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Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)

Charlotte Wernick

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(42)

Final Transcript Mrs. Sidney Wernick
(Charlotte)

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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1977 Federation Program Board for the Project:

Mrs. Harry Sky
Matthew Goldfarb
Jerry Goldberg
Mrs. Stephen Levine
Mrs. Charles Mack
Alan Levenson
Rabbi Harry Sky

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
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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. Benjamen 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 Conservativism 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, humaness. 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:	Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)
INTERVIEWER:	Dr. Konnilyn Feig
PROJECT ASSISTANTS:	Lisa Wilhelm
	Cheryl Greaney
	Martha Browne
PLACE OF INTERVIEW:	512 Baxter Boulevard Portland, Maine
DATE:	September 27, 1976
TIME:	7 P.M.

CHARLOTTE WERNICK (MRS. SIDNEY)

Charlotte Wernick, wife of well-known Supreme Court Justice Sidney Wernick, comes from an old Portland Jewish family, a family which helped found the Jewish community and made a major contribution in this area. Into the Berman family, Mrs. Wernick was born in 1915. Her grandparents on both sides came from Russia. Her father's father came to Portland where her own father, Jacob Berman, was born. Then the entire family moved to Lewiston and set up a restaurant. All four sons went to prestigious law schools. Jacob Berman came back to Portland to practice law. He was the second Jewish lawyer in the city and one of the strong members of the Newbury Street Synagogue. Jacob Berman was also a charter member of the Jewish Community Center, and city attorney in 1916. The grandfather, Shih Berman, while in Portland was one of the leading Orthodox Jews. Another brother, Edward, joined Jacob in the law firm in Portland called Berman and Berman. The other two brothers formed another law firm in Lewiston also called Berman and Berman.

Mrs. Wernick attended elementary schools in Portland, and then went to a prep school in New York - Hyland Manor. She received her B.A. in Sociology from Wellesley College. She then attended Prince School of Retailing and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from that institution in 1937. After working at Filene's for three months in Boston, she attended Porsche Law School and received her law degree in 1940. She met her husband Sidney when he was receiving a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard University. Originally from Philadelphia, her husband came to Portland after he married Mrs. Wernick; and joined in the family firm Berman, Berman and Wernick. Mrs. Wernick and her husband have two children. Their daughter, Judith Wernick Gilmore, 33 years old and a Wellesley graduate, works for AID in the State Department in Washington, D.C. Her husband is a

specialist on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. They have two girls. The Wernick's son, Lawrence, is a 28 year old graduate of Wesleyn College and Harvard Law School. He is single and practices law in Boston.

Mrs. Wernick has been strongly active in the Portland Jewish community and in the Portland community since the day she returned to Portland with her husband. She began fund raising for the Jewish Community Center. At age 26, in the Jewish charities drive, she ran the women's committee for the women's drive. She has been in all forms of the Jewish Federation for 30 years. She served for three years as chairman of the women's drive; for two years as chairman of special gifts; and was honorary chairman of the Federation Drive for two years. In the Council of Jewish Women, Mrs. Wernick has always been active; and she has held every office but President. She has been equally involved with the Temple Sisterhood including holding the Presidency. The Wernicks were founders of Temple Beth-El and Mrs. Wernick served on that board until two years ago.

Mrs. Wernick has contributed as greatly to the Portland community in general. She has worked with and on the Boards of the District Nurses, Symphony and the Museum. She is active in the Wellesley Club and has served as its President. She is now on the Patient Survey Committee of Maine Medical School; on the Board of the Friends of Maine Medical; holds an honorary directorship of the Symphony; and is on the permanent Board of the Museum Guild of the Art Museum. In her spare time, she plays tennis and bridge; and attends the theater and art museums in Boston.

She and her husband live at 512 Baxter Boulevard, Portland.

August, 1977

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL PROJECT

Portland, Maine

1976

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee Name **Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)**

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 **Elaine Lewis**

Signature Elaine Lewis

Date **November 28, 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 Charlotte Wernick

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 12/18/76

Reread and Rechecked and held Confidential by

Name Lisa Wilhelm (signature)

Date 12/17/76

Name _____ (signature)

Date _____

Typist:

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

Name Geraldine Kendrick (signature)

Date 1/12/77

Jewish Bicentennial Project
Dr. Konnilyn Feig, Director
1976

JEWISH BICENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte)

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Konnilyn Feig

DATE: September 27, 1976

F: This is an interview with Mrs. Sidney Wernick (Charlotte) for the Jewish Federation and the University of Maine, College of Arts and Sciences, Portland, the Jewish Bicentennial Oral History Project by Dr. Konnilyn Feig and her assistants, Lisa Wilhelm, Cheryl Greaney, and Martha Browne at 512 Baxter Boulevard, Portland, Maine, on September 27, 1976, at 7 p.m.

F: I know that you were born in Portland, but what about your parents?

W: My father was born in Portland; my mother was born in Manchester, New Hampshire.

F: So, you were not a first generation immigrant?

W: No.

F: Well, what about your grandparents?

W: They were born in one of those places in Russia; I would have no idea.

F: Let's take your father's parents first. They were born in Russia?

W: Uhhuh, then they came over here, and I guess they came to Portland and they lived in Portland.

F: Did you know them?

W: Yes.

F: What about your mother's parents?

W: They were born - well, you know, there were different places in Russia.

F: I know, but at least both sets of grandparents came from some place in Russia. Probably to Portland?

W: No, my mother's parents didn't come to Portland.

F: Oh, they went to New Hampshire?

W: They went to New Hampshire.

F: Okay, so you're third generation immigrant - is that what they call third generation? Most everybody else we've talked to . . .

W: Second generation American.

F: Okay, then everybody else we talked to has been first generation immigrant. Now, you knew both sets of grandparents. [W: uhhuh] Did they tell you why they came over or were they young? What kind of impressions did you get? Let's take your father's family first.

W: My father's mother and father came over when they were quite young.

F: Did they come over married or did they get married here?

W: I don't know. I think they got married here. They met each other, you know. They all were in a special area of the town.

F: Which area?

W: Down by Middle Street and down where the Jewish butcher is and so forth.

F: Do you remember what your grandfather did? Your father's father.

W: Yes, I remember that very well. First he had a restaurant.

F: Do you remember what it was called?

W: No, I don't remember what it was called - in Lewiston. He came to Portland and then moved to Lewiston. And my father was born in Portland and some sisters were born in Portland. Then they moved to Lewiston. What he did in Portland, I really don't know. But when my grandfather went to Lewiston, he opened a restaurant and my father and his three brothers became lawyers out of that restaurant. They were working in the restaurant; they got enough money so that my father could go to law school. Then when he got out of law school, he worked his way through; he put the next one through; and then the two of them put the third one; and the three of them put

the fourth one through college and law school.

F: Well, do you remember where the four of them went?

W: My father went to Boston University. My two younger uncles went to Harvard.

F: Tell me something. I want to go back a minute. What language did your grandparents speak? Do you remember them, by the way?

W: Oh, sure.

F: How old were you when they died?

W: Probably eighteen.

F: So, you had real grandparents [W: yes] whom you remembered. You sat on their laps and everything else?

W: Right.

F: Well, what language do you remember them speaking in the home?

W: English.

F: Both your grandmother and your grandfather?

W: They came over here quite early and they didn't have much of an accent. I don't think they had any accent as I remember.

F: So . . .

W: They couldn't have been married when they came over because they came over too young to be married.

F: Okay, somehow out of that restaurant, everybody went to first-rate schools.

W: Yuh.

F: They didn't just go to law school; they went to Harvard.

W: Two went to Harvard; two went to B.U.

F: So there were four brothers in the family, that's it?

W: Right. Oh, no, three sisters.

F: Seven?

W: Yes.

F: What was your grandfather's name?

W: Berman.

F: Would you give me the first names of your father and the uncles, please.

W: My father was Jacob H., the next one was Benjamin L., the next one was Edward J., the next one was David V.; and what happened was that my father went to law school and came to Portland to practice law. He was the first Jewish lawyer in the city. The second was a man by the name of Henry Taylor, who was a bachelor.

My father came here. Then the next one went to Lewiston, and then the third one came to practice law with my father in Portland and the fourth one went to practice law with my uncle in Lewiston. So, there were two Berman and Berman offices; one in Portland and one in Lewiston, to begin with.

F: And they stayed separated, then?

W: And they stayed separated.

F: Now, do you have any brothers?

W: I have no brothers.

F: What are the names of Edward Berman's children?

W: You wouldn't know them; are you thinking of somebody in Lewiston?

F: Well, I am trying to figure which are the ones who were here?

W; Edward and Jacob.

F: All right, I am trying to figure this out; there are so many Bermans running around, I am trying to track down which ones you are. There are a lot of Bermans; there's Paul Berman.

