

Oral History of
Ruth Losman

as told to
Roberta Benor
Spring 2002

Q (Roberta Benor): This is Roberta Benor of Let Us Remember. The date is April 23rd, 2002. Please give your name and address.

A (Ruth Losman): Ruth Losman, 12509 Northline Court, Potomac, Maryland 20854.

Q: What is your maiden name?

A: Ruth Rabinowitz.

Q: And your Hebrew name?

A: Rivka.

Q: Are you named after someone?

A: Yes, I'm sure I am, but I'm not quite sure who.

Q: What is your date of birth?

A: June 24th, 1915.

Q: Where were you born?

A: Minsk, Russia.

Q: Where is that near?

A: Well, it's fairly close to Moscow, I think, but that was a long time ago.

Q: What is your first memory?

A: We left when I was five, and I don't recall too much before that. But when I was five, and we were thinking about leaving, the Bolsheviks, this was the age of the Bolsheviks, and they had set fire to many homes in our area. Not to ours, and they broke in. Of course, we were expecting them. We, I don't mean we. I mean my parents were expecting them.

Q: When you say "they broke in," to where did they break in?

A: Into the house.

Q: Into your actual house?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember seeing them there?

A: Yes. I remember very vividly the faces of these rotten young Bolsheviks. They were youngsters, young people, and they had hard, rotten faces. They gave orders immediately for my father to get the key for this closet, and he didn't do it fast enough or they used that as an excuse. And one of the Bolsheviks took his rifle and smacked him across his back. And to me, even to this day, I see that so vividly, and I couldn't understand at that time why my father just didn't say a word. I mean, my father was a very important man, not only in my life, but he was a dominating force wherever he went.

Q: What was his full name?

A: Isaac Rabinowitz.

Q: And his Hebrew name?

A: Yitzhak.

Q: When was he born?

A: Uh, well...

Q: Do you know how old he was when he died?

A: Yes, he was sixty-two.

Q: And what year that was?

A: Well, I can figure it out. I'm not quite sure, but I can figure it out.

Q: Okay, so maybe in the 1880's he was born.

A: He was born about then.

Q: Did he live his whole life until that time in Minsk?

A: Yes, yes, pretty close.

Q: So he was born in that same area?

A: Yes.

Q: What was his profession?

A: He was a big man. He owned forests, lumber forests.

Q: How do you own a forest?

A: I don't know!

Q: He bought the land of the forest?

A: Well, the lumber was there. It was his, and he had that. I remember the logs going places. They were directed somewhere or other.

Q: Were the logs on the water?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know what body of water that was?

A: No.

Q: So your father was the owner of the lumberyard?

A: Yes.

Q: Was he wealthy?

A: Yes.

Q: Did your father buy the lumberyard himself, or did he inherit it?

A: No, he did everything himself. He wouldn't have inherited it, because his family left Russia quite a while, a long time before him. He was the last one to leave. Things were, I suppose, were going well. A lot of people depended on him. So, until the Bolsheviks came, he was in pretty good shape.

Q: What's the difference a Cossack and a Bolshevik?

A: A Bolshevik was a political thing. A Cossack I don't think was. It was just a group of I don't know. You know, I don't know whether I wanted, I never asked too many questions after we left Russia. I think that crack of the gun on my father's back did something to me that I, as a child, was the most important thing I had ever witnessed, that my father just kept quiet. And how anybody could dare to do that to my father. And he had welts on his back all his life after that.

Q: The scars?

A: Uh huh. It's something that I know that I remember. Other things I may think I do, but they may have been spoken of. They had been spoken of. Nobody ever mentioned that.

Q: So this was also a scar on your psyche.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Where were you standing in the house when he was hit?

A: I was in bed. I had something, diphtheria or...I had all kinds of things, childhood diseases at the time.

Q: So did you actually see your father being hit, or you heard it?

A: Yes, I saw it.

Q: Oh, so the bedroom was in a place where you could witness this.

A: They wanted to get into a cupboard in there.

Q: Do you know what they stole?

A: They stole. They took everything. And what they didn't take didn't matter, because we had to get out that night. They took over. They took our place as their headquarters.

Q: Where did you go?

A: There were lots of people that we knew, but we had to get out of that house.

Q: So you stayed with other people?

A: Yeah, until we...and as I said before, we did have money, gold, what it was worth, the ruble at that time, I don't know what that was worth, but there must have been gold as well, because it was very expensive to bribe people to drive wagons at night in the forests to get other places.

Q: And that's how you went, in the wagon?

A: Yes.

Q: Describe the physical appearance of your father.

A: He was not very striking in appearance until you spoke to him, and then he became very personable. He took over. He was a very dominat...not dominating, but he dominated every gathering.

Q: In a good way or a bad way?

A: Good way.

Q: He was the life of the party?

A: He was interesting. He was very, very intelligent. He could do things. Actually, genetically, you know, it always amazes me, because Irv, my son, who never met my father...My father died before he was born, but he resembles my father in many ways, but not in appearance, and yet he holds his head the same way my father did. There are little gestures, but he speaks like my father would. He does a *Seder* differently from other people around. My father did that. He always made it a living thing, up-to-date, you know. It brought in today's news.

Q: How else are they alike?

A: I think, well, in what way? They speak very much the same way. I don't mean, my father's English wasn't as good as my son's. After all, this was a first language. My father's first language was Yiddish and Russian, and he was a grown-up man when he came here. But personalities, too, somehow, maybe I'm prejudiced, but... [Laughter]

Q: But it makes you feel happy to see in Irv things of your father.

A: Yes. I mean, it makes me realize that genetics plays a part in one's life.

Q: Where did your father get his schooling?

A: In Russia.

Q: In Minsk?

A: Oh, I don't know. Yeah, I imagine so. You know, in those days, I'm going way back, in those days, you didn't travel. You didn't jump into a car and drive a couple of hundred miles or so.

Q: Did you know your father's parents?

A: My father's father I knew well, because he was here when we came.

Q: Your father's father?

A: Yes. He had come over.

Q: What was his name?

A: I think it was Hershel.

Q: What did he look like?

A: He was a very, well, he looked old to me when I came over, because he had a beard. Today, it's quite common to have a beard, even when you are thirty. Of course, he was much older than that when I came over. And he was very straight, had wonderful

posture, walked well. He died at ninety-eight, and in those days, that was pretty good.

Had he shaved his beard off, I would say that he was a very young looking man.

Q: When he died at ninety-eight, did they say the cause was old age, or did he have a sickness?

A: He really didn't have anything that I knew. No. He died, he just...he was over at a cousin's house for dinner, and then he didn't feel well, and he died that night.

Q: What was your father's mother's name?

A: I don't know. I never met her, because she died before I got here.

Q: She died in America?

A: Yes.

Q: What did she die of?

A: She was eighty-six. I don't think she had been sick. Yeah.

Q: So you never knew her. Did you see pictures of her?

A: I don't think so. I can't recall ever seeing a picture of her.

Q: Do you know how your father's parents met each other?

A: No, no.

Q: Do you know what year they came to America or how many years before you came?

A: Oh, it must have been at least ten years before.

Q: And what year did you come?

A: 1921.

Q: Let's talk about your mother now. Her full name?

A: Bella Freid, Bertha. Maiden name did you say?

Q: Her whole name. We have a lot of names!

A: Oh, all right. Bertha Freid was her maiden name and Rabinowitz.

Q: And her Hebrew name or Yiddish name?

A: Bella.

Q: Do you know when she was born?

A: No, we never...

Q: You never talked about that.

A: No.

Q: What did she look like?

A: She was a sweet looking lady, sort of matronly at least to my way of thinking. Yeah.

Q: Was she a good cook?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What were some favorite foods she made?

A: All the Jewish things, you know.

Q: Did you have a favorite?

A: No, I was always a good eater. [Laughter] I hadn't found anything I didn't like.

Q: How did she busy herself in Minsk?

A: At home, at the house. It was a very much of a Jewish community life, but she came from a small town that was where she was part of "the" family of the town. Her father was the best-known man there, and they were the elite.

Q: What did he do?

A: He had a mill in, which today would be an electrical mill thing, but in those days, it was different. And I can't tell you very much about them, because, you know then we didn't travel. You didn't have the telephone, and we really didn't see very much of them.

Q: How far was their town from Minsk?

A: See, anything would be a distance. It would probably be as far as parts of Pennsylvania.

Q: So a day's journey, at least.

A: Oh, yeah, by horse?

Q: Yes.

A: Horse and wagon, I suppose. But I don't recall...and yet, I had known them, not very much or very long.

Q: Did they come to America?

A: No, and I don't think any one of them in my mother's family died a natural death. So it was really wiping out a whole family.

Q: Do you know when they died?

A: During the period of the Bolsheviks.

Q: What was your mother's father's name?

A: I have no recollection, nothing written, nothing.

Q: Do you know your mother's mother's name?

A: No.

Q: And you never saw pictures of them?

A: Isn't that awful?

Q: How many children did they have?

A: Just my mother, that I know of.

Q: So you assumed that the Bolsheviks killed them?

A: Yes, oh, there were cousins there in that area, too, you know, family, but everybody

was gone.

Q: Do you think they were dead before you left for America?

A: No, no. I think this was the beginning.

Q: So sometime afterwards.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did your mother and father meet each other?

A: We didn't have those conversations. [Laughter] I don't know.

Q: Do you know their wedding date?

A: No.

Q: How many children did they have?

A: Just my brother and myself.

Q: What is your brother's name?

A: Albert.

Q: When was he born?

A: He was born a year before me, May 20th, 1914.

Q: What are your memories of him when you were still in Minsk?

A: Well, I know the day the Bolsheviks came in, my parents had sent him elsewhere to hide, you know. Though my father always said, he was going to be right in his house when they came. He wasn't hiding in any cellar.

Q: So the political climate was such that you knew the Bolsheviks would come. You just didn't know when.

A: Right.

Q: Were you fearful?

A: No, I was protected. Yeah, it isn't like today where a child of five is brought into your conversation or these things would be discussed. Everything was kept from children.

Q: Did you go to school in Minsk?

A: No. I started school right at the point when I came here.

Q: Let's talk about your coming to America. When was it?

A: We left when I was five. We didn't go straight to the United States. It took us a while. We didn't get here until I was six to the United States to Ellis Island.

Q: When you had to leave that night of the Bolsheviks coming and you stayed at homes of other people, then where did you go after that?

A: You didn't take a ride all the way through. I mean, it was many nights that you went. And we did stop somewhere for me to have my tonsils out. [Laughter]

Q: In the middle of everything?

A: In the middle of wherever. We were on our way. It didn't matter [Laughter] as long as we got away from Russia.

Q: Who performed the surgery?

A: In a hospital with a doctor, and it wasn't done very well, because I had very bad tonsils and adenoids, and they didn't give me enough ether. In those days, they gave you ether. They wouldn't let my parents in to the operating room, so they were right outside. And then they heard the scream, because, well, it would be very frightening. I woke up just as they were doing the surgery, because they didn't give me enough. So they left some in. [Laughter]

Q: Oh, they stopped the surgery at that point?

A: Not right at that point. They continued as long as they could, but they left some of the

adenoids in. You know, it was completely done.

Q: So it was a horrible experience.

A: Well, I got over it, [Laughter] you know. But it must have been awful for my parents.

First of all, if you have a child in an operating room, and then you see her drenched in blood and screaming. Well, it took everybody to hold me down.

Q: So along the way of fleeing, you had to have this emergency surgery.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you said it was about a year before you went to America?

A: Well, we got here June 1st, I think it was, 1921.

Q: From where did you sail?

A: Oh, I should have that all down, but I don't.

Q: Do you remember being on the ship?

A: Oh, yes. I was one of the few that wasn't seasick.

Q: Your parents and your brother were seasick?

A: Everybody was seasick. It was quite turbulent.

Q: Were you in steerage or first class?

A: First class.

Q: So your father was able to keep some money with him?

A: Well, he had money. How much gold he had, I don't know. You know, and the rubles weren't worth very much. But he had family here, too, so that if anything was needed, you know, we could promise delivery.

Q: Were you able to bring anything with you from Minsk?

A: Not very much. You were really happy to just get out.

Q: So your mother wasn't able to bring candlesticks or any cherished items?

A: No. We had some tea set, you know, silver.

Q: Samovar?

A: Samovar.

Q: Silver service set?

A: Yeah. We had a few of them, but we didn't pay much attention to these.

Q: Do you remember playing on the ship on the voyage over?

A: Yeah, yeah. We had a good time.

Q: So you were excited about the moment, rather than fearful?

A: Right, yes. Once we were on the boat, we were relaxed, because even fleeing at night, we had taken another group with us in another wagon.

Q: Another family or groups of families?

A: Uh huh. Well, in those days, you call them *landsmen*, I suppose, you know. Anyway, it was another full wagon. And they got stopped, just yards away, and we didn't see them.

Q: So you were doubly lucky then to escape that and the initial horror?

A: Yes, yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you arrived in New York?

A: We really didn't pay attention to it at that time. I mean, I'm just trying to think. It was a wonderful sight, whatever it was.

Q: Whatever you saw!

A: Yes.

Q: What were your memories at Ellis Island?

A: I remember, you know, everybody had to stay in line and all that, but my father said, "Come, let's go." [Laughter] And we went, and nobody ever stopped him.

Q: So he didn't pass through the security area?

A: We did, but we were the first ones.

