they're not religious, many Zionists are not. And they... their standards... but they have wonderful children, no... no generation gap and these children are educated and they're alert, they're bright. And they're nobody's fools. Without benefit of television or any of the pampering things that we feel necessary to give to children nowadays.
Q. That is a benefit.
A. Children have... they have to have this and they have to have that. And it's lovely, they enjoy it and all this and that. These children are very disciplined... they... they really are amounting to something. Careers.
A. (Continued) They have careers, and they're. . . they're... they're OK. Their parents are proud of them. And it's nice to see parents being proud of their children. You don't always see it. Unfortunately... 

Q. Yea. When you returned to Rochester in 1939... 

A. Yea.

Q. You went then back to the Joseph Avenue area?

A. Yes, we went into my father's home. My father was living alone, and we went into his home, there was room for us. And we were very, very welcomed by all the family. My father had great need for having us there. And we lived with him for quite a few years.

Q. Now besides your... your reaction of disappointment with American values, did you notice any changes in the neighborhood?

A. Yes. Well, I don't remember too much. I know that before we left there were Jews who were not observant of the Sabbath. You see, we are Sabbath observers. And I know that in... and Joseph Avenue was tailors and there were shoemakers and there were business stores... there were all kinds of businesses all along, and people lived mostly behind their stores, which we did. See, my father built the building where we lived. He built it from scratch. He had it built, so the store and the home behind was a very comfortable and modern home because it was built, and it was relatively new, ten years old by then. But it was a very comfortable flat, all the conveniences that we could have at that time... at that time. And so we had a very comfortable home. We had a nice back porch, nice back yard and a garden and what... all behind the store. Now there were others like that, more or less. So there were people who lived there, had their business there and lived behind the store. And I... I remember there were tailors and shoemakers, and I'm sure weren't Sabbath observers. But it didn't bother me so much before I left.
A. (Continued) to Israel. But when I returned from Israel it bothered me very, very much that they were desecrating the Sabbath. "Cause in Israel you walked out onto the street, you knew it was Shabbat. You just know it. People are dressed up nicer. They... they... even if they don't go to synagogue and if they're not observing, if they don't even wear kepote they can be without a kepote, but you know it's Shabbat. They're out in the street and... and... and this is the day of rest. And I don't know now unfortunately there are some places there... quite a lot of controversy there... there are some factories, unfortunately, that are open for one reason or another. And there's even I saw it was there painful to my husband and me to read that some Russian immigrants escaped from Russia and all the purges who were personally observant in Georgia, and when they are religious they are very religious. And the only work that they could get was in the port, stevedores, yea. And they were coerced to work on Shabbat or they were fired. That is tragedy. It's a tragedy for Israel that when finally a Jew escapes from Russia, gets out from all that tyranny and comes to Israel where he can live as a Jew and is religious, and if he has to support his family, and the only job he can get is being coerced to work on Shabbat, that is a terrible... that I... I hold very much against the government. I held... there... there are other things. We can fault them on a number of ways. We can fault them in many ways. There are other things. The tragedy... and I must say this for the record. My husband feels this very strongly, and not the... we're not the only ones either. This is authentic. The tragedy of the crime and all the Black Panthers in Israel, I'm sure you're familiar with... with... with all that. There... there... there's a tremendous gap. The Oriental community, who are very uneducated and bitter. There are thousands, something like twenty thousand
A. (Continued) or more who neither have jobs nor go to school. They are a really a mess. And they don't take 'em into the army either because these children are very badly damaged. They go into crime. Now that doesn't belong in Israel. It does not belong in Israel. How did it come about? We didn't see any of it. There was... sure there was crime when we were there. We were once robbed. There's crime... there was crime way back in the time of the Bible, but it was few and far between. But now that crime is so prevalent these days. They steal cars off the street. They... the crime is... they have to keep a lock on their steering wheels. I was appalled. Now these... these kids that grew up, this whole generation that grew up there, they were... came from North Africa, from a very backward standard of living. Not the educated North Africans, there were some educated North Africans that came from Egypt and others, who were educated, professional people who got to Israel. I'm not talking of them. But there were thousands and thousands and thousands from Morocco and other North African countries who came. They were backward, but they were very religious. Some would say they were superstitious, but they were religious and there was respect for the father and the mother. And they came. The aliyah was the big... they came, burst into Israel and Israel was so unprepared for them. And they put 'em in the Mavarot. Now the fault lies with the religious Zionists as much as it does with the labor Zionists because the religious Zionists were not prepared to really do something for them. These children came from religious families. So the labor Zionists gathered the money, put 'em to the very, very irreligious, the extreme left, the kibbutzim where there's no religion. No religion whatsoever. Now they've moderated a lot. They've... they see the tragedy. That the tragedy is that one of theirs became a spy. Because they grew up without... you're aware...
Q. Yea. . . yea.

A. One of the. . . from one of their kibbutzim, a spy, a spy for the Arabs. Yes, but these who came from North Africa were all. . . they had to take 'em away from their parents because the. . . the poverty was so great and the families were so large and the accommodations were just so. . . weren't there. So . . . and they were so afraid they. . . they gave 'em any kind of religious orientation that they would outnumber them, and the labor Zionists were very, very negative and antagonistic to religious Zionists. So they gave these children into the most irreligious kibbutzim. They grew up to disrespect their parents, disrespect the religion that they had while they were in North Africa, and they had no use for their parents as they grew up because they had very little to give them materially. So at least the anchors that they had when they were in North Africa, their religious. . . their family life, and their religious life and respect for the father that was all gone and they grew up without any anchors. And what did they give 'em? So now the children are ruthless, they are. . . they're without any. . . and another thing I want to say in this connection, you may. . . the. . . the . . . he's a humorist, what is his name again? In Israel. . . Kishon, Friam Kishon. He's. . . he's a very fine writer and a humorist. He's really a serious writer besides being a humorist. And no one can accuse him of being a religious man, not at all, not in the least, way off to the left. But he wrote an article saying now. . . now that he in his middle years is convinced that the best element in the youth in Israel now are the youngsters with the keypotes that come from the yeshivote. They do not go back. . . when they come. . . when they come to Israel they stay, they don't go back. They are the best soldiers. Not saying that the others aren't, but they are the best and the most sacrificial. And they have a very great love for the land
Interview with Ruth Lebovics

A. (Continued) because it's rooted in the Bible. They feel that Israel belongs to us because G-d promised it to us. But the irreligious people don't feel that it's because of G-d's promise, it's ours, we need a land, we're... we're... we're a nation like other nations. And this is our home, OK. Not... they don't connect it with G-d's promise at all. You never hear Rabin mention a word of G-d, that a miracle happened or anything like that. He never says praise to G-d.

Q. More of a nationalistic...

A. That's right. There's no religious... and this Kishone wrote an article which amazed people because he... he wrote in the article, said verbatim, no one can accuse me of being a religious person, but he is convinced and he has the greatest admiration for the religious youth there because there's no crime among them. They are serious; they serve the country. They love the country; they're dedicated. They sacrifice, and... and they are now at this moment in history the best element in the youth that they have. And they... they give the least amount of trouble, not saying that they are all holy angels or perfect, they... they... they are not the height of perfection, but they are the best element among the youth in Israel. And he's convinced because of their religious background. And... they... they are now beginning to be aware of their failure by taking away from these... from this youth who had an anchor in religion and respect... 'cause family life is very important. Family... when children are... obey the parents and live... they can... they can obey the law. But if you... if you destroy the family structure, destroy respect for the law, then the children to replace the family structure, they form their gangs. Like happens here. I mean, you have gangs. Why do they have gangs? It's replacing the family. So they have their Black Panther gangs and they... they do
A. (Continued) terrible things, terrible crimes. I mean, it... it
doesn't even all get into the paper. They're having a very bad time with
these children. Now it's very hard to undo it all.

Q. Yea. That's quite an observation about the family and religious life.

A. Yes, yes. It's... it's very... now we have relatives in Israel who are
not at all religious. They are relatives, our first cousins, we love 'em.
We have family ties. They love us, too. They know that we are very religious
and they are very irreligious. And they... they don't see things the way
we do at all, you know, religious. And we try never to involve ourselves
in any arguments, but after all we have so much that holds us together, that...
that's important to us. I mean, what we don't agree upon, OK. But one of
them was here on a visit a few years ago, she's a teacher in the school system
in Tel Aviv, very bright, very nice person. We love her, she's a fine person.
She was going from here to Cleveland by plane, there's a relative in Cleveland
who happens to have his own plane, sent his plane here to take her to
Cleveland. OK. So I drove her to the Paige Airport, not the public airport,
but the private airport. It was a new experience for me. And as I was
driving her down Scottsville Road to take her there we passed by a place
with a big sign, a missionary place. So I made an observation, Israel is
infested with missionaries now and they are taking children of poor families
and taking them off the streets and converting them. And we are... it isn't
bad enough that we lose children through intermarriage and we lose... but
we're losing children to the missionaries, and they're very active in Israel.
And it's a very serious problem. So when I said it to her. So she says --
I don't know if you understand Yiddish -- she says "Yishkafala." Yishkafala
means not too terrible. That was her attitude. She is in Israel. She
is a sabra, and all. And when I said to her Israel was seriously affected
Interview with Ruth Lebovics

A. (Continued) by the missionaries. She says it's not terrible. Now to me, I didn't answer at all. I mentioned it to my husband. So he says that's because she had no religious upbringing. She's cultured, she's educated, she's fine, she's a lady, we love her. But there was no religious life, no... no love that the Jewish people must survive. And we can't afford to leave a... lose a single Jewish child. We can't lose anybody to the missionaries or to intermarriage. We just can't afford it. The birthrate is going down, and we must... if we don't care about Jewish survival, what kind of Jews are we?

