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Bertram Silverman

Bertram H. Silverman

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PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

The Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig, Director

September 1, 1977

Commissioned by: The Jewish Federation of Southern Maine

The Maine Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Program

PORTRAITS OF THE PAST: THE JEWS OF PORTLAND

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Commissioned by:

The Jewish Federation of Southern Maine with the
support of the University of Maine, Portland/Gorham,
College of Arts and Sciences

1977 Federation Program Board for the Project:

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Jerry Goldberg
Mrs. Stephen Levine
Mrs. Charles Mack
Alan Levenson
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Project Dates:

June 1, 1976 to September 15, 1977

PARTICIPANTS IN THE ORAL HISTORY

1. Judge Louis Bernstein
2. Mrs. Israel Bernstein (Rebecca)
3. Sumner Bernstein
4. Mrs. Louis Black (Selma)
5. Gerald Boxstein
6. Sam Cinamon
7. Robert Clenott
8. William Cohen
- *9. Morris Cox
10. Mrs. Maurice Drees (Mildred)
11. Rabbi Steven Dworken
12. Julius Elowitch
13. Daniel Epstein
14. Mrs. Abe Fineberg (Tama)
15. Mrs. Norman I. Godfrey (Ethel)
16. Jerome Goldberg
17. Arnold Goodman
18. Mrs. Arnold Goodman (Dorothy)
19. Julius Greenstein
20. Morris Isenman
21. Harry Judelshon
22. Mrs. Max Kaplan (Ethel)
23. Jules Krems
24. Mrs. Meyer Lerman (Ethel)
25. Mrs. Charles Mack (Cynthia)

26. Harold Nelson
27. Mrs. Harold Nelson (Mildred)
28. Arnold Potter
29. Mrs. Rebecca Rice
30. Maurice Rubinoff
31. Louis Seavey
32. Barnett Shur
33. Mrs. Barnett Shur (Clarice)
34. Bertram Silverman
35. Israel Silverman (Dean)
36. Rabbi Harry Sky
37. Jerry Slivka
38. Mrs. Ben Troen (Gertrude)
- *39. Harry Weinman
40. Louis Weisberg
41. Judge Sidney Wernick
42. Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)
43. Mrs. Lester Willis (Rita)
44. Dr. Benjamin Zolov

* Deceased since interview

August, 1977

The Oral History Study

A Note to the Reader from the Director:

Background to the Study

Sometime in the early summer of 1975, a group of Jewish leaders appointed by the Jewish Federation of Southern Maine as a "Jewish Bicentennial Committee" met together at the home of Rabbi Sky. National and State Bicentennial planning was at its peak; and some Jews wanted the Jewish community to do something to emphasize the heritage, the presence, the tradition, or the contributions in Maine over the 200 years of a distinctive culture and religious community. They knew from heresay that the Jews had come early to Maine, formed significant communities and had made and were making a considerable impact on the past, present and future of the State. But what should they do? The American Bicentennial theme, "Heritage and Horizons," seemed to echo the Talmudic words: "Know whence you have come and wither you are going." So many possibilities existed, and the suggestions flowed freely. Should the plans be comprehensive and cover the entire State or should they emphasize only the larger communities? Should the program, whatever it became, be aimed at increasing the historical and cultural understanding of the general community, or should it be a kind of re-exploration, re-examination, reminder for the diverse Jewish community? Ought it take the form of some gift which a grateful Jewish community could present to the State which had so recently served as a haven or opportunity for all of their immigrant parents and grandparents? And what vehicles should it use - theatre, music, lectures, exhibits, discussion groups, dialogues? Whatever was done would have to be inexpensive, because the Federation Program Funds were already committed to a continuing project which by consensus the entire community agreed had an urgent priority - the resettlement in Portland of Russian Jewish families, fleeing from the

modern form of Soviet persecution. The Federation had always participated fully in national and international projects, and the Refugee Program received its usual alert and committed attention. So the Committee deliberated, argued, pondered, debated.

Finally, a member of the group hesitatingly suggested the sponsorship of a book - which would detail the entire history of the Jews of Maine. No information was available on the Jews of Maine with the single exception of a brief book, Portland Jewry, written by Ben Band in 1955, sponsored by a newly formed Jewish Historical Society, and published locally. Meant to be a beginning step in helping the Jewish community learn about itself, the book essentially tried to pull together the chronology of events in the formation of the Portland community and its institutions, and to identify some of the participants and leaders in that extraordinary development. The beginning step was a valiant one, but it ended there as did the Historical Society. The Portland Jews were too busy doing, building, creating, and helping Jews across the world. It was not yet the time for reflection, for stocktaking, for a thorough examination of the ROOTS of the community. But now, perhaps the time and energy had to be taken, lest the history disappear, never to be reclaimed; and the rich tradition never be transmitted accurately to the children and to the community.

Rabbi Sky mentioned that the American Jewish Committee was suggesting, in fact, encouraging, a series of Oral History Projects across the country, emphasizing that a well conceived multifaceted reconstruction of the past could surely help to create a balance, an awareness of the unfolding story of the American Jewish experience. Perhaps that thrust should be seized upon in Portland. But no one really knew what oral history meant, and additionally, who would do it? There were no Jewish historians in the State of Maine. Rabbi Sky alerted the Committee to the unusual fact that the Dean of Arts and Sciences

at the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham was a scholar of the Holocaust; and as an Associate Professor of History had initiated courses in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Perhaps Dr. Konnilyn Feig could be approached. Rabbi Sky knew that Dean Feig had a heavy schedule in her position; that she would never allow her additional commitment to the teaching of the Holocaust to be tampered with; and that in whatever free time she managed to find, she was writing her own book on Hitler's concentration camps - the capstone of fifteen years of research in Europe. It looked hopeless, but the Committee asked the Rabbi to try. And he persevered. And Dean Feig found herself volunteering her free time to create and direct the project.

When I entered the picture, I had the same overwhelming reservations which the Committee had already expressed. I had little time, and my interest and commitment centered on the Holocaust. Where would I ever find the space for such an enormous project, and who would help? We had no graduate program in Liberal Arts at the University. Where would I get the trained assistance I would need? I met with the Committee, outlined the limits of what could be done, and explained that the project could never be a book, but a re-beginning, another first step, which could be built upon in the succeeding years, and resulting perhaps, someday in a full and real history of Maine Jewry.

It would be an oral history folklore of Portland Jewry; but widened to use the group as a microcosm of Maine Jewry, an example of some kinds of experiences of American Jewry, a renewed acquaintance with the Old World Culture, and a picture of the often-repeated American immigrant story. It would result in a set of final transcripts, made available to the entire reading public. Thus, a small study, a beginning, with wide implications, centering in Portland but suggesting a state-wide impact, a re-examination for the Jewish community and a first reading understanding for the general community, a part of a picture

puzzle for an entire nation, a gift - to the Jewish community and to the Portland community. To my surprise, the Committee and the Federation voted to sponsor the project. I finally agreed to do it for two reasons. When I came to Portland, the Jewish community had been very good to me and had invited me to the Synagogues, the organizations and the homes to talk about the Holocaust. I felt some gratitude. But far more important, I felt a sense of shock when I, too, discovered the absence of any real research and history on one of Maine's most significant immigrant groups. I, too, felt the sense of urgency to re-begin before it really was too late.

Oral History as a Research Discipline

Oral History concerns itself with conservation of a special kind. It conserves the intimate knowledge and experience of humans who have made significant contributions to the life of the time, to a group, to an area, or who have been ideally posted to observe the major events and developments. These humans may be leaders and movers of history, such as Kennedy, Kruschev, and other notables. But oral history taken from those who "made history," only touches the tip of the iceberg when understanding of human cultures and the fabric of civilization is at issue. Perhaps, then, of even greater significance are oral histories taken from groups of ordinary human beings - men and women, known primarily to their neighbors, and perhaps in their towns and states, through whose lives have flowed the currents of an historical age; and whose reactions and understandings determine a collective impact upon a cultural grouping and a time; or upon whom a collective impact of a time and a culture can be measured, evaluated, analyzed, pondered.

The ways of life characteristic of earlier America are rapidly disappearing, but there are persons still alive today who remember them

vividly. Their memories will not be preserved by writing historical memoirs. Oral history projects have attempted to utilize individual recordings, which are admittedly fragmentary and highly personal, but when taken together provide a fund of color, detail, and incidents valuable for future historical research. Roots, centers, beginnings, road signs - all are critical ingredients to any portion of America's colorful culture, and to the essentials of every human being's possession of knowledge of his own individual and group past. And here it is that the necessity for an oral history project centering upon Jewish life in Maine reaches the critical level.

The Jews in Maine

That Jews have been deeply involved in the religious, educational, political, cultural, intellectual and economic life of the State of Maine is one of the best-kept secrets in historical and sociological literature. And Maine is one of the few states in America to be devoid of any major study of one of its important cultural influences. Since 1800 at least, Jews have been living in Maine, and since 1829 with the formation of a Jewish Community in Bangor, some Jewish community life has existed. By 1866, Jews had begun to settle in Portland in noticeable numbers. For nearly 100 years, then, Jews have been making a considerable contribution to and impact upon the state at every level and in every area.

The Jerusalem of the North - the term used so frequently in the past to refer to the Portland Jewish Community. Almost all of the Jews who immigrated to Portland came from Eastern Europe - from Poland, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania - and they brought with them the rich Ashkenazen Orthodox religious and cultural traditions. Orthodoxy found a new home in Portland, in a transplanted form, and held its strength and oneness far longer than most communities in the U.S.

Early twentieth century Portland might be described for the Jews as a community of eastern European shtetl survivors, a pious Orthodox community with several synagogues, central in the lives of the community members. Formal education played a minimal role in the lives of their parents, yet most of the children are learned in the study of the Talmud and graduated from college or comparable institutions. Here we have an unusual phenomena: parents are immigrants, starting out as peddlers or small shopkeepers, and in one generation, the children are college graduates. These college-educated men and women began in the Twenties and Thirties to question traditions which seemed to them troublesome in a modern world. In America, the land of freedom, of relief from pogroms and Russian Army conscription, where the streets were "paved with gold," the wall of Orthodox piety of Portland's Jews began to show cracks as these men and women struggled to educate and provide a better standard of living for themselves. Many had to break the holiness of the Sabbath to work.

Institutions had to be created. In the decade from 1920 to 1930 the Jewish Home for the Aged was built to accommodate family members who could no longer be cared for by their families. In the decade from 1930 to 1940 the idea of a new Jewish Community Center, with a gym, social rooms, kosher kitchens, and sauna and bathing facilities, culminated in the dedication of the present Center in 1938. Throughout the Forties and the Fifties this Center was the focus of family, social and athletic life and the focus of all Jewish functions in the city of Portland.