Q: Well, also you were from first class, so maybe that made a difference?

A: Well, there were other people there, too. But everybody had to stand and wait and wait around until they were called.

Q: Did your father's family meet you there?

A: Yes, some.

Q: Who met you?

A: Well, first we went to a sister's house, and we stayed there for a while, quite a while.

Q: Who was the sister?

A: Aunt Molly and Uncle Kay, Uncle Krainin. He was the founder of the Hebrew National factory.

Q: Where was that?

A: In Manhattan then.

Q: So you stayed with that family.

A: With them.

Q: Where did they live?

A: In Manhattan on Convent Avenue. That I remember [Laughter].

Q: That's amazing.

A: But I can remember that house. I don't know if I could find it.

Q: How did America look different to you from Minsk?

A: Well, it was all so very different. People were walking in the streets. I mean, it was entirely different. It was a different world.

Q: How long did you stay with your aunt and uncle?

A: It must have been about three, July, August, September...about five months altogether.

Q: And you started school there?

A: Yes, in Manhattan.

Q: What was the name of the school?

A: I don't know.

Q: Were you a good student?

A: [Laughter] Well, I don't think they would have considered me a good student, because I would not open my mouth. Because in those days, it wasn't that you brought a culture with you. I was so afraid they would call me a greenhorn, and that...

Q: This is Tape 1, Side B. You said you started school, but you didn't say anything, because you didn't want to be called a greenhorn.

A: I was so afraid of having an accent that I could absolutely die, but I couldn't go to the bathroom, because you'd have to raise your hand, and the teacher would say, "And what would you like?" And I wouldn't speak.

Q: How did you learn English?

A: By not speaking any other language. I would not speak Russian. Once in a while, I might say something in Yiddish to my parents, but I really didn't speak that much Yiddish. At home, once in a while, I would speak English.

Q: Your parents were speaking Russian to you at home?

A: Yes, I asked them not to. [Laughter]

Q: Well, how did they learn English?

A: My father was out a good deal. My mother spoke Yiddish a lot to me. Actually, where she would go, they would speak Yiddish a lot.

Q: After you stayed with your aunt and uncle, where did you move?

A: To the Bronx.

Q: To where?

A: Crotona Avenue.

Q: Did your parents buy this house, or was it an apartment?

A: No, no, no, no, an apartment.

Q: Did your father have a job by this time?

A: He worked in the factory, Hebrew National factory.

Q: What did he do there?

A: Supervised.

Q: So he continued to commute into Manhattan.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did your mother work?

A: No, no.

Q: What did this apartment look like?

A: Very ordinary apartment.

Q: Was it a two bedroom?

A: Yes, and it was a...two or three bedroom? My brother had a room and I had a room, and they had a bedroom. It was right near a park.

Q: What park?

A: Crotona Park.

Q: Did you play in the park?

A: A little bit. It was very close.

Q: What was the name of the school you transferred to?

A: P.S. 44.

Q: Do you remember any teachers you had in grammar school?

A: Yes. Miss Hughes.

Q: You liked her?

A: She was a card of the first order. And I could do no wrong, because I, [Laughter] she had a beautiful handwriting. And in those days, Palmer Method was the big thing, and I copied it very well. And I did have, for a child, a very lovely Palmer Method handwriting.

Q: So she liked you.

A: So if I talked to somebody, if I did something wrong, she always blamed the person to whom I spoke. And I'd say, "But I did it." She said, "Don't you tell me that. You did not. I saw it." [Laughter]

Q: Even after you admitted to doing it?

A: Oh, yes. I didn't want somebody else to take the blame for something that I did.

Q: What grade did she teach?

A: Oh, first, third, right through.

Q: You had her for more than one year?

A: No, no. You know, but sometimes they'd come...No, I don't think she was in the first grade, come to think of it. I don't think you do Palmer Method in the first grade. But by

then I was able to talk. I began. You know, with a child..., I haven't stopped since, but I began talking, and I wasn't conscious of an accent.

Q: What were your favorite subjects in grammar school?

A: Like everybody else, reading probably.

Q: Did you have favorite books?

A: Anything that they gave me to read, [Laughter] I read.

Q: Did you have favorite playmates?

A: Yes. And a cousin of mine lived very close by, and I was very friendly, very close to her.

Q: Who was she?

A: Charlotte Feldman.

Q: And who were her parents?

A: Isn't that funny? His name was Ted. Her father's name was Ted, Theodore, and her mother's name was Sadie, and she was my father's sister.

Q: How many siblings did your father have?

A: I should know, if I start counting. I think there were twelve.

Q: Do you know their names?

A: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Can you say them?

A: Uh huh. Sidney, Sadie, Mary, Rose, Sol, Sam, Abe, Molly, Leah.

Q: And with your father Isaac, that's ten, and so there were probably two others you think.

A: I thought so.

Q: All right, it will come to you. So where did all these people live?

A: Most of them lived in Boston, and it was great, as I got older, to go to Boston, because without a word of warning, you'd pick up the phone, and you'd say, "I'm here." And somebody would come out and pick you up. And inside of ten, fifteen minutes, everybody else would know you were there, and they'd come. It was an impromptu dinner party and staying, and it was just, just a wonderful feeling.

Q: How many of them lived in Boston?

A: Well, Sid, he had the Colonial Provision Company.

Q: What was that?

A: Meat, frankfurters, and you know.

Q: Prepared meats?

A: No, ham, and all kinds of meat products factory. It was a very big thing. Aunt Mary was a Rosoff.

Q: That was her last name?

A: Yeah...And Aunt Rose was Rose Liff. And Aunt Jennie, she was Sam's wife. Sam had died.

Q: So at least four of them lived in Boston?

A: Well, there must have been more, [Laughter] because there were so many.

Q: It was a big group. Did they all live in Boston, or did they live in Brookline?

A: Brookline, they all lived in Brookline, Newton, Newton Highlands, Chestnut Hill.

Q: How often did you visit there?

A: Quite often, actually, the nicest way of going when I began working after college was there was a boat that I would catch. It took overnight and right into Boston.

Q: From where?

A: From Manhattan. It was the greatest trip. You had dinner on the boat. It was just wonderful, and had a room. And you went to sleep and woke up in the morning, and you were there.

Q: I'm sorry they don't have that any more.

A: Yeah. That was lovely.

Q: So let's get back to you in grammar school. We talked about your favorite subjects.

A: Well.

Q: And you said most anything. You were a good reader. You had beautiful handwriting. Did you have favorite toys in those days, a favorite doll or a teddy bear?

A: No, no.

Q: Was your mother always in the house when you came home from school?

A: She was always in the house anyway. Right.

Q: Now you mentioned that they were well-to-do in Minsk, but they really weren't...

A: Here, no.

Q: ...here. How do you think they adjusted to that?

A: My mother, really and truly, would have adjusted with any kind of life that my father would provide. It was really, she really lived for him and was completely satisfied with anything as long as she was with him. It was a beautiful marriage.

Q: How do you think he adjusted to the change of status in America?

A: He was always the same. He could adjust to anything.

Q: How were the Jewish holidays celebrated in your home?

A: It was all family. Now an aunt lived, in fact, after we moved to another apartment,

we lived right next door to this aunt and uncle.

Q: Who were they?

A: My best friend's parents. My cousin, Charlotte, who was called Chick.

Q: So that was Ted and Sadie?

A: Right.

Q: Where was that apartment?

A: 1865 University Avenue, I think that was, yeah.

A: Why did you move there?

A: I think it was a better, nicer, better apartment.

Q: So you were close to the aunt and uncle, and you got together for holidays.

A: And we had relatives in Brooklyn. It was a family kind of living.

Q: Where were the *Seders*?

A: Mostly in our home.

Q: Who led it?

A: My father, my father did.

Q: What was your job at the *Seder*?

A: When I was young, to ask the Four Questions.

Q: Did you help with the cooking?

A: No.

Q: Did you find the *Afikomen*?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Where was it usually hidden?

A: Oh, different places [Laughter] in the house, though.

Q: How was *Chanukah* celebrated in your home?

A: It was always family dinner.

Q: Was there a special *Chanukiah*?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: What did it look like?

A: Very traditional, in fact, quite similar to that.

Q: You're pointing to a beautiful brass *Chanukiah*.

A: Yeah.

Q: Were there special *Shabbat* candlesticks?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: What did they look like?

A: Very traditional, actually, anything that we had was very traditional looking.

Q: Did you help your mother *bench licht*?

A: No, no.

Q: Did you have a *Sukkah*?

A: No.

Q: Did you go to *shul* on *Shabbat*?

A: Yes, until I was thirteen.

Q: Then what happened?

A: Well, you know, everything was Orthodox, and I always went with my father. And all of a sudden, one day the men got together, oh, some men said, "She doesn't belong here," you know, "she should be with the women." It was said in a way that I did not appreciate, and I got mad. And that was the end of my going to *shul*.

Q: Forever or as a child?

A: As a child.

Q: Why didn't your mother accompany you to *shul*?

A: Women didn't go very much. They stayed home, so that they'd have *Shabbat* lunch or dinner, actually it was a dinner.

Q: Did your father understand why you didn't attend after that?

A: Yeah, yeah. He could understand it. He did not see that business of a curtain drawn. I mean, he was Orthodox, and yet if you had a point to it, if you had a reason for something and you could talk about it, he would understand perfectly, but there was no alternative in those days. It was all Orthodox.

Q: Did you have training in learning to read Hebrew?

A: Yes, yes. I did go to Hebrew School.

Q: At what age?

A: Up to about thirteen or so.

Q: For how many years did you go?

A: Eight to thirteen or so.

Q: What did you learn in Hebrew School?

A: To read and the prayers.

Q: Did all your girlfriends go?

A: No.

Q: Was it common for girls to go to Hebrew School?

A: Not too many of them that I knew went.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

A: No. I didn't dislike it. It was just something that you did.

Q: What was the name of the *shul* your family attended?

A: It was the one on, there was one on the corner, and I don't recall ever knowing the name. It was, we went to *shul*.

Q: Did your brother become *Bar Mitzvah* at that *shul*?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember his *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony?

A: It was like everybody else's *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony.

Q: Was there a party for him?

A: Yes. We had a big family and friend party, but we did it...There was a vacant apartment that had just been painted and re-done, and we set up tables and chairs in there, and we had some music. And it was really a very lively, great party.

Q: Live music?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was the apartment in your building?

A: Uh huh. It was really very nice.

Q: How did you get along with your brother?

A: I didn't...My brother and I were very different. He was very much to himself, didn't have many friends, not very communicative.

Q: So you didn't have much to do with him?

A: No, I mean, we didn't dislike each other. We just didn't communicate too much.

Q: What did you do for fun during your grammar school days?

A: Played with children.

Q: What did you play?

A: Ball...grammar school? I was a tomboy. That's for sure.

Q: What kinds of sports did you like?

A: Any kind of ball games.

Q: Were you a good athlete?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you play stickball?

A: Yes, yes. [Laughter]

Q: You're laughing.

A: Well, not many people remember stickball. You must have been speaking to older people.

Q: That's true. Did you play in the street?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you attend movies?

A: Yes, yes. And the movies, gee, what was it? You could stay. There was always a double feature.

Q: How much did it cost?

A: I think it was ten cents, five cents, ten cents.

Q: Where did you get the money?

A: Oh, my family had some money.

Q: Did you have favorite movie stars?

A: Well, in those days...Now you're talking about...?

Q: When you were still in grammar school.

A: Grammar school, no everything, you know, comedians were the ones that you liked in grammar school.

Q: Was there music in your home?

A: No. I am not very musically inclined. I cannot carry a tune, and, of course, I had to take piano lessons, because people took piano lessons. And I could play if I had the sheet of music in front of me. I could play that same thing every single day, but without the music in front of me, I wouldn't be able to play it.

Q: Did the teacher come to the house?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What was the teacher's name?

A: I don't remember. All I remember is that she used a tremendous amount of perfume, and I was in a trance. I couldn't...It was very heavy perfume. Don't ask me her name, [Laughter] and I didn't care for the perfume, so I didn't ever find out what the name was.

Q: How long did you take the lessons?

A: Oh, it must have been five, six years.

Q: Oh, so you got very good?

A: No. [Laughter] Mechanically, yes, mechanically, I could do anything, [Laughter] but don't ask me to play by ear or you'd think I had memorized by now. If you told me the notes, I could write them.

Q: Did you have recitals?

A: No, oh, no. That I couldn't do.

Q: Did the family go away on vacations?

A: Not very much.

Q: What did you do in the summers?

A: We went to the beach, yeah. Of course, you could go to Brighton Beach or Coney Island and come back the same day.

Q: Did you enjoy going to those places?

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: How was your birthday celebrated?

A: Just a party, just very ordinary people and ordinary kinds of things.

Q: Did you graduate from grammar school in eighth grade?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there a graduation ceremony?

A: No, no. We'd have a graduation party at home.

Q: Did you have to wear a special dress?

A: No, no. You didn't have a graduation in elementary school in those days. I mean, you graduated, period. And I did take a test to get into Hunter College High School. You must always remember Hunter College High School, because it was not under the Board of Education but the Board of Higher Education.

Q: And you passed the test?

A: Yes, I got in.

Q: So you were very smart?

A: I...adequate. [Laughter] It was hard. It was a very hard test, yes.

Q: Was there a tuition for this school?

A: No, no.

Q: How far was it from your home?