W: I don't know him.

F: And there's a Berman who had a room named after him in law school.

W: That's Ed.

F: Okay, that'll do it. There is another Berman who was a lawyer advocate, a Judge Advocate, at Dora Nordhausen in World War II. He came back and practiced here and his wife is still alive but he is dead. He was the lawyer at one of the concentration camp trials. He's a Berman who died about eight years ago. Any relationship to you?

W: No, there were no other lawyer Bermans in this city.

F: Colonel Berman, a Colonel, he was in the World War II.

W: Oh! I beg your pardon; you know who that is? He died and his wife is still alive, as you said.

F: She has a sculpture of Hitler that she very graciously offered to give to me, but I don't want a bust of Hitler. She was going to give it to the Synagogue and she decided not to do this. It's a priceless thing, but I don't want it staring at me. I was going to take it and I thought, "No, I don't want to live with Hitler the rest of my life."

W: He was a comparative newcomer. Of course, my husband just came to Portland 37 years ago and he is still considered a newcomer. Colonel Berman was much more of a newcomer than Sidney.

F: Then he is no relation?

W: No, as a matter of fact, coincidentally, his daughter married a cousin of mine, a Clenott.

F: Son or daughter of whom? Robert Clenott?

W: Robert Clenott is a cousin of mine. I don't know who Paul Berman is.

F: All right, so we've got Jacob and Benjamin setting up law practice here.

W: No, Jacob and Ed . . .

F: Edward, I'm sorry, the first and the third Jewish lawyers in Portland.

W: No, Ed wasn't the third in Portland. He was the third in his family.

F: Jacob was the first but Ed wasn't the third.

W: No, I don't know what he was. [F: laughter] I think Israel Bernstein was third in Portland.

F: Jacob Berman, your father, was really in operation before Israel?

W: Uhhuh.

F: Well, all right, I know what year you were born because I've got it here, but may I say that you don't look like it.

W: Oh, you be sure and say that! [laugh]

F: Now, listen, did the three girls in this family of your grandfather's marry anybody in Portland?

W: No.

F: Did they stick around or did they go elsewhere?

W: Two went to Lewiston and one went to Boston.

F: Okay, so we've got them. We don't have to worry about them.

W: You don't have to worry about them.

F: Okay, we're only worrying about two of the Bermans from your grandparents in Lewiston.

W: I don't know. If that's who you want to worry about!

F: [Laugh] We get this on everybody, Mrs. Wernick, just cooperate. We're trying to trace Portland Jewry back to its roots in the old country, okay? [laugh]

W: Okay, now do you want to know about my grandfather?

F: My mind only works in a certain way, unless you can't handle it this way . . .[laugh]

W: Okay, you take it from here.

F: All right, we have Jacob and Edward. Do you remember about what year we could talk about your father, give or take five either way, starting his practice in this town?

W: Around 1908.

F: Okay, and your uncle, five years later, four years later?

W: It was quite a bit later.

F: Okay, so, we can talk about your father in Portland Jewry from 1908?

Now, let's go back. When you remember your grandparents, I take it they remained living in Lewiston until they died.

W: Yes, and he went from a restaurant to a little candy, grocery, variety store. Not grocery; candy, fruit and vegetables, I think it was.

F: Did you ever ask them why they came over from Russia?

W: No.

F: Do you remember them saying anything about it?

W: I assume they just - why did everybody come from Russia? To get out of . . .

F: The reasons are different.

W: Are they really?

F: Yes.

W: I don't know. I really don't know what their reasons were.

F: Now, your mother's parents. They lived in New Hampshire?

W: They lived in New Hampshire but, when I knew them, they were in Worcester.

F: Okay, now, how did your mother and your father meet?

W: Maurice Davis, who presently is a lawyer in Portland, had a brother by the name of John Davis, who was a doctor and practiced with another brother by the name of Dr. Harry Davis, who was a very well-known pediatrician in Portland. Dr. John Davis was a general surgeon and practitioner, and how he met his wife, I don't know, but his wife was my mother's sister. She came to Portland and lived with her husband, Dr. John Davis. My father was a very good friend of Dr. John Davis in Portland and so she brought her sister up here, who was my mother, to meet my father. Does that make sense to you?

F: Yes, it does.

W: And that's how she met him.

F: Okay, and they got married about when?

W: I need my husband; he knows more about all of this than I do because he knows everything by dates. They got married about 1911.

F: Were you the first child?

W: I was the first child.

F: Were there others?

W: There was a younger sister.

F: What did she do? Did she leave Portland?

W: She went away to college and then she went to New York and she was a writer on a magazine. I think it was before your time.

F: Try me.

W: Liberty Magazine.

F: Yes.

W: She worked for them; and she got married and they both lived in New York in Long Island. Now she's lost her husband.

F: What college did she go to?

W: Radcliffe.

F: And that ended it after she got a B.A. from there?

W: Yes.

F: Okay, so first of all, your grandparents on your father's side were remarkable for one reason if nothing else and that is their four children. They came over from Russia; they built a business in this restaurant; their four boys all got law degrees. Then, your father turns around and he begins practicing here and meets your mother sometime before 1915 and they get married and they have you and your sister. [W: yes] And that's it. [W: yes] All right, your mother's parents, did they speak English? [W: yes] Did you ever hear your parents speaking anything other than English?

W: Well, you know, when they didn't want the children to understand anything, they talked in Jewish. They were able to; I can't say that for their daughter.

F: It's now 1920.

W: Okay.

F: You're about five years old.

W: Yuh.

F: Okay.

W: Sounds like hypnotism.

F: [Laugh] This has been such an interesting day as it is, uhm . . .

W: I'm going to ruin it.

F: No, no . . . One interview like this once in a while isn't going to hurt any of us. Tell me, when you think of your two grandparents' homes, were they Orthodox homes? Let's take your father's parents. First of all, he ran a restaurant so it would be difficult for him to be rigidly Orthodox, wouldn't that be true?

W: He was not rigidly Orthodox, but I think they were Orthodox.

F: In a sense?

W: Yes, in a sense.

F: Now the ones who lived in Massachusetts?

W: Yes, adequately Orthodox. I never really saw much religion in their homes, so I really don't know what they practiced.

F: So, we're talking about High Holidays.

W: The High Holidays, they observed them.

F: Are we talking about kosher kitchens, do you think?

W: No, I don't think they had kosher kitchens.

F: And certainly not Shul every morning or evening.

W: I don't think so.

F: You don't remember your grandfather doing that, do you?

W: No, because one was in Lewiston and one was in Massachusetts, so I never had that much contact with them. I never went to live with them or anything, so I don't know exactly what they did. I know they were all pillars of the Jewish community in a social way; but whether they were actually Orthodox, I don't know. Of course, in those days, men were nothing but Orthodox around here.

F: I know. That's why when somebody looks at me funny when I ask the question about how would you define their Orthodoxy for me in certain ways, I am doing it for a reason because Orthodox is not Orthodox is not Orthodox! I'm trying to determine what this Jerusalem of America was truly like.

W: Well, I think just like there are now those of us who are more Reform Jews than anything else, and there are those of us who are Conservative, all of these older people had different grades of Orthodoxy because they had no place else to go.

F: That's right.

W: I don't remember either set of grandparents being fanatically religious or especially religious. I know they went to Seders there - you know what the Seders are? And on the High Holidays they would go to Shul; but what they did in between I really don't know.

F: Now, describe your own home in a religious sense as you were growing up.

W: Oh, my own home. It wasn't religious, no.

F: Non-religious?

W: No, well, I can't say it was non-religious, but I didn't go to Hebrew School. I went to Sunday School.

F: Where was it?

W: It was down on Pearl Street.

F: In the Hebrew School?

W: Well, I guess, the Hebrew School was held there. I don't really remember where I went. I didn't get much of a religious education, let's put it that way. In my home, there was not a kosher kitchen.

F: What about Friday nights. Was there anything special about Friday nights?

W: Friday nights there was the wine and the challah and that's about all.

F: And you went to Synagogue, Shaarey Tphiloh, I suppose.

W: We belonged to Etz Chaim and I went on the Holidays.

F: But you wouldn't be found there nor would your father or mother, usually, on a Saturday morning?

W: Probably not.

F: And probably not on Friday night, right?

W: They didn't have Friday night services that I remember.

F: So, everyone is defining their Jewishness in a very different way.

W: Right, they had no place to go, you see, to integrate how they felt; so they all went to the Orthodox and then did parts of it when they got home. My mother, for instance, wouldn't have lobster in her house and so she called herself kosher; but she would have bacon because it was good for you; and she wouldn't have ham; and she wouldn't have pork. And this is what they all did.