The winds of Conservatism and Reformism bypassed Portland and it was not until the decade from 1940 to 1950 that a demographic migration from the inner city to the outskirts of Portland, and a shared belief by many that options to Orthodoxy had to be created, resulted in the formation of Temple Beth El, as a Conservative Congregation. The Conservative movement wanted to conserve

that which was appealing in Orthodoxy, and to bring those who were no longer practicing Judaism back into a religious atmosphere. That decade also saw the organization of the Jewish Federation, and its international concern in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. The funds raised to help Israel during those eventful years into the Fifties are impressive for a community which has relatively little Jewish wealth.

Jewish people succeeded during the next two decades in breaking down some of the barriers to those of their faith in clubs, organizations, professions, institutions, and geographic areas which had previously excluded them. The need for the construction of a new Orthodox Synagogue in the Temple Beth El area became clear during the early Fifties; and the Orthodox Shaarey Tphiloh Hebrew School and Synagogue on Noyes Street was erected. The Newbury Street Synagogue, Etz Chaim, and Anshe Sfaard maintained their separate identities, although many of the congregation members of Newbury Street became members of the new Synagogue. During the Sixties the Community Hebrew School was created.

Today Orthodoxy and Conservativism exist today side by side, strong, active enriched by each other. In the baggage which the immigrants, the founders of the Portland community and those who followed brought with them were two unflinching commitments and enduring dreams - education and public service, unfaltering, regardless of the cost. And the story which emerges is one of involvement and the mutually beneficial changes which come out of the tensions and reciprocal relationships between Maine society and Maine's Jews as individuals and as a community.

The Study

This transcript is only one of forty-four. It presents a portrait of a family, a story of generations, in America and in Europe. The reader would be doing himself a disservice to focus only on this transcript . All forty-four

volumes should be read, because they tell a different story - the story of a remarkable community, a courageous people. Each volume is a family story and one small part of a community folklore history. The full set of final transcripts will be readily available to the Jewish community in the Temple Beth El Library and to the public, in the Portland Public Library. In addition, a professional Permanent Photographic Exhibition containing mounted pictures of each interviewee and pictures of all of the buildings and places significant in Portland Jewish History has been presented to the Federation. It will reside in Temple Beth El.

The enormous project itself was completed under the Coordinator, Lisa Wilhelm, with two years of committed, continuous and volunteer help from a few undergraduate students trained by the Director and the Coordinator, and a few gentile and Jewish community volunteers who worked with incredible energy and dedication. Behind it was the unfailing sponsorship of the Jewish Federation. And, of course, central to it all are the human beings who are the study, the men and women who invited us into their lives and homes, and who so openly and compassionately shared their thoughts, their honest assessments, their feelings and intuitions, their remembrance of factual events, their hopes and their fears concerning the development of this exceptionally strong and traditionally Orthodox Jewish community over a period of seventy-five years, and its development in the future.

Contained within their words is an intricate web of Jewish concerns which bear significance not only to the present and future generations of this community, but also to the broader realm of American Jewry. The project raised as many questions as it answered, questions of considerable scope which could affect American Judaism in the future: What does being

Jewish mean to you? Of what significance is Israel to you in your life? How do you feel about intermarriage and assimilation, and how will these facts affect Judaism? What trends have you observed in the Jewish institutions in this city, and where are these trends leading you? What have been the changes in your Jewish family life - which traditions, cultural and religious, remain with you and which have been discarded?

The majority of interviewees are over the age of fifty, born of immigrant parents or immigrants themselves, who carried with them to Portland the traditions of the Eastern European shtetl and who have watched that ghettoized secure life in the "Jerusalem of the North" be slowly supplanted by a more modern, urbane existence of the present-day Jews.

They represent a heterogeneous group but with a strong linkage. Each is an inspiration, and each reflects commitment, dedication, humanness. As individuals, each has something to say about himself, his life, his hopes, his dreams, his thoughts, his sadnesses. And if the group is placed together, the picture that this gathering together paints, patch-work quilted as it may be, kaleidoscopic as it may seem, has an artistic potential for richness, continuity, color, form and spirit.

Those of the older generation miss the piety of the "Jerusalem of the North": the days when on a Friday afternoon the smells of the Sabbath baking emanated from Jewish neighborhoods; when the men gathered after the daily minyan within the confines of their synagogues to share their thoughts, discuss business, or play cards; when Bar Mitzvah celebrations were simple, with a little herring and kichel, and pure; and when the younger generation shared their lives with the older generation. Today the traditional, Orthodox ways are melded with a modern age, and Jews realize that they can be both good Americans and good Jews. The Jewish Family Services has successfully

brought about, during the past three decades, a transition from the old belief that Jews should take care of their own to an enlightened view that Jews should take advantage of community services. Citizens are now aware of Jewish contributions to the general community, and the "Jewish tokenism" of past decades is disappearing. While there are as many definitions of Judaism as there are Jews, ranging from ultra-Orthodox to minimal identification with any aspect of Judaism, there is little to support the belief of one of our interviewees that the American Jew "will sink into the fading sunset." Many view Judaism, to some degree, as a continuum which has survived for centuries. Many also talk about it as a cultural identification, a combination of religion and common ancestry in terms of the Bible and mystical in the sense that it is inexplicable. Judaism is more than good works and ethics. It includes that mystical, spiritual something which ties all Jews from all times together in their diversity - that mystical tie which all of our interviewees struggled to define when speaking of their own Judaism.

To everyone the state of Israel has some degree of significance. "A Homeland." "A fountainhead with which all Jews can identify." "A place that worries about Jews - just in case." "A unifying structure of Judaism." "The yearning of a 2,000-year-old culture." "It shows the world that Judaism lives." "Israel made the Jew an important human being in today's world." "A paradise built from a wasteland." These are just a few of many reasons why Israel must survive for the Portland Jews.

It is with a depth of gratitude that I express my final thanks to these forty-four individuals who have allowed all of us from the outside to view for the first time a picture of the Jerusalem of the North, to understand

the background and traditions of this community, and to realize the commitment and contribution, past and present, of Portland Jewry.

Dr. Konnilyn G. Feig
August 25, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Bertram Silverman

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Konnilyn Feig

PROJECT ASSISTANTS: Lisa Wilhelm
Cheryl Greaney

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: 19 Longwood Drive
Portland, Maine

DATE: August 27, 1976

TIME: 1:00 P.M.

BERTRAM SILVERMAN

Bertram Silverman was born in Portland, Maine in 1913 of immigrant parents. His mother came from Russia to New York when she was three months old, and his father came to Portland from Minsk, Russia when he was sixteen. In 1927, his mother's parents immigrated to Israel, expecting to stay for the rest of their lives. However, the family in America pleaded with them to come back, which they did. Before they left, however, they built a small Synagogue in Tel Aviv.

Mr. Silverman's maternal grandfather went into the retail shoe business and real estate. His grandfather on his father's side and his father started a business in Portland as dealers in wools and rags in 1901. That business grew; and is now Mr. Silverman's business. Once called P. Silverman and Son, it is now named the Portland Textile Company, and Carlbert Fabrics. Both Mr. Silverman's grandfather and father were leaders and founders in the Jewish community. His grandfather was one of the founders of Shaarey Tphiloh and his father also helped to found the Newbury Street Synagogue. In fact, his father performed the ceremonial act of purchasing the first key to the Synagogue.

All three of the immigrant father's children went to good colleges. Bert Silverman graduated from Portland High School as salutatorian and as a Brown Medal student. He went on to Bowdoin College where he graduated with a B.A. in French Literature, in 1934, as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Upon graduation, he returned to Portland and immediately went into his father's business. In 1943, he married a Boston woman, and they have two children. Their daughter Marjorie, 27 years old, graduated from Columbia Teacher's College with a Master of Arts Degree, and is in charge of a remedial reading department in a school in Hudson, Massachusetts. Three years ago she married a Moroccan Jewish man whose family had moved to Israel and still lives there. She and her husband met in America. In February of 1976, Mr. and Mrs. Silverman traveled to meet

the in-laws in Israel! Mr. Silverman's son James, 31 years old, graduated from Bryant & Stratton Business College in Boston, Massachusetts. After serving with the Navy in Vietnam, James is presently general manager of the Hoffman California Fabrics in California.

Mr. Silverman's major activities in his long life of community service have been with his business and with the Orthodox Synagogue. From the time he graduated from college, he has been active in the Jewish community. As a young man recently graduated from college in 1934, he immediately became involved with the Jewish Community Center. He served as Vice President and served on many of the committees. His greatest love was the theater group, and he served as President of the workshop and acted in many of the plays presented. In 1954, Mr. Silverman headed the initial campaign to build the Noyes Street Hebrew School and Synagogue. As general chairman, it was his job to raise the \$189,000, which he did. He was one of the original founders of the new Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue. From the time the building was built he served as Vice President. In 1959, this grandson of a founder assumed the Presidency of Shaarey Tphiloh - a position which he held for seven years. He is now a member of the Executive Committee of the Synagogue and participates on other committees as well.

Mr. Silverman and his wife reside at 19 Longwood Drive in Portland.

August, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name Bertram Silverman

I certify that I have transcribed the Interview Tapes to the best of my ability, as accurately and clearly as possible. I have discussed the contents of the tapes and transcripts with no one.

Transcriber:

Name Judy Goldberg

Signature Judy Goldberg

Date Nov, 5, 1976

Ok'd by: Konnilyn Feig

Project Director

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name BERTRAM SILVERMAN

I certify that I have edited the Original Transcript to the best of my ability, checking carefully on all unclear sounds and omissions from the tape. I have added no material of substance and changed no ideas. The editing goals were completion, clarity, removal of redundancy, removal of unnecessary comments and "chatter" non central to the interview, and grammatical clarification. The prime goal was a transcript which read well, flowed, and presented the ideas clearly, while always retaining the mechanisms and responses which kept intact the personality, state of mind, and beliefs of the interviewee.

Editor:

Name and Title DR. KONNILYN FEIG

Signature Konnilyn Feig

Date DEC. 17, 1976

Reread and Rechecked and held Confidential by

Name Yisa Wilhelm (signature)

Date DEC. 4, 1976

Name _____ (signature)

Date _____

Typist:

I certify that I have typed this transcript accurately and held the contents confidential.

Name Geraldine Kendrick (signature)

Date DEC. 23, 1976

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Bertram H. Silverman

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Konnilyn Feig

DATE: August 27, 1976

F: This is an interview with Mr. Bertram H. Silverman for the Jewish Federation and University of Maine, College of Arts and Sciences, Portland, Maine, Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Project, by Dr. Konnilyn Feig and her assistants, Lisa Wilhelm and Cheryl Greaney, at 19 Longwood Drive, Portland, Maine, on August 27, 1976, at 1:00 P.M.

F: The first kinds of questions that we are interested in, which are unusual in this kind of project, are your origins and the origins of your family. Were you born in America?