A: Well, a subway ride. It was connected with Hunter College, and as many people as I knew that had gone through Hunter High and graduated from Hunter High, they did nothing at Hunter College, because there was nothing. You learned everything in Hunter High, all.

Q: So they went to a different college?

A: No, no, no. The only free college was Hunter, and it had a very high scholastic rating, but after you went to Hunter High, it was just repetitious.

Q: But people still did go to Hunter College?

A: But you did, yes, oh, sure.

Q: What other childhood diseases or sicknesses did you have?

A: Just the usual, mumps, chicken pox. What else do you have?

Q: Measles?

A: Measles.

Q: So you stayed in during those times.

A: Oh, sure.

Q: Did your mother bring you chicken soup?

A: Always, [Laughter] always, and she did make good chicken soup.

Q: What other foods did she make that you liked?

A: That is a very peculiar question, because there is no food I don't like. [Laughter] I like food.

Q: What did she excel in in cooking?

A: But it was always stuffed chicken, you know, roasted chicken, baked potatoes, and everything was fresh.

Q: And she kept a kosher kitchen?

A: Yes.

Q: Did she sing to you?

A: Not that I recall, no. But what I recall about my mother is that she never wore a wedding band. And I asked her about it, and then it dawned upon me that she had to pull off her rings when the Bolsheviks came to our place, and actually, if you didn't get it off fast enough, they just chopped your fingers off and took your rings. So later on, I wanted her to get a wedding band. You know, either I would get it for her or my father, and she said, "No, no." She did not want a replacement. She felt that was her wedding band that she had, and as far as she was concerned, that was the place for her original one, and it was there.

Q: Do you know what her original one looked like? She never described it?

A: Well, it would probably have been a very plain gold band.

Q: Did your father ever wear a wedding ring?

A: No, in those days, you know, I'm dating back.

Q: It's a few years ago.

A: A few! And men didn't really wear, I didn't know any of my uncles that wore wedding bands.

Q: How old were you when you realized your mother wasn't wearing her wedding ring?

A: Oh, I was still in elementary school. I must have been about eight or nine, because all my friends' mothers wore bands.

Q: Did your mother have any other special pieces of jewelry?

A: No, no, they took everything, so I don't know what she had before that.

Q: What kind of a dresser was she?

A: Very simple, very simply dressed.

Q: Where did you all buy your clothing?

A: Anywhere, [Laughter] wherever we would see something that we wanted.

Q: Did you ever have any favorite dresses when you were a little girl?

A: Not that I recall. Those weren't the things that were uppermost in our mind when I was little.

Q: This is Tape 2, Side A. What were some things that were uppermost in your mind?

A: Uppermost in my mind was becoming an American, where nobody would dream of asking me, "Where did you come from?" I really wanted to be assimilated [Laughter] here.

Q: How old were you when you achieved that goal?

A: About ten or eleven.

Q: How did you feel when you came across other greenhorns once you had achieved your goal?

A: You know, I think I was the last one of the young persons that I knew who was not born here. I don't know of, no, I didn't really meet anybody until much, much later in life.

Q: Did your brother learn English quickly?

A: He always had an accent. He started talking the day he came over, and he did have an accent.

A: But you don't have an accent.

A: I don't think so. If it is, it's a New York accent. [Laughter]

Q: Let's discuss your high school years now. How would you describe them?

A: It was a very, very intensive four-year course, and it was complete. You went as a group. The freshmen all went together. You had no departmental schedules. You took what was prescribed, and everything was prescribed. Many of my friends failed one subject, and if you failed one subject, you had to do the whole year over. And so, of course, they transferred, and they had enough credits to make it in three years instead of four.

Q: Did they all fail the same subject or just each individually?

A: No, no. If you failed any subject, and it was very easy to fail. [Laughter]

Q: Did you ever come close to failing?

A: No, no. It wasn't allowed.

Q: Did you do homework for many hours each night?

A: Well, quite a bit, quite a bit.

Q: What subjects interested you the most?

A: English, history, that's about it.

Q: Did you take a foreign language?

A: Well, in high school, everybody took, it was prescribed, four years of Latin. And then that is the only selection that you had, the other language. It was either French or German for three years, and I took German.

Q: Was that easier for you because of your Yiddish?

A: It was, yes, yes, I think I was.

Q: So how many languages do you speak?

A: That doesn't mean I speak them! [Laughter] Latin, I know a few phrases, which I try

to get in to every conversation, [Laughter] like *Timeo danos et dona ferentis*.

Q: And what is that?

A: "I fear the Greeks especially bearing gifts." And a few other things, but no, I don't. It is a help with English, though.

Q: Did you have favorite teachers in high school?

A: They were all very prim like the principal. It was not a fun kind of high school. You didn't have outside activities. It was just learning.

Q: Did Hunter College professors run the high school?

A: No, no, they were completely different groups.

Q: Wasn't it unusual for a high school to be under the auspices of a college?

A: Yes, yes, yes. That is the only high school that I know of that is run by, that is, it's Hunter College High School, and it's run by the college group.

Q: Where was it located?

A: In Manhattan, Sixty-Eighth and Park Avenue.

Q: Was it coed?

A: No, no, not until very much later.

Q: So was there an equivalent boys school nearby?

A: City College was the closest to it.

Q: But that was a college.

A: Oh, the high school, Townsend, Townsend High School. It wasn't part of City College or related to it, except that most boys that went to Townsend automatically went to City College.

Q: Are you glad you went to an all girls high school?

A: At this point, when I look back, there was no choice. You're talking about the big Depression, and there was no charge with Hunter, either the high school or the college. I mean, the greatest expense we had was the five-cent subway fare, so it was ten cents a day. But the books were all free. Everything was free. If you couldn't get in there, you didn't go.

Q: So you felt very fortunate to be there.

A: I felt there was no alternative, [Laughter] that I would not have to think about where I wanted to go. That was where we went.

Q: You're looking at it from a perspective of now. At the time that you were in high school, were you glad that it was an all girls school, or did you wish it had been coed?

A: It would have been nicer if it were coed.

Q: When did you start dating?

A: Sixteen, seventeen.

Q: Where did you meet the boys?

A: Most of the boys were at City College.

Q: Where did they take you on dates?

A: Well, actually, now from seventeen on, it was City College. I'd gone out of high school at seventeen. Most of the things were formal affairs.

Q: Dances?

A: Formal dances, school dances, fraternity dances, that kind of thing.

Q: Where did you get your formal clothing?

A: Well, I really had some very fine clothing, because I had some cousins who wore things once, and my clothes were really very, a lot of them. Others I bought, but after all,

if you get a designer's dress handed to you that was worn once, I was out of the class.

[Laughter]

Q: So you were considered very well dressed for these affairs?

A: I suppose so, [Laughter] yes.

Q: So you remember your first kiss?

A: Oh, that was before then.

Q: When you were still in high school?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Where else did you go on dates?

A: Broadway shows. We were, you know, this was New York.

Q: What were some shows you remember seeing?

A: Oh, gee, I saw them all. I saw them all. [Laughter]

Q: Do you remember the price of the tickets?

A: There was a dollar ten cents in the second balcony, and that's where we always sat.

Q: This was in the Broadway shows.

A: Yes. Oh, the movies?

Q: No, the Broadway shows.

A: Oh, yeah, the Broadway shows were a dollar ten.

Q: Did you go to Radio City Music Hall?

A: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: Did you remember seeing entertainers there?

A: They had a chorus line that was wonderful, yes.

Q: Did you have a favorite part of New York to go to?

A: Oh, sure, I was here. A lot of the hotels had dinner and dancing.

Q: Were you a good dancer?

A: It depended on the leader.

Q: Were there any special boys in your life at this time?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Any you care to mention?

A: No. [Laughter] No.

Q: You're entitled.

A: I don't want [Laughter] anybody to read this and know about the others.

Q: How did the Crash of the Stock Market and the Great Depression affect your family?

A: In those days, the parents took care of finances. They never discussed it with the children, at least nobody that I knew of. We always had plenty of food, and you might have to think about paying a certain amount for a dress, but you had clothing. You might have to step down a little bit, but you didn't suffer. Actually, you didn't go out as much as you would normally. In an afternoon, you wouldn't meet the girls and all of you go down to a Broadway show or to lunch out, but otherwise, you didn't feel it. One thing was that everybody knew dinner was served at such a time, and you were home, so the family was always together, and you didn't have TV then. You really didn't have even radio. Well, it was just the beginning of radio. And you talked, and you knew what each member was doing. And you had friends in for dinner. You had family, other relatives, in for dinner, but it was very, very pleasant having the family together instead of everybody running.

Q: You preferred those times to how families are today?

A: I think so, not because, because today, there are so many pressures on children. They have so many meetings and school meetings, and they just run all the time, can't stop for dinner, can't. "I'll have dinner out." And it's nice when everybody gets together for dinner.

Q: Was your father able to keep his job during the Depression?

A: Yes, except that he had an automobile accident.

Q: When was that?

A: Oh, that was when I was in college, my junior year, I think. An aunt of mine from Boston was in, and my mother and father went down into Manhattan to spend some time with her.

Q: Which aunt?

A: Aunt Mary, and as the two of them were crossing the street, and it was about one thirty in the morning, a car came at high speed against the light without any lights on on the wrong side of the street, and they had just stepped down off the sidewalk to cross, and so he pushed her back, so she wouldn't get hurt.

Q: Is this your mother or your aunt you are talking about?

A: My aunt.

Q: Your aunt.

A: Aunt Mary. My father got dragged for two blocks by this car. And that was a horrible experience, because when I heard, when I got this telephone call, I was told that he was still in the lobby of this hospital, because they said that he didn't belong in the hospital. Of course, he didn't have any identification. Everything was torn off him by being dragged, but he belonged in the morgue.

Q: Oh, they assumed he was dead?

A: They said there's no need to put him in a room, so I got down there.

Q: Which hospital?

A: Roosevelt, that's on Central Park West and One Hundred Street. I got down there, and you must have heard me here, because I carried on high. And I think, from that day on, they gave, when they saw me coming, [Laughter] they got scared, because I never heard of such a ridiculous thing. Well, I mean, when you or somebody is sick, you put him in a room. You don't leave him laying there. And, of course, you couldn't recognize him. He was black and blue from the head to foot. He was in the hospital for two years.

Q: In that same hospital?

A: He had a body cast from the neck all the way down.

Q: How old was he?

A: Well, let's see. He was sixty-two when he died in 19...oh, he was in his fifties, I suppose, fifty, sixty. No, not sixty. I'm sorry. Yes, in his middle fifties.

Q: So two years in the hospital?

A: Two years.

Q: Was your mother called immediately to go to that hospital?

A: She had been down there, not at the hospital, but he was taking my aunt somewhere or taking her back, and she was at my other aunt's house, probably Aunt Molly.

Q: Aunt Mary wasn't hit by the car?

A: No, he pushed her back.

Q: Did anyone ever find out why the car was without lights and on the wrong side?

A: Well, I mean, this is the information I got from the police station, and they assumed that they were gangsters in the car.

Q: So did you feel as though your father had a second lease on life?

A: Well, he always made the best of things. I mean, it was amazing that he lived. It really was, and then he lived for quite a while after he got home.

Q: Did you and your mother and brother go to visit him frequently during the time he was hospitalized?

A: Mother was there all the time, and I used to get, they insisted I continue school, that I do not take time off, so I used to get down there at least three times a day, running across the park from One Hundredth to Sixty-Eighth.

Q: Why did they keep him so long in the hospital? Couldn't he recuperate at home?

A: No, they, no, it wasn't a matter of, in those days, when you were sick, and he couldn't be taken care of at home with a cast on like that.

Q: Who paid for the hospitalization?

A: We did. If I never did know if he had needed help..., Uncle Sid in Boston would have helped. Uncle Abe in Philadelphia would have helped, 'cause they were very, very wealthy.

Q: Speaking of those uncles, do you still think there were twelve of those siblings?

A: No, I went over and over and over it, and it couldn't have been. It had to be ten.

Q: It was ten. We wanted to clarify that.

A: Yeah. I must have counted some uncles by marriage.

Q: So did Uncle Kay keep your father's position at the factory while he was in the hospital?

A: Actually, he went broke and was bought out.

Q: What was Uncle Kay's first name?

A: Theodore.

Q: So it was Theodore Krainin.

A: Right.

Q: And Uncle Kay was the letter "k" or Kay?

A: No, it was just people called him Kay because of Krainin.

Q: So why did he go broke?

A: Because he was not a businessman. His daughters took care of the books, and he would come in and pull out the checks and cash them, and then they would write, call or write to people that they had an invoice that was not paid. "Oh, we sent you a check."

And sure enough, if you looked at the statement, it had been cashed.

Q: So he was bought out?

A: Well, he went bankrupt, and then other people took it over. He, when I say Napoleon, you couldn't talk to him. He could have been the biggest canner of foods, far bigger than Campbell's or any of them. He made things, and if you tasted them, they were wonderful. Of course, he didn't pay attention to the cost of it. He used wonderful ingredients and seasonings, and so, of course, it was always better than anything else, [Laughter] but he never would give you the recipe to manufacture it, to put it up, so what good was it? [Laughter] Even during the height of Depression, when he wasn't doing anything, Hygrade offered him, well, people were making twelve dollars a week or so, and Hygrade offered him two hundred fifty dollars to start, a week, to just sit in an office and when he could think of something to write it down.

Q: So to be creative.