Q. Do you think that somebody is any less of a Jew for not living in Israel?

A. Well, I won't go along with that the way Ben Gurion said... Ben Gurion... no, I don't feel that way. I don't feel that way. My husband might possibly. My husband would. He is... he... he feels very sad that he has to live here. He would like to live his life in Israel even now. If he could go he would even go tonight. He wouldn't even wait for tomorrow morning. He is very... I am a little less, although I feel that as a Jew you can fulfill yourself better in Israel. But I don't feel as though as a Jew that you can't fulfill yourself here, too. I feel you can. I feel you can. I do. That's my feeling. Maybe my husband wouldn't go along with it, but I feel that I can fulfill myself as a Jew. There are many mitzvot, you know, mitzvot good deeds, as a Jew that I can perform here. And we can enable others to go to Israel, that's a very great mitzvah. We give our money, we do. We help people. Just only recently we sent one of our bonds came due, instead of buying another bond we sent it to a relative who is connected with the yeshiva there. We felt we were investing it in Israel. I mean, we... we do like others do. I mean, bonds or whatever and others... when a little money comes along our way, when someone says now give it to charity, see?
A. (Continued) They leave it to our discretion. We... there are places in Israel where we do send. When we returned from Israel I sent a lot of clothes to our former neighbors. They never asked me, but I knew their need. And when we came home there were young people with small children. Their clothes were outgrown, they were wealthy and they said do you know of anybody? We hate to... they're good clothes. I said, sure, some of my neighbors, their children I know. So we sent a lot of clothes to them. In the beginning because I knew that they could use 'em, but that's not the point I mean. That's not the point of the... the interview. I feel that you can be fulfilled as a Jew living here. I won't say as well, but you can, you can.

Q. OK. Let's... let's return to Rochester again. It's a fascinating aspect though of your life and...

A. Yea.

Q. ... of Jewish life in general.

A. Well, it has enriched me as a person very much. As a Jew and as a person. I don't think I would be quite the same person not having lived those six years in Israel, that's for sure. Not just only education, but as a Jew, it reinforces you as a Jew. I think most people feel that way who go to Israel. That's why so many youngsters who go there don't want to return. They go there for a year at the Hebrew University, they never want to come back. I can tell you quite a few that we know. Their parents are very disappointed, they want 'em back. But they won't go back. My niece's children, you know, quite a few of them living there. They won't come back.

Q. They find something there...

A. They find... yes, they find something there.

Q. OK. Well, we were beginning to talk about your reaction to...
Q. (Continued) Avenue.
A. Yes.

Q. ... area when you came back.
A. Yea. Well, the first... the... what... when we lived on Joseph Avenue before our going to Israel I saw Jews there who violated the Sabbath...

Q. Right. That's right.
A. So that... it didn't pain me so much because I felt this is American life. I am observant, they are not observant. OK. But when we returned my husband went to synagogue the first Saturday, I remember. He went to synagogue in the morning and I was home. Our... our boy was then three years old. And I took him for a walk, walking up and down Joseph Avenue. And as we walked, the further we walked on, I see a Jewish shoemaker sitting and fixing shoes. And I go a little further and I see a Jewish tailor mending, you know, doing his tailoring. And the further we got, I took my child and turned around and got home fast. I says I don't want him to see it. I was so upset by it that on Shabbat, here we're taking a walk on Shabbat. Shabbat in Israel is so glorious, and it is... it's the culmination of the whole week. You... you get flowers. Even the poorest person buys flowers for Shabbat. They don't do that here. The poorest... the man will come home on the bus in his dirty work clothes and he looks so shabby, he looks like so uncouth. But he's got flowers to take home for Shabbat. So the Shabbat is honored in Israel. And here I take a walk down Joseph Avenue and see the Jews... it's just like not only is it just like the goyem, but it's just like an animal. He doesn't know a day of rest. And I saw those things before I went to Israel and it didn't affect me because some Jews are religious, some Jews are not religious people. OK. This is... this is the way you live in America. But since having lived in Israel and seeing
A. (Continued) what Shabbat can be like and how it permeated your whole life, and the whole week culminates... this is... this is the day of the week and everybody gets dressed in their nice clothes, and you're out... if you don't go to shul or if you don't observe anything, but you're out walking. You visit your friends. It's... so there's a joy. And here... I didn't want my child to see it. I grabbed him, I turned around and walked right home. And my husband came home from synagogue, I says, I feel so let down. I felt so hurt. Later on you live here you accept it. But the first week was... it was painful for me to see it.

Q. But that was happening as you said before you left, too.

A. Yes, but having lived in Israel...

Q. Yes, I see.

A. ... a fact that changed me. Not that I was more religious religious. I was always religious. I was always religious before that but it didn't hurt me. Maybe I was too young or to think about it. I was too young... I just didn't give it any thought, let's put it that way.

Q. Right.

A. But it didn't hurt me because I just didn't give it any thought. It was a... a fact of life.

Q. You were following your life and you were allowing other people to follow...

A. Yes, right.

Q. ... their lives.

A. Well, I do now, too. I mean, I don't... I'm not the kind of person that'll go over and say now look you... you are doing wrong. I... Our Torah teaches us to tell someone they're doing wrong, but I don't do it. I mean, I... I'm not that aggressive. I'm not aggressive at all. But, they do it now, I see it. But I don't say anything.
Q. What about any physical changes in the neighborhood? Did you notice any changes that way?

A. I... If I noticed it I wasn't too much aware. Oh, yes. Colored people, yes. When we left there were no colored people, when we came back there were. But not... not... and there was a tavern on the corner... on the corner, very noisy, yea. There were... there were colored people that I didn't see before we came back. Yea, they were already infiltrating or moving into the neighborhood, as housing deteriorated. Yea, we did... we did notice colored people. It didn't bother us too much, but even some drunks. There were some drunks, yea. We did... we did notice that.

Q. There weren't many black people, though, at that time?

A. No. No, not like now. Oh, no, no. As the years went on, 'cause we lived there for about ten years or more, they increased. They increased. No question about it. And the area became more rowdy, more noisy, more drunk, what. But we had one or two colored neighbors who were very nice with whom we had very friendly relations. One of them was very nice to our son. She was a cultured lady and she was upstairs of Applebaum's. They had a big apartment. She had a nice apartment. My son used to go up there, she used to lend him books and magazines. And she'd talk with him. She had no children of her own. She was a very nice lady. They were colored. I mean, and they were... they were other colored people. There were... even as now there are some who are very nice and some who were less than pleasant, shall we say?

Q. Right.

A. Yea, but they kept increasing in the neighborhood, no question.

Q. You mentioned that there was some deterioration in the neighborhood as well.
A. The buildings, yea, were more dilapidated.
Q. Yea. That must have been a change over the decade, too.
A. Yea, yea. Oh, yes they did become more dilapidated. People didn't keep up their property so well as... that... that's inevitable.
Q. Now at about... well, I should say maybe in the mid-forties, late forties and certainly the fifties there was a gradual change. That is to say Jews were leaving the area...
A. Yes. Well, when urban renewal became in the air, when it was already being mentioned and when it was in the papers, and when you saw them buying up... they bought up houses and demolished them.
Q. When did it begin? What is your recollection?
A. I don't know the year. I really don't know. We were still living there. We moved away from Joseph Avenue, I'll give you the best information I can. We moved away from Joseph Avenue 17 years ago, that's when we bought our house on Avenue A. So, prior to 17 years ago there already were some demolition.
Q. So that would be in the fifties then?
A. Possibly, but I... I don't know precisely. But...
Q. Now part of this demolition though, we're knocking down some very important, lovely buildings?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Synagogues...
A. Yes, yes, synagogues. Well, the synagogues unfortunately were going down, too, in membership, you see. But they would have remained if they... if they didn't come along, make them offers of money and, you know, and then people said, well, we're moving anyway and this and that. It was a two-way business. I mean, the Beth Hamedresh Hachodosh Synagogue on Hanover Street...
Q. Right.
A. ... which was the... they called it the... the Big Shul.
Q. Big Shul.
A. It was the most gorgeous building. It was patterned after a synagogue in Toronto. It was a... a... really a... a... a gem of architecture. Very, very beautiful. Very ornate, very beautiful. But not ornate... I've seen ornate synagogues, too, that to me were not artistic, but this was really very artistic. And came down... there were dozens of them down on Hanover Street, our synagogue. They all came down. Painful. One after the other, yes. Well, this is a pattern in all the cities in America. This has happened in other cities, too.
Q. Yes. Now this is partly, as you were saying, because the shift in population...
A. Yes.
Q. There was really no need to keep synagogues in the area when...
A. Well, they might have had a need for one or two perhaps.
Q. Well, there are still a couple synagogues...
A. Yes, there are, yea, yea. There... there being... people come.
Q. I mean even at Beth Joseph Center...
A. Right, yea. We have... we still have a very on-going synagogue. We... we're still very much functioning. But, everybody's who's connected with the synagogue anticipates that in another five or ten years, the way the neighborhood is deteriorating, the way the people are moving away, and some are dying...
Q. You mean at present?
A. Yes. Well, we have lost members through death and the membership is an older membership mostly. We don't have young people with children, that's the thing.
Q. No.
A. You see, when you have people with young children then your... then your Hebrew school thrives, a Hebrew school. We don't have Hebrew school anymore because all the young children that we had have grown up; they're in college now. They come back. There's... there's one set of parents who are at Beth El, but for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when the boy comes back from college, he comes to Beth Joseph. That's where his ties are. He sleeps in a sleeping bag on the floor of his grandparents' house for the holidays so he can come to Beth Joseph, he won't go to Beth El with his parents.

Q. Yea.

A. When he comes home for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So his ties are there. See, he loves it. So, but... but the children have grown up. But they come back. And they come back to Rabbi Chiger. They have warm... warm feelings. They have a lot of attention centered on them. We had a very good Hebrew school and a very nice youth group, clubs, fun, you know. Bowling and everything. It was a very well rounded...