S: I was born right here in Portland.

F: Well, what about your mother and father?

S: My mother was about three months old when she arrived in Troy, New York. She came from old Russia. I don't even know which part, if you want to know the truth. Her parents came from Russia, although historically there is an interesting background. Her great grandparents were in Spain, originally. It goes back that way and then they went to Russia; and then a certain part of my grandmother's family came over to the United States back around 1850 to 1855. They were here for several years, and then went to England; and then a part of the family again went back to Russia, and then my mother's parents, as I say, came from Russia to the States.

F: Did you know your grandparents?

S: My grandparents? Yes. In fact, they died right here in Portland.

F: Well, did they come from a little town in Russia or a large town?
A shtetl?

S: A little shtetl, yes, let's put it that way.

F: Why do you think they came?

S: Why? The same reason that almost everybody else came, I suppose.
Because of persecutions and the opportunity for betterment for themselves and for their children.

F: Did they talk as though they regretted coming?

S: No, not at all. They were very pleased that they were here. They had a good life here in the United States, and, as I say, my mother was age 94 when she died; so she was here 93 and 3/4 of the years of her life [laughs].

F: Your father, was he born in Russia?

S: My father was born in Minsk, and he was a young man of 16 when he came here. His father came here two or three years prior, and left his family - his wife and my father, the oldest of seven, I believe, although one was born here in the States. My uncle, who is still living, was born here in the States, but the rest of the family were just youngsters. My father remained, and he took charge of the family, he and his mother; and he was only a youngster of 16. They had a grain business; it was a pretty good business in Europe. My grandfather came over here for probably the same reasons that my mother's parents came over here, and he settled right here. They landed right here in Portland, as a matter of fact. They didn't arrive in New York as a lot of people did. They arrived right here in Portland.

F: Your father's father landed here, and then your father came over?

S: And my father and his mother and the rest of the family, except for one. My uncle was born here in 1901. My father was only 16 when he arrived here.

F: Now, where did your mother's parents go? Here to Portland, also?

S: No, no. They settled originally in Troy, New York. Mother went to school in Troy, New York with all of my uncles and aunts. Then business took her father into the State of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They moved around a little bit. They lived in Holyoke; they lived in Providence. It's rather interesting because my grandparents were retiring at about the time of my Bar Mitzvah, which was in 1926. Even at that time they had the pioneer spirit within them, and they wanted to settle in Palestine. At that time, of course, it was Palestine, not Israel. And they wanted to go and live out the remainder of their days in Palestine, as soon as I had completed my Bar Mitzvah here in Portland. They had been living in Boston, in the Roxbury area, which was a predominantly

Jewish area then. My grandfather was not a cantor, but one who read the Torah, on Saturdays and Holidays for the congregation. The Blue Hill Avenue Congregation in Boston was the biggest Jewish congregation in the Boston area at that particular time. My grandfather had a very strong, powerful, and very nice voice; and, of course, it required a lot of knowledge in order to be able to read the Torah! So, they were living in the Boston area at the time that my Bar Mitzvah took place here in Portland in 1926. Almost immediately thereafter, they went over to Palestine. They lived there for a couple of years, but the folks here were lonesome and wanted them to come back. They were fully prepared to stay there for the rest of their remaining years, but, due to the urging of my mother and my two uncles and my aunt, they decided, or agreed, that they would come back to the States. As a matter of fact, they lived in Tel Aviv. Just before their departure, they built a little Synagogue in the Tel Aviv area. It has since been torn down. But, they built a little Synagogue there, which they left in their name inasmuch as they weren't able to remain there permanently for the rest of their days. Furthermore, during the war, I had a cousin, who has since died, who was stationed over in Palestine. He met a girl there, fell in love, and they were married in that very Synagogue which my grandparents had built! Then he brought his wife over here to the States after the war. They lived in Massachusetts for awhile, and then they moved over to California because his wife felt that the climate was more closely associated to the Israeli climate, or Palestinian climate. That's the story, except, unfortunately, my cousin died a couple of years ago; but his wife and the family are still there.

F: Were your grandparents unhappy, when they came back? How did they feel about it?

S: They would have preferred to have remained in Palestine. They did it merely because the children had urged them to come back. Now, when they came back, they lived here in Portland and they both passed away right in the city of Portland.

F: Were they retired at that time?

S: Yes, yes.

F: What did your grandfather do for a living before he went to Palestine?

S: My grandfather had been in the retail shoe business and in real estate. As a matter of fact, my mother's two brothers lived here for awhile. These two uncles were manufacturing cord, which was going into tires at that time. They were using a cotton cord in automobile tires. They had a mill over here in Westbrook which they were using for this particular purpose. My grandfather was in the real estate business and owned that real estate over there which my uncles were using as their factory. The uncles moved away. In fact, one of these uncles just died a year or so ago, so there is longevity in the family. He was over 90 years of age, too!

F: So, that's why you look so young . . .

F: [Laughs].

F: Well, you have to look young. You've got 50 more years to live!
[All: laughter].

S: Well, I don't know [laughs].

F: All right. Your father's parents came here to Portland, and what did your grandfather do?

S: My grandfather went into business with my father in 1901. They were dealers in wools, rags, and things like that. When I say rags, I don't mean old rags. They were always in new rags, what we call clippings, materials which we would bale up and sell for reprocessing. It was an early recycling business [All: laughter]. And also, my father was associated with various woolen mills where he had contacts; and he would purchase so called close-outs from them constantly. My father was the inside man. He didn't like to travel very much, contrary to myself, who likes the road. I must have my grandfather's blood in me in that respect. My grandfather was a very religious person, and he would travel. In those days, to travel throughout the State of Maine was a week's trip. He would leave on a Monday morning, for example, and take the train up to Lewiston. He would conduct his business with people around there. He would be out purchasing, mainly, not selling; because my father had the contracts way out of New England on the selling end of it. He was very religious and he would eat only kosher food, and made sure that he had the proper places where he would stay, so he had friends - every bystop, he had certain Jewish people where he would remain every time he went there. Now, I don't know if you have interviewed any of the Goodmans here - Arnold Goodman?

F: Not yet.

S: Well, maybe Arnold is on your list [F: Yes, he is]. Well, Arnold's wife, Dotty, comes from Auburn, Maine, and her father's home used to be one of the places where my grandfather would stop. Then, he'd go up to the Striar's in Bangor, or he'd go to the Rosentals in Waterville. But wherever it was, he would make various stops.

F: Well, now, when you grew up, did this business remain this kind of business? Your father did retire, didn't he?

S: My father passed away in 1949. He was sort of semi-retired, because he had had a couple of heart attacks. He wasn't completely retired, but the business went on through myself. I conducted that type of business; and then when I saw that some of the woolen mills in places which we had had contact with were dying out and leaving New England, I gradually went into the fabric end of it. In other words, we com-

pleted the spectrum from all those . . .

F: What exactly is your business?

S: My business is selling fabrics to fabric stores. I am a wholesaler, and I take in wools or cottons or polyesters, or what have you, and we process them down at my place. I get big rolls of cloth, and then we cut them up into smaller pieces, which you see in fabric stores for the home sewing trade. In fact, I have a retail store also within my building, as well as my wholesale business.

F: Are you in this business alone?

S: Well, my brother-in-law is associated with me.

F: So, it was your grandfather's business, and your father's business, and now yours.

S: That's right.

F: What is the name of the business?

S: The name was changed since they had it. It was originally P. Silverman & Son - P. was my grandfather, Son was my father; but now I call it Portland Textile Company, the wholesale aspect of it, and the retail is called Carlbert Fabrics. If you've ever driven down York Street, maybe you have seen my building.

F: Where did your grandfather and father attain the capital to begin this business and develop it?

S: My grandfather had a pretty good business in Europe, this grain business. Now, I honestly have no idea how much money they had. There was no substantial amount of capital, but they managed. They worked very hard and they had a good reputation with whomever they were involved.

F: And did business volume grow as time went on?

S: My father developed a nice business.

F: What about during the Depression?

S: We were in pretty good shape. I don't say we were not hurt, we were, but not badly. We weren't hurt the way a lot of people were. When I was in college, the banks were closed. Our bank, the Canal Bank, happened to be one at that time that did not close. I was able to provide funds to a lot of my chums in school. I don't mean we were terribly wealthy, or anything like that, but we were always comfortable, let's put it that way.

F: From scratch, these two men and then yourself built a constantly expanding business. Now, I want to go back again. Am I to assume that your father's family was Orthodox and very observant?

- S: My father's family, yes. My father, not to the degree of his father. He went to services, yes, on Saturdays, and he was quite observant, but not to the nth degree. [F: Uhhuh]. My mother was a little different [Laughs]. My mother's parents were very, very Orthodox. But my mother was one who, on a Saturday afternoon, had no compunctions about going out and taking the streetcar downtown [Laughs], going to the movies [Laughs], or something of that sort, which was not very common in those days.
- F: So, she would ride on Saturday.
- S: She would ride on the Sabbath, which today I know is common.
- F: But it was unusual then.
- S: But it was most unusual at that time.
- F: When your grandfather and father had the business, did it observe the Jewish calendar?
- S: Yes, absolutely.
- F: Does your business observe it now?
- S: I observe it as far as my wholesale part is concerned. I have a retail store, and I do keep it open, but not on the High Holidays. This is only within recent years. I wish I didn't have to. I am not observant like they were, and I wish I were more observant. But my wholesale firm, I don't operate on the Sabbath. I ride and I do a lot of things that I know, according to strict Orthodoxy, you shouldn't do, but I am not particularly proud of it; I'll admit it [F: I see]. I wish that I were retired so I could be more observant, maybe, than I am at this moment. I was President of my Synagogue, as you probably know, for seven years, and I loved it. I went to services every single Saturday. I still go to services on Saturday. This morning I was at services at 6:30 a.m. I don't attend every day. I had been, up until a month ago, because this uncle, whom I mentioned who passed away, had no children. So, out of respect for him, I was observing Kaddish for a year. That was completed a month or so back, but I still told the boys down at the Synagogue that I'm a big sport; I am going to give them one day a week [Laughs]! I wish I could give them every day, but to be there at 6:30 to 6:45 every single morning of every week . . .
- F: Yes, that's hard to do.
- S: And nights, too. I was attending the evening services, as well, but

now that I have completed the Kaddish, I do go Fridays, and I do attend on Saturdays. As far as the holidays, the major holidays in particular, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and so forth, they were always closed and I still am closed and I always will be. There is no question about that. The major holidays I would never consider anything but that.

F: But you would drive?

S: I don't drive to the Synagogue, no.

F: How do you get there?

S: I walk.

F: You can't walk; it's too far.

S: Don't tell me that; I do! [laughter].

F: You walk? You don't walk from here to the Synagogue?

S: Yes.

F: You do that?

S: On holidays, absolutely.