A: Right, and he was very insulted, that somebody would offer him a job, when he should, you know, he wasn't going to work for anybody.

Q: So your father after the hospitalization never returned to that job?

A: No, no, he died, ah, he was really not in a position to work after that accident.

Q: So he never worked after that?

A: No.

Q: Do you remember his homecoming?

A: Well, we got him home.

Q: By a car?

A: You know, I don't...

Q: Did your mother drive?

A: No, no, we didn't, very few people living in New York had cars. No, we had a cab, a taxi.

Q: When he got home, did he just stay in bed? How did he recuperate?

A: They took the cast off by then. You know, the cast became from the waist down, and then he no longer wore a cast. No, he moved around well in the house. In fact, very soon after that, he decided to go to Boston to visit, and my mother had a fit. [Laughter] He said, "Well, what do you want me to do, just sit at home until I die? I'll go. I'm going to go as long as I can." And he did, and I remember that very clearly, because four o'clock in the morning, the phone rang, and I almost had a fit. And it was the wrong number. You could hear somebody drunk on the other side. So that was scary, but he got there, and he had a good time. And he came home. So he really lived very well until the day

he died.

Q: Did he use a cane?

A: No, no.

Q: So he had most all of his bones broken? What was the diagnosis?

A: He was a mess. [Laughter]

Q: He was a mess.

A: It did something to his heart, because every doctor that looked at an x-ray said, "Oh, somebody made a mistake. This can't be." His heart is covering his whole body, upper side. From the x-ray, it looked so huge, and his heart became so enlarged, so each doctor took another x-ray, and each doctor said he couldn't believe it.

Q: How did he busy his days from when he got home until he died?

A: He was an avid reader, and people always came. When he was around, people came.

Q: What did he finally die of?

A: He died very nicely. We were having dinner. It was Purim Eve, and he had dinner. And it was time for dessert, and he said, "You know, I'm a little tired. I'm going to lay down for a while." That was very, very different. That was not my father. We were very surprised, so we didn't continue. He got into bed, and we all came over to his bedside. He said, I could just see him, he snapped his fingers and said, "*Hint es Purim*" Well, "Today is Purim. Today we have to dance and sing." And that's it. He closed his eyes, and that was it.

Q: Say it in Yiddish.

A: "*Hint was mit tanzen und...*"

Q: *Singen?*

A: *Singin* [Laughter] I suppose. "*Hint es Purim muzmen tanzen,*" live it up. That was it.

Q: This is Tape 2, Side B. What was the date of your father's death?

A: It's different on the English calendar and on the Hebrew calendar, because I know it was Purim, and Purim is a leap year kind of thing, but it doesn't follow. It's very confusing. So I really would have to look it up.

Q: What year was it?

A: Well, that what I'm talking about.

Q: How old were you?

A: Oh, let's see.

Q: You were still in college?

A: Yeah. I got out when I was twenty-one.

Q: So it was when you were in your early twenties.

A: Yeah.

Q: Where is he buried?

A: In Mt. Hebron, Long Island, Flushing, Long Island.

Q: How many years after his death did your mother live?

A: She was fifty-eight. She was a good deal younger. She lived about...

Q: She was fifty-eight when she died?

A: Yeah. Okay. My father died in 1942, and my mother died in 1950.

Q: And is she buried with him?

A: Yes.

Q: What did she die from?

A: Well, she was diabetic, so she had a bad heart and kidney problems, because in those

days, I don't know, I don't hear anybody having Bright's Disease, but that's what they called it then. And she really and truly didn't take care of herself after my father got sick. She didn't care. Her eyesight, she was just about blind, and she would cross the streets in Manhattan. It used to drive me crazy. But she had no desire to live without him. She said, "What difference does it make?"

Q: And yet she lived almost ten years.

A: Uh huh.

Q: Did she take insulin injections?

A: Well, I used to give them to her when I lived at home. But once my father got hit by the car, she did not care about living. She did take shots. I know I gave them to her until 1940.

Q: So she took care of your father, but not of herself.

A: Right.

Q: Do you think she was suffering from depression?

A: She was extremely depressed. When he was home, though, she was feeling better. At least she had him to take care of. But he didn't live that long after.

Q: Did you feel it was your responsibility to cheer up your mother?

A: To take care of her, yes.

Q: Was that a burden for you?

A: No, now I was living here after Irv...

Q: When you say here, you mean in the Washington area.

A: Right. Let's see, we came here in '42.

Q: And your mother was still in New York?

A: And Mother was still in New York. My brother came back to live with her for a while, and then Irv was born in '44, and when she got quite, oh, I don't know, so she didn't, '44, right. But then she died in '44? Irv was, wait. Did I? Irv wasn't, it was about, not six, four, so she must have died in 1947 or so, and I took Irv back home, and we stayed with her until she died.

Q: She died at home?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were your feelings after you no longer had parents?

A: It wasn't that I didn't expect. It didn't happen suddenly, so you know, they died before they died, 'cause I didn't expect my father to live. When I saw him in the lobby there, he was, the blood, his blood burned him. He was burnt from head to foot, head to toe. The blood got so hot, his own blood, by being dragged, that it burnt him inside and out. It was a horrible thing to witness, and only somebody like my father could have gotten back on his feet.

Q: To what do you attribute his fighting spirit?

A: He didn't know what it was not to fight back. He was always, he was a very courageous man. I don't know. He must have been driven.

Q: Did you ever think how their lives would have been different had the accident not occurred?

A: No, I never thought of it. I mean, it was just something that happened, and I never, no.

Q: Let's pick up on what's been happening with your brother. Where did he go to high school?

A: Evander Childs.

Q: Where was that?

A: In Manhattan.

Q: And where did he go to college?

A: City College.

Q: When did he move away from home?

A: Right after he, ah, college.

Q: Was he drafted?

A: No, he was 4 F.

Q: Do you know why?

A: He had a few physical problems. One foot was shorter than the other and was underdeveloped, and four toes, which threw his body off completely. And then he was diabetic by then.

Q: What job did your brother have?

A: He was a, what do you call it?

Q: Philatelist.

A: Philatelist, and in those days, people used to have stamp collections, and he was always interested in history. When he went to school, he really wasn't interested in any other subject except for history and had a good background for that. And I think that is what made him so interested in stamps. I don't know how anybody took that as a business, but in those days, people collected stamps.

Q: Did he work for himself?

A: Yes.

Q: And where did he live?

A: The last place that he lived was London Terrace, and that's in Manhattan, really far down.

Q: Did he marry and have a family?

A: No, no.

Q: When did he die?

A: Let's see. That was, oh, I have it down somewhere.

Q: Were you living in Washington?

A: Yes, yes, he died much later. We were married for quite a while.

Q: Did he die from complications of diabetes?

A: Yes, he died because of his diabetes. He was born May 20th, 1914, and he died at the age of sixty-two, so he died in 1976.

Q: Where is he buried?

A: Out in Flushing, too, but not in the same place.

Q: What do you remember most about your brother?

A: As far as I, he was really quite an introvert, but some of the friends he had were very devoted to him. He didn't have many friends, but those that he did, loved him very much.

Q: Let's pick up the threads of your life in college. You had been dating. You had Latin and German as languages from high school. Did you take any other languages in college?

A: You continued just a year more of Latin and a year and a half of French. You didn't continue the French, but if you took German, you automatically took French in college.

Q: So you added another language.

A: Yeah.

Q: What about the sciences? What kinds did you take?

A: I majored in Geology.

Q: Why?

A: Because it was just, I had read a little bit about it before, and it did sound very much more interesting than any of the subjects that I had taken earlier. And it was.

Q: What did you learn in Geology?

A: [Laughter] I've already forgotten. Now it would be a more interesting thing, because there were no avenues open for that kind of thing.

Q: Did you hope to get a job in the Geology field?

A: Well, it would have been fun, but this was all during the Depression, so you took what you could, and I had an educational background, but when I got out, they were not giving any teaching tests at all, because they, of course, it was something that everybody wanted.

Q: You mean to become a teacher?

A: To become a teacher, so I didn't do that, so you just took what you could immediately.

Q: What year did you graduate from college?

A: 1936.

Q: At what age?

A: Twenty-one.

Q: What was your college graduation like? Did you wear caps and gowns?

A: Oh, yes. You even wore caps and gowns in high school. And today you wear in

elementary school, I think. But in those days, only Hunter College High School was allowed to wear caps and gowns. [Laughter]

Q: What color were they?

A: Black. Everything prescribed, nothing else.

Q: And then did you get a job?

A: I went to work at Gimbel's.

Q: Why there?

A: Because somebody recommended it.

Q: What did you do?

A: I went into the Comparison Shopping Office.

Q: What was that?

A: Oh, I went into the Mail Order.

Q: Did Gimbel's have a catalogue?

A: No, well, no, but people would write in or phone orders. They would write a good number of their orders.

Q: And you'd fill those orders?

A: I wrote out the sales checks, and then I took on the special departments, like liquor department, because you had to be a little more careful. And then from that point on, I started the foreign department, which was really a very simple thing and very lucrative, and why when I left, they couldn't continue it, I don't know. Because nobody knew what I was doing, I think. [Laughter] I had nobody to help me, except that it started with a lot of the South American big shots wanting to furnish homes and things like that. It was very simple. You just looked in the paper. You got the exchange. And a lot of them had

ships of their own, and they would meet, you know, it was not a difficult thing to do. It sounds very complicated, but you filled the order. They were always thrilled to death. Where you didn't have to watch your pennies, that's for sure, because these people were all pretty well-to-do, so I'd, I didn't build the homes, but I furnished many a home. And it was wonderful to do, because you didn't have to, you know, you didn't know there was a Depression going on.

Q: Did they give you *carte blanche* to choose furniture for a certain room, or were they specific in what they wanted?

A: Some were. Some weren't. And I corresponded with them until they gave me the okay.

Q: In English?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was an example of an order that you filled?

A: As I say, some were furniture. Some were just items that they needed in their homes.

Q: Like what?

A: Oh, glassware. You know, actually, they get the newspapers, too, and some were just from the advertisements. Then you had a little bit more leeway. It was a very, you know, you didn't have long sessions of correspondence, but it was a very much more interesting thing than filling the mail orders that people sent in. You had much more leeway. You made out the orders. You had, simple enough, it was all packed for you by the packing department and shipped. I told them where to go, and they did that. We got the money, and that was it.

Q: Did they ever send thank you notes?

A: I should have kept them, huh? But they didn't send them to me.

Q: But you know they were for you.

A: Yes. Oh, well.

Q: Why did you leave Gimbel's?

A: To come to Washington.

Q: Where was Gimbel's in the hierarchy of department stores in New York?

A: Well, you know, Macy's and Gimbel's, Macy's doesn't tell Gimbel's, and Gimbel's doesn't tell Macy. Gimbel's was sort of middle class. It was owned by the people who owned Saks Fifth Avenue.

Q: The same family?

A: Uh huh.

Q: So why wouldn't the wealthy people go to a higher end department store?

A: Well, these are the ones that I got.

Q: Or maybe some others did.

A: Maybe they did, yes. I'm sure many of them would, but you know, once they get started, and I started it because somebody had written.

Q: Oh, you started the whole department?

A: Yeah, and why it couldn't be kept up, I don't know. I only had difficulty once [Laughter] with some books. That was the stupidest thing. I had selected some, it was somebody who wanted some medical books. And I had gotten those all together, [Laughter] and the Embassy, yeah I think it was the Spanish Embassy, called me and said they couldn't send those things out. They examined them, because they had pornographic illustrations, nude people. A skeleton is nude. [Laughter] I had such a

time getting those things out. So you find stupidity everywhere you go. So after that, they were very happy with me, [Laughter] because evidently they must have had trouble getting these things through. Because I never thought about it. Would you?

Q: No. Where was the Gimbel's located?

A: Right across the street from Macy's, at Pennsylvania, well at the, oh...

Q: Pennsylvania Station?

A: Yeah, Forty-Second, ah Forty- no, Forty, well, I'm trying to think of the hotel, and I keep on thinking of Hyatt and the Pennsylvania Hotel, I think it was. Yeah, I can see it, but I can't.

Q: Did you feel like a spy when you went to the Macy's parade?

A: Oh, [Laughter] no, no, we had good relationships there.

Q: Did you do all your shopping in Gimbel's?

A: No, no, no. There were other places that I preferred for different things.

Q: When did you meet your husband?

A: In 1934.

Q: What was his full name?

A: Nathan Losman, no middle name.

Q: What was his Hebrew name?

A: Natan.

Q: Where did you meet each other?

A: There was a formal dance run by Pete's best friend's firm.

Q: Well, first of all, why do we call him Pete?

A: He was born in Pittsburgh, and everybody in the family had a Nathan, so to

distinguish, we called him Pittsburgh Pete.

Q: And what kind of firm?

A: This was a clothing firm, men's clothing.

Q: The name of it?

A: I don't think I ever knew, so I didn't forget it.

Q: Where was the formal?

A: Oh, one of the hotels. I don't really recall.

Q: When did you first see him there?

A: When I walked in, and he came over and introduced himself.

Q: What did you think of him?

A: He was very, very nice, nice-looking, tall young man, but...

Q: But what?

A: That was it. [Laughter] That was it.

Q: So you didn't spend time with him that evening?

A: A little bit. I danced with him a few times.

Q: How did you start dating each other?

A: After that, he called me almost, very frequently.

Q: Where were you living then?