Q. But this process of a deterioration, if I'm getting this straight...

A. Yes.

Q. ... is continuing?

A. It is continuing because... it is. Houses are becoming more dilapidated. Landlords or the people... not... not all. It's just... G-d forbid it's all! It would be very... it would be horrible. But, some are very well kept up. But, some are dilapidated and are not being repaired. They're condemned and then they're vandalized. And unfortunately many of the colored people, not all, many of the colored people they rent a home especially... they... they... they rip the porches and the kids are... I don't know these things. But there are some. Other colored people on our street that keep their property just spic and span. And when my husband complains I
A. (Continued) says now look at these. He says yea but they are the exception. I'm a little more tolerant towards them, yea. They are the exception, and they stand out. They're really very nice people, very fine people, and they keep their property nice. And they buy up these houses cheap. So, this is cheap for them to have a home and they really take care of it, the gardens and their lawns. So we have a mixed neighborhood. It isn't that deteriorated. It is really not that deteriorated. Some are fine. There are a few right on our street, there are immediate neighbors across the street two families who came from Turkey. They're Moslem. Turkey... they're tailors and they work for Hickey-Freeman, and they bought their homes on our street 'cause they can come home at noon for lunch. They live right around the corner from their work. They keep their properties beautifully. Their gardens are just immaculate. They have... one has eight children. Those children are very, very well behaved. And they're... two of the boys are going to college now. And they have small children, too. And they're very, very desirable people. They... they bought these homes because they... and they're in the neighborhood, and they have all their friends. There are quite a few Turkish families here. My husband said he wished every house on the street was sold to Turkish people. But, so far it's pretty good yet. But, there are a few sort of borderline homes.

Q. So to... to... to kind of sum up this aspect of the interview, it seems that your impressions of the Joseph Avenue area when you returned... now I'm talking about the forties again...

A. Yes.

Q. ... really hadn't changed so much, with the exception of a few blacks that moved into the area.

A. Yes and a little deterioration in the... yes... yea
Q. Deterioration beginning at that point.
A. Yea, yea.

Q. But the Jewish community itself was still thriving in its own way and . . .
A. Yes, yes. We went for quite a number of years back to the same synagogue that we . . . on Ormond Street. Our synagogue was thriving when we returned. And we were doing all the organizations that we knew when we left were still intact. Mizrachi was intact, Mr. Hollender was still living there and he kept Mizrachi very much alive.

Q. Right.
A. He was a dynamic . . . yea . . . And most of the people were . . . the active people in the real Orthodox community were still very much going and things were thriving.

Q. At the same kind of pace as well?
A. As when we left. We were only gone five and a half years, so there couldn't have been that great a change.

Q. Probably . . . I mean the one reason that there might have been a change is because on the one hand there was the Depression, on the other hand there was some shift in population . . .
A. That was . . . the shift in population more than anything.

Q. That was big . . .
A. I would say, yea.

Q. OK.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview II)
Interview with RUTH LEOVICS
August 5, 1976
By Dennis Klein

Interview II
Tape 1
Side B

Q. This is Dennis Klein. We're talking with Ruth Lebovics on August 5. And this is Tape No. 2, Side B. Let's talk a little bit now about your brother...
A. Yes.
Q. I've heard so much about Hyman Kolko. Maybe you can, for the sake of the interview, give us a brief summation of his contribution to the Jewish community. He was so much involved.
A. Yes.
Q. And also his friend, Al Hart.
A. Al Hart, yes. He was also... my brother was also a very close friend of Joseph Silverstein.
Q. OK.
A. They were... they were intimate friends from their earliest boyhood.
Q. Now when did... I guess we should begin with... with your brother.
A. Yes.
Q. What was it that got him so much involved in the Jewish community?
A. Well, I think it was just a natural outpouring of himself. He... he was just that kind of a person. He was... in high school he was a busybody already. He was editor of the school paper, the Clarion, then it was the Clarion. He was editor of the paper, and there was a German paper, and there was a debating society. He was a great debater. And the East High School had a debating team. They went to Syracuse to speak. I... I don’t know if he was captain of the team, I think he was. And he was a great debater, and he was involved in all kinds of high school activities. And he was also involved in Zion... Zionist activities here in the community.
A. (Continued) very early in his life.

Q. Do you know how early that was?

A. It's hard for me to remember.

Q. As a child?

A. Yes, because I was... I'm nearly eight years younger than he. So that when he was already out of high school I was still a pretty young yet. As well as I can remember I'll tell you. I can't tell you exactly, but it was... it had to be young because... as he did everything young. He was in business already when he was 18 years old. He went into business right out of... out of high school. See, he didn't... And he even worked when he was in high school. He and Joe had a little enterprise of their own. They used... and Joe recalled it to me very recently. They in those days the water didn't come out of the faucet very clean, it had sediment. So they sent away, I suppose through a magazine or what I don't know, sent away to some company and they got parts they could put together and made filters of. And all the kids on the street worked, they remember, they remind it to me now when they see... when I see them now, they're grandparents. They remember working for him, and they'd pay 'em a quarter or fifty cents a day. And they'd sit around on the kitchen table and assemble these filters. They put the parts together, and the wire and the mesh and things. And they had a little satchels, and Joe and my brother would work the territory of the city on the streetcar. And they'd peddle these filters. And everybody bought them eagerly because the water came through dirty and these filters filtered the water. So they went out to what they used to call Dutch town, that's way out in... way out... Ridgeway Avenue, I don't know where. They'd go to the end of the line on the streetcar, and then work themselves. And Joe had one side of the street and my brother had the other side. Then
A. (Continued) they'd do what they called Polack town. You know, every area in Rochester had a name according to its inhabitants, you know. And that's the way they spent their summer vacations, the two of them. And they made... they made themselves some nice money.

Q. I'll bet.

A. Some of that money was really the... the money that he started his business with. He supported himself. You know, our parents... his... Joe's parents and neither of our parents were rich people. You know, you went to high school, you had expenses. Well, they weren't... this was their summer. And the two of them. And they had quite a few experiences. Some of them were humorous and all, whatever. Well this project was every summer. And they were both very enterprising and they made out all right. So that was... he was in business when he was in high school. This was his business. And then after he was out of high school he started the paper business in the basement of our home where we lived.

Q. Right. This is the Kolko Paper Company?

A. Right, yea, yea. So we had a relative, his name was Mr. Flanto who lived I don't know where. He was in the paper business. He was older and more mature. So my brother went out to visit him for a week and he gave him a few pointers, where to buy, what to do, what's the difference in... a few... just a few leads, how to establish himself. And from then on he was on his own. And he bought a pushcart, he delivered himself with a pushcart. And I remember when he delivered his first order. I went along and I held onto the handlebars. And I even remember the first customer he went to. Their name was Gudelsky on Baden Street...

Q. That's something.

A. ... and they were friends. They were friends from shul. And they kissed
A. (Continued) him and they wished him good luck, and they kissed me. 'Cause he was delivering his first order, and they gave him... they wanted to give him a break so they gave him an order, you know. So I... I remember that clearly. I don't remember further than that. I... I didn't always go... so that was the first delivery. I went along.

Q. That's something though.

A. But he delivered his own orders. And then after a while when he needed a little bit of bookkeeping and typing I did it for him. And as I told you he paid me fifty cents a week. That was my first job. That was after school because at that time already I was in high school. And his business grew.

Q. Now this business began in the late twenties I think?

A. It... not the late twenties, I would say, no. Early...

Q. Earlier.

A. Because I was graduated from East High School in 1921. And he was already in business while I was in high school. It might have been even before 1920. Could be maybe in the late 19... before the twenties because I was out of high school already in '21 and I remember working for him while I was going to high school, maybe a few years. It could have been 1917, 1918 or thereabouts I would say. And it grew.

Q. Now was... I mean Joe Silverstein did not get involved that way?

A. No, no. This was in the summer, but they were very close friends always. Before they were married and after they were married. And Joe's late wife was a very, very close friend of my brother Hyman's wife. The wives were very close friends. And Joe and my brother were very close friends. In the later years when we had to go out for UJA they would... they were the team. My brother and Joe went together for UJA. They went to the big givers,
Interview with Ruth Lebovics

A. (Continued) you know, where they'd get, you know...

Q. Right.

A. But they always worked together.

Q. Now the first activities, as far as Jewish life is concerned, for your brother was in Zionism?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Like yourself. I mean, this was a common way for...

A. Yes, that's right. For the people of... that were growing up with us it was. It was. The Zionist speakers would come to the city, and they would stir you up so. And if they scheduled a movie on Israel, that was a big event for the whole community. People broke their necks to get there to see this movie. Now it's... people with their slides and all, a dime a dozen, you know. They're not so... it's very interesting...

Q. But not special.

A. But the excitement... the excitement that it generated for us was something tremendous, seeing a movie from Israel. And that would stir us up and then the speakers would stir us up. And the... the mood was very, very... you were very receptive to any Zionist and to a Young Judea club or whatever there was. You... you flocked to them. I remember my brother was very active in what they called the Young Men's Zionist Society. These were all men, and they were his contemporaries. Every one of them... I know some of them now. Joe Silverstein, Joe Goldstein, who is the attorney here, Joe Goldstein. There was a Richardson. There was... some people are already since deceased, after all my brother was 80 when he passed away, so some of them are gone already. But, they were a very choice group of young men, my brother's age. Some of them are professors now. They're all over the country. Ginsberg is a big professor wherever... of if he's still
A. (Continued) living. But from time to time there was some contact. But when they were active, they were very active. And they were very loyal. And they were really... and they were debating. They had Zionist debates and they had fundraising affairs... and they... there was a lot of stir. They made a lot of stir in the community, this Young Men's Zionist Society. I remember that. We even had a picture... I don't know where that picture is, of the group. It was quite a... maybe his children still have it.

Q. Now your brother, I believe, was instrumental in the Jewish Children's Home?

A. Oh, yes. He was one of the founders, together with Mr. Hart. With Mr. Hart and Mr. Jaffee, Ady Jaffee. He was older, Mr. Jaffee was an older generation than Mr. Hart and my brother. But they... there may have been others, too, I certainly wouldn't want to leave anybody out. But, I wouldn't remember. But, I do remember Mr. Jaffee, Mr. Hart, and my brother, they were the founders.

Q. They were the founders.

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Now, the home itself, I'm thinking, believe was open in 1920. This is about the same...

A. Well, it could be that he was then... 'cause he involved himself in community at a very young age. He did everything very young.