F: You do?

S: Now, the only thing that we do is this: my wife finds it a little bit difficult, so we sometimes stay at my brother-in-law's home, which is closer. We both walk, though. I would never think of driving on Yom Kippur or on Rosh Hashanah. I never have in my life and I'm not going to start now. And yes, I have walked many, many times from here. It's two miles. It's good for me. It's 33 minutes to be exact. I can be absolutely precise with you; it takes me 33 minutes to get there!

F: All right! Your mother and father, were they educated up to the high school level?

S: My mother went through high school, and my father, of course, was 16 when he came here. But he studied, and he could read and write very well; he was a genius when it came to mathematics.

F: Did they care about education?

S: Oh, they sure did. They saw that all three of us got our complete education and went onto college.

F: When you grew up, what was the language spoken in the home?

S: English.

F: English?

S: I know Yiddish [F: uhhuh], because I picked it up at my grandparents.

- F: Your father must have learned English quickly, then. Where did your father meet your mother?
- S: In Boston through mutual friends of the grandparents, I guess. They were married in Boston.
- F: And he brought her here?
- S: They were married in Boston and moved up here.
- F: How many children did they have?
- S: Three.
- F: Are you the oldest?
- S: Yes. My mother went nine and one half years before she had any children [laughs].
- F: And who else is there?
- S: Two sisters.
- F: You are the only boy?
- S: Yes.
- F: Where do these sisters live?
- S: One in the Boston area, and the other one in Providence.
- F: Did both girls marry Jewish men?
- S: Yes.
- F: The sister who lives in Providence, is she still Orthodox?
- S: My wife keeps a kosher home, but my sister does not.
- F: You went to college. Did your two sisters?

S: Yes.

F: Where did they go?

S: The older went to Colby and the younger one went to Pembroke.

F: So you went to Bowdoin and you got a degree there.

S: I have a degree.

F: In what?

S: Bachelor of Arts. Phi Beta Kappa [Laughs].

F: Phi Beta Kappa?

S: I shouldn't say that [laughs].

F: Yes, you should. We need to know.

S: I haven't worn the key since I got out of school, and I happened to notice that everybody is going to wear vests now, so it is a good opportunity for me to put my key on again! No, I was just kidding about that.

F: No, it's funny to see people wearing the key; I lost mine a long time ago.

S: Getting back to your prior question about my parents, they weren't pushy, they didn't insist that you study, or this or that. We had it ourselves. Each and every one of us were good students, and all of us were Brown Medal students at Portland High. I happened to have been the Salutatorian of my class at the time. We weren't urged, or anything like that. My father wouldn't say you have to be Orthodox, you have to do this, you have to do that. If it came from within me, he was satisfied. If there were things that I did that he didn't do, why, he didn't complain about anything of that nature, either.

F: When you went to college, what did you major in?

S: I majored in French literature. I'm a French literature major who went into the business world [laughs]!

F: Well, did you intend, when you were majoring in French literature, to come back and take over your father's business?

S: I always thought that I would become associated with my father. On

the other hand, I don't know whether I am a frustrated French professor, or what [laughs]. I was always interested in languages, and I love reading languages.

F: Can you still read French?

S: I can read French and I can write fairly well. I am not very fluent in conversational French. I should be more so very soon again.

F: A Phi Beta Kappa French major ought to be able to recover his French.

S: All right. I can read and I can write and if I had a little conversation with somebody for awhile I suppose I could speak it. My daughter can speak much better than myself, and she had much less French than I. The reason that I should become a little more fluent during the next several months is that I am contemplating a trip to Israel with my wife in February. My daughter married a Moroccan Jewish boy, three years ago, whose family moved to Israel. And, inasmuch as they came from Morocco, the native tongue is French. I have not met his parents. They live in Israel, and if I'm going to get along with them and I can't speak Hebrew well enough, I've got to know my French, or else be stuck with interpreters [laughs]!

F: Well, she was a French major, also, wasn't she?

S: You see, my daughter speaks quite fluently and she is a teacher. She has a sister-in-law, my son-in-law's sister, who resides in Paris. They have a good element of their family in France, so she got along beautifully last summer when she was over there.

F: When you graduated from college, what year did you graduate, by the way?

S: 1934.

F: Did you immediately go into business?

S: Yes.

F: Happily?

S: Yes. I had every intention of doing it, and did it [laughs].

F: When World War II came along, you were too old to serve in it.

S: No, I wasn't too old, but I was 4-F, unfortunately. I had a heart murmur. When I was a kid, I had rheumatic fever, I was in bed for about six and one half months, and I couldn't walk. They didn't think I would ever be able to walk, but, thank God, I came out of it. The murmur was still there. I've been as active as anybody could ever be, and I've never been bothered, but the fact that it was there put me into a 4-F classification at that time, and I had trouble with that, and with insurance. I've been brought back to complete normal rating

as far as the insurance is concerned; so it's not anything that has ever bothered me during my entire life, except during that time. But it kept me out of the service, and it kept my insurance rates up for awhile.

F: And to overcompensate for the six months in bed, you became a scholar!
[S: Well, I . . .] Where did you meet your wife?

S: I met my wife up here in Portland. Some Portland girls who were living in Boston were vacationing in the summertime, and brought Evelyn up here with them. We double-dated - blind dated, I should say, and it took [laughs]!

F: What year were you married?

S: In 1943.

F: So you waited quite a while. You sewed your wild oats for nine years after you graduated from college.

S: I'm not going to record anything there [laughter]!

F: Had your wife gone to college?

S: No. She went through high school. She was from Boston. Then the depression hit her family pretty hard [F: uhhuh], and she went to work.

F: Then, in 1943, she moved up here and then you had children.

S: Right.

F: How many?

S: Two.

F: When was the first one born?

S: In August of 1944. We married in June of 1943, so it was twelve months later . . .

F: Right away [laughter]!

S: Not immediately! [laughs]

F: And Marjorie lives in Massachusetts?

S: Marjorie lives in Acton, Massachusetts.

F: She's married to an Israeli, isn't she?

S: Marjorie is the one, whom I mentioned, was married three years ago to an Israeli.

F: It is her parents-in-law who live in Israel?

S: That's right. It's an interesting story and I have time if you do [laughs].

F: Yes, we do have time.

S: Barry was born in Morocco and his family, due to circumstances, moved out of Morocco with the exception of one brother. His mother and father live in Beer-Sheva, Israel. He has a couple of sisters, also, living in Israel, and one brother. Then he has a sister and a brother-in-law who are in the fashion design business in Paris. They have a wonderful business there, from what I understand, and two other brothers. And Barry was the assistant manager of the IBM plant in Beer-Sheva, Israel. He's a whiz at computers. And then his sister and brother-in-law's business apparently was growing to a very great extent in Paris. They asked him if he would go over there and help them computerize the business, and maybe go to work for them, which he agreed to do. So, he left Israel several years ago; and he went to work with his sister and brother-in-law in Paris. Then he decided that he would like to make a trip to the States for a visit. He went over to Los Angeles for about three weeks, and then he called a boyhood chum of his who had married a Portland girl, who was a friend of my daughter, Margie. Now it is beginning to tie in [laughs]. They were residing in Syracuse at the time, so he said that he would visit with them on the way back from Los Angeles to the East. They gave him the address. He arrived in New York and he thought Syracuse was around the corner and he was looking for his buddy to meet him, so he called and said, "Where are you?" He said, "Well, I'm up in Syracuse; it's not around the corner. Take another plane and come up here." He was a little bit upset about it and said, "Well, I don't know, I've got some friends in London. I may want to visit them and I may come up to see you. Let me check and see which plane is the first one." [laughs] Just like that, really. It's fate. The one to Syracuse was the first plane, so he went up to Syracuse and visited with this couple. The wife had come from Portland, a friend of Margie's, and her parents live here. They called Evelyn, my wife, to inquire if Margie would be available for a double date that weekend, because they were coming to Portland and they didn't know how to arrange to meet with Margie. Evelyn spoke to Margie and said, "This young Israeli is here and he's with your friends and would like to double date." She said, "Nah, I'm going to Washington over the weekend and I don't want a blind date or anything like that." I said, "I met your mother on a blind date - it wasn't so bad, was it?" So, we convinced her to come up. He's a wonderful, wonderful guy. You couldn't meet anybody any nicer. I am very prejudiced I know, but I have very good reason to be. He is very talented. He speaks Hebrew, English, French, Arabic. His brother was one of those who went across on the tanks, during this last war, through the Egyptian lines. He was a commando, in other words. My son-in-law, Barry, fought on the Golan Heights in the '67 war, so they had their experiences. He came over here; but Margie wasn't inclined to want to uproot herself and go over to Israel quite that soon. Barry kind of liked what he saw here in the States. Margie graduated from Lesley College in Cambridge, preparing as a teacher, and then she got her Masters Degree from Teacher's College at Columbia. She was working at that time in the

Boston area. She is a remedial reading expert, very talented, and very devoted to her work. She decided she would give up that job because Barry found himself a job in Concord, Massachusetts, with an Insurance Company in their computer division. As luck would have it, she got herself a job in charge of the remedial reading department in the Hudson, Massachusetts, area. So, that's the story as far as they are concerned.

F: Do they have children?

S: No.

F: Do you think they intend to remain in America?

S: For the immediate future. But I wouldn't be surprised if someday Barry might want to go. After all, his whole family is over there. I don't know. That is conjecture.

F: Does Marjorie keep a kosher home?

S: Yes, she does.

F: The other one?

S: James is my son.

F: And he is living in California?

S: He is living in California and he married out of the faith.

F: Did that bother you?

S: It did.

F: Are you close to him?

S: Yes and no.

F: Did it really bother you?

S: Very much.

F: It's a very big concern among Jewish people, too.

S: It bothered me very, very much, yes. I don't know whether I can feel free to talk here or not. Maybe I shouldn't, but on the other hand, I feel very strongly about these things. I felt that this was breaking the line. I was the first born; my father was the first born; my grandfather was the first born; and we had come from way back on Mt. Sinai; or wherever you want to go; and here the chain was completely broken; as far as I am concerned.

F: So, you don't have a lot of contact with him?