F: It's somewhat folkloric,then; whatever they did had something more to do with folklore.

W: I can remember there was a very Orthodox rabbi when I was a kid by the name of Lewittes.

F: Yuh, Lewittes, right.

W: He was a real Orthodox rabbi, but I remember hearing a quote of his that at least if you picked out one thing not to do on Saturday, you were making some effort at being Jewish. And for a long time I didn't sew on Saturday just so I could say I was doing something! [laugh] And I think my mother and father were a lot like that. My father was very active in the Jewish community, but as far as religion is concerned, they were not really religious and they really did not care enough about my getting a Jewish education.

F: Do you wish you had had more?

W: Oh, I would have liked to have had more but I wouldn't have liked to have had it in what they called the Cheders that they had here. I would liked to have had it like the kids have it now so at least when you go into a Temple, you know what the service is about, even though you don't remember much from your Hebrew School days.

F: How much younger was your sister than you?

W: Five years.

F: So, when you were growing up, I take it that some sort of emphasis was placed on education.

W: I gather.

F: Do you remember being encouraged all along?

W: I went to prep school so I could get into a good college.

F: I missed that; you went to elementary schools in Portland, then you went to prep school? What prep school?

W: Well, the name of it was Highland Manor. It is no longer.

F: Was that a high school kind of thing?

W: A high school and it was in Tarrytown, New York. [pause] It was run by a wonderful man who was an educator nationally known.

F: Was it run by the Jewish Community?

W: No. Run by the Jews, but not by the Jewish Community in the "community" sense.

F: Why did they decide to send you away? Weren't there any places in the state?

W: In the state of Maine?

F: Uhhuh.

W: For a prep school, you mean?

F: Yes, aren't there any?

W: I think they felt more comfortable sending me to a Jewish one.

F: Did you want to go?

W: I guess so, because I don't remember not wanting to go, and I had a very good time there.

F: [Laugh]

W: Not socially, but I did a lot of things as a high school student there that I would never have done here. There were only twelve or fourteen in a class. I was the editor-in-chief of the yearbook. This is why I guess I've sort of liked all my life doing this kind of thing, being president of the class, and those kinds of things I would never have gotten here. And I am sure I got an education that I wouldn't have received here because here I wasn't really motivated. I was much too busy having a good time.

F: When you were growing up, where did you live?

W: On the Eastern Promenade.

F: Oh, so you lived right in the Jewish community?

W: There were a lot of people who weren't Jewish; but Munjoy Hill was a good Jewish community.

F: Well, when you grew up, did you play or go to school or have as good friends non-Jewish kids?

W: Yeah, there was a wonderful boy that lived across the street from me and there's a young lawyer in town that we used to play with. Yes, I had Gentile friends.

F: But generally not?

W: All right, generally not.

F: Is that correct?

W: There were good school friends that we went out to play with, but are you talking about best friends? When I went out with boys, it was always Jewish.

F: Always?

W: Yes.

F: Always, even though your family wasn't religious?

W: Yes. I don't like to say that my parents weren't religious because religious is a very . . .

F: I know what you mean, and I understand how you're saying that.

W: Okay.

F: I think we understand it. After thirty-some interviews in the community, we understand it. Maybe we shouldn't brush over it so quickly, but I think we've got it; don't you think? It's not an atypical story. It's the same story that many others tell.

W: Right.

F: I will talk to you about how you define Judaism for yourself in a little bit.

W: I just didn't want to malign my mother and father.

F: No, no, no, not to be strictly Orthodox is not to be non-religious. All right, so then you went to Wellesley. Did you like Wellesley your four years there?

W: I like it a lot better now than I did when I was going there.

F: So, now do you remain a strong supporter of Wellesley College?

W: Very strong. They have a Wellesley Club in town at which you spoke at one time, [F: that's right] and I've been very active in that the last twenty years.

F: Have you ever been President of the Wellesley Club?

W: I beg your pardon?

F: Have you ever been President?

W: Yes.

F: This is not time for humility. You say you've been very active; just say you've been President, would you?

W: [Laugh] Well, I've been active.

F: All right, and that's because . . . why? Why are you so active in the Wellesley Club?

W: Because I think it's a very good college; the people whom I have met from there I approve of highly. I'm not altogether sure I know enough to approve or disapprove of the fact that they remain a women's college. I'm sure there are good reasons for it and I'm sure you know what they are; but it's one of those things where I just don't have the knowledge to know whether it's a good idea or not.

F: Well, do you feel somehow strongly about working in higher education? Is this some sort of commitment that you have?

W: No, I started to work, really, when my daughter got close to college age, and I was hoping that she would go to Wellesley. I take that all back; I wasn't hoping she'd go to Wellesley. She wanted to go to Wellesley and I had decided she should to go a coed school; and, as you will find out when you have children, you don't always get what you're hoping for. It seemed like one of those things that all old ladies do, and I wasn't going to get into that. But as Judy got nearer

college age, with a great deal of prodding from some of the members, I finally went to a few meetings. I found I liked the women there very much and I liked some of the things they were doing. I thought it wouldn't be bad for Judy if I was an active member of the Wellesley Club, so I stayed. I'm sure it had nothing to do with her getting into Wellesley, the fact that I stayed, but she did go; and after she left, I just had become very involved with the women in the club. I had gone back to Wellesley two or three times as President to the Alumnae Association, to a great number of things. The more I went back, the more I just loved it; and I feel it's a great school to send somebody to. And I think that the reputation it has nationally is a good asset for any girl to have.

F: What is your B.A. in?

W: Sociology.

F: And your daughter's?

W: French.

F: You then went to Prince School of Retailing. Where is that?

W: It is no longer in existence. It became part of Simmons College recently. But it's like the New York School of Retailing or Chamberlain School in Boston. It was a very good retailing school. And I got a B.S. from there.

F: What is Portia Law School?

W: Portia Law School was a women's law school on Beacon Hill in Boston. And it was a four year school. Later on it became the New England School of Law in Boston and it went coed.

F: Why did you decide to do that?

W: That's something I remember and that is because that was definitely a conscious decision. [F: laugh] You know, when we were growing up, we didn't think so much like you kids do about why am I doing this or do I want to do this or can I change that or why should I do this. You just sort of did what was expected of you and nobody questioned very much. I think it's very difficult for people your age to put yourselves in that framework because you've certainly been imbued with a lot of who am I and where am I going and what do I want.

F: I think you've got the wrong group. Marty has been a stewardess and everything else; Lisa grew up in Europe for twelve years, and I am forty! So, you've got three oddballs here.

W: That's what I am saying.

PA: That's exactly what she said.

W: Back in our day we never had that many oddballs. These days you do a lot of things that maybe aren't expected of you, but we never did. We never questioned anything. People of my ilk went to college; and the only thing I really wanted to do was go to a coed school. I was accepted at Syracuse University and my mother and father almost had heart attacks to think that I would choose Syracuse over Wellesley. So, I went to Wellesley. Now, you want to know why I went to law school?

F: Uhhuh.

W: That's a very good social, logical reason and I don't think it ought to be in the tape.

F: You can strike it. You can say anything you want. But I hope you will not strike it.

W: My mother sang very beautifully, but she was only a high school graduate and she didn't have too much awareness. She had wonderfully good sense, great style, and all of this, but she didn't have great intellectual knowledge. After the four brothers became lawyers, practically the only socializing they did was to go every Sunday afternoon - and it took us three hours to drive to Lewiston and visit all the relatives. Or they would come to our house. The four brothers, while they were educated, had spent so much time getting educated that they really had no relaxing pursuits, no leisure pursuits. So, when they got together, they had nothing to discuss but law. And my mother sat in the living or the dining room, or wherever she sat, like a dummy because she never had anything to say because all they talked about was law. For the two younger ones, after they got married, it was a different story, but this was before they got married. I'll tell you how I happened to go to law school. I went to Prince School and I got a job in Filene's basement, which I would not wish on my dearest enemy! [F: laugh] And the reason I got a job a Filene's Basement is that I didn't want to go out of Boston because by that time I had met Sidney. He was taking his Ph.D. at Harvard and he was going to Harvard Law School so I wanted to stay in Boston. And Chamberlain School of Retailing really had all the personnel jobs sewed up, which is what I wanted in the department stores. And so I agreed to go to work in Filene's Basement and I lasted exactly two and a half months.

F: Of course, this is right in the middle of the Depression, isn't it? Well, we're still in the Depression in 1936.