Q. Do you recall his involvement...?

A. Yes. I remember they needed to have a superintendent, and they went to Binghamton where Mr. Hollender, the late Mr. Hollender, Reverend Hollender, who I'm sure you've got a lot about him on your tapes. Mr. Hollender had a position there, and he was recommended as a potential superintendent. So the old man, Mr. Jaffee, my brother and... Mr. Jaffee was old enough
Interview with Ruth Lebovics

A. (Continued) to be my brother's perhaps father or grandfather. There was a great age difference. But they... they were very compatible. And Mr. Jaffee, he was a rich philanthropist of the city. He also was one of the founders of Beth El eventually, yea, Mr. Jaffee. So Mr. Jaffee... let's see now. I hope I'm not mistaken of whether he was a founder of Beth El. Maybe I'm... I'm not sure. I don't... I'm not positive, but I think so. Well, Mr. Jaffee and my brother went to Binghamton to engage Mr. Hollender. And this is perhaps irrelevant, but they... they were put up there was only one bed and they had to sleep together, one bed overnight. And Mr. Jaffee had a nightmare while he was... through the pillow and busted the feathers all over my brother. So he... he remembers that. Now I'm sure this is irrelevant... it's irrelevant to this all, but I... I have to... well, whatever. They interviewed... it's beside the point... they interviewed Mr. Hollender and they engaged him. He was a very young man. Came to Rochester and he hadn't been long in America, he came from Israel. He was an Israeli, born in Israel. His wife, too, they were both from Israel. And he came to Rochester and got... he started off on the right foot. He was a very able man and he was the superintendent all the years. They never had anybody else till... until the... until the... I don't know how many years, a great many years. But my husband... Mr. Hart was the president. Or maybe Mr. Jaffee was the first president, I don't remember. And my brother was always the secretary, all the years he was the secretary. He involved himself very much.

Q. What kind of need did they see to begin an enterprise like that?

A. Like that? Well, in those days social services didn't have the awareness that we have now. They didn't have the understanding that we have now. There was a need because there was a lot of poverty, and there were orphans.
A. (Continued) And there were children... divorced parents... there were children of neglected parents... there were the whole... the whole run of the mill. I mean... now children who get placed in homes, foster homes, they're not all orphans. They're all... all the problems that exist now with children who need some kind of placement existed then. But then that was the only way that they could see it. It's seen differently now.

Q. Right.

A. Yes, of course it is. But, in those days I suppose... I... I'm only supposing, but that's the way they could see it. And to take care of orphans was a very great mitzvah.

Q. OK.

A. And that home graduated some very outstanding Jews in the community now.

Q. I talked with Will Greenberg...

A. Yes, that's right. That's right. He was willing... I mean... I remember him when he was...

Q. You remember him?

A. Yea, I... I... He was Willie and I was Ruthie. Yea, we... we... we had a big brothers and sisters club. And we used to come and have picnics with them and entertainment. It was supposed to be brothers, one brother and sister, you know, and all... doesn't always work out that way. But it was a close association between the big brothers and sisters and the children in the home. I'm... I'm not sure the children were always happy there. Anybody who lived in an orphan home, but they were given a Jewish upbringing and they were looked after. I'm sure there were many shortcomings, it's inevitable in an orphan's home, the concepts that they had then. But all the shortcomings there were some very fine achievements.

Q. express a little bit of...
A. Bitterness?
Q. A little bit.
A. I wouldn't be surprised if it was a little more than a little bit of bitterness. I would be very surprised if he wouldn't. Of course he would because it's no cinch being an orphan, no cinch being patronized, no cinch having people condescend to be nice to you. I'm sure it's there in his heart. I know...
Q. I see. I see.
A. If I... I... I'm sure of it. I know some others who were there, some of the girls, some of them married... there are quite a few of them. Sometimes you hear from them or you see them or you see their grandchildren. They're all already graduated. Some of them have better feelings, some came out with worse feelings. But if... if Willie Greenberg had some bitterness or resentment I wouldn't fault him at all. He would be less than human...
Q. Yea.
A. ... if he didn't.
Q. He also has some very warm memories of it.
A. I'm sure of that, too. And especially I think they all had very warm feelings of Mrs. Hollender, Mr. Hollender's wife. She mothered them in her way. And she was not professionally trained at all. She was an old-fashioned Jewish mother. But in her way, you know, the warmth came through.
Q. Right.
A. 'Cause I remember at her funeral those... those graduates of the home, they all stood there and they wept, they wept. 'Cause she's probably, for some of them, she was the only mother they ever knew.
Q. You're right.
A. That's right. And I know that she extended herself. She was a very warm
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A. (Continued) person in her way. But not in a professional... she was the least knowledgeable about psychology or any of these things. She just herself was a warm, Jewish mother. And...

Q. Said that...

A. Yes, but if he...he or any of the others came out of the home felt resentment or bitterness I... I wouldn't fault them because it's... it's less than a perfect way of taking care of orphans. And now are there orphans' homes at all anymore?

Q. Well, they've closed the Jewish Children's Home, it doesn't exist...

A. No, no, no, no. But, the Catholics I think... do they...?

Q. That might be.


Q. I'm not sure.

A. But the concept is different now, foster homes.

Q. Yea, foster homes. But that's one reason why the Jewish Children's Home...

A. Yea, yea. Yea it was dissolved and went to foster homes...but does it always work out real well, too?

Q. In the foster...?

A. Yea, sometimes they bounce around... sometimes...

Q. The situation is so uncomfortable anyway...

A. Yea. Sometimes they bounce from one to another 'cause we've come across that, too. Of...

Q. That seems to be the... the trend. Well, I think this trend began in the forties.

A. Yes.

Q. Back to foster homes.
A. Yea, foster homes.

Q. I'm wondering where your brother and Al Hart got the capital for... for beginning an enterprise like this?

A. Well, they went to the community, went to the community and people responded.

Q. Is this how they began?

A. Appeals... appeals, yes.

Q. They had to first appeal to the community?

A. Yea, sure. Where would they get it? I mean, Al Hart himself by that time... I think already was a rich man. Not as later, he became enormously wealthy. See, he started out with the Hart Grocery... he in himself is a very interesting person. He was considerably older than my brother, and he was real German. From the Deutcherjehudim, the real... they knew nothing of Yiddish kité at all. Some Germans did, but he came from a family removed from the kind of Yiddish kité at all. But when he got involved in the home and all, there was Yiddish kité there. You know, they had their own services, they had their own synagogue, and the children conducted services. And how he got motivated I don't know. I just... I wouldn't presume to say it was through my brother's influence 'cause I really don't know. Or else I wouldn't presume to say that. But how it was he responded with such love to... to Orthodoxy. And he became... he asked to become a mem... a paying member of our congregation on Ormond Street, Nusbaum Shul. And he was a paying member of Nusbaum Shul at the same time that he was a member of Beth El. See? He wanted to give them his support. He had a warm, very warm response to Orthodoxy. He was a very kind, generous man, very much so.

Q. Well, the Jewish Children's Home was primarily of an Orthodox turn...?

A. Yes, because there was another orphan's home in the city
A. (Continued) at the time on Genesee Street. It was run by the German community.
Q. Right.
A. And it was non-kosher and non... no religious education...
Q. That's right.
A. It was an orphans' home but not... no Jewish content.
Q. And so rather than supporting that, the Genesee home he...
A. They... they made...
Q. ... supported the...
A. Oh, yea, he put...
Q. So it's interesting...
A. And... and he, himself, responded with great warmth to Orthodoxy. Now he was married, Mrs. Hart, she's still living. He was married. She came from an Orthodox family. They were our neighbors and in a very distant, remote way they... that is, some relatives of theirs were relatives of ours. We weren't directly related to Mrs. Hart, but her relatives were our relatives by... you know, to... through... one through the mother, the other the father... whatever.
Q. Yea, right.
A. And they were our neighbors, Hart was our neighbor when we grew up. So I knew her as a young child. Very sweet lady. Now she was... came from an Orthodox family, but I don't know how observant she was, that I really don't know. But, he, himself, responded with great warmth and enthusiasm to Orthodoxy, although I'm sure he didn't become a Sabbath observer or... or observed the mitzvot the way my brother did or what... but he had a very warm feeling for it and gave support to it. And he... he was the backbone of the whole... I think a great deal of the funds may
A. (Continued) have come from him. Although I'm sure the community responded, I'm sure of that 'cause that...

Q. Weren't they...

A. I know... I know they used to go out through the streets soliciting money for... for the... and people responded.

Q. Where was its first location?

A. On Gorham Street. It was always there. That was... 27 Gorham Street. They bought one...

Q. What was always there?

A. ... building... it was always there, they bought one building and then they bought the next, you know, they bought the houses around, they expanded. They remodeled, they rebuilt. But it was always there. They had a playground. And then they built a synagogue... someone endowed it and they had a synagogue, a separate little building there. And people from the neighborhood came also to pray there even on the high holidays, they'd engage a cantor. The synagogue was very thriving and the children conducted, and they got... all their boys were Bar Mitzvahed in their own synagogue. And the Bar Mitzvah was always made nice and splashy, you know. There was a Mothers Club there, too; not only a Big Brothers and Sisters Club that I and my... my friends and I were in... belonged to, but there was a Mothers Club where the older ladies... And they did a great job for the children. They made them the Bar Mitzvah and they... they bought them the clothes, always saw that they were well-clothed and they... the Mothers Club did a great job, more than I would say that we did. My sister-in-law... one of my sisters-in-law was very, very involved. And they got warmth, of course. The warmth that you get in an orphans' home is...

Q. By its very nature has to be less than...
A. And...and there is a lot of patronizing which...which every human being, as young as you are, can be...should resent. I mean, that...

Q. I know what you mean.

A. It's hurtful.

Q. Yea. What was the name of this synagogue?

A. Well the synagogue was the synagogue of the Jewish Children's Home.

Q. That was its...

A. It didn't have any other name. It was the Jewish Children's Home...beautiful edifice. It was so...so heartbreaking when they had to...when it all had to come down.