- S: I have a lot of contact with him. It's a crazy situation [laughs], if that's the proper word. I'll tell you how. Jim was with me for a little while and when this happened, we mutually agreed that he would not remain with me. I am associated with a fabric company out on the West Coast in California, Hoffman of California, who are big importers. They are a much bigger company than I would ever dream of being, and I have a contact there. I am not part of it, or anything like that. I have a business association there whereby we derive a certain amount of revenue out of it. When it looked as though Jim was not going to be with me anymore, he had to live and he had to make a living, and so forth. So, being friendly with the Hoffman family out there, who are not Jewish people, I got him a job out there. Now, Jim is a very talented young man. He knows fabrics better than I do. He became the assistant to Phil Hoffman, who is the President of that company, and Jim was very well liked, not only by Phil, who was the President, but by his father, whom I know quite well. Phil's father was the originator of the company - a gentleman who is 82 years of age, and he became sort of a protégé of both of them. Just this past January, they promoted him to General Manager of the whole operation. So, Jim is in charge of that whole operation, whereby it gives Phil, the President, more opportunity to be out to travel the world; and he does, literally, buying fabrics. He goes to Japan, to India, to Europe, to where have you, so that Jim has an excellent, excellent position, and I have an excellent business contact and a business association with him.
- F: When you retire, what will you do with your business?
- S: I'll sell it out.
- F: You don't expect he'll come back.
- S: No, he has a much better job over there than carrying on my business.
- F: He has children now?
- S: No, he hasn't.
- F: He was Bar Mitzvahed?
- S: Yes, he did a wonderful job.
- F: Did he go to Hebrew School and have a Jewish education?
- S: He had as good an education as any child in this city.
- F: Does he keep any kind of a Jewish home?
- S: No. His wife is Catholic.
- F: I see. He did service in the Navy in Vietnam, right?
- S: Yes. He was on the battleship U.S.S. New Jersey. He served in Vietnam.

To show you how capable he is, after they came back from Vietnam, the Admiral selected him from 1,500 men to accompany him for three or four months on the West Coast, even after the rest of them were discharged. He liked Jim that well. A handsome young man, very talented, very capable.

F: Well now, let's go back. You brought your children up so that they went to Hebrew School, and the young man was Bar Mitzvahed.

S: My daughter even went to the parochial school here at the Noyes Street Synagogue.

F: Did you always live in this area?

S: No, I lived up on Munjoy Hill until the time I was married. I still think it is the best section of the city [laughs].

F: You moved from Munjoy Hill to where?

S: Well, when Evelyn and I were first married, we moved to Pitt Street, and then we lived on Richardson Street. Do you know the Weisbergs by any chance?

F: I know who they are.

S: Yes, well, you know where the Goldsmiths live. We lived downstairs where he lives. Then we moved into this beautiful, beautiful home, which you must have seen, on the corner of Highland and Longfellow Street, 25 Highland Street. It's a beautiful white house there with an outside terrace, and an indoor terrace. My wife was so sick when we decided to sell it that she didn't even want to show it to anybody. It's a big house, much too much house for just the two of us, because there were about 14 rooms that we were using, and I don't know how many more that we weren't. So, somebody came along and wanted to buy the house. So, subsequently, we sold it. But it was great for us at that time. I was President of the Synagogue. I was fund-raising chairman of that Noyes Street building at that time; and when we had the groundbreaking, and so forth, we had many, many people whom we would entertain over there at that house. I was the President of the Synagogue and we would literally entertain as many as 200 people at a time, either inside or outside, or wherever it might be around the house. Evelyn had the lawn party there for the Center Women's Club, which they have annually. It was a beautiful home and it served its purpose very, very nicely for us for a good many years. But the time came when there was just the two of us. This house on 19 Longwood Drive was in the process of being built when we sold ours. We had to store our furniture and go and live with my brother-in-law and sister-in-law for a few months until this house was built.

F: How many years have you lived here?

S: This is going on eight years now.

F: So, you raised your children in a way in which they were acutely aware of their religious responsibilities.

S: Yes, not a strictly Orthodox background, you understand, I am as liberal as the next fellow. I was the President of an Orthodox Synagogue, true, but I have not been, and am not, that observant. Yes, I want a kosher home. My daughter is keeping a kosher home. I ride on Saturday. I didn't eat outside until after college. When I was in college, I went to a Jewish home where I had my meals. Now, I try to stick to a kosher meal as best as I can, or eat fish or whatever it is, but I am traveling so much that I don't profess to be entirely kosher, and I am certainly not hypocritical about anything of that nature. I do a lot of things that a strictly Orthodox individual would not. Again, if I were completely retired, I think I would revert back maybe a little closer to some of these things. But, as it is, the flesh is weak, let's put it that way. But at least, basically, I had hoped that my son would marry a Jew. I am being very open with you and I hope you don't object. [F: no] I had hoped that my son would marry into the faith, even if he married someone who was a Reformed Jew. But I feel that he just broke those ties completely and it upset me immensely.

F: This whole business of intermarriage - you're personally troubled about it because you saw a long line in your own family broken, but do you also think that it's troublesome for a Jew in general?

S: I sure do.

F: Are you worried? We have talked to others who are quite concerned about this.

S: I think that this is going to be a factor which could destroy Judaism if it is continued to the degree that it is going. I certainly hope that it won't. As I say, please don't misunderstand me about any of these things . . .

F: No, no, no, we understand exactly what you are saying . . .

S: And you know what I am saying, I am sure. You have encountered this enough times, but I am very much disturbed about it. I feel that even if two people are Jewish and they are not observant, maybe they might come back at some point. Or perhaps, the child, for example, will go to a Hebrew School and come back to the parents and say, "Listen, I would like you to observe this, that or the other." It happens, I don't say it is common, but it does. But when they break the ties like this, it's very unfortunate for everyone. I don't know if I am doing my son, Jim, an injustice. But, I wonder whether he even thinks or wants to go to a Synagogue during the highest of the Holy days. Maybe I am wrong. I hope that I am. But certainly he has nothing that would be any indication of Judaism. His wife is a

strong Catholic. I am trying to say, like some of my best friends are Jews, some of my best friends are Catholic, but I don't mean it in that way . . .

F: You don't have to say that, please don't.

S: Please don't misunderstand me.

F: Please don't excuse yourself, because it is not necessary.

S: We are having a discussion and a frank one . . .

F: It is terribly important to put the picture of a Jewish community together accurately. Some of my best friends are not gentile! [laughter].

S: All right, I am trying to put this in the proper context, where I am disturbed because of the fact that I am a Jew and I feel that Judaism should carry on the same way as Catholicism. I feel that there is a place for everybody and every religion; and I suppose and hope ultimately that we are all going into the same area some place at some time [laughs], but . . .

F: But Judaism is more than a religion, isn't it? And that is why it may be more important. It's more than a religion, isn't it?

S: Well, I suppose you would have to say so.

F: I would doubt that your son would ever forget that, inside, he is Jewish.

S: All right, maybe he won't - maybe he can't, but if he had any children, there wouldn't be anything there as far as Judaism is concerned. This I know. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it.

F: Well, when you were in college, did you go to Synagogue? Did you ever fall away at all?

S: Oh, I came home for every holiday, even the minor ones, where today it is common practice for the kids to go to high school. In my day it was unheard of. I am not trying to be super critical, or anything of that sort, but certainly I would never dream of not coming home for any of the holidays.

F: Many people I have interviewed talk about a period of three or four years in their lives where they had fallen back a little to question and challenge, and then came back even stronger.

S: I didn't have that strong an urging, despite the upbringing. It wasn't what my father said. Even my grandparents were not that persistent as far as pushing me. I am being frank and not trying to pat myself on the back, but I was a good student and, also, I had a good

feeling for this sort of thing where nobody had to urge me. It wasn't necessary, and so, as a result, we didn't get that prodding. But, I didn't feel that there was anything that I had to rebel against.

F: Now, when you were in college or growing up, or even in business, did you experience times or incidents of Antisemitism?

S: I think I answered that in . . .

F: You said something to the effect about the fraternity.

S: Well, that didn't bother me. There were no Jewish fraternities at Bowdoin at that time. At that time they were not open. There were a couple of isolated instances where there were a few Jewish boys involved in the fraternities, but there were no Jewish fraternities. That didn't bother me one bit. I had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends at school and still maintain a relationship with a lot of them. There were some Antisemitic individuals there who didn't hesitate to display it.

F: And in business, it hasn't been a problem?

S: It hasn't been a serious problem, no.

F: At least in this area.

S: No. First of all, in the wholesale business, I get along very nicely with everybody who we are selling to - with both Jewish and non-Jewish. No, I can't say that I've run into Antisemitism. I don't say there might not be or have been Antisemitism during the course of all these years. There are bound to be some problems, but there is nothing that has seriously concerned me in that respect personally.

F: Now, you have made a large contribution to Jewish religious life here and I want to talk about that in a minute. But, are there things that you have done outside of the Jewish Community? You have spent a lot of time in the Jewish community. I just want to be sure that I haven't missed anything external to the Jewish community.

S: Well, of course, I have done my bit by collecting funds for United Fund, and things of that sort, but I don't know. I hesitate to answer. Maybe this is a void which I shouldn't have in my life at this particular stage [F: no]. Maybe nobody has called upon me, but maybe that's not a fair answer, either.

F: One person can't do everything, you know.

S: I have been very much involved in the Synagogue and Synagogue life, and my business, which has kept me very active.

F: I want to start with the Synagogue, then. You have belonged to this Synagogue ever since when?

- S: Shaarey Tphiloh is Newbury Street and Noyes Street - one and the same [F: that's right]. Now, my father bought the key to the Newbury Street Synagogue in 1904 [laughs] . . .
- F: He did what?
- S: He purchased the key to open it. It was a ceremonial thing.
- F: You mean he helped found that one?
- S: Oh, of course. My father, and grandfather, too.
- F: Okay. Let's talk about your father and grandfather for a minute. I want to know what they did in the Jewish community.
- S: They were very active in the Jewish community. This is more interesting than myself. [laughs].
- F: No, it isn't, really.
- S: My grandfather was a very religious man, and a very, very charitable individual who was interested in doing good. They literally brought brick and mortar to build that Synagogue, a good many of the pioneers in our community here.
- F: So, when you came back to Portland from college, did you begin being involved in the Synagogue right away?
- S: Not immediately. You said there was a little lapse there of nine years, didn't you? [laughs].
- F: Oh, when you were sowing your oats, you were also not involved!
- S: I'll get back to that in a second, but let me just get back once more to my father, because this is interesting, too. My father had a good business and there were a lot of immigrants coming to my father and grandfather at that time, although my father was more the businessman than my grandfather. My grandfather was more interested in institutions, and things of that sort. But my father would always provide a job for newcomers who were coming into Portland. He helped a lot of people, and I have heard some very interesting stories. One particular individual mentioned something that I didn't even know until a couple of years ago. Immigrants would come into Portland and, whether they went off into business on their own afterwards, or whatever it may have been, my father would provide them with the original job that they would have in Portland on a good many occasions. Now, after I got out of college, I was not involved in Synagogue work. I would go to services on Saturday. I would go to services on the holidays, and I was just a routine Jew like everybody else. I was quite active in the Jewish Community Center.
- F: Now, what did you do there?
- S: Well, I was vice-president there for a number of years and I was

active in almost every committee around there, finance, and membership, in particular. One of the things that I loved and I was very, very actively engaged in was the theater group - the dramatic theater group, but we called it the Workshop. I was President of that Workshop for a couple of years until my father died, but, prior to that, I was very actively involved in amateur dramatics. I loved it!