W: 1936, right. I don't know if you want me to take the time [F: yes] to tell you funny stories [F: yes] that happened in Filene's Basement like the women who would come down to the dress department. And they would put one dress on and then another dress on and then another dress on and then would take off one and walk out. The final thing was that they had a shoe sale; and if you can imagine Filene's Basement with a shoe sale with these shoes thrown all over everywhere, and one was here and the match was over there. And the salesgirl was supposed to get everything together with everybody pawing like animals over the whole thing. So, about that time, I threw up my hands and said I didn't want to stay there

any longer. So, my mother for years had been at me to be sure, with a father and three brothers, all of whom were lawyers, to go to law school. I hadn't wanted to; but by that time, I had met Sidney and he was going to be a lawyer, and my mother said, "You can't be the wife of a lawyer without going to law school. You'll be unhappy all your life." I stuck it out at Filene's Basement for two and a half months. [Filene's Basement to law school]. And then I went to Portia Law School, and this was a law school that really was a glorified bar review course for the Massachusetts bar. And I tell you that for a very good reason because you are going to ask me later why I didn't practice law, and that's one of the reasons.

After Sidney got through with his law school and we came back to Portland, he went into practice with my father and my uncle; and we were busy getting settled. He was taking the bar and he had to spend all his time studying for that. I just felt my job was to run the house, and I didn't want to sit down and study for the bar like he had because I had nothing but Massachusetts law. I didn't have general law principles like you get at a Harvard or a Yale Law School. That's one of the reasons, but I have always tried to tell my mother, since she's been dead, that it wasn't very good advice she gave me, because I married a guy who never talks about law and has so many outside interests that law is the least of his pursuits outside the office.

F: Well, how did you like those three years? Wasn't it three years in law school?

W: I did four years in three years.

F: Well, how did you like it?

W: I didn't like it particularly. I knew I didn't like law particularly, but I went there. But I was preparing myself for marriage.

F: [Laugh] I hope you don't - if you don't like the story the way it is, I hope you change it but don't take it out because you're one of the few women in the world who has ever prepared herself for marriage by going to law school! [laugh] Seems to be the hard way to do it!

W: That's right. So, I never did take the bar.

F: All right, now, when you were in college and all these years in Boston, how Jewish were you?

W: Not at all. My best friends were Christian, Gentile.

F: You were not active?

W: No.

F: Once in a while, would you go on the High Holidays, maybe?

W: Yes. I had relatives in Boston and on the High Holidays I think I did go to Temple with them.

F: In your years in Boston, it really wasn't on your mind?

W: No. What?

F: Being Jewish, or [W: no] any of that, really wasn't on your mind in those days.

W: Only from the point of view that I had gone to a Jewish prep school and been thrown with Jewish people. Most all my friends in Portland were Jewish, and I was very watchful and leery of Antisemitism when I got to college. That's the only thing I can remember about my being Jewish those years.

F: All right, now, when you were growing up in Portland, were you aware of Antisemitism?

W: No, never.

F: You were somewhat sheltered from it, right?

W: I really was. I never was one of these kids who had to fight her way with somebody calling you dirty Jew or all of this. I never got any of that in Portland until I got married. Then we came to Portland and we had a problem when we tried to buy a house.

F: Could we go back a minute? Now I have to go back to your father and mother in the Jewish community. Your father was very active communally in this town, was he not? [W: yes] He was a Jewish leader? [W: uhhuh] Am I right so far?

W: I would think so. I think that would be the way to describe him.

F: I take it that he must have started a good business and somehow done well at it.

W: He did very well.

F: Did your parents sacrifice for your education or was it fairly easy?

W: I think it was fairly easy until the Depression.

F: Oh, and what happened during the Depression?

W: He lost almost everything he had.

F: When did he die?

W: 1953.

F: Did he recover after the Depression was over?

W: Uhhuh.

F: And built up his law firm again?

W: Uhhuh.

F: And your uncle stayed with him all this time?

W: Ed did, yes.

F: So it was Berman and Berman and Wernick?

W: Right. And then it was Berman, Wernick, and Flaherty. They took in Flaherty, which was a big joke, because how did a Flaherty get in there, but he did. And then when my husband went on the bench, he had to take his name out of the law firm, so that became Berman and Flaherty.

F: So, you had a tradition of leadership which you were aware of in your home as far as community [W: that's right] leadership. You were aware of that? [W: uhhuh] That your father somehow thought it was important to him and he evidently spent time and energy in the community. [W: uhhuh] By the way, I will ask you and then I will ask Sidney the same question: How did you meet Sidney?

W: I had an apartment in Cambridge when I went to the Prince School with a girl from Bangor. Nowadays you don't have to say who you have an apartment with, see. [F: laugh].

F: You're very proud of the fact that you could say it, that you had it, aren't you? You like that!

W: Listen, let me tell you something. There's nothing more educational than having two kids growing up. I lived in an apartment, went to Prince School, and Sidney lived in the same apartment house.

F: Oh?

W: He lived in the same apartment house, <u>not</u> in the same apartment!

F: We understood that.

W: Yuh, okay, just want to be sure!

F: We weren't thinking anything.

W: I was terribly worried about that.

F: You wouldn't want to get something like that on tape.

W: No, no.

F: Heavens!

W: And that's how I met him.

F: You met him in the corridor one day, right?

W: Well . . .

F: Now, you knew him for several years before you married him, right?

W: Three. He comes from Philadelphia.

F: So, is it because of his marrying you that he came to Portland or had he already thought of doing so?

W: No, it was because of me. His father also was a lawyer in Philadelphia. He didn't think he wanted to go back to Philadelphia to practice and he didn't think he wanted to go in with his father, anyway. So, he tested out the waters in New York and he didn't like what he saw in New York. So, he decided that Portland would be a great place for him because he could get a variety of law work that he wouldn't get in New York.

F: When you were in college, had you thought about returning to Portland to settle down?

W: Uhhuh.

F: You had always thought so?

W: Oh, I thought about it, but I didn't want to.

F: [Laugh] Instead of you dragging Mr. Wernick back here, he dragged you back.

W: That's right; that's the truth. [laugh]

F: Yeah, but you hadn't envisioned spending the rest of your life in Portland at the time that you were in Boston?

W: No, I had not.

F: But your father and your husband met and found that they liked each other and would like to practice together, right?

W: With my uncle.

F: And you had really no say in any of this, correct?

W: Oh, yes, I had a say, but you know . . .

F: Where were you married?

W: In a hotel in Boston.

F: Uhm, by what?

W: By a rabbi.

F: A rabbi came to your hotel? [W: uhhuh] A Reform rabbi?

W: No.

F: An Orthodox rabbi?

W: I think he was Conservative.

F: I know I shouldn't ask this. Is there any particular reason why you were married in a hotel?

W: Yes, there is. Do you want to hear it? You'll like what the answer is. The answer is that Sidney's father was very Orthodox and very observant and to be married in Boston, we had to find a kosher kitchen; and there were a limited amount of places since we did not belong to a Temple in Boston. And the Kenmore Hotel, which is where we were married, had a kosher kitchen and also a beautiful place to have a wedding, and that's why we had it in Boston.

F: And your husband stayed out of World War II. He didn't go in at all, did he?

W: No, he didn't. He had rheumatic fever and St. Vitus's dance as a kid and he was left with certain things, so they wouldn't take him.

F: So here you were in 1940 back in Portland, [W: uhhuh] and that's where your contribution and your husband's to this community began. All right, have I left out anything prior to 1940 that you would have liked to talk about?

W: No.

F: Well, when you were growing up, did your parents have a car and all that? You don't remember the horse and buggy level?

W: No, I'm past the horse and buggy level but I'm not past the level where it took nine to twelve hours to go to Boston.

F: In a car?

W: In a car.

F: Why?

W: Well, they didn't go that fast and they had to go through all the little towns. There were no turnpikes. It was a whole day's trip to Boston.

F: So you fared all right through the Depression. The only major experience of any real [W: right] negativity and image shaking was the two and a half months in Filene's Basement, right?

W: Yuh, and I was aware that my father lost all his money. But I can't say that I suffered any by it. I don't know where he got it or how he did it,

but I went to school and he supported me.

F: Did your mother die before your father?

W: One year.

F: In the early Fifties?

W: He died in 1953.

F: How old were they when they died?

W: She was 63 and he was 67.

F: They died young.

W: Yuh, it is young.

F: What did your mother die of?

W: Cancer.

F: Your father?

W: Brain hémorrhage.

F: So, those were sudden and your father was still practicing at the time. [W: uhhuh] Because there's no lawyer in this town who retires at age 67.

W: Oh, no, he wasn't retired at all.

F: You might like this; I've told everybody else, you might as well be told, too. They're sick of hearing it. Our very first interview out of all of these was with Louis Bernstein. I guess you know, you might as well start with a toughy, although we didn't feel that way. At the end of a very long interview, I turned the tape off and asked him if he was going to start taking life a little easier, you know. And he said, well, he had been able to go to Florida the past two winters because there was a youngster in the firm who had really done quite well and he felt pretty confident about it.