A: I was living in the Bronx. He was living in Manhattan.

Q: How old were you?

A: Oh, '34, it would be about nineteen.

Q: And how old was he?

A: Two years older.

Q: Where did you go on dates?

A: We ate a great, well, let's see, the Hotel Edison used to have a very good band and also good food. We ate there. We ate in quite a number of the nicer hotels, you know, for dancing and eating. And we went out with, you know, a few other couples each time.

Q: Were you a good dancer?

A: If, yes, yeah.

Q: Was he?

A: Not great. Neither of us were professional dancers to say the least.

Q: Did you meet him in Manhattan?

A: Yes.

Q: So if it was a date, you would meet him at a certain place?

A: Oh, did I meet him? No, he used to come and pick me up, and then we'd go to Manhattan or...

Q: So he went back and forth and back and forth?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: When did you realize this was the one?

A: Well, we began seeing each other almost every single day in oh, about 1936 or a little later than that unless I had another date. And every night instead of saying good night, he used to say, "Will you marry me?" And I'd say, "No," and the next day the same thing would happen. And one day, I said, "Yes," and, of course, he didn't expect it, so he went home. And suddenly, he didn't get all the way home, but he realized I had said, "Yes." So he came back. [Laughter]

Q: How far had he gone?

A: Oh, he got into Manhattan, when suddenly he realized that.

Q: For how long a period of time did he ask you to marry him?

A: Oh, about four years every day.

Q: And why did you say no?

A: I wasn't quite ready.

Q: And why did you say yes?

A: That day, I was ready. [Laughter]

Q: Do you know what made the difference in you?

A: No, that isn't important.

Q: How did you tell your parents the good news?

A: I just told them that we were going to get married, and when would be a good time for them, because my father had been, you know, quite sick.

Q: He was recuperating.

A: Yeah, well...

Q: He was home by this time?

A: Yes, he was home by then.

Q: So what was their answer?

A: Anytime I wanted was fine.

Q: When did you meet his parents? This is Tape 3, Side A. You were explaining when you met Pete's parents.

A: I didn't meet his father until quite a time after I was married. He didn't come to the wedding. He was having dental problems. He was not my favorite person to begin with.

Q: He just didn't want to come to the wedding?

A: He was a very peculiar man. The less I say about him, the better off I am. [Laughter]
He wasn't my kind of person.

Q: Please say their names again.

A: Anna Losman and Mendel Losman.

Q: What was Mendel's work?

A: He sold vegetables in a large wholesale company, and he could walk through the area and tell you if there was onion that was bad.

Q: So what was his nickname?

A: The Onion King, that's about the nicest thing I can say about him. [Laughter]

Q: How did Anna keep herself busy?

A: She was not a very well person, but she was probably the cleanest, neatest person this world has ever made. She was home either cleaning or preparing things, but she was a good, simple woman.

Q: Where did they live?

A: In Pittsburgh in Squirrel Hill, Lombard Street.

Q: Did they immigrate to America?

A: Yes, but they got married here in the United States.

Q: Where had they lived in the Old Country?

A: She came from, not Russia, Lithuania, I think. And he came from, I think he had immigrated to England and then came here. It was an arranged marriage, and I don't think there was great love there.

Q: Who were Pete's siblings?

A: He had a brother, Isadore, and a sister, Becky. And Becky is still living. She's living

in Florida. His brother died about five, six years ago.

Q: What's Becky's last name?

A: Perl.

Q: Did she always live in Florida?

A: No, she lived in Pittsburgh and moved to Florida, oh, it must be fifty-five years ago.

Q: Where did Pete go to college?

A: He went to City College in New York.

Q: And then he remained in New York to work?

A: Yes.

Q: Where did he work?

A: He did some real estate, and then he did work somewhere in men's clothing.

Q: In New York?

A: In New York. Don't ask me where or what, because I don't recall.

Q: And then did he move to another city?

A: No, after we got married, we moved to Washington. First, he lived in Penn Yan for a while.

Q: That's in New York State.

A: New York State, upstate New York, and then he came to New York City. He went to City College, and then he did some real estate work until after we got married and moved to Washington.

Q: What was the date of your wedding?

A: October 13, 1940.

Q: Where was it held?

A: It was held on the Grand Concourse. Oh, it was held in, Pete's uncle was a rabbi, and it was right on the Grand Concourse, where the rabbis would also have a place in there for weddings. It was one big room.

Q: What was the name of the rabbi?

A: Bailey.

Q: He was Rabbi Bailey?

A: Ah huh.

Q: What did you wear to the wedding?

A: A blue velveteen dress.

Q: To your knee or the floor?

A: No, to a little below the knee.

Q: What flowers did you have?

A: Orchids.

Q: What color?

A: It was very orchid, almost white.

Q: Did you have something on your head?

A: Yeah, a little veil.

Q: What did Pete wear?

A: A suit, a dark, navy suit.

Q: How many people were at the wedding?

A: Oh, about seventy, eighty people.

Q: Was there a reception afterwards?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Where was that?

A: Right there, and it was mostly relatives and friends.

Q: Did you have a good time at the wedding?

A: Sure, sure.

Q: Where was your honeymoon?

A: I went back to school to take a business course at Columbia, [Laughter] and so I didn't have time.

Q: You mean the day after the wedding?

A: That's when I, it wasn't the day after the wedding. It was a couple of days later. We lived at the Hotel Edison on Forty-Fourth Street.

Q: Near where?

A: Right off Broadway, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue.

Q: Did you resent not having a honeymoon?

A: No, because it was my choice. [Laughter] I decided I wanted to take a course in business administration.

Q: Did he ever give you a honeymoon?

A: Oh, we went away.

Q: Did you just take the one class at Columbia?

A: Yes, all I wanted was business administration.

Q: What did you learn from that class?

A: Actually, I don't know if I did learn anything. I think it was given by this professor, who wanted to sell his book.

Q: Do you remember the name of the book or the professor?

A: I remember him, but not his name. It did start with a "T," and I don't think I kept the book.

Q: Now, why did they allow women at Columbia?

A: This was a night class. After all, I had to work during the day.

Q: Were you enjoying your job still at this time?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: What happened when the War broke out? Was Pete drafted?

A: No, he was, when he was given a physical, he was put into 4 F, so he was not drafted.

Q: For what reason was he given 4 F?

A: I don't know. He had, it was just, I don't really recall.

Q: Did you feel fortunate that he didn't have to be drafted?

A: Right. Yes, yes. He felt very uncomfortable about it, so that from that point on, in Washington, we were very close to Walter Reed Hospital, and every time he saw somebody in uniform, he always had them come home for dinner. [Laughter]

Q: How did the War affect your family?

A: Not too much.

Q: Do you remember going without things during the War?

A: No, Pete and I worked hard all our lives, really, and it was a way of life. When he came to Washington, he came for a job that was offered him. It was called Phil Bobby's, and it was a men's clothing store. I think he met Phil Bobby, and then they took on jewelry, and from that point on, he went into the jewelry business.

Q: Where was Phil Bobby's located?

A: On Seventh Street in Washington.

Q: Did he take the job sight unseen?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So how did you feel about leaving New York?

A: I think New York is a wonderful place to be from.

Q: So you didn't mind leaving?

A: No.

Q: How did your family react to your leaving?

A: Fine, fine, because we did get back a lot.

Q: When did you move to Washington?

A: Very soon after we got married, soon after.

Q: Where did you live?

A: Well, first when we came here, we took a room in someone's home, and then we moved to Silver Spring, Maryland.

Q: To an apartment?

A: To an apartment that was just being built.

Q: Where was that?

A: On Cameron Street.

Q: Do you remember the address?

A: 8722 Cameron Street.

Q: What did you like about that apartment?

A: Oh, it was very nice. It was brand new, and a friend of mine that I went to school with was the one who introduced me to somebody else who moved, and they moved here in the same buildings. There were about eight buildings in an alcove, and there was a little

grass. It was a little different from New York. But Silver Spring was just being built up, and it was very nice. And it started a new life for me.

Q: Did you make a lot of friends?

A: Yes, we did, a lot of friends that were very good friends from that point on.

Q: What did you do with the friends? How did you socialize?

A: The closest friends were the landlords, who were in a transition period, and they moved from Baltimore into the St. Charles Apartments. That's the same apartment.

Q: What was their name?

A: Isadore and Bertha Gudelsky. Do you know the name?

Q: Yes.

A: They were very close friends.

Q: How did you socialize with them?

A: We went out together. We went to each other's home. Anything we did, we did a lot of things together.

Q: How far a commute did Pete have to work?

A: Oh, well, we were pretty close to the bus line, and it was fifteen minutes.

Q: When did you both learn to drive?

A: Let's see. Pete learned to drive about two years later, and I think with me it was about, yeah, about the same, two or three years later. And we got cars.

Q: What was the first car you got?

A: A Pontiac.

Q: What year?

A: You expect me to remember everything? [Laughter] What year? It was a new car.

Q: A new car. So in the mid '40's.

A: Right.

Q: When did you start working in Washington?

A: The day we came, I went down to the Government. I thought I'd get a Government job. There was a whole room full of girls sitting at desks doing nothing on the telephone, and it didn't sound like they were really working very hard. Immediately, the one interviewing me said when I told her I was born in Russia, "Oh, we have to get the papers from there." Well, I knew immediately that they'd come up with the same answer, that the papers had been burnt. And I said, "Well, I have naturalization papers." "No, that isn't enough, and we'll get in touch with you." First, they wanted to know what job I wanted, so from there, I walked over to the Hecht Company and started a very nice position there.

Q: Where was the Hecht Company located?

A: Right on Seventh Street.

Q: Between?

A: At Seventh and F.

Q: What position did you have there?

A: I started in the Comparison Office.

Q: What is that?

A: Shopping and comparison, you compared prices with other stores, and it was almost anything and everything. You took care of the advertising to make sure that the advertisements were backed up by merchandise. And you got to know the entire store pretty much and other stores as well. This was a very nice relationship you could have

with the merchandise in other stores. The buyers and everybody worked very well with you. It was a very congenial merchandising experience.

Q: When you say in other stores, other Hecht stores or other department stores?

A: No, Landsburgh's, Kann's, and other stores.

Q: And where did Hecht's fall in the hierarchy of department stores in Washington?

A: Probably, the most profitable. Garfinkel's was the finest. Jelleff's was a lovely store at the time. That was a lady's. Kahn's was a nice single store. Landsburgh's was promotional. But the Hecht Company was the promotional store.

Q: Did you think this was a perfect job for you based on your skills?

A: Yes, because I took over the Comparison Office. You see, when you had an ad in the paper, you'd have somebody in your office go down and see what the response was the first thing in the morning and then later on to see how that advertisement in another store worked and how your advertising held up. Then I became a buyer, probably the youngest in the Hecht Company, in Picture and Mirrors.

Q: When you were how old?

A: About twenty-seven, and while I was in the Comparison Office, I did a survey for Mr. Hecht himself, which was very secretive.

Q: A survey of what?

A: Areas and where to build another suburban store.

Q: There hadn't been any other Hecht's at this time?

A: No.

Q: And was it a radical idea to expand to the suburbs?

A: Well, the area was growing, D.C., Virginia. Silver Spring was coming up. Actually,

from that survey, you got the Silver Spring Hecht Company, if you remember it.

Q: How did you perform the survey?

A: I went looking in these outlying areas as to the population, and I read up to find out what people bought and where they shopped, and it was just keeping your eyes wide open and reading some of the newspapers, area papers, just using a little bit, doing a little research.

Q: Who was Mr. Hecht?

A: Mr. Hecht himself? He was from Baltimore. Max Hecht, I think Morris Hecht?

Q: M. Hecht.

A: M, yeah.

Q: Did he have an office in the downtown store?

A: No, no, when I dealt with people, I dealt with Dulcan, who was the general manager, Vice-President, Quirck.

Q: So did you ever meet Mr. Hecht?

A: Yes.

Q: Was he grateful for the survey?

A: Yeah, we talked. I dealt more with the general manager.

Q: And as a direct result of your survey, they opened the Silver Spring Hecht's?

A: Yeah, well, they were going to open somewheres, but I would think so, yeah.

Q: You recommended to be a Hecht's in Silver Spring.

A: Yeah.

Q: So did you feel maternal toward that store?

A: No, [Laughter] no.

Q: Did you recommended other locations as well?

A: No, I wrote up some, but it wasn't like I said, "I want this store here." No, I just, you know, gave locations.

Q: What were your other duties?

A: Oh, when I was doing this, checking advertising quite a bit.

Q: Now there was more than one newspaper at the time. How many newspapers were the ads running in?

A: Mostly the *Post*. What other papers did we have? The advertising that I checked was from our own store, because very often some of your buyers would advertise and not have merchandise to back it up, and I wanted to see that if you advertised, you had the merchandise right there, not in Baltimore.

Q: What's the secret to good merchandising?

A: You're, I'm going to get a test! [Laughter] Well, having what your customers want, getting the best quality that you can, and value, giving value.

Q: How has customer service changed from then until now?

A: Retailing has changed a great deal, completely, and the wording of advertising. I don't know if you have Better Business Bureau anymore, because when you had a price sale, this is on sale for forty-five dollars, regularly seventy-five dollars, well, you'd have to show me that it sold regularly every day for seventy-five dollars. It isn't that way any more. Originally meant something. Regularly, it doesn't mean much today. It's all rack shop, I think. I don't quite understand merchandising today.