Q. Because Mr. Greenberg mentioned the shul and that this was part of their...their background.

A. Yea, and did he mention that he was Bar Mitzvah there?

Q. Yea, yea.

A. They all were. They all were, yes. Does he have warm feelings about that?

Q. He does, he really does. In fact, I would think that his...

A. I wonder.

Q. ...I think he said that his Jewish...feeling of Jewishness really came from that experience.

A. Yea, yea.

Q. But you were saying that you wonder whether that...

A. I wonder, I do wonder because he's...he's not an observant Jew the way we are. You know, he goes to B'rith Kodesh, see? So...

Q. Well, you wonder really what kind of an impression then it had.

A. That's right. Now, he may have...whatever his reasons for going there, his own...his own reasons, and I wouldn't question 'em, and it's not my...

Q. Yea.
A. It's not my... my... it's not my concern really.
Q. Yea, yea. Right.
A. I mean, I'm... I give everybody...
Q. What about that though? Do you think that...
A. I'm not critical.
Q. Do you think that this was a beneficial... I mean do you think that it might have turned off more children than... than it might have turned on?
A. I wouldn't know.
Q. Difficult to say, of course.
A. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know if... it's very hard to say. Some of them who've come out from there, professional people, there's a couple lawyers here, pharmacist, some have done very well. Some of them... one especially that we know is such a failure in life, he would have been no matter what. He would have been a failure wherever he was, if his parents brought him up, I think it's in his genes. He's a burden to himself and he's a burden to society. All right. Now you certainly couldn't blame the home for that.
Q. Right.
A. The home turned out some very fine young men and women. And... and they all of them, without fail, invited Mr. Hollender to their weddings. He had to travel out of town all over the country to go to their weddings and their Bar Mitzvahs without fail. He had to share in all the simchas, I know that, 'cause we were close to Mr. Hollender. See? So he was still there... what you... father image, whatever you would call it. You can't call it foster father, whatever. But he had to go to all their simchas wherever they were. And I do remember the mother, how they stood and wept. So this is the only mother they knew. Although some of them had parents but there were some very tragic situations there. All... all kinds of tangled situations.
Q. Family situations.
A. Very, very ... 
Q. In other words. ...
A. ... snarled, very snarled situation. The ... the social ... it happens these days, too. But in those days there was more poverty so maybe it was even more difficult for people to straighten themself out. Now people in trouble understand they've got to go for marriage counseling, and they understand that ... and then there's this and as a last resort there's welfare. There's unemployment, you know. Then in those days there was poverty, and when you had too many burdens and you had children there, it was all snarled. We had some very snarled situations. And Mr. Hart would personally involve himself in a very caring way. And I know my brother did, too. He'd go into court many times and he ... he traveled on their behalf and what and when. Now it would all be done professionally.
Q. Yea. Yea, that's ... that's a big change.
A. Oh, yea. That, you see, yes. Now it would be done professionally, it would be social workers who would do it. Then it was the ... maybe there were social workers then, too, I don't know.
Q. Well, of course, the Baden Street Settlement was in its own way a ... 
A. Yes, yes. ... Oh, yes.
Q. ... social. ... a social work. ... 
A. Yes, I used to go there for clubs, before Young Judea when I was a very young girl. I used to go to sewing class there. And then one day a week we used to walk over the way over to B'rith Kodesh for sewing classes. And then we felt we were in a different world. You went in there and you felt that you were among goyem. That's the way I always felt, you know, goyem. You know what goyem are?
Q. Yea, oh yea.
A. Yea, yea. All right. I. . . I felt that. . . I felt very different when I came, but I liked to go. I liked to go, and we. . . they taught us sewing. We made little things to take home, sewing and all. And once a year they even gave us a picnic from B'rith Kodesh. Yea, they took us all to Sea Breeze I remember once. And. . . but I always had the feeling. . . and I went with my friends, I never went alone. There were a whole group of girls and we walked all the way from. . . from. . . then. . . then it was a very, very big walk to Gibbs Street. It was on Gibbs Street.

Q. Right.
A. Upstairs they had classrooms, and it was a sewing class. And I remember the teachers even, I remember the sewing class. But, it was like going into another world. You felt you were. . . this is not our world. We're going to another world. It was pleasant. It was nice, but then we came back home again. Not that home. . .

Q. What was different about it though? Why was it. . . why was it another world? Was it the Reform Jewish? Was it the German Jewish?
A. Well, we. . . one thing we knew it was Reform Jewish, we knew it was German Jewish. My mother approved of it. She was. . . that was all right for me to go. There was not. . . it wasn't. . . there was no religious connection, it was purely a sewing class for the poor kids of the other side of the city, really. That's what it was. We were poor kids, and we don't have many privileges, and so we came here and the teachers were very nice to us. And sweet and pleasant, and one year we got this lovely picnic, which was a very big treat. It was a very big treat, this picnic was to us. And all. . . but the building was different. It was austere, it was very clean. It was big high rooms, roomy and all. And the ladies who were there were all dressed
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A. (Continued) Like rich ladies.
Q. Well, of course, the economic differences.
A. You felt. . . we felt it rather. . . it wasn't. . . if it wasn't apparent it was unconscious.
Q. Well, a child picks up these things.
A. Yes. It. . . it wasn't a. . . a. . . it was unconscious. I had the feeling that I am in a different world. These rich ladies, kind ladies, and they're being nice to me.
Q. That's what impressed you more than. . . than they were Reform Jews.
A. No, no. That's. . . I was too young. . . I was too young to feel that, I would if I were. . . when I were more grown-up.
Q. Yea.
A. But it was a pleasant experience. I enjoyed it.
Q. Why didn't you continue at the Baden Street Settlement?
A. I think we did both. I. . . As I remember back. It was my friends who told me about this, and we all went together, all the kids in the neighborhood. We played together and then we would go over there. I don't know whether it was more than two or three years, or maybe it was. . . it wasn't for a very. . . for a long period of time, but it was summertime, vacation time.
Q. Yea.
A. When we had nothing to do.
Q. Did the settlement play an important role in your life?
A. I wouldn't say important, but I went there for some classes. I didn't go for too long. I'm not sure. It's so long ago really. I'm not sure whether when I went to settlement that I went to Beth. . . to B'rith Kodesh at the same time or whether one supplemented the other. I can't be too sure about it 'cause this is. . . this is every bit of 65 years ago or more.
Q. You're doing remarkably.
A. Well, I try to remember.
Q. But apparently it didn't play, then, a...
A. No, it didn't... no, nothing like... like Young Judea or anything like that or JY. JY and Young Judea was really very, very important to me.
Q. That was certainly Jewish. The settlement was not strictly Jewish?
A. No, no. It was a place we went there to play.
Q. Right.
A. Play games, that's all. Just games that's all.
Q. Right. But we got onto it because you mentioned about social work and...
A. Yea, yea.
Q. ... professional and that...
A. Yea, yea, yea.
Q. And that, of course, was an example of an early...
Q. ... an early movement.
A. Yea, they did good. They did good, no question about it.
Q. Let's go back to your brother...
A. Yea.
Q. We've hardly finished up on him.
A. Well, we mentioned the Young Men's Zionist Society which was very much a part of his life. And then he was one of the founders of the Jewish Children's Home. He was also one of the founders of the Jewish Home for the Aged. And he was their first secretary.
Q. Again, this plays into Will Greenberg's experiences in that he has...
A. Yea, Will Greenberg was a very young man then.
Q. That's right.
A. Probably in college then or maybe...

Q. He had some recollections, though, of the... of the home for the aged.

A. Will Greenberg did?

Q. Yea, but probably through stories and whatever.

A. That's right. Or records. I mean he's superintendent there now, so there are records there.

Q. Right.

A. Yes, but he... he was... Will Greenberg's is the age of my brother's children. He's more contemporary with my brother's children.

Q. Right. Was your brother, again, instrumental in the founding of this home for the aged?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q. With Al Hart? Or the... 

A. I don't know about Al Hart. I really don't remember. I know Rubin Dancoff. Yes. Rubin Dancoff. The names of the founders are on a plaque there in the home.

Q. Oh, yes. I saw...

A. Garson Meyer. Garson Meyer, yes, Garson Meyer for sure. Garson Meyer was a contemporary of my brother's. And he was one of the founders and I think even his mother was, too, Mrs. Meyers. She was a remarkable woman. And there are others. I can't remember.

Q. A group that decided to...

A. Lester Nusbaum, he was the first president. He was an outstanding person. You get anybody caught speaking about him, he was a very outstanding person in this community. Lester Nusbaum. He was older than my brother. He was one... one of the founders and the first president of the home for the aged.

Q. And when did this... Children's Home?
A. I can't remember if it was simultaneous or not. It could have been
simultaneous. I think there were always... as far as I can remember there
always was a home for the aged.

Q. It's another example of the philanthropic... 

A. Yes, oh yes.

Q. ... energies of your brother.

A. Yea, well he wasn't the only one. I mean, there were... there were others
like him who started very young. Joe Silverstein also was very, very active
in the home for the aged. I... I'm not sure whether he was one of the
founders, but he well might be. He well might be. And then my brother was
also one of the founders of the Hillel School.

Q. Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q. This is a later... 

A. Later development.

Q. Later development.

A. He worked very hard with the Hillel School. That was very, very dedicated,
very dedicated. And he motivated other people.

Q. Forties or fifties, even that late.

A. I ought to remember but I don't. I was never very good at years.

Q. I was told and I forgot myself.

A. Yes. Yes, but it's quite a few years back. The children were very...

Q. And then the Jewish day school.

A. That's the Jewish day school, yes.

Q. And it was and is, I believe, the only one like that in the area.

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q. It serves, of course, that need... that need to overcome the problems of...
A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It's very meaningful and...

Q. ... education.

A. ... very meaningful to the community. It has some very fine graduates. Some of them have even come back to... a few of them have even come back to teach there. Yea. Now he wasn't the only founder. There was Rubin Dancoff, he was with him and Ruby Goldman, the... and the late... oh, what's his name, an attorney... Beunice... Beunice, Louie Beunice. Yes, he was very...