W: Barney Shur?

F: Yeah. I told Clarice and Barney; I spoke to them.

W: But he's gone to Florida a lot more than the last two years, too. [laugh]

F: Well, if he was pulling our leg, I'm glad. So, okay, 1940 begins the Wernicks' contribution to the Jewish community in Portland. I won't ask you about your husband at all. [W: I'll appreciate that]. Did you become involved right away? I know he did.

W: I don't think he did right away.

F: Fairly soon. The only piece of information we have, which isn't even accurate, is Ben Band's book on Portland Jewry.

W: Oh, yuh.

F: We're trying to piece together pieces and that's why your husband's interview is terribly important. We need to get different campaigns in order. He's not going to like his interview; we're not going to like his interview. We've got to ask him all about this campaign and this one and this one and let's get it in order and how did they really raise so much money and all that sort of stuff. He's not going to like that at all. It's not very interesting.

W: He isn't terribly interested in it right now.

F: Well, that's all right. Cynthia said if he didn't do this, when he is seventy or eighty, he'd be kind of mad about it so we're really trying to help him out, see! So he won't feel badly when he gets older! [W: laugh] No, we don't ask tricky questions; it's just that we need to fill in some spaces. When you came to town, they had just bought the Jewish Community Center .

W: Ah, no, no, no. When I first came to town, there was no Jewish Community Center.

F: Well, after you came, within a year, then.

W: Oh, I beg your pardon.

F: The Jewish Community Center.

W: Yes, I'm sorry; I was thinking of the Temple. I'm sorry; yes, of course.

F: So, what did you start doing right off the bat?

W: I started selling tickets for some fund raising thing. That's what I started doing right away. The reason I remember that is that I was terribly concerned that I was going to be very stale in the city of Portland; nobody was going to know I was there and I was going to stagnate. Here I had been in this rich educational community of Cambridge and Boston, with so much culture. And here I was coming back to Portland where they had nothing - and believe me, they had nothing in those days socially. And I was just going to stagnate. So, the first time anybody called me up to sell tickets, I was so tickled to death that somebody knew I was in town and that I wasn't going to have to stay behind my front door. That was my first job here. But actually, my first big job, at that time was the Jewish Charities. I was at the ripe old age of probably 26 or 27 when I came back here. I ran the Women's Committee, the Women's Drive, for the Jewish Charities all by myself.

F: At 26?

W: Yuh. That gave me quite an introduction to all the Jewish manifestations in the city of Portland.

F: Now I'll go back with you then. Right away then you were aware of the formation of the Jewish Federation. You know it was right after you got here, about a year or so, that they formed that, right, about 1942? Do you remember that being done?

W: Oh, of course, I remember it being done but I just thought it was done later than that.

F: Nope. The first meeting of the Federation was held in 1942. It was formed in November, 1941.

W: Well, then that's probably what it was because when I took it over, there was no Federation and there were no committees and there was no Special Gifts and there was no anything. I just went around and saw every Jewish woman in the city.

F: Okay, I wanted to know how you did this. Most people are very vague about it.

W: How you do what?

F: Raise all this money. I know that somebody like an Ethel Godfrey, or someone, went around with all these tickets she sold all her life. She must have sold tickets to absolutely everything. Ethel Kaplan? Who was it who was at one level of every fund raiser, either in the kitchen, she said, fixing the food at every dinner or selling some ticket to something. It was a little earlier than your time. But when you started, before all these committees were formed, how did you actually do it? I know that Barney Shur in his marvelous year put everybody on a train to Boston to hear Abba Eben. I don't know what Clarice Shur's going to pull this year that would ever top what Barney did But, how did you collect money? What did you do?

W: I just went around and visited.

F: Every single Jewish family.

LW: What was your pitch?

W: I don't know if anybody's told you this or not, but there is one thing - you see, I don't know - I can't get dates, they get all mixed up, but there was a very long time when I was in Portland where the Jews were supposed to take care of their own and this was the pitch: that you needed to help the Jews overseas, to help the poor Jews in the city, to help Hebrew University, Jewish University or whatever you call them, and that was the whole pitch. You know, we have to take care of everything ourselves. And there was a very definite time when those of us who could said, "Listen, the community means of taking care of the citizens should

apply to the Jews as well. It isn't such a great thing to have you take care of the Jews yourself. If somebody has to go on relief, they're citizens of Portland or Maine and they should get state relief. Why should we have to take care of them as a charity case?" And there was quite a lot of discussion back and forth before that philosophy really took hold. There is still a Jewish Family Services, but they only supplement what is legally coming to the client from the state.

F: When do you think that took hold? Not very long ago, was it?

W: Not very long ago.

F: Would you say within the last ten years?

W: Oh, I think it's longer than that.

F: You think so?

W: I'm not too sure of that. There was another organization before the Jewish Family Services. The Council of Jewish Women was doing a lot of it, too, before that. But, you know, those of us who came back to Portland educated and interested in the American scene as well as the Jewish scene, said why in the heck should they be second-class citizens? They should get as much from the community as anybody else gets. And the older people had a terrible time understanding this.

F: Now,were you involved in the Jewish Family Services?

W: I was not involved in the Jewish Family Services, but I was involved in the formation of the Federation. I was chairman of the drive for three years and I was chairman of Special Gifts for two years and I was honorary chairman for two years.

F: Of the women's division?

W: Of the women's division.

F: In those days there was no way that a woman would have been general chairman, right?

W: No, dear, no way. This is the first year. She can have it, too.

F: Well, as I said, I thought she had rocks in her head. If you're going to aspire to something as a woman, that isn't exactly the frosting to pull off as the first one! I think that's just remarkable that Clarice would even do that, but I don't see why she needs that headache.

W: She doesn't.

F: But, I imagine all her friends are going to share it with her, huh? [laugh]

W: Well, I'm not. I haven't been active in the Federation the last few years.

F: All right, now, you spent several years fund raising for the Federation.

W: I would say that up until two years ago I spent every year doing it.

F: You did?

W: In one form or another.

F: All right, were you ever on the Federation board?

W: Yuh. As a board member.

F: So you saw the Federation grow in all these years [W: uhhuh] to what it is now. And you were active until two years ago?

W: It's been two or three years, yes.

F: Is there some reason why you aren't working in the Federation now?

W: Well, uhm . . .

F: Other than that you are tired of it?

W: Oh, no, I'm tired of a lot of things, but not that.

F: But up until two years ago you were quite active? In fact, you were a leader every single year.

W: Since 1941.

F: All right, every single year somewhere around the Federation on some basic project, in some leadership way, pushing was Charlotte Wernick, is that correct?

W: Yuh.

F: So you really served?

W: I hope so.

F: Well, now, you saw the Federation grow; you saw it develop. What changes have occurred in Federation, say, in the last ten or fifteen years? You saw it grow from nothing to something and it really did raise remarkable sums of money, don't you think?

W: Yes, it did, yes.

F: Most people think it raised remarkable sums of money. Then there are some who say that it didn't raise much at all and that people aren't really giving.

W: There are people who can afford to give who don't give and that's what they mean.

F: You found the Federation important?

W: Yes. The main reason for starting Federation was that the community has been bombarded all these years on fund raising events. There was hardly a day that our doorbell wasn't rung by somebody selling tickets for something or somebody calling and asking you to be on something. So the gimmick for Federation was you would have a one-time giving. But, of course, as it happened, there were many people who didn't add correctly and they didn't add up what they would have given fifty times during the year, and then give that amount to Federation. So, those are the people who aren't giving, especially people who can afford it.

F: Well, were you a member of the Center Women's Club?

W: I was a member, that's all.

F: You weren't really active in the Community Center for any of these years?

W: No.

F: Did your life,socially,center around the Center at any time?

W: They used to have dances there and things that I went to. They held meetings there, banquets, Federation banquets. I was in the building quite a lot but actually active on the board of the Center Women's Club, I was not.

F: But as far as it being a center and mainstay of your cultural and social life in the city, not true, right?

W: It was early in my years. I was so active in going to dances and Bar Mitzvahs; and all these things were held at the Center so that I was there a lot; but running it or concerned about it in any way, I wasn't. Except to support it.

F: Okay, now you were also on the Council of Jewish Women. Were you active in that?

W: Always.

F: Still, to this day? What offices have you held? Every one of them?

W: I was president and had to resign because I was pregnant and very, very sick with my first pregnancy. After that I got smart and didn't take the presidency. But I've been treasurer, secretary; I've been everything except president, and I've been on the board all these years.

F: What changes have you seen in what has been emphasized over the years in Portland or has it remained the same?

W: Well, it had a great social service emphasis at the beginning, [F: uhhuh] and it's gradually become a Jewish organization that takes part with the gentile community. They do a great deal of state legislation.