F: Well, that follows French literature quite well.

S: [laughs] I loved it. Do you know Beebee Waxman?

F: No, I don't.

S: Well, of course, she has been very active in community circles here, and in the little theater. She and I were a team. We were generally typed to be in these productions. Well, my first production, I can remember quite vividly. It was a small one, and then we graduated into three act plays, and so on and so forth. That was my main interest and I used to love it. We would have rehearsals, and they were very enjoyable, aside from the fact that we were accomplishing something. We also had what we called a drama festival, where we would have a series of one act plays as well. And it was a very, very active and involved group. Unfortunately, the Center isn't as active these days. I think I can say that it's not anywhere near as active today as it was in those days. I was approached to become President of the Center on numerous occasions by Barney Shur, and Harold Nelson, and a number of others - the past and former presidents of the Center; but I shied away from it. I had started to become active in the Synagogue. All of a sudden, before I knew it, I was the fundraising chairman for the Noyes Street Building. Am I ahead of the game?

F: No, you are not ahead of the game. I want to keep on the Center for just a minute. You served partly because it was interesting to do, but you must have believed that the Jewish Community Center was an important thing.

S: Why? Because I felt that it was a good opportunity for the Jewish community to get together. We were much more cohesive in those days, prior to the establishment of the Temple and the Synagogue. That was the area where we all would meet and we had some wonderful programs there. We had not only this dramatic part that I was talking about, but we also had lectures, concerts, movies, dances, and any number of things there. So many enjoyable things took place within the confines of the Community Center; and, also, our children, as they grew up, went to the Center Day Camp. They had opportunities in the gym there, so that it was a good place for us all, whether it be the younger ones or the older ones, to congregate and know that one had a Jewish life and a Jewish factor in which one was involved. It was nice! Some of the most pleasant days of our lives were spent around that Center there.

F: What do you think now as you look at it? What is going to happen to

the Community Center in the next ten years?

S: Could I say "no comment?" - I'm afraid.

F: No, don't say, "no comment," because even Jerry Goldsmith has not said, "no comment." People have different ideas.

S: [laughs] Maybe I shouldn't have said it that way.

F: The first problem is that . . .

S: I didn't quite mean it that way. . . .

F: The problem is, first of all, that it is in a place where there are no people, is that correct?

S: You certainly cannot continue to exist down there on Cumberland Avenue, absolutely. And, another thing, and I say it from both points of view, both the Orthodox and the Conservative, I feel that there has been too much of a tug of war between the two elements where maybe the kids have suffered. There has been a proposition to build a Community Center out here in this part of the city several years ago which never did take place. Whether it ever will or not, I don't know. If that had taken place years ago, maybe that would have been the salvation. Right now, I don't know what to say to you. I don't like the looks of it, and I don't think there is any future, certainly, down there on Cumberland Avenue.

F: Do you think there is still a need for a Community Center?

S: I'd love to see a good one, yes.

F: Did you know Norman Godfrey?

S: I sure did. Norman and I were very friendly.

F: I hear that he really built that Community Center, that he was an unusual man, that [S: wonderful] there were no rifts between Orthodox and Conservative that he couldn't work easily with.

S: Well, the only thing I'll say is this. And again, we have to talk pretty openly here. Let's see, when did Norman die? [F: 1947] - 1947. You see, we didn't have a Noyes Street Synagogue at that time, for one thing, and we didn't have much of a Conservative element. It was all based on the Newbury Street, and the Conservative was just starting. Norman had no problems. He had no divisions of any sort, with all due respect, and, as I say, Norman was a wonderful guy, a very close friend of mine. What would have happened after the Temple came into existence, I don't know that. That is a conjecture that we certainly cannot answer.

F: He just didn't have the same situation?

S: He didn't have that situation at all.

F: Well, when the Federation was formed, were you in favor of that move being taken?

S: Yes.

F: And are you still?

S: Yes. I think that was a good move.

F: Now, you were around when they built or developed the Conservative Temple, weren't you?

S: Yes, of course.

F: Was there a hubbub, at the time, when this happened?

S: A hubbub? It was a normal procedure and I certainly feel that there is room, and was room at that time, for the Conservative element as well as the Orthodox. First of all, we had two buildings. You couldn't accommodate the entire Jewish congregation in any one - or either one of them as far as that goes. The Conservatives have a different philosophy, and this is all right. Now, originally, I said, I was born and brought up Orthodox. I still have a very deep Orthodox feeling within me, even though it may not be in my complete observance. There are a good many other people like myself, some of whom are much more observant, some of whom are no more observant or less observant than myself. On the other hand, they have that Orthodox feeling about them, and they would not want to be a member of a Conservative Temple. Now, on the other hand, there are many, many people who have moved into the city of Portland in recent years. When Evelyn and I were first married, there was hardly an individual in the city, a Jewish person, whom we didn't know; and now it's almost the reverse [laughs]. There are so many who we don't know. A lot of these people have come in from non-Orthodox families, whether it be Conservative or Reform. So, there is definitely a need for a Conservative Temple here in the city of Portland, as well as an Orthodox; but, thank God, the Orthodox has been able to maintain itself, and we have had just as strong an organization as the Conservative throughout the years. Numerically we are just as strong, and in every other way, shape or manner, you name it.

F: There are many people who belong to both. Many people have membership at both.

S: Yes, there is a lot of dual membership. Do you know Judge Bernstein, Louie?

F: Yes.

- S: Well, Louie was my uncle's roommate at Bowdoin, this young uncle who was born in the States [laughs], in my father's family. My uncle was the youngest in the family. My father was the oldest. So, he and Louie were roommates at Bowdoin, and Louie is like my older brother. It is much more than an attorney relationship with him and Sumner, or any of us, because my father and Sumner's father were very, very close, too. You take Louie. Louie had a very Orthodox upbringing, and still, Louie felt that they should become Conservative and their whole family is Conservative. But Louie has very deep ties with the Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue; and Louie's father was a pillar there - a very learned scholar. When it comes time for his saying the Kaddish, Louie comes to our Synagogue. He doesn't observe it over there at the Temple. Now, a lot of these people have a dual membership. A few months ago, we had a very big event take place at our Synagogue. Our cantor became emeritus after 30 years, and I was in charge of that program. When I prepared that program and approached Louie or many members of the Temple, they certainly wanted to be part of it; because they are members of our congregation, just as well as they are of the Temple. So, again, there are a lot of dual memberships, yes.
- F: Louie told us when we interviewed him that, in the beginning of this Conservative movement, he went over to the Synagogue and told them that he wasn't doing this because he would steal any members from Orthodoxy. He wanted to get the Jews who were left, the whole group who were out at the golf course, to come into Conservatism and, as far as he was concerned, he wanted them to come to Conservatism. If they all went back to Orthodoxy [S: to remain], he would be delighted.
- S: I can understand Louie saying this. I started to say that there are a good many people who have moved into this community from previous backgrounds, let's say Conservatism or even Reform. Now, they certainly want to affiliate themselves somewhere. Maybe the Orthodox is too extreme for them, and, as a result, they have become associated with the Conservative Temple. Also, the same thing would apply to some of our own natives who have been brought up with the Orthodox background and, let's even call it the rebellion that you mentioned [laughs], or whatever it is. I certainly was never opposed to the Conservative movement, and I tried to work as harmoniously when I was the President with them, and with their rabbis, as I possibly could.
- F: I would imagine you move very easily in all groups.
- S: I get along pretty well with all, let's put it that way. I have no serious problems. I was not opposed to the others and I could work with them. We had good relations.
- F: Well, do you think there is a serious split in this community?
- S: I don't say it is not serious, and I don't say it's that serious. I don't know how to describe it. It has depended, on a good many occasions, on how the rabbis got along or didn't get along. It is

not so much the individuals involved.

F: No, I don't think it is the congregations, so much, is it?

S: No - no. Rabbi Dworken is leaving, incidentally. He is staying with us until January. But, getting back again to the Conservative and Orthodox elements. Certainly the people are close. We don't have that cleavage personally, but you may run into it when it comes to meetings and things like that. And another thing, let's put it this way; like Louie mentioned, and there is a lot of truth to what he says, maybe this is an opportunity, through the Conservative element, to maintain people within the fold, whether they are observant or not that observant. There are a lot of Conservative people within our community who observe certain things, like the candles and kas-ruth, and things of that nature, where there are a good many in the Orthodox fold who do not. We are a mishmash of everybody and everything. As I said to you before, even though I might be a member of the Orthodox and was completely nonobservant, still our Rabbi says, "Here it is, our Synagogue is here 100 percent; now it is up to you - if you want to strive and come up 10 percent, 20 percent or 30 percent, it is there for you. But it doesn't mean that you are not Orthodox because you don't observe. We want you to be more observant, that's all." I am comfortable in a Conservative Temple. I have worshiped there on a good many occasions. I have traveled throughout this country, and especially when I was saying the Kaddish for my mother a few years ago, and my father years back, and then more recently for this uncle a year or so back, I would literally break my neck to get to a service every morning. I would go to a Conservative Temple, or I would go to an Orthodox institution, and it didn't make that much difference to me. The observance, in the morning particularly, is precisely the same. If there is a little deviation, it doesn't bother me personally. Now, you undoubtedly know that one of the major differences between Orthodoxy and Conservatism is the separation of men and women in this day and age [laughs]! Well, we still have it, separation, whereby the women are on one side and the men are on another side. Now, this has not been any problem. Let me put it this way to you - it has never been any problem within my Synagogue. We had one little problem, but not because of the fact that our congregation was not satisfied to be separated. Listen, we are with our wives long enough, so if we are there alone for a couple of hours during the observance [All: laughter], why, it isn't going to disturb us that way. For most of the people I know, certainly in the beginning, this was an acceptable thing. My wife wouldn't question

it, and doesn't, nor would Dotty Goodman, or many of the people. And it is not that women are so servile to us, or anything like that [laughs], or subservient to us, but it has been acceptable. It is our religion and this was the way it was supposed to be. We were brought up that way. Our mothers lived with it. In the Newbury Shul, the women worshiped upstairs and the men downstairs. At Noyes, because we are on one floor, we have a separation. There was never any major problem. But, those who observe in the Conservative element have mixed seatings. All right, this is okay; I'm not being critical of it. I have done it myself, when I have been away, sometimes; and if I've been with Evelyn, we've sat there and it hasn't bothered me. Frankly, the organ does bother me, but I suppose you get used to it after awhile, and it becomes part of you. I wouldn't want to see an organ within our Synagogue on a service, but as far as a mixed seating, I could live with it. As far as a microphone, we don't use one. That is a very technical Orthodox matter. Some rabbis agree and others say you can't. Steve Dworken, out of deference to the other element, is not using a microphone; but he says that he personally could, even though he is an Orthodox Rabbi, so there is a difference.