Louis Beunice was very dedicated to... one of the very... one of the founders of the Hillel School, and there are others. Mr. Hollender. Mr. Hollender. Rabbi Stitskin and Dr. Diamond. Dr. Diamond is now in Toronto, he was the head of the Bureau of Jewish Education. Very great help. And then in the founding of the Hillel School my brother was able to motivate people to give very generously. He... he was like a catalyst. He had very good friends who were pretty well established financially who themselves didn't have the need for a Hillel School or didn't know too much about Jewish education, and perhaps didn't care too much. He motivated them. He motivated them and they gave. They gave generously and all institutions get in financial difficulties, even universities need a lot of money, I mean... and when they'd get into a real tight financial position he could go to them and get money.

Q. So that was an important contribution...

A. Yes.

Q. His ability to do that.

A. He could go to them and motivate them to write a check for $1,000 if they needed it. There were a few people in the community, he knew 'em, he could go to them. Of course, he'd explain the needs and what, but they were receptive to him and the... the strength of his explaining to them the
A. (Continued) great need.

Q. Was the Hillel School his idea? Or is that developed in a community type...

A. Well, I'm sure it couldn't have been the idea of one person. I don't know.
I mean, I... he didn't talk these things over with me exactly. It... I'm sure it was the idea of more than one person. Mr. Hollender was very involved in this.

Q. Right.

A. Mr. Hollender... he... and Louis Beunice, and Ruby Goldman. I'm sure that whether he was the... I couldn't say. I really couldn't say.

Q. Yea. It's difficult to always define...

A. I... I couldn't say. I don't want to shortchange him...

Q. Or the other people.

A. That's... either the other people or him. Because I'm sure that it was a joint effort. But there may not have been too many at first. It was a meeting of minds, let us say. And the need was very much there. And he... I'll tell you, he used to go every winter to Florida, spend the winter in Florida. For a time his health was very poor, he'd spend the whole winter in Florida. And the people he associated with, and the friends he had there were very active in day schools in their communities. These became his bosom friends. He had some wonderful friends. My sister-in-law, bless her memory, used to tell me that they had as many devoted and warm friends in Florida as they had here. They had a host of friends there, all over the country. Detroit, Chicago, you name it. And these were people who were involved in the same way that he was involved. Day schools and synagogues, Orthodox. These are all Orthodox, all very wealthy people. Some of them could buy and sell him as well. He had... was peanuts compared to them.
A. (Continued) This was enormous there...there are some Orthodox millionaires in the country. And they throw their weight around. You don't have 'em in Rochester, but Toronto and other cities...well they all congregate in Miami. And when they sit around they talk about their achievements. And so they'd tell about their synagogues and about their day schools and about their yeshivas. Many of them had yeshivas. Some of these same people were actively involved in founding day schools and yeshivas and half a dozen important institutions in their communities. People who really not only moneygivers, but they were catalysts. And this...this was a challenge to my brother, you see. He says well what have we achieved here in Rochester? You see? So he'd come back and he'd...the other people and he'd say now look we've got to do something in our community, too. So that was perhaps that...

Q. The Hillel School...The Hillel School might have come out of that type of...

A. That...that type of...not entirely. From that and the need that was here. I mean the need is...people here were aware. Rabbi Stitskin was very aware that...and others here were very aware that our community needed a day school. So many smaller communitites that we have...than we are had fine day schools. So why not we? Money is always there. There's money here, too. You have to know how to get it. There's plenty of money available for Israel and everything. People have money to burn, all kinds of narashkite, so certainly they should have money for...for things that are basic. But you just have to know how to get it. You have to educate them, you have to motivate them and approach them properly. And so I think his associating with the cream of Orthodox people in Miami stirred him up and also the people in the community here who were likeminded, it wasn't he
A. (Continued) alone. So they said now look, this is about time we
did something. And when they founded the Hillel School they didn't have a
building and they didn't have any money, they really didn't. So they...
Beth Joseph. . . you probably got this from others. But the school functioned
at Beth Joseph Center, their basement.

Q. OK.

A. Yea. I don't know for how long, whether a year or two or three or more. I
really don't know 'cause I think we were living in Israel then. But, for a
number of years, for how many I don't know, the school functioned there. And
they bought a bus, had a bus, they collected the children and brought 'em.
And . . . and they engaged teachers, and they functioned at Beth Joseph until
came the time when they were able to raise enough money and they bought this
building on East Avenue. And they converted it and fixed it up and that was
quite a. . . quite a job, you know. To make it into a proper school with
classrooms and assembly hall and everything else. And they really went along
very nicely.

Q. Continued to grow.

A. Yea, they continued to grow. But there always were financial problems, always.

Q. I thought you said though that there was always money here that they could
get money, that that was no problem?

A. Yes, but never . . . never enough. Never enough. There were. There were a
few individuals, they. . . they've since passed on. After they were gone. . .
there is two that I know of specifically and there may have been more that
my brother used to go into their offices and say now look we really are in a
jam and we need $1,000 and he could get it from them. They would give it to
him.

So it seems to me that there was that. . .
A. Yea, yea. . . there. . . there. . . but the. . . there were two who I know, I know they've passed on long before my brother did. But, there may have been others. But it wasn't that easy. But with it all there are always deficits. That's why they had to sell the building because they. . . they had a huge mortgage. Yes. Yea, they sold it . . .

Q. So money definitely was a problem?

A. Oh, always. It was a problem. It was a headache. Yea, but still they functioned. They functioned.

Q. Let's . . . well, before we go on, let me just ask did your brother give to secular causes, too? So he didn't confine himself just to the Jewish community?

A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, certainly did. You know, they don't pass anybody by and they're. . . What is it, Knights of Columbus or whatever else, and always the charitable enterprises, picnics for donations, you know. Paper donations isn't just a five or ten dollar donation, you know, it amounts to money. There wasn't any organization that didn't come and ask for supplies for whatever affair they had over the year.

Q. I see.

A. Some of them will have two or three affairs. If it's a picnic and it was a . . . and it was a. . . some other affair in the winter, whatever. All organizations, no matter what secular or non-Jewish or whatever. They came, they always got. Yea. No, he involved himself in the community. Community Chest, whatever. I think he. . . he used to work on the Community Chest drive, too. He and Mr. Hollender, yea. Yea.

Q. So there. . . there was that. . .

A. Oh, yea, yea. He was. . . he was. . . yea. He always was community-minded.
Q. OK. Now you mentioned the yeshiva, and...
A. Yes.

Q. ... told me before that you have been somewhat involved...
A. Yes. My husband and I. Not in founding it, but in supporting it. We're not among the founders, but we... we were aware of it being founded. Some of our friends were involved in the founding.

Q. Tell me something about that. How it...
A. How it came about?

Q. Yea.

A. Well, I would tell you what I know but it will be very incomplete, and maybe I'm not 100% factual. I think you can get that information from Mr. Brinen Mershel because he was directly involved. And I may be gaps in my knowledge.

Q. Well, give us what you can remember, and that will...
A. Well, there were more than just a handful, there were quite a few parents in the community here who very much want their children to go to yeshiva. And some of them moved away from the community because there was no yeshiva here. We lost I don't know how many, about fifteen or twenty fine Jewish families that would have stayed here and would be an asset to our community because these were not just ordinary people. They were fine, educated people, but they couldn't conceive of their children not getting yeshiva education. And they couldn't also send them away, they couldn't financially afford to. So they left the community and they got a position in other communities where there was yeshiva. Mainly New York, Brooklyn or like Baltimore or the bigger cities where there are yeshiva. So we lost them. The community lost them. And it's a loss because they're not replaced. We lost them, we lost their children. And this has been going on for quite a number of years. Now
A. (Continued) some people here in the community, like Rabbi Cohen, Rabbi Hyman, and later on the other. . . Rabbi Chiger, send their children away. Their children just have to have a yeshiva education, so they send them out of town. But not everybody can do that, not everybody can do it for any number of reasons. But they. . . they have done it, they've done it very successfully. Rabbi Cohen's children are all very well educated, very well educated. And they're fine children beside, I mean they're fine people. Very proud of his children. Now I think that the education that they got is very much a part of them besides the fine parents and the kind of home life they have. I mean, all of them are. . . But there are others who have done also as they have. They sent their children away and they've remained. But, what we have lost some very fine families. And there are smaller communities than Rochester that have a yeshiva, why couldn't we? You just have to really strive, nothing is handed to you. And so these families got together and how they went about it, Mr. Mershel will have to figure, and if you're really interested to know how this came about, I think it's interesting. I think it's a very important part of Rochester history, I feel it's very important, he can give you. . . he can fill you in much better. But, they are connected with the yeshiva in Forest Hills, Long Island. It's the. . . I think it's the. . . it's high in the Forest Hills, it's an outstanding yeshiva in Forest Hills. They established a branch in Montreal somewhere, I think, and they were willing to come and establish a branch here and send us some of their outstanding students and some of their outstanding teachers, 'cause you couldn't just start it from scratch.