F: So you worked with Rebecca Bernstein in this, then.

W: Oh, yes.

F: She is sometimes referred to as Mrs. Council or something like that. Has it changed its emphasis from social services?

W: Yes, I think it has.

F: It would seem that the work of the Council is almost a success story so that it no longer needs to do the same thing it did. If I am right in looking at history, the Council of Jewish Women worked for some of the things that became a goal in the city of Portland itself in terms of Family Services, such as competent directors with training, such as certain kinds of laws that were pushed by the Council - all of which had a really strong impact on the entire community.

W: That's right. One of the things about Council is that it sees a need and it takes it over and gets it going and then gives it back to the community. Then it gets out and starts something else.

F: Well, what does the Council do now? Is it a vibrant, vigorous organization still?

W: It has a great many young people in it. Nationally, it does a great deal that I would support, even if I were not active on the board. Nationally they do a great deal; they have an observor at the United Nations; whenever there is to be an interfaith anything, Council is the organization that is known nationally to be the one that they call upon. We still push for legislation in child welfare and family welfare. They have educational programs; they've had study groups on important issues.

F: So, it's sort of current.

W: That's right. That's just exactly right. It tries to stay current. It was one of the starters of WICS. Do you know what WICS is?

F: No.

W: The Council of Negro Women, the Council of Protestant Women, the Council of Catholic Women and the Council of Jewish Women formed WICS which was a national organization for social service for youth. Have you heard about the Ingraham Volunteers?

F: Yes, but I don't remember for sure what they are.

W: That came out of WICS, and the Council of Jewish Women members participated in that. They had an Ingraham House in which they housed girls who were street people and needed housing who had to leave their families. They gave them housing and social service and tried to help them and set them up. Then they formed a telephone thing where they were on duty 24 hours a day like they do for suicide. Girls could call and be given advice as to where to go or how to handle their problems. There was manning of the telephone for 24 hours.

F: On a volunteer basis?

W: On a volunteer basis.

F: Did you man the telephone?

W: No, I didn't man the telephone. I didn't have too much to do with WICS. Anyway, the Ingraham House has closed, as such, but they are continuing the Ingraham Volunteers as far as I know. Ingraham House, itself, is now owned and used by Abilities and Good Will, Inc.

F: So, in other words, again it was for the community.

W: Right.

F: In which the Council of Jewish Women was somewhat of a catalyst, at least one of the elements.

W: We've done things with Junior League; we've done things with Y.W.C.A.; and this to me is equally important to Zionist activities.

F: In other words, what happens in America, what happens in your own communities.

W: To me that has always been quite an important thing. I've always felt the Jews should take a place in the community as Jews, not as a token Jew on the board of a Gentile organization. They should take their place in the community, and give to the American community.

F: Has your membership in Hadassah, then, been nominal?

W: Uhhuh.

F: You've never held the leadership because you have not put your energies into that in terms of being an officer.

W: There's just so much you can do.

F: Oh, I know, I'm just trying to be sure I don't leave out something. What about the Temple Sisterhood?

W: I was very active in that. I was President of that.

F: How do you feel about the Temple Sisterhood?

W: I think it could be a very good organization. I think it's a very important arm of the Temple. I feel that it can bring a lot to the women in the Temple community.

F: Is it alive and well?

W: Actively, I guess.

F: Do you still go to meetings?

W: I go to general meetings. I guess I'm on the board because I was President, which I think is a bad thing; but, anyway, I don't go to board meetings any more.

F: When you were President, was there anything special that you concentrated on?

W: We did a lot of educating of the community then. It was very early in the life of the Temple. It had to do a lot of things for the Temple. We did all the practical things. We formed the kitchen and we did the drapes and we did all of that stuff. We had fund raising affairs and we had educational affairs and religious parties. It should be a very important part of the Temple.

F: Now, when you came back to town, did you go back into Etz Chaim? When you first came back, did you go back into anything?

W: No, because the Temple started. We were one of the agitators for the Temple.

F: You were?

W: Uhhuh.

F: How did that work? Did you sit around at dinner some night with somebody and start talking about this?

W: No, but some people did. Some people can tell you the history much better than I, but there were a few people, like Dr. and Mrs. Caplan, whom you must have heard about. A few people like that got together and decided there should be a Conservative Temple.

F: Up until then had you been to the Synagogue on the High Holidays or pretty much not . . .

W: I always have gone to Synagogue on High Holidays; and I don't want to get into a discussion as to whether or not I do it religiously or for social reasons because I had a terrible argument about that and I'm not . . .

F: It never occurred to me to ask you that question until you . . .

W: . . . exactly, I'm not exactly sure of the answer to that one.

F: . . . until you brought it up. I've never asked that question. It has never occurred to me. Most of the people in this community do not go except on High Holidays and special events, most of the people we've talked to. People are describing to us a broad spectrum and nobody has an identical spot on it. You can't find anybody who is on the same spot any more.

W: I understand that, but then there are those of us in the Conservative Temple who are much more Reform than others.

F: All right, well, now you got in on the Temple right from the very beginning.

W: They couldn't find anybody to take the Presidency of Sisterhood, so we decided that we would do it on a monthly basis, and I was the second month.

F: That's very democratic. What year was your daughter born?

W: 1943.

F: And then your son was born five years later.

W: It was 1948.

F: Your son, Lawrence, was he Bar Mitzvahed?

W: Uhhuh.

F: Oh, he was!

W: Uhhuh. Sure.

F: Did he go to Hebrew School?

W: Uhhuh, so did my daughter, she was confirmed. Bas Mitzvahed.

F: In a group?

W: Uhhuh.

F: And nowadays, if it were being done, would she want an individual one, would you think?

W: I don't think so; I don't know. I don't have much feeling about that one way or the other.

F: In the last three or four years, women have been able to do more and more in the Temple, right?

W: Right.

F: There probably are no limits if the women only wanted to do it. In other words, it would appear from what I have heard, from the people whom I have talked with, that women really can do just about anything now. Whether they do it or not is another issue.

W: What do you mean?

F: That there are no laws preventing them from doing anything in the Temple.

W: I don't know; you ask Rabbi Sky that. I don't know.

F: You certainly don't feel prevented from any kind of thing that you wish to do as a woman?

W: Oh, yes, but I was thinking more about what part of the service they could participate in.

F: That's what I am thinking of, too.

W: Well, I don't know that.

F: I think one of them said that the only thing she hadn't been able to do was to attend a circumcision ceremony, and she really didn't think she'd break the doors down on that!

W: Well, I really don't know how much they let them do.

F: So, both of your children grew up with at least as much Jewish education as you.

W: Oh, much more. You have to remember that we were all very enthusiastic about the Temple. We had finally found a place . . .

F: It was really yours, wasn't it? You built it; it was yours for a while.

W: But it wasn't so far away from anything we believed in as the Orthodox Shuls were, like sitting upstairs, and the service all in Hebrew. Those of us who didn't understand Hebrew didn't understand it. And to us it was very primative and very . . .

F: Undignified?

W: Uhm, I don't know if I'd use that word or not because some of those very religious men were very dignified. I have a great deal of respect for them; I don't down them at all; I just couldn't feel that kind of religious feeling. Perhaps it's my loss but here we had something that was going to be meaningful to us; we were going to participate in it; it was going to talk to us much more than an Orthodox Shul service would. And we had great input into it, and we were all very active. Even my father was active in the new Temple.

F: He came over from Etz Chaim?

W: Oh, sure. He was very active in it. I have a picture somebody gave me of him speaking outdoors at the groundbreaking of the Temple. I don't remember how he got there. I don't know whether he was chairman of anything or what. We were all very gung-ho for this so all our children were sent to Hebrew School without any question because we were all going to get this thing going. So, even though I didn't evince any religious feeling up until that time, it was that I wanted my children to have more than I had gotten. And here was a great place for them to get it. It was going to be such a great thing for the community to have a Conservative Temple.

F: Has it been?

W: Yes, I think it has been. Now I'd just as soon have a Reform one but I don't know how they would make it pay so I'm not opening my mouth.

F: I've heard this before; what about Reform Judaism?

W: Because that's what I am. I don't keep a kosher house. To me one day of Rosh Hashanah is plenty.

F: Did you go?

W: Yes, I went. I like a great deal of English in the service because I can't understand Hebrew and I have no great desire to learn. So, I am really a Reform Jew and I would be much more at home in the Reform Temple.

F: Someone suggested that ten years from now there'll [W: there probably will] be something out in the Falmouth area, and suggested that . . .

W: That's funny, you know, because we were never allowed to live in the Falmouth area for a long time. That's why I'm laughing; but now everybody lives everywhere and the barriers are broken down in a great many ways. I think that's good.