F: Your young women, can they be Bat Mitzvahed?

S: Young women Bat Mitzvahed? My daughter was Bat Mitzvahed.

F: But, how would you feel if a woman wanted to wear the Tallis?

S: I don't know.

F: What if a woman wanted to take part in a minyan?

S: I've seen it at the Temple. I have been in a good many communities, much more maybe than the average individual here in the city of Portland, and I have been into many more Conservative Temples than many of the people who are members of the Conservative element here. I have seen how closely allied the services are with our own Orthodox in 85 percent of them - just like ours, except for the mixed seating. Here in Portland, we are not that way, and I'll tell you what my own analysis is, maybe you haven't heard this from anybody, and maybe I am wrong. I feel that here in Portland we are a small community. Nevertheless, there is room for Orthodoxy and there is room for the Conservative element, but let's take the Conservative element. This Conservative Temple here in Portland is much more inclined toward a Reform Temple than 90 percent of the Conservative Temples that I have witnessed, where I have observed myself. It inclined toward it much more so during the last few years, in particular, because of some of these very things that you are starting to ask me. Personally, I am opposed to it. That's my own personal feeling. I don't believe in sending the woman up there for an aliyah [laughs]. Now, maybe I am wrong; maybe if I stopped and discussed this with my own Rabbi, with my Orthodox Rabbi, he would tell me that certain things are permissible. I don't know, I don't think so [F: I don't think so], probably not. My own opinion is that I am Orthodox, that I feel that we should stick within

- certain observances and not deviate to that extent.
- F: Do you pray each morning, "Dear God, thank God, I am a man?" [S: laughs]
- S: I pray every morning [F: laughs], whatever - certainly I pray . . .
- F: I'm kidding you. It's all right, just for a minute, to kid you, isn't it?
- S: Yes, that's all right [All: laughter]. I feel women are my equal any time, and surpass me on a good many occasions [laughing].
- F: Well, there are THREE women here today [laughter].
- S: I should have asked my wife at least to fortify me here [laughs].
- F: You went into your congregation and did a very critical job, which was fundraising for the Synagogue; and that's probably one of the toughest [S: that was a terrific thing] jobs that anyone could have [S: a tough job]. Could you tell me why you did it and the problems you had? Would you talk about building that building, because I am not going to get this from anyone else.
- S: Let's talk about this, because that's how I became so involved. Little did I dream, first of all, that I, Bert Silverman, would ever be President of an Orthodox Synagogue, really. It wasn't that much in my feelings or in my background. Certainly, from the point of view of my father [laughs], he would have been most proud, I suppose, if I grew up to become a President of a Synagogue. Unfortunately, he had passed away by that time. But, historically, let me tell you what happened. A group of people saw the need for a Synagogue or a religious institution, not only a Synagogue, but a Hebrew School out here in the Woodfords area. We had a community Hebrew School on Pearl Street. They purchased the land, just a small handful of people, with whom I was not associated at that time. Mickey Weisenthal was tied in with a small group there that bought that land on Noyes Street, where we are now located, with the thought of turning it over to a religious group which would be interested in building a religious institution. At that time, we saw the light, and the Conservative element was just beginning. They had a home over here where they had Friday night services, and then they eventually built their building a couple of years before we became involved in this part of the community or part of the city. Also, we were having Friday night services in that big house that I had on Highland Street. Rabbi Bekritsky, at that time, was conducting special Friday night services for a small group of us who didn't go into town or didn't want to go all the way into Newbury Street on Friday night. We had some beautiful sessions there. We saw the need, and a group of people who were interested decided that they would hold a preliminary meeting which was held, again, at that house of mine on Highland Street. We had 12 to 15 people there, and we discussed the possibility of our building on Noyes Street. I just wanted to play host and sit in the background. I am not that overt,

really; I am shy by nature, really [laughs]. Sometimes you have to be prodded into these things and they just pushed me into the Chairmanship of the fundraising. I didn't want it. Arthur Waterman, may he rest in peace, was active in community circles. He more or less forced me to become the fundraising chairman of that particular operation. Now, that was a tremendous undertaking, believe me. First of all, we had opposition.

F: You did?

S: Well, the Temple had just been built out here and they weren't too anxious to see the competition coming out here.

F: What about within your own congregation?

S: I'm coming to that, too. We had plenty of opposition within our own group; people who couldn't see the light because they had the building on Newbury Street. They said, "This is all right, we have our building; we don't have to move out into the suburbs." You couldn't initiate a fundraising campaign unless you had permission, official permission, from the Jewish Federation because, after all, these were community funds. Consequently, a group of us went to the Federation and asked for permission to build a Synagogue out here. They came back at us, and they had their motives, I must say this. They came back at us, little thinking or dreaming that we would be able to accept the challenge, and they said, "Now, if you are going to build, you are going to have to build a Hebrew School combined with a Synagogue out there." This would be a more substantial financial undertaking and they didn't think that we could do it, but we accepted the challenge. We got Federation's permission, and I assumed the chairmanship. If ever anything in my life was a grass roots type of thing, and if I ever got any more satisfaction out of anything, even maybe having been President of the institution later, it was this fundraising campaign, and seeing the spirit that prevailed and the way people rallied! We had meetings down at that old Hebrew School building on Pearl Street, and I don't care whether a person gave me \$50 or \$5,000, there was such spirit! I'll say this, also, on behalf of so many of our friends at the Temple, too, who are members of the Temple, they contributed - they pitched in. Of course, I had two choice people with me at that time, and I'll admit I played one against the other [laughs]. There was Abe Levey, may he rest in peace, and Billy Goodman, Arnold's father. Abe started us off with a \$10,000 or \$15,000 contribution. Billy would match it. Then, if something came up where we wanted \$5,000, one would match the other, and I played them for all it was worth [laughs]. But, I felt the cause was deserving of it. So that every time that I would get a good contribution from either Abe Levey or from Billy Goodman, I would be able to match it with the other. Then, as I say, we raised a pretty good sum of money. The original cost was about \$225,000, and we raised \$130,000 or \$140,000, something like that, in original contributions. Then we went along with a subsequent fundraising campaign where we got another \$40,000, and so forth, in pledges over three to five years. They must have \$500,000 or \$600,000 in that building at the present time, with everything that they have included. Well, we kept getting additional contributions,

aside from that original campaign that I am talking about; and then, of course, they do have a Beano game there and that knocked off the mortgage beautifully.

F: Is the mortgage over with now?

S: The mortgage is all paid off, yes. That building is all free and clear. It has been for a few years now. In fact, the rabbi's house is a \$60,000 or \$70,000 house, and that's all paid for, too. And the house on the corner is ours, that house further up on the corner of Noyes and Deering. That belongs to us, so all the property is free and clear.

F: It was a major undertaking, wasn't it?

S: It was a wonderful thing. I feel that people really put their heart and soul into it, and they contributed. And, as a result, we went ahead; we built the Hebrew School and the Synagogue that you see there today. And this was undertaken by the Portland Hebrew School-Synagogue Association. This is getting back to your earlier question. We were not associated with the in-town Synagogue, the Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue. They would not become part of us, originally. They didn't see the light, enough of them, to become part of us. The last thing, or the furthest thing from our minds, was to create a splinter movement, but we felt that we had to have an Orthodox Synagogue here; so we operated under the name Portland Hebrew School Synagogue Association. That is, even today, the formal name of the corporation. But, we talked our hearts out and we went to meeting after meeting down there on Newbury Street. We talked with the powers that be, and particularly with a gentleman like Billy Goodman, who was tied in with both of them quite closely. After a year, or something like that, Shaarey Tphiloh, Newbury Street, saw the light and saw that, for their own preservation, they would have to become part of us. We would have to become one and the same, because we were getting a lot of their members. We were getting an awful lot of their members who lived here. I am going to digress for a second. When we lived up on Richardson Street, Evelyn and I would walk into Newbury Street, which is further from the Synagogue than here, for the High Holidays. When we lived on Pitt Street, we would walk in for the High Holiday. A lot of people had moved out here, so that when we built this building, they weren't going to remain as part of Shaarey Tphiloh in town if there was another congregation, an Orthodox one, for them right here in the Woodfords-Deering section. Consequently, we were beginning to drain off their membership, not because we wanted to do that, but because these were the facts of life at that time. After a short while they saw fit to acquire our building. We gave it to them. We wanted this Orthodox Synagogue to be ours. After all, my heart and soul are in Newbury Street, just as much as here. I was Bar Mitzvahed at Newbury Street, and it was probably the first of those illustrious big Bar Mitzvahs that they ever had down there. We imported the Rabbi from Los Angeles, because he had left us at that time. My father brought him back. And in those days the Congress Square Hotel was THE hotel; and we had a big party there on Sunday. We had an orchestra, and the whole works, with a catered affair.

I have roots and deep roots there at Newbury Street, as do a lot of other people. Ultimately, they became part of us, and it was one and the same. You are aware, I am sure, that there is the Etz Chaim Synagogue on Congress Street. It is a small Synagogue. It was flourishing in its day, the same as Newbury Street - not as big as Newbury Street, but a good sized, substantial organization. Again our good friends would be members over there and would be members over here, and there certainly was no cleavage or anything as far as we individually were concerned. Our relationships within the community, personally, are very good. This Synagogue on Congress Street was beginning to die out. A lot of their people were coming over here with us, as well. Well, we tried our darndest to get them to become part of us, but to this day they haven't done it. Now, they are a dying organization. There is nothing left there to speak of.

F: But it is still a nice place . . .

S: But it is still in existence. Our Newbury Street Synagogue, unfortunately, is up for sale now. It is one of those things. There is no attendance. They still have afternoon services there, but it is one of those things. It's the passing of time.

F: But it is a shame, though. We've been in both of them taking the pictures as the background for what we are doing. It is a shame that Portland hasn't decided to make that a landmark building, or something like that [S: I know, we've been talking about that]. That is a shame because it will disappear. It is not going to be left as a historical museum or anything.

S: You're right. I agree with you 100 percent.

F: That's too bad.

S: So getting back, they had a President then who was very vigorous in his attitude and I couldn't agree with him. I can generally agree with most people, but we just couldn't see eye to eye. I said, "Listen, we are not here to take anything away from you. We are here to preserve Orthodoxy." My family would have been the first to say, "Bert, move over to the Noyes Street Synagogue as long as you can preserve what it stands for - not the brick building, and so on and so forth, even though you may have memories within those buildings." So, I said the same thing, "We have acquired Newbury Street, so why don't you, also, become part and parcel to this? If you have funds, we are not looking for your funds. This is not a matter of money. We don't want your money. We want you. We want you to be part of this Orthodox community with us as one." "Well, we have money; we don't need you," they said. At that time we had a big mortgage. I said, "I would rather be the President of an organization which is alive and vigorous and have a good-sized, substantial mortgage, than of one which doesn't have a mortgage, such as you are talking about, which is dying." And we left it at that. I mean, we were never able to get them to become part and parcel of us.