Q: When did it go wrong?

A: [Laughter] When I got out! That's funny.

Q: When was that?

A: When things became so very self-service. Today you go in to a shoe store, and everything is lined up with sneakers, and it's all self-service. It amazes me, one hundred and fifty dollars for a pair of sneakers, and they're all in boxes, and nothing is fitted. It's, I don't know. I don't know where it is. And many of the stores do not have, well, many you can't get adequate help, but there is very little help. I notice if you go into the Hecht Company today, you can't find a sales person.

Q: It wasn't like that in the '40's.

A: No, no.

Q: Was there good training for salespeople?

A: Well, it was up to the person in charge of the department. You learned a lot when you took over a department. Now when I took over the Picture-Mirror Department, I had, it was quite a revelation to me, because I thought I'd bring in real art, until customers came in with pieces of paper with a hole in it to tell me that this is the size of the hole in the wall that I have, and I need a picture to cover it, and that kind of thing. Though I did buy for certain people, and I wanted to bring in some, an advertising, big advertising scheme of original art.

Q: This is Tape 3, Side B. You were talking about your plan to bring in original art.

A: We were going to have an exhibition of original art in the store. It was worked out beautifully with a very fine advertising company in New York, and it would have been a magnificent thing, but it would take up the whole store. [Laughter] I don't mean that you'd have artwork everywhere, but a lot of very fine artwork would be throughout the store. It got to be too difficult of a project, and Wanamaker's took it over. I don't know

how well they did, but it was a very, very interesting program for them. It was more than just making money in the Picture and Mirror Department. It was a store project.

Q: Did you get credit for Wanamaker's display?

A: No, no, no. It was something we dropped, that they took it over.

Q: Were you sorry that it couldn't have been done at Hecht's?

A: I don't know. It turned out to be something bigger than we had planned originally, and it wouldn't have been a department thing. It would have been a storewide thing, and I wasn't quite ready for that.

Q: So you were really a visionary.

A: Oh, no, [Laughter] no, just I had originally thought of bringing local artists in. That didn't pan out very well, because they are very difficult to work with. I tried that. I didn't want just a Picture and Mirror Department.

Q: Did you at that time want to have your own store?

A: No, no, no, at that time, I was wanting to have a baby.

Q: And when did you have a baby?

A: 1944.

Q: And who was that?

A: Irv.

Q: What is the date of his birth?

A: October 1st, 1944.

Q: How was your pregnancy?

A: Wonderful, [Laughter] fine. Everything was fine.

Q: Where was he born?

A: Children's Hospital.

Q: They had maternity there?

A: They did at the time.

Q: After whom is Irv named?

A: My father, Isaac.

Q: What is Irv's Hebrew name?

A: Yitzchak.

Q: What did he look like at birth?

A: [Laughter] He was gorgeous from the day he was born. And he read all the Spock books before, so I didn't have a thing to do.

Q: Irv read it all. [Laughter]

A: Right, he knew everything. He never did anything wrong.

Q: How did you adjust to being parents?

A: Wonderful. [Laughter] No, he was really a great joy. Four years later, Bruce was born.

Q: His date of birth?

A: October 7th, 1948. Not October 7th. Well, maybe. I'm not sure.

Q: Did he resemble Irv?

A: No, he was a very nice looking child, and at about eight months of age, he didn't seem to speak, and then we discovered that he was autistic.

Q: Was it difficult to get help for him?

A: Very, very, very difficult, because there was nothing, nothing that was known at the time. There was one doctor who was called the doctor of autism, and she knew nothing.

She really didn't, because up in Bethesda, there was a little school, I mean class, and she told me that somebody from New York came to observe. His nephew was autistic, and the only one in that group that resembled his child at all was Bruce, and he was experimenting with some medication. We started Bruce with that, and I couldn't seem to, first it worked. It quieted him down a little bit, and then it didn't seem to do much good. And I increased it, and then I called this doctor once and asked her if it was all right to increase it some more or, and she said, "Well, what's the difference? You know. You do as you think. Why ask me?" I said, "Because you're the doctor." So, I mean, there was nothing. You didn't know what you could do and couldn't do if she was the expert. And, of course, with Pete, he thought I ought to go take some classes and see if I could find a cure.

Q: He had faith in you.

A: Yes, he thought anything to do, I could do it.

Q: Did you take classes?

A: No, I didn't have a medical degree, and I had my hands full not knowing what to do with, you know, there.

Q: How did you cope?

A: Very poorly. [Laughter] I mean, there was nothing, no help, and then Isadore Gudelsky asked a politician what to do, and we did put him into, well, I don't know what we could call it, but now he's in a group home. I had him in, oh, long before that, I had him at the Corley School in Leesburg until he was about ten or twelve.

Q: Were you getting support from family and friends?

A: There wasn't anything that, we didn't know, you know, all I could do was give him

care. He didn't sleep, so we didn't sleep, but we did put him in the Corley School, and he stayed there until they couldn't keep him.

Q: Did he respond to something in particular very well like music or art?

A: No, no, that's just recent that they're trying to do that now. No, he seemed to have a marvelous memory, because if I would drive somewheres and I had driven there before, but I would go elsewhere, you know, make a right turn, he'd carry on high until, because I was supposed to go straight.

Q: So he had quite a sense of direction.

A: Yes.

Q: How did he and Irv get along?

A: Well, that was one of the reasons I had put him into an institution, because I felt it was very unfair for Irv to be burdened taking care of Bruce.

Q: It must have been a very difficult decision for you.

A: Yes, well, yes, except that I don't know, I didn't, you know, it grew more and more difficult. See, when he was at the Corley School that was fine, because this woman was wonderful, but the help, well, she was getting on in years. She was going to close the school.

Q: How did you find out about this school?

A: A friend was in Leesburg, and she noticed a group of youngsters that were from the Corley School. And she had inquired, and she was impressed.

Q: So you felt fortunate to have found this place.

A: Yes.

Q: And the same with the group home now?

A: Well, yes. From the institution, they started a few group homes, and this group home is very nice.

Q: Do you have advice for other parents of children with special needs?

A: Well, it depends on the special need. No, I think each case is so different, but even to this day, they haven't discovered enough with autism.

Q: What kind of student was Irv in school?

A: Irv was always good. [Laughter] I really and truly think he was above average, that's for sure.

Q: You were going to say even more than that.

A: Well, he was a perfect kid. He was a perfect child all the way through.

Q: What were some of his interests when he was a child?

A: I think leadership, if that's an interest. I don't know. Wherever he was involved in anything, he was a leader. Now Ben has a great number of the qualities of Irv.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: Wonderful. They're all good qualities.

Q: And what do you see in Hannah?

A: Hannah? She's going to be the next President, or if the world turns away from democracy, she'll be [Laughter] the leader.

Q: Did you drive Irv to different lessons, extra-curricular activities?

A: You know, I was always busy working, really. I drove him to, not very, no.

Q: Let's pick up on your working years. Did you continue to work after you had the children?

A: Well, yes. I left in about the eighth month out of the Hecht Company, and I refused to

go out of town buying after the seventh month. And I stayed until the new buyer came in. After I began working with Pete, he at that point was working at Roger's Jewelry Company. He was managing it.

Q: Where was that?

A: In Arlington, Virginia.

Q: He went to Roger's from his original job at Phil Bobby's?

A: Phil Bobby's became, ah, he left Phil Bobby's when they became involved with some jewelry, and so he went to Kay's Jewelry from there, because if you are going to sell jewelry, you might as well sell it big way. And he was with Kay's Jewelry Company until Mr. Kirschbaum came in from Pennsylvania and opened a jewelry store in Arlington, Virginia. He had heard of Pete, and he asked him to come and manage, open the jewelry store there in Arlington. And he did. So Pete managed that jewelry store.

Q: For how long?

A: Until 1960, no, a little bit after 1960, about 1961, 'cause in 1960, I opened Tiara Gifts in Wheaton.

Q: After you left Hecht's and before you opened Tiara, where did you work?

A: I worked with Pete at Roger's Jewelry, where he managed the store.

Q: Did he manage you?

A: Yes. [Laughter]

Q: Did you mind that?

A: I really, I mean when he managed, no, no. It was very pleasant, but I didn't work all day.

Q: You worked part-time there?

A: Yes.

Q: So you had to go separately there, each of you?

A: Huh, come to think of it, by not working, ah, I worked, went in with Pete, and I came home with Pete, but I didn't work every day.

Q: Now I understand. What's interesting about selling jewelry? Where do you get the thrill?

A: It was merchandise, merchandising is more interesting. I mean any merchandise is interesting, but, of course, the customers were interesting. I think it's more the customers and the merchandise, fitting the right thing with the right person.

Q: Do most people actually buy what they came in for, or you change their minds during the sale?

A: Well, once you get to know your customer, you know whether the thing the customer picks out is the right thing.

Q: What were some favorite stories from that jewelry store?

A: Stories? Seems like a hundred years ago.

Q: Were there engagement rings purchased or returned?

A: Pete was really much better at that. He knew those customers. I really and truly tried to keep the books straight there.

Q: From where did you purchase the jewelry?

A: Well, Mr. K bought the diamonds. He had loose diamonds and had them set with the customer's approval on different kinds of settings, and the watches we had, the Gerard Perogaux were very, very good looking.

Q: Did you wear jewelry in the store that wasn't yours as you were showing it?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Now is Mr. Kirschbaum Mr. Kay of Kay Jewelers?

A: No, no, no, no.

Q: Okay, so it's just a co-incidence that they're 'K' names.

A: Yes.

Q: Mr. Kirschbaum is the founder of Roger's Jewelry Company?

A: Right.

Q: How was it to work with your husband?

A: Oh, well, Pete was very easy, very easy to work with.

Q: Where was the store located in Arlington?

A: Ah, I don't know. Gee, I could see it right there. Isn't that awful? What's that main street? It starts with a "W," I think.

Q: Well, it will come to you. So you had a lot of foot traffic?

A: Well, you know, it was pretty close, about three blocks away on that street from Sears, Roebuck. I didn't think I'd ever forget the name.

Q: It will come to you. So you kept the books, and you knew your clients, your customers.

A: Ah huh.

Q: What else did you enjoy about being there?

A: I really didn't care too much for that operation. [Laughter]

Q: Why not?

A: 'Cause Mr. K was nothing. He wasn't, couldn't learn from him.

Q: You couldn't learn from him. So did that make you want to open your own shop?

A: No, not a jewelry, well, I wouldn't have wanted to open a jewelry store, because we didn't have the money for inventory, didn't have money, and I felt that Pete should have a different kind of store. I mean, we could, we didn't have, well, shall I say, we borrowed money to open Tiara, but it would have been a tremendous amount to open a jewelry store. And gifts are a little bit different. It wouldn't take the same kind of inventory, and, of course, I did most of it myself in that I'd order the merchandise. I'd unpack it. I'd bring it up, display it, and then each day, I'd look at the bank account, and see how many, what bills I could pay.

Q: Did you have to hold your breath at the beginning?

A: Well, [Laughter] yes, yes.

Q: Whose idea was it to open the store?

A: Well, Isadore Gudelsky owned the shopping center.

Q: Which was which one?

A: Wheaton Plaza.

Q: So did he give you a break on the space?

A: He built the store, which made it a little bit better than my building the store. He lent me some money and paid it back right, I had paid it, the last payment, next to last payment, when he was living, and the last payment to his brother.

Q: So how many years did it take you to pay that off?

A: Just a couple of years.

Q: Who came up with the name for the store?

A: Pete.

Q: How did he decide?

A: He was looking through the thesaurus and hit upon Tiara.

Q: How did he get to “t” in the thesaurus? Did he start at the beginning? Did he start with “a”?

A: No, [Laughter] he was going.

Q: And you agreed that that would be a good name?

A: Yes, yes, it sort of sounds good. It still does.

Q: It still does. When did you open?

A: June 1st, 1960.

Q: Now you had a prime spot there in Wheaton Plaza, at the crossroads.

A: Yes.

Q: That was Mr. Gudelsky’s choice or yours?

A: No, Mr. Gudelsky thought that was a good spot.

Q: When you first opened, did you think how will I ever fill this entire shop?

A: No, that was not a problem. That wasn’t the thing. The thing was that we originally had cards, Hallmark, that you could see from the window, because Tiara Gifts sounds high class, and I wanted high class stuff in there, but I didn’t want people to just walk by. I wanted them to come in, and I thought the cards would be something that would invite them. You know, anybody can come to browse in a card shop.

Q: And did it lure people in?

A: Oh, I think so. People weren’t afraid to come in.

Q: Can you tell if someone’s really a browser or they are really going to buy when you first see them?

A: I think any browsers can be turned into a buyer.

Q: And that was part of your challenge.

A: Right.

Q: From where did you order the merchandise?

A: First, I went to New York to the Trade Show. The New Yorker used to have Trade Shows, which were very difficult to do, because they were little tiny rooms, [Laughter] you know.

Q: This is the New Yorker Hotel.

A: Right, but 225 Fifth Avenue was the main gift shop area. And Atlantic City always had a good Trade Show, so you managed.

Q: What's the secret to buying properly in a Trade Show?

A: Before you know what you want?

Q: Yes.

A: Oh.

Q: Is it something that appeals to you or something you know your client, your customers, will want?

A: Well, it's something you hope your customers are going to want, not you. I mean, you're not out there to teach each person. You want to have something that when a customer comes in, he will want.