F: Are you going to be at the Yom Kippur service?

W: Oh, yes.

F: The Kol Nidre service?

W: Yes, I like that.

F: So do I.

W: I like that service.

F: We all got tickets. We figured that for our volunteer labors, that's the least they could do! [W: laugh] But I also know enough this year to know where I want to sit when it begins so that I can [W: walk out] first see, which I was not able to do last year because I was at the

back, and second of all, not to see so well that I can't exit when I'm quite ready to.

W: Right. The service is very long, to say the least.

F: But it's beautiful, at least the first part of it, I think. Okay, now as this Temple grew and you made this commitment, you said you really are a Reform Jew, so it began to not be as central in your life as it was when you first began?

W: Right. Well . . .

F: You formed it and you got it going and then . . .

W: And then I just became a member. Well, I was on the board until about three or four years ago; and then the young people came up which is what we've been waiting for for so long because there was a hiatal period where they could find no young leadership at all. And now they've come and, you know, you just can't keep as active in everything as you get older. When we were young, we used to think people my age had nothing else to do so they might just as well put all the jobs on to them. Now that I am this age, I find that you just can't do as much. Your interests change and you don't take on as much as you used to.

F: Well, you've seen this community change, then, in terms of what Jews can and cannot do, haven't you? You said to me that you couldn't buy a house when you first came or that you had difficulty. Where were you trying to buy a house?

W: You know where Roz Bernstein lives?

F: I bought the house on Craigie Street which is two doors up.

W: Has it got the front door on the side?

F: Yeah.

W: That's the house.

F: That's the house!

W: Uhhuh.

F: I painted it red now, you know; then I sold it.

W: Oh, did you?

F: Yes, I didn't even know I was living in the Conservative Judaism section when I moved in. I sold it last year and moved to Noyes Street, 23 Noyes Street, and then Rabbi Sky called me and he says, "Well, Ackerman's your landlord, isn't he?" And I said, "Yeah." And then I realized he was

wearing a Yarmulke. Sky said to me, laughing, "Now you're living in an Orthodox Jewish section." And Rabbi Dworken waves in the morning. He laughed and he said,"Didn't you know where you were living?" I said, "No, I didn't know where I was living. I moved from Conservative Judaism to Orthodoxy." Yes, the two lots on the hill and the house with the drive up the side and the door on the side and the beautiful back lawn. Yes, I bought that, fixed it up, painted it red and sold it.

W: Well, we had looked at that house. It was in 1940.

F: Well, that's strange because everyone there is Jewish.

W: Oh, but it wasn't then. Nobody on Craigie Street was Jewish.

F: Now everybody is, except two families.

W: Uhhuh, that whole area .

F: At one time then, not so many years ago, there were certain places where you just really couldn't live.

W: Oh, yuh, that was the first time it had happened to me!

F: Were you stunned at that?

W: Yes! Right across the street from that lived a real estate agent; and he found out I was interested in it and he got to the real estate agent who we were working with and told him, "no way!"

F: Were you surprised?

W: Yes, since I had never come up against Antisemitism anymore than what I saw in college. I had never had any taste of it here at all.

F: Did it repeat itself in any other things?

W: Well, [pause] . . .

F: Well, you've seen the town change. Here you are, sharing a professional life with your husband, mixing with professional people throughout the city, correct?

W: Well, when I first came here, there was never a Jew who was allowed to have anything to do with music and the Symphony, Rotary, a lot of places besides the Cumberland Club and the Portland Country Club.

F: There was much more than that, right?

W: Almost everything. I was put on the board of the district nurses because the Jew who had been on before left. So, they had to have another Jew. Well, I didn't like it but at least they were making an attempt to

include us in a community activity.

F: When you came back from a very rich life in Boston in which the participation of the Jewish community in Boston is now quite strong and I imagine it was, at least at that time, you found yourself in a really odd situation, didn't you? You hadn't been used to being the token anything on anything, right, and you found yourself doing that in this community?

W: Just in that particular thing. But I think a great deal of it has changed.

F: It's very different now, is that not true?

W: Very different. Look at the United Fund. I have a sort of secret suspicion that one of the reasons it was opened up is that they were in financial difficulty and they needed the cooperation of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, it was opened up and I feel that the Jews who have walked in the door that was opened have done a great deal in their own way to combat Antisemitism.

F: There's something that just occurred to me. Was your husband the first Jewish judge?

W: Oh, no, he was the second. There was a Judge Rudman on the bench before him.

F: Well, Mrs. Wernick, you wouldn't have talked this way twenty-five years ago.

W: Talk what way?

F: In terms of [pause] being a little leery of the attitude of the gentile community?

W: No, I wouldn't.

F: What has heightened your awareness?

W: I know what you are talking about; I wouldn't have said that the doors were opened because they weren't, if that's what you mean.

F: I meant the reverse; it must have been somewhat of an education for you coming back here in terms of the things that were still closed for ever so long.

W: Oh, yeah, but, I didn't think of it too much again. I didn't know enough to question it and do anything about it. They had enough in the Jewish community that kept me terribly busy and I felt that that was enough for me at the time. But when I was asked to do something in the gentile community, I felt that I should do it because I felt that in this way they're going to break down the barriers. There was no reason in the world why Jews shouldn't participate in Symphony,

which is available to everybody. It's a community thing, and why shouldn't they help the Museum, which is our museum as much as theirs.

F: And you worked in all these organizations in the community?

W: Yes.

F: Would it be fair to say that you have worked in as many non-Jewish organizations as Jewish?

W: Yes. I've always felt that one should.

F: Do you feel that it matters one way or another now in any of this whether someone is Jewish or not any more?

W: I have seen the gentile community be very much more interested in getting Jewish people to work because it doesn't mean that much to them any more. Besides, there is the fact that almost every gentile has its Jew in the family, [pause] if you know what I mean.

F: Uhhuh.

W: And so they've gotten used to it and I think that [pause] it's been good for this community and for the Jews in it.

F: In terms of your two children, are they both married?

W: No, my daughter's married.

F: Your daughter is married and she works for the State Department. And what is it that she does in the State Department?

W: She works for AID. They are interested in disadvantaged countries.

F: She enjoys it there?

W: Oh, she loves it. She wants to go and live in every disadvantaged country in Africa.

F: What does her husband do?

W: He's on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as a foreign relations expert. He has an A.B. from Columbia and whatever you get from the School of International Affairs.

F: Fletcher School, you mean?

W: Like Fletcher only it's John Hopkins, and then he has his Ph.D. from some place in Switzerland.

F: In foreign affairs? Do they have any kids?

W: Yes.

F: Is he Jewish?

W: Uhhuh.

F: And your son is still single?

W: He's still single.

F: He's been practicing only three years?

W: Three years.

F: In Boston. Now, do your children go to any synagogue at all?

W: My son came home for Rosh Hashanah this year. I was very surprised that he did.

F: If they were in Washington, would your daughter and her husband go to High Holiday services, do you think?

W: They <u>are</u> in Washington, in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and they don't go! No, they have two little girls. If they had had a son, he would not have had a bris. You know what a bris is? He probably would not have been Bar Mitzvahed. Rick was not Bar Mitzvahed. Rick is my son-in-law and he calls himself an atheist!

F: Are they committed to Israel or anything like that? Are they interested? Are you saying that they've had Jewish education but they've made their own decisions as to what they are?

W: <u>They</u> haven't had a Jewish education.

F: Your two kids.

W: Oh, I thought you meant my daughter and her husband. He hasn't.

F: But your daughter and your son have had Jewish educations and they reached an age where they decided what it all meant to them and made some decisions.

W: [Pause] I think my daughter is struggling quite a lot with this problem because I think she does have a commitment to being Jewish. I think she would like to do more in the way of serving; but she gets no help and she just goes along with it.

F: Have you ever been to Israel?

W: No.

F: Do you want to go?

W: Yes, I'd like to go.

F: Do you think you will?

W: Nope.

F: You don't like to travel?

W: My husband doesn't like to travel.

F: Okay, now, I'm not going to work you too much longer, don't worry.

W: I'm not worried; it's fun.

F: I want to move in a little different direction now.

W: I think you're wonderful to listen to all this gab from everyone.

PA: No, really, you're interesting.

F: [Laugh] All right, let's go back. You said it was kind of fun to get in on the ground floor of building your own Temple [W: uhhuh], and you had this concern. But you've really put out a lot of energy into the Jewish community in jobs. There are positions you could have held or not held where there would have been less energy expended.

W: Yuh.

F: All right, now, why? You still haven't really told me why. What's the reason?