Q. Right.

A. And give us all kinds of things, but we'd have to do the financial part of it. And give support. And so after he sent his two most promising young men.
Both of them are really outstanding. It's Rabbi Davidowitz and Rabbi Harris. Both of them come from wealthy families. Rabbi Harris's father is an attorney in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He wanted to send his son to law school. He wanted him to have a professional career. He says, no, he wants to devote himself to Torah learning and teaching other men Torah. A handsome, fine boy, specimen. And... and his parents went along. This is what he wanted, they went along. So he went to yeshiva, he got his degree; he's a rabbi. And he's one of the deans there now. The other one, Rabbi Davidowitz, is the head dean 'cause he's a little older. And incidentally these two rabbis are cousins. They are cousins. The Rabbi Davidowitz is the older of the two, and he is the son of very, very prosperous people in New York, very wealthy people. They have... New York is familiar. There's a company that manufactures all kinds of delicatessen meats, all kinds. 999 is the company name. Now I don't know it, the New Yorkers know it. And this is the very... they send their products all over the country, very wealthy. And he had a future in his parents' business. He didn't even... he wanted no part of it. He... so for Torah... all right. So these two are the deans. And they are educated. They're not only rabbis, but they are educators. They have their college degrees, too. I mean they... in education and all. I mean... they... they're not just... so they came here three summers ago and they spent an entire summer getting things... contacting people; getting things started. They had to find a building to buy, they had to engage teachers. They did the ground work, and it didn't always go easy, and it was discouraging. People came across very well. One family gave 'em their home, their typewriter, and their meals and all gratis, all this because they cared, they're dedicated. And a car... they... there wasn't anything enough. And everybody helped, everybody helped them and all. It wasn't easygoing, but they finally motivated... and they've
A. (Continued) given help from some people that is really amazing, non-religious people with money and services. Now you know Fox's Restaurant, don't you? O
Q. Right.
A. OK. Know Mr. Fox?
Q. Himself, no.
A. But have you patronized his restaurant?
Q. Well, when it was ... when it was ...
A. Oh, all right ... .
Q. ... in Brighton.
A. Yea, it is ... he's relocated now.
Q. Oh, I see.
A. He's relocated, got a new place. Now he is not a religious Jew, he keeps his restaurant open on Shabbats. All right. You wouldn't say he's a religious Jew. But he has given himself over to this yeshiva with such dedication and with such love and devotion. My husband has told me that Mr. Fox has given them tens of thousands of dollars worth of services that they couldn't replace. And, you see, at the time his restaurant burned down he was at loose ends. That may have been one reason. He wanted ... he's an active, busy, energetic man. He wanted to have something to do, but he really cared, he also cared. It ... it wasn't just to fill in his time. He brings them money; he brings them donations, and he collects favors from people to whom he gave favors, people owe him favors, see? 'Cause he ... and he has many contacts in the food business, got them a cook. He gets them food wholesale. There isn't anything ... and ... and so now they're having a concert on Chanukkah and they're dedicating their booklet to him. Yea. But ... but a person like that you would never connect with caring
A.  (Continued)  about a yeshiva.  Now there are others like him, too.
So they get money from all kinds of sources.  They very badly need... their.  ... their resources are very... are we running out of time?
Q.  Well, we can go on to another tape.
A.  Yea, yea.  But, they have in the three years they're here, they've made fine strides.  They started out with 22 boys.  Now they have something like 56. They doubled their enrollment in one year.  And the parent yeshiva sent them their choice senior students, because after all they had to have some nucleus to start.  You couldn't start with all beginners.  That would be too discouraging.
Q.  Right.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B  (Interview II)
Interview with RUTH LEBOVICS
August 5, 1976
By Dennis Klein

Interview II
Tape 2
Side A

Q. This is Dennis Klein. We're talking with Ruth Lebovics. August 5, 1976. Tape No. 3, Side A. And we were talking about the yeshiva.

A. Right. Well, they... they've got a very fine group of founders. And one of them is an attorney who gives them all his services free. Does all their legal work. And there was a lot of legal work involved because there was zoning. They had a tough fight over zoning. The neighbors just didn't want them.

Q. Right.

A. 'Cause this is a residential street. It's on Pinnacle Road. They bought a very lovely estate. Oh, beautiful. And they had a tough fight with the zoning. And they had a tough fight with the zoning, and then they prevailed after a while. Although some neighbors were resentful, which... some of them were not Jewish and whatever, you can understand. Now recently, within the last year, they bought a neighboring house because they... their population doubled. And all the boys who attend have to stay in the dormitories, even the local boys. They want them all living there because they study till late. Their hours are very long. They study till about ten or eleven o'clock at night. They study right through the day, no fooling around, you know. But they do have athletics. They have a basketball court in the back. There's time off for sports. And it's well rounded. But there's an intensive study because they do have their secular... they have their high school program, their Regents, and their Hebrew. So that these boys really have to apply themselves. And they have a principal for their secular studies, all the people in their secular department teach in
A. (Continued) the high school system, either in Irondequoit or Brighton, or Rochester. These are high school teachers who take this second job. And they're all qualified. And they have a principal, although for a small school, they have a principal for the secular studies. And they grade these boys and test these boys. I mean everything is according to Regents. They... and they have been approved by the New York State of Regents...

Q. Right.

A. By... they're secular. I mean this... there's a proper high school, and they have a high school department and they have a college department. And these... these kids get algebra, they get French, they get... I think French is the only language. And they... everything that they would be getting if they went to any of the high schools. And besides they have their Hebrew studies. So... so they... they just study until late in the, evenings. Six days a week. Sunday's a school day. No day off. No day off on Sunday. But these boys are very well rounded boys, some of them come from all over the country. We have some local. There's a boy from Los Angeles; a boy from Washington, from Buffalo, from all over. And they have a fine ladies auxiliary, of which I am a member, and we had a meeting one day when three of the boys came to entertain us. One of them played the guitar, one of them played the piano, and one of them was sort of the one who did the singing. And then they were great, they were great. They went across with personality and... and charm I would say. These are boys who sit and study Talmud.

Q. Yea.

A. But they're well rounded. Very well rounded. They're talented musically,
A. (Continued) they're not just one-sided. There was very gratifying to us just to even to look at them, you know, real nice, modern boys. And religious, with their keypote. And they have a nice program for these boys and every Saturday afternoon a group of them have to go to Genesee Hospital and visit the sick, the Jewish sick. You have to understand that that's a mitzvah from the Torah. You visit the sick. And while they're young they're indoctrinated. So it's within walking distance, so they use the Genesee Hospital. It's not the. . . And they go every Saturday afternoon. Go in. . . they find out who are the Jewish patients, they come in. . . young, bright people, cheer 'em up, pay 'em a visit, wish them recovery and spend a little time with them. And this is part of yeshiva program, too. And then they. . . Rabbi Davidowitz, the dean, teaches a course in. . . in Homish, that is the five books of Moses at the University of Rochester, here. Yea, for Jewish students.

Q. I didn't know that.

A. Yea, and he gives it and. . . and they try to relate to the community. They're not. . . they're reaching out. And some of the boys are available for Torah services when. . . for instance a Torah reader on Saturday is sick or can't come, they call the yeshiva and send 'em a boy. OK. So they . . .

Q. So it seems that it's very. . .

A. Yes, yes. And. . . and. . . and they. . . the ladies auxiliary are really going to town. They have all kinds of social activities and fundraising activities. And people responding nicely. And . . .

Q. Do you think this kind of interest can be sustained in a community this small? I mean this is a relatively small Jewish community.

A. Yes, I think that it not only can be sustained, but I think it will grow because I'm surprised at some of the people who have joined the ladies
A. (Continued) auxiliary. They have no children... they have no children. They, themselves, will not directly benefit by it, but they've joined. The membership is $10 and every little while they're expected to sell raffle tickets, and every little while they're expected to bake a cake, you know, the usual things. And... and... and they come across, they joined. So, it... it... it's... if it wasn't meaningful to them they wouldn't. They could say now look, I belong to so many organizations, the ladies auxiliary of B'nai B'rith and it's Hadassah and this. leave me alone.

Q. Right.

A. But, no. They joined.

Q. So that's... 

A. Not only... I think not only sustain but it will grow, it reaches out. Friends bring friends, and it's a appealing. It appeals to them because I think it's beginning to penetrate people's mind, this generation gap and this intermarriage and this alienation of the youth, and for some people it's very, very painful because it's close to home or it's relatives who've lost a child to intermarriage or to assimilation or what. And it's beginning to penetrate them that something was wrong in the way many young people grew up. They did not have a basic Jewish education. And I think this draws people to the yeshiva idea more than anything else.

Q. It's interesting that... if I can follow through with that theme for a second in relation to the... to the yeshiva. You mentioned last time that there is... the phrase was in Yiddish... perhaps it was in Hebrew, I forget now, but the English was that there is a drop of Jewishness in all of us.

A. (Says Yiddish phrase twice in Yiddish language.)

Q. That's the line.
A. That is the drop, the gene. There may be one tiny little gene in every Jew, and even if he converted...

Q. Right.

A. And some...

Q. So with that kind of outlook, what... I mean through intermarriage, through assimilation and don't you nevertheless believe that there will be, because it's dormant in all of us, even if we go through assimilation or intermarriage, whatever...

A. Yea.

Q. ... that nevertheless is that drop of Jewishness...

A. Yes, it's there but it... it... in most cases it's minimal. It doesn't always come across.

Q. Do you see something like the yeshiva as awakening...

A. Oh, yes.

Q. As having awakening type of...

A. Oh, yes.

Q. ... function.

A. Oh, yes. It has awakened. It's a catalyst. It's a catalyst to the community. It's awakened some dormant Jews here. I know some of them who I'm suprised that they want to be on the Board and give $1,000. I am really suprised.

Q. Or Fox himself. I mean...

A. Yea, Fox himself...

Q. This is a good example of this...

A. This is a man... Fox himself. What does he need a yeshiva for? I mean, he... his place is open on Shabbas, it's open on yontiv and he's not an
A. (Continued) observant Jew. And he drove Rabbi Davidowitz over to our house one day. Rabbi Davidowitz wanted to come and see my husband, and he didn't even wear a... he was bare-headed, see? You would think out of respect to Rabbi Davidowitz he's put on a yomulke. And he didn't. And Rabbi Davidowitz didn't fault him for it.

Q. Right.

A. See? I mean, 'cause... didn't fault him... but you'd think... so he's so removed from even that little thing.

Q. Right.

A. You know what I mean. And he gives his services with devotion. He saves them enormous amounts of money with favors of all kinds, of all... and he continues to do it.