Q: What was the philosophy of the store? What did you want to sell?

A: First, we wanted Lenox China. That was very big at that time. Lenox giftware, and they would not swerve. One year from the date you open, they used to, the salesman told me, "One year from the day you open, I will take your order."

Q: This is Tape 4, Side A. The Lenox salesman wanted to make sure that you were

viable before he would sell.

A: Yes, and in those days, the salesman, I mean, he must have discussed it with Lenox, but the salesman's word was it with the firm that he worked for, because, the Hecht Company could not get Lenox at that time, 'cause they kept on asking for it, for Lenox. And Harvey Clapp, the salesman, showed me a letter that Lenox had given him, turned over to him, to ask him if he would sell. And he said, "No."

Q: Why wouldn't he sell to Hecht's?

A: I don't know. Well, that isn't the firm that he wanted to have Lenox in.

Q: So did you feel honored when they sold to you?

A: Oh, we got [Laughter] to be very good friends in that year. He used to come in every once in a while, but I went through his wife's pregnancy with him and all. [Laughter]

Q: So you were being a good salesperson to the salesman.

A: Well, it was just that I was waiting for Lenox to come. I wanted it, because I knew that our customers wanted that.

Q: Do you remember your first sale of Lenox in the store?

A: The day we got it, I don't know.

Q: What other brands were you interested in carrying?

A: Waterford was very difficult to get at that point, Waterford Crystal.

Q: Was it difficult because it was sold in prestigious stores, or there were enough outlets in Washington?

A: No, it was very difficult for anybody to get. It's from Ireland, and John Miller had taken the entire Waterford Crystal business here, and he was tough. And it was just, I don't know who carried it here. I know in New York, Altman's had it. He had been a

buyer at Altman's. They had done a terrific job. And then he became the salesman rep here. He was Mr. Waterford here, and I worked awfully hard getting it. We did a tremendous job on it.

Q: What attracted you to Waterford and Lenox that you wanted to highlight them in the shop?

A: Well, they were quality, and that was quality merchandise. It was very difficult getting Waterford. If you could get it, you could sell it.

Q: What were the prices of the Waterford when you began in 1960?

A: High for crystal, but it was the crystal that was in great demand and difficult to get.

Q: How did you advertise?

A: Well, let me see, we didn't start advertising, because we were really feeling our way. I mean, money was, we wanted to make it, stabilize the store first. And that is one reason that we had cards.

Q: In the windows, you said.

A: Well, the cases were really smack against the windows. You could see in, and you could see that we had cards there, so that it wouldn't be so high class looking that you couldn't come in and browse. There was a great demand for Waterford, and it was very difficult to get. Only the fine stores had it. We worked very hard getting in there.

Actually...

Q: To build up your reputation.

A: To build up the reputation, and also because once you got people started on a crystal pattern, you had them as customers, because once we stocked, we stocked very well.

Q: Now when you say a crystal pattern, are you talking about stemware?

A: Yes, both, we had stemware and the other pieces as well.

Q: How did the bridal registry go?

A: Quite well, quite well. We did, it took a little while, but we did very well, I think.

Q: When did you have the feeling that you were doing well, after how long?

A: Oh, when you say “well,” do you mean out of the red, or did we have a reputation by then?

Q: Well, let’s take both. When did you get out of the red?

A: Oh, within the first year.

Q: Did you have a celebration?

A: No. [Laughter] No, we were so busy. Really and truly, I was doing it myself, so that Pete would bring in some money. [Laughter] He brought in money and had to subsidize me as well as expenses at home.

Q: Did you give yourself a salary?

A: At the beginning? A little bit, a very minor salary.

Q: And then how long until you built up your reputation?

A: I think we did it almost instantly. That first year, I think we did build up quite a reputation. But you must realize that it was one of the first shopping centers around. In this area, there was one on Seven Corners in Virginia, and this was the second largest at that time. Hawaii had one, and then Wheaton Plaza.

Q: Now just for people who weren’t around in the ‘60’s, it was not a covered mall at that time.

A: No, that’s right. It wasn’t covered.

Q: And who were the other vendors coming in around you?

A: Around me or...?

Q: Neighbors to the store. And the anchors to the mall?

A: Well, we had Kay Jewelers, Hahn Shoes, Woodward and Lothrop's, Ward's. I'm trying to think of the dress shops now.

Q: Were you friendly with the other storeowners?

A: Most of them, after a while.

Q: Did you eat in the Hot Shoppe?

A: The Hot Shoppe was right across the way, and then they had Sirloin and Saddle, as well, which was also a Hot Shoppe steak house.

Q: Did you keep the first dollar you made in the store?

A: No.

Q: How did you hire staff?

A: At the beginning, the first person I hired was from People's Drug Store, because she moved fast.

Q: From the People's Drug Store across from you?

A: Right. She moved fast, and I thought she'd, and there was so much physical stuff to do as well.

Q: Did she work out?

A: Yeah, yeah. Very down to earth, but a real, almost a person you'd expect on a farm.

Q: How do you know when you should hire someone at an interview?

A: I think most of it is intuition. I mean, you might like the personality, and if they have a background, I think you know pretty much.

Q: How large a staff did you have in that store?

A: At the beginning?

Q: At the beginning and at the end.

A: At the beginning, there was just two or three, two, I think, plus myself, and then we had about five.

Q: Please talk about your regular customers.

A: We had customers that came in, that became regular customers, and I think they grew with us, or maybe we grew with them. They had an influence on us, and you almost knew, you could visualize their homes from the way they bought and spoke. It was always a very friendly store.

Q: Were you ever invited to the homes to see if your intuition was right?

A: Didn't have time to go anywhere.

Q: Did you work seven days a week?

A: Plus, plus. [Laughter]

Q: Did that wear on you?

A: No, no, expected it.

Q: Did you enjoy it?

A: Yes, yes, I must say I did. You know, sometimes you'd get tired and wish that you could relax a bit, but Wheaton Plaza, I was there while it was being built. I spent a lot of time in the basement there getting the merchandise in and packing and unpacking it, and so you knew, you grew with it. It was like you were building a home.

Q: What did Pete do there?

A: Pete, when he came in, of course, he was the guy on the floor, and everybody loved him. He was a great person to have selling, because he immediately became your friend,

and then he got what you needed.

Q: Even if you didn't know what you needed?

A: Well, you knew [Laughter] by the time you spoke to him. He actually wasn't selling. He was listening to you, and, therefore, he was a very good salesman.

Q: What did he enjoy about the art of salesmanship?

A: People. I think, whether it was the manufacturers or the reps or the customers, he liked people, never got tired of them, and once he was your friend, he was your friend to the end, really. He was a good person. That's for sure.

Q: So he created a very warm atmosphere in the store.

A: Right, yes, yes. To this day, people come in and talk about him.

Q: What do they say?

A: Only good things, only good things. And it isn't to be polite.

Q: They remember what he sold them, and how much a good listener he was?

A: They remember him as a friend, not as a salesperson.

Q: Did you socialize with people outside of the store, I mean, with customers?

A: Not too much, not too much.

Q: What were some of the problems of running this kind of business?

A: Well, I've been in retailing for so long, I had been, and the hours got tremendously long, tremendously long.

Q: How late would you work each night?

A: The store was open until nine, nine-thirty every night, which is a little ridiculous in a gift shop. You can't find a drug store [Laughter] open those hours, and yet, if you break a cup and saucer, you can still wait until the next day to replace it. It's not a matter of life

and death.

Q: Do you remember some of your nicest customers?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Do you want to give an example?

A: Actually, most of them were very nice. I can't think of them as being close friends, but they were very nice, nice people.

Q: Business acquaintances.

A: Yeah.

Q: What was the worst thing that happened there?

A: I think we were taken advantage of after, no, let's, nothing bad. [Laughter] No, I'd rather not.

Q: You continued to work there every day. How did you manage raising the family?

A: Well, it was just Irv for a long time. And then, it was quite difficult. Ah, ah, with Irv, it was fine. He went to school, and he'd come over to the store. He'd spend time at the store.

Q: Where did he go to school?

A: High school?

Q: Yes.

A: Blair, and we lived at Parkside Plaza, so it was just, and it was right there in the park.

Q: When did you move from the Cameron Street apartment?

A: We moved to Sligo Creek Parkway, uh, to the Parkside Plaza Apartments just before Irv went to Blair High School, which then was right in Sligo Creek Parkway.

Q: When did Bruce go to the Corley School? How old was he?

A: He was about three.

Q: So after Irv was done with school, he would come to the store?

A: Right.

Q: Did he help out there?

A: Oh, he helped out. He didn't always come to the store. He did his homework. A friend of mine, who lived in the apartments, was always there, and in the apartments, there was a good number of very close friends.

Q: So you think you stayed there a little longer than you had just said?

A: Yes, yes. It was longer than, Parkside Plaza wasn't built yet.

Q: But maybe when Irv started high school is when you were there?

A: Yes, but he was in high school already.

Q: Okay, so sometime in the early '60's.

A: Right.

Q: Was that new apartment larger than your old one? Is that why you moved?

A: It was larger. It was nicer. And it was newer.

Q: You didn't want to live in a house?

A: We didn't have time. No, we didn't think of buying a house.

Q: You were New Yorkers.

A: Right, right. That's true. Then it became a condo.

Q: And so you bought it?

A: Yes, we bought into that.

Q: How long did you live there?

A: Oh, we lived there quite a while. I've been living here, until I moved here and built

on.

Q: This is in Irv and Kate's house, your meaning here.

A: Right.

Q: When was that?

A: About fourteen years ago, fourteen, fifteen years ago.

Q: When did you have free time from the store?

A: Not much.

Q: Just in the evenings.

A: Well, because [Laughter] I had a lot more energy then than I have now, evenings were late evenings.

Q: What did you do for recreation?

A: We had people in. We went out.

Q: Did you belong to a synagogue?

A: Yes. Pete and I were founders of Ohr Kodesh Synagogue.

Q: How did you become a founder?

A: We were one of a group that broke ground and built Ohr Kodesh, not ourselves, but that was a long time ago.

Q: Who were some of the other founders?

A: Oh, Jack and Shirley Serber, Claire and Joe, ah...

Q: It will come to you. As you say, you can get the Ohr Kodesh Directory. How was it to be a founder of a synagogue? What responsibilities did you have?

A: Well, it wasn't, we'd meet, first we used to meet in churches, like Kehila. [Laughter]

Q: What need did you all feel to start a synagogue? Why didn't you join an existing one?

A: There weren't, we felt that this area, Silver Spring, would need, it was a new area. Really, it was very, it hadn't really been developed, and we felt that Jewish people were coming in and there should be a synagogue here.

Q: Did you have a hand in the hiring of the rabbi and cantor?

A: I personally didn't know who, I didn't go to a meeting for that. Pete was more involved in the rabbi and... You know, everybody was called. There was just a handful, you know. It was a very small group.

Q: How do you feel when you see how much it's grown now?

A: Out of proportion. Of course, I am still a member. I pay dues, but I don't go, because I go, I'm more involved with Irv and the Shneyers.

Q: What made Ohr Kodesh a special place?

A: It was the only synagogue here. But why? Well, it answered all our needs, once we switched it around and made it more of a synagogue. It started out being a community center, the Montgomery County Jewish Center (MCJC), almost until, it didn't even have a kosher kitchen, which a *shul*, a synagogue, should have.

Q: Was there a discussion about whether it should be Orthodox or Conservative?

A: It was a conglomeration at the beginning, and it grew into a Conservative synagogue.

Q: When was Irv's *Bar Mitzvah*?

A: October 26th, and let's see '44 and thirteen, '47.

Q: '57.

A: '57, I'm sorry.

Q: What do you remember about the *Bar Mitzvah*?

A: He was wonderful. [Laughter] And people came over and said, "Oh, Ohr Kodesh

must have a wonderful, wonderful class preparing them.” And it wasn’t that at all, but he did go to, he went to camp, Camp Ramah.

Q: Which Ramah? Where was it?

A: That was outside of the Boston area.

Q: And that’s where he learned his Hebrew?

A: He learned it by doing. Camp Ramah had a very profound influence on his Jewish education. You know David Shneyer went to Camp Ramah. It did something to them.

Q: Were they there at the same time?

A: No, they weren’t at the same one.

Q: How did Irv come back different after camp?

A: Didn’t realize he was different until, well, when we went up to see him, I first began realizing how great a camp it was, because I came in, and I’d see these kids running around with *yarmulkes* on, and I wondered, “God, did I send him somewhere that’s so Orthodox that they can’t move without a *yarmulke*? He must be out of his school entirely.” I mean he was just out of reach. And then it dawned, I could see they jumped into the pool with the *yarmulke* on. It was just done so nicely. It wasn’t that they were conscious of it. And they had a show on. It was just a band playing, but it was different people came to visit. There were Israelis there, and then they had somebody there from the Philharmonica band, and they joined in. So it wasn’t like you studied and worked hard in the band to show off for your parents. It was, everything was impromptu, and that’s where he learned.

Q: How old was he when he first went?

A: Oh, about nine or ten.

Q: For how many years did he go?

A: Until after his *Bar Mitzvah*.

Q: So you were very pleased.

A: Yes, because I knew nothing about it beforehand. I met Mr. Abell, who was very, was one of the, he was very big in the Camp Ramah, and I met him at a party that a cousin of mine had, who was in politics, gave.