W: I really can't tell you except that I've always had a feeling that I must contribute to both the Jewish and Christian community. You see, in my day, you didn't go to work unless you had to. There wasn't the drive to go to work that there has been lately whether you have to financially or not. Consequently, my concern was what was I going to do with my life and how could I make it meaningful. And to me it wasn't just enough to be a housewife and mother, which is very difficult; it probably is enough for many people because it certainly is worthwhile. But I had to do something more to contribute and this was the outlet that came to me. It seemed to be what I could do. I had all the schooling I ever wanted so I didn't want to go back to school; I didn't want to be a lawyer; and I didn't want to work in a department store which I had also done. And this to me seemed where I could make a contribution.

F: And you are still doing it.

W: And I'm still doing it. I'm doing it in ways that I prefer most. I've whittled my way into jobs that I like that don't take too much. Well, it takes a lot of effort, but it doesn't take as much drive as some of the jobs I've had before.

F: What are you doing now that you really enjoy?

W: Well, I work in the hospital which I really enjoy. I do a number of things for that. They have a survey committee at the hospital, a patient

survey committee, and it's a committee of about ten women. Every month we have a floor assigned to us and we interview the patients and we discuss with them what suggestions they might have for bettering the service at the hospital, what's bothering them, what they don't like, what's happening to them. Many of them are very lonely so you use this as a guise to talk to them; you get their concerns. It's a very interesting job and then you meet once a month and discuss all these things. We have speakers come from the hospital so we can hear about the medical community and the hospital's concerns for reaching out into the community. That I just love. And I have a nice old comfortable job where I sit at the front desk one afternoon a week and direct people and take care of their concerns as they walk into the hospital, whatever is on their minds. And I also am on the board of The Friends of Maine Medical Center and I have a job on that. That's all I do at the hospital.

F: Still work with the Symphony?

W: No. I'm an honorary director of the Symphony but this is the first year in, oh, I would say twenty years, that I haven't worked on the Symphony. Now I'm on the Art Museum. They've started a new thing called The Museum Guild. I originally was on the planning committee for this. They needed some people who had some expertise in getting things started in the community, so I went on that and then I got pushed into being on the permanent board.

F: Do judges in this state have to retire at a certain age?

W: At seventy. Seventy they have to retire; sixty-five, they're allowed to retire if they've worked for twelve years in the judicial branch.

F: So, you're starting to relax a little?

W: Oh, yuh, I'm relaxing.

F: I mean, you've let up somewhat from this frantic pace that you kept?

W: Well, I don't know, I seem to still have a frantic pace, but I'm sticking more to things I like.

F: I'm not suggesting that you're anywhere near approaching the laziness that I would be approaching in your place. I'm ready to retire right this minute, you see, for good, but I don't seem to be able to find the means at the moment.

W: I'll tell you what happens to people who are in this. Peggy Bernstein will tell you the same thing, and Clarice will tell you the same thing, and that is your way of life. This becomes a way of life for you and you don't like not being in on things that are going on in the community. You feel that you still want to participate but, you see, I have lots of other interests now. I like to be able to go down and see my daughter and my grandchild when I feel like it. I like to go to Boston to the theater; I like to go to Boston and do the galleries; and I like to be

able to do that when I can. I like to play tennis which I do twice a week; I like to play bridge which I do once a week; so you keep yourself in a busy schedule no matter. I guess psychologically I do it to myself because I just want to live like that.

F: But when you look back at the things you've done, did you enjoy them?

W: How the hell did I ever do them!

F: I mean, when you look back now.

W: Oh, sure, I enjoyed them. There are a lot of headaches to every job , however.

F: Do you see that you made a contribution? Do you understand that, honestly?

W: I don't know. I don't know that I have, but I feel that I haven't because I don't see anything changed by my effort in the community. I had been a sociology major and I had done some work with the Judge Baker Foundation. I came back to Portland ready to institute a child guidance clinic, right? And things got tough and so I backed away from it, and that I feel sorry about. I feel I should have fought it and fought it because they still need a child guidance clinic. And so, in that way, I feel I haven't made a contribution. As a community "helper," I have made a contribution, but I haven't really made a [pause] difference in the community because I was so active. And I'll tell you a funny story. Ed Berman, we'll go back to him. My father was very active in the community. Ed Berman's wife was one of the starters of the Community Center; she was one of the first presidents of the Center Women's Club. They were active all over this whole Jewish community. My father since 1909 was chairman of drives and all that kind of thing. I've got all kinds of silver things that were given to him in his honor. When I was in the hospital a few years ago, Rabbi Dworken came to see me. And my Uncle Ed had died, my father had died, my mother had died, and Barbara, Ed's wife, had died. But I venture to say that everybody in the community knew who the Bermans were because they had been so active for so long. And he came into the hospital and he does come to visit every Jewish patient. So, he came to visit me. And I enjoyed meeting him; I didn't know him. And he said, "You know, Mrs. Wernick, I don't think I have ever met you before but I have met your husband." And I said, "Yes, but you have met me before, you just don't remember me." He said, "What?" I said, "I was in the hospital about three years ago, whenever it was, and you came to visit me." But you know, I understand that because when my husband came back to Portland in 1940, all the Jewish people knew him because they knew me and they knew I had married him. But he couldn't get anybody straight for a very long time and he had difficulty saying hello to somebody that he had met because he didn't remember everybody. And Rabbi Dworken said, "Oh, are you a Portland girl?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "What was your name?" And I said, "Berman." He said, "Berman? Is that a Portland name?" And so when you ask me about my

contribution, that's what I think about. What have you done for me lately? And I haven't done anything so that there's any great change by what I have done. And that's why I feel that whatever the question asked, the answer to it is "no." Except for two great children and a well-run home!

F: Okay, now, would you say that in terms of Reformism, there are a number of people who feel that way in this city?

W: Yeah, I think they vaguely feel that way, but not enough. They wouldn't put their money where their mouth is.

F: And, then the next question. I didn't assume you weren't religious. I wouldn't even make that presumption about another human being. But when you think of being Jewish now, what do you think of? What does it mean?

W: I think of it almost as a culture; and I think that's why I observe the few things that I do because it's an observance of culture. But I can't tell you that I'm a Jew in the Orthodox sense because I don't observe any of the things that one should.

F: But you don't think of yourself as an atheist, for instance.

W: Oh, I sure to God don't.

F: I mean, you have a God?

W: I have a God and I feel it's a very personal God. I don't know; I really never tried to formulate it. That's another thing about being 61, you give up by then trying to formulate all your philosophies and putting them on everybody [laugh]. I don't know; this may be a rationalization because I don't want to do all the chores that you have to do to be an observant Jew. I feel there's a divineness in each one of us and it's the consciousness of a goodness or whatever you want to call it in each of us that makes us what we are that is a religious thing. It is part of a special religion.

F: Do you feel that the Jews are some sort of a chosen people?

W: Oh, I surely don't.

F: You don't!

W: No. We're supposed to.

F: Well, I don't have any supposed to's or not supposed to's.

W: I mean, if you're an Orthodox Jew, you do, don't you?

F: Well, some people are talking about being chosen in a very simple way nowadays. I'm not suggesting it's wrong. I don't have any opinion

that way either; but they would say, "Yuh, we're chosen all right, we're chosen to be exterminated" or whatever. I'm sure you've heard the statement in one form or another by some people. So, when I ask the question of chosen, if and when I do, and I don't in all interviews, some people talk about being chosen in a positive way, other people have talked about being chosen in a negative way.

W: And I don't think we're chosen at all. I just try living my life by putting one foot in front of the other and, in that way, I've gotten through the religious part, too.

F: Well, you don't stay awake at night, then, as some people do, worrying about whether or not American Judaism is going to disappear some day from intermarriage?

W: Unfortunately, I don't. I wouldn't tell my kids this [pause], but it really wouldn't devastate me if they married somebody who was Gentile. It really wouldn't. I've had, with these roommates who I had in college whom I have continued to see and write to, lots of discussions about being an American. And one of my friends is a Catholic. She and her husband were saying that he would hate to see a Jew in high places in the government because they would feel that the Jew had a dual allegiance and that he would advise the government in ways that would be beneficial to Israel but may not be beneficial to the United States. Well, I think there would be Jews who would do that. I'm sure Rabbi Sky would and a few people like that and others I could mention. This may be because I never got much of a basic Jewish training. I wouldn't deny that I am Jewish; I work for Jewish causes; I'm part of the Jewish community. And it's not exactly a racial thing, but it's something different from a religion. And all of this is fine and I like observing the big holidays and the seders and all this stuff as part of the culture. But other than that, I'm much more American than I am Jewish until they throw me out. And that's a question that I can't answer. It was answered for us in Germany; there were people who were a lot more Germanic than I am American who were sent to concentration camps. I don't know whether it could happen here or not. But I have always felt that the best way to combat Antisemitism was to be just as decent a person as possible and make yourself available so that they can find out that you don't have horns!