F: They can't get enough people for a service.

S: For a minyan, no. It's very difficult. They combine now with those who remained of our group in Newbury Street during the afternoon and once a week. So, getting back, that was the story as far as the fundraising was concerned, and then we became Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue and I was Portland Hebrew School-Synagogue Association's vice-president in charge of that building. I don't know whether you have come across the name Irving Rothstein. Irving was a wonderful chap who was the President of the Newbury Street Synagogue, prior to my becoming President of Shaarey Tphiloh, but his main interest was over there at Newbury Street. It was still going and it was a good going organization, and he didn't live out this way. So, he put me in charge of the Noyes Street Synagogue. In effect, I was President with a title of vice-president; and Abe Levey, may he rest in peace, was the honorary president of the Association, or the Synagogue. And then, Irving was ill at that time, and they really twisted my arm, almost literally, to become President, because I didn't want it. First of all, I say this to you and I said it in Rabbi Bekritsky's presence, in particular, and I talked with him just as we are talking. I said, "Rabbi, they are asking me to become the President of this Orthodox Synagogue. All right, I have had the upbringing and I have had the background; but I don't pretend to be that well-versed in everything. Where do I compare with, for example, this gentleman, Irving Rothstein, who is so learned and so observant to the nth degree, or the Presidents down the line who have preceded him?" I said, "I am not that way and you know it! I do many things that you certainly can't condone." He said, "Bert, we have to have somebody. If you can take care of the business administration, and do the best you can, we will be satisfied." And that's the way it has been and has to be with all subsequent presidents, from myself down. But, as I say, I became President and I did the best job that I could. We went along very nicely. We were always on a par, numerically, with the Conservative Temple, and that is almost unheard of in many communities in the United States, because many of them have gone from Orthodoxy into Conservatism. We had a good, healthy organization, and still have. I am not using that in the past tense. We have a good organization and I tried to blend, as best as I could, not only the religious aspects, but also the social, because I feel that is very important; not just for the kids, but for the older people. We have some very happy social activities there - dances, and things of that nature - whereby it is a joy to come there on a Saturday night or a Sunday night or whenever we have events. The 30th honorary program for our cantor a couple of months ago, which I mentioned I was in charge of, was probably the nicest event we have ever had in that Synagogue. I am not trying to praise myself about these things, but I have had some good working people with me, excellent. When I was President I was in charge of the 70th Anniversary program of the Synagogue, too, which was also one of the nicest events that we have ever had. We've had a good going operation there, whereby it's been a good combination. I feel it is very necessary in this day and age, and maybe was before, but especially now, to have a certain amount of social activity to go along with your religious institution.

F: Do you think that is continuing now?

S: I think so.

F: Have you seen major changes in the congregation since you built the building and then became President? What changes have you seen occurring, if any?

S: Well, basically as far as the institution per se is concerned, and its observances, there are no changes. We went from Rabbi Bekritsky, who was strictly Orthodox, to Steven Dworken, who is strictly Orthodox. He may be a young Rabbi and he may have a little different feeling toward things, which I felt certainly was for the better, but the institution is still strictly Orthodox. If you want to belong to it, you have to realize that it is an Orthodox Synagogue, and if you are coming to services, your wife is going to sit over there and you are going to sit here, and you have to accept it. We have daily services strictly according to Hoyle, shall I say [laughs], Sabbath services - everything within the religious structure of the Synagogue. As far as the individuals? They come and they go. We have had a lot of losses, unfortunately, people who have passed away. There may be a movement someday, I'm not saying that it is in the offing. On the other hand, there could be a movement for a change, a movement whereby there could be a request for mixed seating. But, maybe as you grow older and as you realize and analyze the fact that you've got younger people there, for whom this might be terribly significant, maybe you might have to make that change some time. You would have to go according to the strictest tenets of Orthodoxy, I'll say that. On the other hand, I used to go to conventions with Rabbi Bekritsky in Washington, D.C., and I would be there as the President of my institution. I would meet many other presidents, and many other Orthodox presidents. And I would say, "Do you have mixed seating," and a good many did. And I would say, "Well, how can this be, I mean, this is supposed to be an Orthodox Synagogue," and I would talk to Rabbi Bekritsky. Rabbi Bekritsky would answer, "Maybe someday they will see the light and return to separate seating." I would take it with a grain of salt, and it just didn't strike me right. I said, "If they are doing this, then they don't belong to this Union of Orthodoxy. How come you keep them?" [laughs] "Is it for their dues?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you something. Strictly, they are not Orthodox, due to this change, but, on the other hand, we hope that someday they will see the light." Well, this is a lot of nonsense and I know it. But, you have to go along with some of these things. So that I say there may be a good many changes within Orthodoxy, and I hope that I will be liberal enough to live with them then. My own kids, Margie and Barry, both have a feeling, but they are far from observant. Margie keeps an observant house, as far as that goes, and for the High Holidays they will come up here; but I don't know what the future will bring for them, and I certainly hope that it will be all right.

- F: Well, you are a man, then, who played an unexpected role; but you built that Synagogue, I am just looking at facts, and then you led it through its formative years, and its growing and developing years. When you were President, what were the accomplishments that you feel strongly about?
- S: Well, I take a great deal of gratification, of satisfaction, from the fact that we did have and still do have a good going Orthodox Synagogue within this city. I feel there is a need for both, but I feel very, very happy and satisfied that, in my own little way, at least, I was able to maintain that, or help maintain it, that it still is going, and that we do have a good Orthodox institution. Whether the individuals observe or not, it is an Orthodox structure for them. They still are inclined to want to be members, and we have a packed house there on the High Holidays, the same way as the Conservatives. I take a great deal of pride and satisfaction from the fact that we do have this Orthodox Synagogue here, and I hope that it will be with us for a long time, just as long as any religious institution within this community. I feel there is a need for Orthodoxy, and maybe I did play a little unexpected part.
- F: A major part.
- S: Well, whatever it is.
- F: But, as a Jew, as the demands were made upon you, did you grow as a person through this?
- S: I think I did. I think it meant a great deal to me, personally, and I also feel that maybe even religiously, I might have grown a little bit. Now, Evelyn also had a pretty strong background, and I know she's got just as Jewish a heart, if that's the expression, as myself, or a feeling for these things. I feel that there are others in the community who are the same way, who feel that this is an institution where they belong. They want to be part of it and it is there for them and we want it to remain with us as a part of us.
- F: So, it benefited you, as well as . . .
- S: Oh, I didn't quite finish my thought. I know I started to say something, because you were referring to college years and postcollege years, and so forth. When I was a kid and my father would take me to services over there at Newbury Street in the mornings, on Saturdays, and then when I got to college, I still went on a good many occasions. But it is very possible that I might not have been inclined to want to go every Saturday, as I do now on most occasions. I'll skip a Saturday once in a while, but I want to go; I feel that I would like to go. It means something to me to go to services on Saturday. Let's say I had become President of the Center, which I could have been, maybe, and then gone my merry way and been a member of this institution, this Synagogue. Somebody else would have done the job, I am sure, and it would have existed. I would have been an

ordinary member, but maybe I would have been a three-times-a-year Jew, the same as many of my friends are. I am not being critical, because this is the way of the world these days. I would have gone Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and maybe on an occasional other day, you know, and I would have observed, of course, the Passover, and all that sort of thing. But, maybe I might not have gone as "religiously" as I am inclined to want to go now. It gave me something besides anything that I might have been able to offer in whatever way I did.

F: Now, what are you doing now in the Jewish Community?

S: Oh, I am still very active in the congregation. We had a very important meeting the night before last because Steve Dworken resigned.

F: Are you still working on the Board?

S: Oh, yes. I am a member of the Executive Committee and all that sort of thing. The religious committee . . .

F: And you want to continue that, don't you?

S: Oh, yes, yes. I am still very actively involved in the Synagogue, but I just don't have the burden of the tremendous responsibility which went with it. I was, maybe, overly conscientious, if I can use that expression, because when I undertake something, I undertake it thoroughly! I was President for seven years, and I did not miss one meeting, and I do a lot of traveling. If I was 200 miles away, I would make sure that I would travel up here to attend and conduct the meeting. I didn't give my vice-presidents a chance, which wasn't fair, maybe [laughs]. I can associate myself probably with hundreds, literally hundreds and hundreds of meetings pertaining to anything I see within that Synagogue. After two years, I wanted out. I didn't want to be President any more. Billy Goodman came up to me and said to me one day "Bert, we are going to buy permanent seats; it's going to cost \$5,000. I'll give the \$5,000 if you stay on for President one more year!" And I was bribed every year, practically, in that way [All: laughter], until, after seven years, it was enough. I can tie myself in with almost every brick or wall or any chair there that you may see, or something that involves a meeting. I was too conscientious, maybe, about things like that; but I felt that I had to be there to attend those meetings. I am not involved that way, not anywhere near that way, at the present time.

F: I only have two more general questions for you, and one of them has to do with Israel. [S: yes]. Now, you are going to go? [S: uhuh]. First of all, do you call yourself a Zionist?

S: Well, I belonged to the Zionist Party. I paid dues. I wasn't an active Zionist. We had a pretty active group here who called themselves Zionists, as far as paying dues to help establish a land in Israel. So I paid my dues [laughs].

F: Now, do you feel it is important that Israel survive?

S: I sure do.

F: Why?

S: For the preservation of a Jewish people. I know it is not necessarily a religious land, either. I am fully aware of that, but certainly, in view of everything that has transpired throughout the world, I feel that there should be a Jewish Homeland. I have never been there myself, but from everything that you hear from anybody who has been there, and I hope that I will be imbued with the same spirit, there is nothing like it once you get there. It is just a part of you, it's something you feel.

F: But you would contribute money to Israel, wouldn't you?

S: Sure, I buy Israeli bonds today.

F: Finally, you've traveled around this country, and you were the President of a congregation. You've seen Jewish leaders from all over this country, and so you have somewhat of an overview. Different leaders whom I have talked to have expressed different kinds of concerns. When you look at the future of American Jewry, do you feel concerned; do you feel positive; do you feel optimistic - how do you feel?

S: How do I feel? Oh, I am a little bit concerned, but, on the other hand, I am not pessimistic or anything like that. I just would like to see that we are able to survive in as decent a manner as, at least, I feel that I have been able to during the years that I have lived here. I should hope that we would be able to continue that way and maybe improve the situation somewhat, too. There is always room for improvement. I would like to see this as a homeland for a good many of my fellow Jews. I have no desires particularly to settle over in Israel as a lot of other people do. I feel just as native an American as anybody else, but I do feel that we should have a homeland for Jewish people over there as well.