Q. That's a part of his...

A. (Yiddish phrase meaning drop of Jewishness.)

Q. Pin talyid?

A. Yea, he might be even warmer than that. He is not so removed. He has contact with his customers, they're all Jews. I mean they come to him. He probably maybe knows more of Jewishness than I would give him credit for. I don't know him myself personally, so I don't know. But maybe he's got more Jewish background than I think he has 'cause there are many people with a lot of Jewish background who just aren't observant. But they know from the old country yet or from their parents, and they know. They probably know a lot more than we think they do. But I'm not talking so much of him in... in relation to pin talyid, but some who are much further removed from Jewishness than he would... could conceive... and I'm not saying that he's removed from Jewishness at all. He's just... he's just not a fromp Jew. But there are some who are removed from everything. And even the creation of the
A. (Continued) State of Israel or the alienation of the youth now or what and it stirred these people up. So they come across with money, they come across with interest, and they care. I have a good example. I have a cousin, he's since passed away. He was an extreme left; he was a radical all his life, but a real radical. I... I can't conceive of anybody more left than he. He had no use for Zionism. He was a Socialist... maybe he was a Bolshevik for all I know. And he had nothing to do with a synagogue or anything. Our relative, we hardly ever saw him, but we knew him. I mean... relative. When the State of Israel was declared and there was a rally at Temple Beth El, and people flocked to Beth El with their checkbooks. When the war broke out, when the Arabs attacked Israel, it was a real state of emergency, and people we... I know we came with our checkbook and we saw other people around us all over writing checks. It wasn't enough to make a pledge, we felt we just had to give them money right then and there because it was our state was in danger. The Arabs attacked us and... and... When we were leaving the parking lot, going home, we see him getting out of his car, he didn't walk, he was running into Beth El. And I says to Heyer, to my husband, do you see what I see? Our cousin there, he must be running there with his check, too. Of all the people we could never conceive of him caring to give for Israel. That little pin talyid that was in here. Israel was in mortal danger and he had... it was late at night already and he came. We saw him get out of his car and he was running in. Now he only would have been coming there for one reason. He didn't come to hear the speakers. He... I'm sure he came to give his contribution because we... we were in danger. We were attacked, and he was as far removed from Zionism... he had no use for it. He was a real radical. So, that woke up in him. And I'm sure it would happen to him... it could've happened to
A. (Continued) others. So something happened. And ... and now ... this, of course, was 1968. 1968? 1965?

Q. What? When the war broke out?

A. Yea, when the ... when the Arabs ... 1967.

A. '67. When the Arabs attacked Israel. All right. This is quite a few years since and ... and the generation gap is just proof. And the alienated children are 50% intermarriage in colleges. It's awful. Awful. And ... and people are beginning to see involved. ... Well, this is terrible. We won't have any Jewish grandchildren anymore. So, this hits them, too, and I think the yeshiva comes across.

Q. Which way do you think it is going? Do you think that there is a return to Judaism or ... ?

A. I wish I. ...

Q. ... getting away from that?

A. Well, in some areas there is a return ... there is. In the bigger cities you see it, you see it.

Q. How about here in Rochester?

A. Well. ...

Q. The yeshiva there seems to be some indication. ...

A. Yes, yes. ...

Q. ... Israel is still strong. ... groups for Israel. ...

A. Well, what happened in our synagogue. I spoke at length about our mehitzah. That couldn't have happened five years ago. It was because of two young people, and the one especially whom we needed and wanted to engage for the summer. We needed him badly and he was very eligible. I mean it wasn't that we created ... he was very eligible, very desirable. He did a very
A. (Continued) fine job. And those were his terms. Now he came... as I told you then his family were not very observant. They were observant after a fashion, after a fashion. But, only after a fashion I should say. But the... and he... and like he are many others who when they came back for the summer to their parents here, parents came to our synagogue and they wouldn't they went to Keppeler Shul or they went to one of the other shuls where there was a mehitzah. They wouldn't... their... they're principled. They just wouldn't. And these are young, modern kids. But they have come back. They feel like this. Either I'm really observing all the mitzvahs or I don't observe at all. And they are not fanatics either, they're modern people. They're modern. They're... they're good sports. They... athletics and sports and they watch television. I mean they're not... they're not the real extreme. But, they feel... this is the cardinal principle of Judaism, when we pray there should be separation, and this is what we observe. They were taught this in yeshiva and they accepted it, and this is... and they won't yield. The older people yield. We agreed... we yielded, came to pray there. I mean... so we yielded and others like us did, but they do not yield. And there are others like them, in New York. As I mentioned last time, there are some children that will not come back to their parents' for holidays. They won't eat in their homes unless they can have their own dishes. And they're not fanatics but they feel it has to be kosher, and if it isn't kosher... Some parents have become kosher because of their children. They have eliminated all their dishes and they've become kosher because they want their children to be able to come home and... and... and enjoy.

Q. Feel comfortable there.
A. That's right. That's right. So there is a return. There is a return.
Q. So you feel that there may be then? Because on the other hand...
A. I think... so I...
Q. ... on the other hand you talked about whether our... whether our grandchildren will be Jewish.
A. Will even be Jewish. Yea. Well, unfortunately... unfortunately, the return is not as great as the going away. As the assimilation. Unfortunately.
Q. So they're both going on but...
A. Both is going on, but very unfortunately the... the assimilation is very great, and there are many reasons... many reasons for it. It's very unfortunate because in the long run these youngsters who assimilate and intermarry and all, they can't really be happy. They can't. They can't really be happy because in every perfect marriage... there is no perfect marriage, but in the best of marriages let us say, there is moments of friction. There are moments of... of... OK. And in those moments of friction it comes out: "the dirty Jew or the dirty..." in the moments of friction. In the best of marriages and... and... and children suffer for it. Children don't know if he's a Catholic or is he a Jew? And I've heard some people say well when he grows up he'll choose. We're tolerant... we won't influence any way...
Q. Right.
A. He goes to choose his own religion.
Q. Right.
A. But what kind of anchor did they give that child in the first place?
Q. On which to make that choice?
A. That's it. There's no anchor. Children don't want to make those choices.

I remember a family... I know a young growing up adolescent where the
A. (Continued) parents were quarrelsome, they didn't agree. This was a... this was a religious matter, they didn't agree. And the girl was... says to me one day, I wish my mother and father would both tell me I'm wrong. I'd feel much better if they'd both tell me I'm wrong than if... then if one tells me right and one tells me wrong.

Q. Right.

A. But if they'd only agree, even if they both tell me I'm wrong I'd feel better about it. You see? They... they want this direction. They want to be told this you can do and this you can't do. They want it.

Q. A kind of a reversal of what we've been hearing in my generation. Certainly educators have been saying, you know, permissiveness and this is the way it has to go and...

A. I know... I know... We brought up our boy very permissively, too. We thought this is fine, no... nothing rigid or all, but many people are getting to see that this was not the way... all right, you don't have to be autocratic and mean to... to... to lay down standards, but the permissiveness is not... no... no...

Q. No where to go...

A No, no, no. It hasn't given them the strength that they need in the years that they need it. They need those anchors. They need those anchors.

Q. That would be to me, since we are coming to an end here, to be a good... a good phrase for you, if I may put into a certain...

A. Yes, yes...

Q. ... department because anchors for your life, and certainly as you perceive others say in the Jewish community...

A. Yes.

Q. ... and also in secular life...
A. Right.

Q. The anchors of family, religion seem to be very, very...

A. Most important. Most important I feel. I... I think so. And because of the anchors of... of... of family life and religion, I could be a Zionist. I could fulfill my life as a Jew.

Q. Right.

A. I can... and my husband feels strongly that way, too.

Q. If it has been such a fulfilling dimension of your life why did you nevertheless feel that permissiveness was the proper for you to rear your child?

A. Well, unfortunately our child is a sick boy so that I can't generalize too much about it. He's... with him there's exceptions.

Q. I see.

A. There are really exceptions because he has more than just a few problems, he's really...

Q. OK.

A. So that that would really... no I couldn't... no I couldn't generalize 'cause when I said we brought him up permissively, I didn't say it in the sense that that spoiled him...

Q. I see.

A. ... because it... it didn't.

Q. OK.

A. He was really a sick child.

Q. He's in a different...

A. In a different context, yes.

Q. So it doesn't contradict your major feelings...?

A. No, no.

Q. ... about the anchors of life.
A. No, no. I see my family's children are growing up and I see the way some of my husband's nieces and nephews have numerous family, and those who had very deep religious anchors have some very fine children. They're proud of their children. They've achieved. They've achieved in careers, they've achieved... they're financially all right. They're menshen, they... they're solid, they can function by themselves and they're dependable. They're good citizens. And they're very religious, and their parents have no grief over them. Now you don't see that all the time. You just don't see that.

Q. It seems that it's an interesting comparison to make between the age that we're living in, which I think is still... well, it is very much as you're saying. You're getting away from these anchors. And in the twenties, which we were talking about in such a great detail before, there seems to have been so much Zionist activity...

A. Yes.

Q. ... and the contrast in your lifetime has been, I think, fairly remarkable within these terms.

A. Yea, yea.

Q. It's almost... well, one of nostalgia, you know.

A. It is. Well, I think most people at my age do have a nostalgia. They say... I hear this all at the old... the old... years ago were better. They were better for what...

Q. It always seems...

A. Yea, for one thing we were younger. We were younger. We were healthier. We could enjoy some foods that we can't eat now anymore. We could enjoy some activities that we don't have the energy for anymore. And there were... our families were still intact. So many of our dear ones are gone. So many of our loved ones are gone. For me it's a very sad feeling because all my
A. (Continued) brothers are gone now. I'm the youngest. I was very devoted to my brothers. They were very devoted to me, and I loved them all. They were all older than I, and they're all gone. All right, I have my nieces and nephews, but I have a very bereaved feeling to feel I'm the only one of my family.

Q. Yea.

A. The last one, the last one. They're all gone. I... I feel a great sense of loss. But you can't live... when we were young we... we had a lot of contact with each other, holidays or what... .

Q. Whenever...

A. Yea, I think that's true for everybody. I know some people who are older than I who have no family at all, no nieces, no nephews, no nothing. They're just all alone in the world. They live in the old homes, it's very sad.

Q. It is.

A. Very, very sad.

Q. Well, let's not look back, let's...

A. Yea, yea. I don't... I don't spend too much time thinking of the past because...

Q. Of course, it's kind of process...

A. Yea, yea.

Q. You feel obviously...

A. Yea, yea.

Q. Look backward. But, we've also looked a little forward here, too, and...

A. Yea, yea.

Q. And I think that's really has a...

A. Yea, yea.

Q. OK. Thank you very much.
A. You're very welcome.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A (INTERVIEW II)
XI. Hyman Kolko II, cont.
   D. Secular philanthropy

XII. Yeshiva in Rochester
   A. Beginnings ***
   B. Funding *

Tape 3, Side A

XII. Yeshiva in Rochester, cont.
   C. Problems with zoning
   D. Program ***
   E. Prospects

XIII. Jewish awakening, survival: "the return is not as great as the going away" ***