Q: This is Tape 4, Side B. You were talking about how you met Mr. Abell.

A: Well, this cousin of mine was giving a party, because he was always entertained, and it was a thank you party.

Q: Who was the cousin?

A: Maxwell Rabb. Do you know him?

Q: No. What kind of politics?

A: What kind of politics? Republican.

Q: On the state level?

A: Oh, at first he was on the state, but national level.

Q: So was he a senator?

A: No, no, but he worked very closely when he was in Boston with Senator Lodge, and then he was active in national politics. In fact, he was advisor to the Cabinet, or was a legal advisor to the Cabinet under Eisenhower.

Q: So you attended this party and heard about Camp Ramah.

A: Yeah, Maxwell Abell was the owner of the hotel and was also a very close friend of Max Rabb. And when he, to Max Rabb, my cousin, we were very, very religious, because he was not. [Laughter] When Mr. Abell learned that we were the Jews, he

immediately insisted that we send Irv to Camp Ramah. I had no idea that they closed the membership to the camp or that it was late. The next day, I got a form to fill out for him for the Poconos, and I called and said I didn't want him to go to the Poconos. [Laughter] I wanted the closest place to Boston, so at least when I go to visit, I could go in to Boston to see family, and that's how he went.

Q: So that was a good decision.

A: Oh, yes, yes. I think he enjoyed it tremendously.

Q: What role did Israel play in your life?

A: Well, Pete thought there was nowhere else to go but to Israel. I mean, you don't go to London or to Paris unless you're on the way, there's a stopover going to Israel. And, of course, Irv, when he got married didn't go on a honeymoon. He went to Israel, supposedly to live.

Q: What year was that?

A: He was twenty-five, so '44...

Q: '69?

A: '69.

Q: What was her name?

A: Kathy Campbell.

Q: How long were they married?

A: Oh, let's see. About three years.

Q: Where had Irv gone to college?

A: Boston University in Massachusetts.

Q: What was his major?

A: Well, he started in Communications, but I don't know, I mean, ah, I don't think he ever changed it.

Q: Was he ever drafted?

A: He was in the Reserves. He had something wrong with his wrist that they discovered.

Q: Did you always feel that Irv would take over the store, or you were surprised when that happened?

A: I didn't know whether he should or not. I thought he would go into a profession, but I wasn't quite sure. I felt it was his decision.

Q: Did you ask him to do it?

A: I didn't, and I don't know if Pete hadn't gotten sick and died, if he would have had, if he would have continued. I'm not sure.

Q: Did you and Pete travel to Israel?

A: Yes, we used to go at least once a year.

Q: Where did you stay?

A: At different hotels.

Q: Did you have different sights to see there?

A: We used to go with, we were very active in Israel Bonds, and we used to go with a group there, so we really, in time, saw everything.

Q: Did you have other places in the world you liked to travel also, to and from Israel?

A: Well, [Laughter] with Pete, he felt if you have a week, you go to Israel, and there's no place else that's worth going, if it's a choice.

Q: When you took your vacations, was it just for a week's time, or were you gone longer?

A: We didn't really get away for much longer than that, but it was not a matter of being first choice with Pete. It was always a matter of, "Oh, we have some time. We'll go to Israel."

Q: Was it in the summertime that you went?

A: Very often it was in the summertime, which is unfortunate, because it gets hot there.

Q: Did you and Pete attend many plays and concerts in the Washington area?

A: No, no. We had done that, not concerts, but the plays we had done in New York on Broadway.

Q: What were some of your favorites in Broadway?

A: Well, let's see. We really date back. I think the musicals. You know, I really couldn't give you a rundown.

Q: So your socialization was centered around Ohr Kodesh and meeting with friends and Israel Bonds. What else?

A: That was it.

Q: That was a lot.

A: Mostly friends.

Q: That was a rich life. When did Pete get sick?

A: Well, he was in the hospital. He died at sixty-nine years of age.

Q: The date?

A: When he died? October 23rd, 1982. He was in the hospital for eight months.

Q: Which hospital?

A: George Washington.

Q: What was wrong with him?

A: He had a brain tumor.

Q: How did you realize he had it?

A: He passed out, and he was in a coma for the eight months that he was in the hospital. He was sick about four months before he was hospitalized. It was malignant.

Q: Was there surgery done on him?

A: It was, we knew that surgery, well, we knew the chances of surgery. We're waiting for a miracle to happen, and it didn't.

Q: So did you go down to visit him each day? How did you have time to work?

A: We didn't. [Laughter] At that point, we didn't. Irv was in the store. Irv was working. He'd come running down in the evening. Kate was fantastic. She was down all the time. It was a very trying time.

Q: Did it bring back memories of when your father was in the hospital for so long?

A: Yes and no. It was different, because my father was always alert mentally. Pete was out completely. There was, in all of the eight months, the most beautiful *Bar Mitzvah*, if you would talk about something like a *Bar Mitzvah*, a lot of it is, today has gotten to be a big show, but Eli, Irv's first son, had been in camp, and he was coming back home, and he stopped at the hospital first. We had postponed his *Bar Mitzvah*. There were a few of us. We gathered a few people together, and here was a man who for eight months did not respond to anything. He just lay there. You could poke, and you could reach out to try to shake his hand. There was no response at all. And Eli did the *haftorah* for him. And Pete mouthed every single word. It was the most miraculous thing I have ever seen, and squeezed his hand. And then when it was over, it was back to normal.

Q: So there was some connection there.

A: When you [Laughter] talk about, you know, a big show of a *Bar Mitzvah* or something, “Oh, this was beautiful. The food was this.” This was a *Bar Mitzvah*.

Q: There must have been tears all over the hospital room.

A: I don’t know. I don’t know. I mean, I get choked up even today, and that is going to be twenty years.

Q: How long after that beautiful moment did he die?

A: He died very soon after, very soon after that.

Q: Were you there with him, or you had to be called to the hospital?

A: We knew he was going. We were surprised each day. And then we got word during the night.

Q: Tell me about his funeral.

A: It was from Ohr Kodesh to, it was big.

Q: Who officiated?

A: Porath, Rabbi Porath from Ohr Kodesh.

Q: What were some words that were said about Pete?

A: Well, his friend, Jack Serber, spoke beautifully. He was very, very fond of Pete. I mean, it was Mutt and Jeff group. I don’t know.

Q: How did you make it through?

A: It was very much easier, because of Kate and Irv.

Q: How did they make it easier?

A: Because they were there, and I was with them.

Q: Where is Pete buried?

A: In Memorial, ah, Virginia, you know. I can’t give you the name.

Q: The name will come to you. How did it feel to be a widow?

A: Empty. You know, you walk from one room to the next, and you call out, and then you wonder, then you realize you're not going to get an answer. [Laughter] You know, it, but I, you make it through. You don't sit around.

Q: Did you feel that going back to work was a help for you?

A: Was there anything else to do? What would you, what else would you do?

Q: So you were glad you had that to go back to. What do you miss most about Pete?

A: He was always there.

Q: What impact did he have on your life?

A: He was always there, always. And he didn't, you know, ah, and now I can say it.

Sometimes it used to be annoying. Like I'd say, well, we never had two cars, and I'd say, "I really should have a car of my own so, you know, I can go." He said, "Where are we going to go without each other?"

Q: That's lovely.

A: And I didn't realize how important, how wonderful it was that we were always together until, so I don't know whether you miss each other more or less. You miss each other one way or the other, because you become one person. I mean, this is, when you have a happy marriage, you are one person, not two, so that, I don't know, well just one way or the other, you always miss each other.

Q: How was it to be single in a world of couples?

A: Not good, but I wasn't interested, because there wasn't anybody there that I had, you know, had had a relationship with, that I would be interested in.

Q: How old were you when Pete died?

A: Sixty-seven, which is quite young, come to think of it, at this point in life.

Q: You're right. But in those eight months, did you plan? You knew he was going to die, so how did those eight months help you or not help you?

A: Well, realized that he was going to go, and when he went, it wasn't like somebody crossing the street and getting hit by a car. You knew it had to be and was probably just as well for him, because he was not living.

Q: You mentioned that Kate and Irv were a big help, but we need to meet Kate. How did Kate come into your lives?

A: Kate, you know Kate. To know her is to adore her. She is good and sweet and bright, and if I had had a daughter, I would have wanted her to be just exactly like Kate.

Q: That's a beautiful thing to say.

A: She is, she is a dear, dear person.

Q: When did you first meet her?

A: I knew he was going out with somebody, and he did not, I didn't meet her right away. I didn't meet her, yeah, I didn't meet her right way. After all, Irv wasn't living at home.

Q: Where was he living?

A: He had a house in Silver Spring.

Q: And his other marriage was ending.

A: And his other marriage had ended. Then when I heard he was going with someone, I thought, ooh, ah, she's not Jewish. And Pete had a terrible time before with the fact that Kathy wasn't Jewish. He had said something to me at that point about his wanting to sit *shiva* because he never thought of, I mean 'cause she was, ah, Irv was marrying a non-Jewish girl. And I said, "Look, we have a wonderful relationship, but don't make me

choose between my son and my husband.” And that shut him up for awhile. So something was said to Irv when I just found out that he was going with Kate and that she wasn’t Jewish.

Q: What’s Kate’s maiden name?

A: Hayes, a charming family, wonderful family. I said something, and Irv said, “It’s too late now.” And they had gone to Cleveland to see this old counselor of Irv’s who was a rabbi. And she converted there. But, of course, knowing Kate, it’s a different thing.

Q: What do you mean?

A: I mean, how could you not want her as your daughter-in-law? If you can’t have her as your daughter, you certainly want her as your daughter-in-law.

Q: What has she meant in your life?

A: I love that girl so dearly, and I always felt that Irv was very, very special and deserved somebody very special. And God heard. Either He heard me or knew that they were, that was what should be.

Q: When were they married?

A: March, is it March? Yeah. Let’s see. It’s twenty-one years ago, something like that. They were married by Rabbi Porath.

Q: What was their wedding like?

A: It was a happy, happy wedding. It was really a lot of fun, and you didn’t have to be coupled off, because all the dances were, the dancing was the *hora*, and you’d get up and dance, and it wasn’t a pairing off kind of thing. There were a lot of girls there that weren’t married. You know, nowadays you’re not going out steadily at eighteen or nineteen or getting married at twenty.

Q: Was the wedding at Ohr Kodesh?

A: Yeah. Everybody had a great time. It was one of the friendliest, happiest things, and it was, when I say that family, the Hayes family, is lovely. Now Kate's parents stood under the *chuppah*, and they are very devout Catholics. They didn't feel any less devout Catholics.

Q: So there was wonderful acceptance.

A: Wonderful.

Q: When did Kate start working at the store?

A: [Laughter] Oh, she's not working, she thinks she's not working.

Q: When did she show up in the store not to buy?

A: [Laughter] After they got married.

Q: Did you train her?

A: No, she knows more than I do.

Q: Then you became a grandmother.

A: Yes.

Q: Talk about that.

A: Talk about Ben?

Q: Okay.

A: To know him is to love him. That is, I always thought that Irv was a terrific child, that he read all the books. I didn't have to do anything about bringing him up. He knew, he was really a great kid. Well, I think Ben is a wonderful, wonderful son, grandson, just a wonderful person to be with and to know.

Q: How did it feel to hold your first grandchild?

A: He just gets better with each day. Just watching him develop, he is so sensitive and so good and so interested in people, in helping. Now he was tutoring a child. I didn't even know that. I knew he was tutoring somebody, but evidently this child has a great deal of problems. And I wish you would read the letter, I don't know where it is now, that the parents sent to him, to Ben. It just chokes you, just beautiful. And he's a good student, and he's National Champion in Karate, and I don't know what he isn't.

Q: And then you had a second grandchild.

A: And a second grandchild, and she is, she can be the next dictator in the United States.

[Laughter]

Q: Dictator or President?

A: When we turn in, when it is no longer a democracy and we have a dictator there, and she'll be the dictator. [Laughter]

Q: Does Hannah look like someone in the family?

A: She's pretty. No, not like anybody.

Q: Does she remind you of anyone in the family?

A: Gee, you know that's the first person who's ever asked me that. Now that I begin thinking, I had a cousin who always took over. And she was always right whatever she did, and damned if she wasn't. You know, she took over, and everything was, and I wonder, she was so definite about everything.

Q: Who was the cousin?

A: Florence, Florence Liff.

Q: Whose child was she?

A: Well, she was my first cousin. She was Aunt Rose and Morris Liff's. You remember,

I said something about Biff Liff. That was his sister. Florence was his sister. ...Who was it who mentions him, Merrick, David Merrick, the producer? Well, he worked with him. Maybe that's where all the dramatics comes [Laughter] in, but Florence was very sure of herself.

Q: This is Tape 5, Side A. You were talking about your cousin, Florence.

A: Florence was very dramatic. She was always the center of anything, any occasion. Whether it was a tea party or a great big convention, she was the dominant force there. Whatever remark was made, it was her word. And the thing that was always annoying [Laughter] or true was that she was always right.

Q: And do you see that in Hannah?

A: Hannah acts more like Florence did, and I must say I admired Florence very much.

Q: Did Florence live in New York or in Boston?

A: No, In Boston.

Q: So you had boys, and then you had a grandson. How was it to have a granddaughter?

A: Wonderful, [Laughter] wonderful. But it is a funny question to ask me only for the reason that I remember that when I did practice teaching, that, of course, was a hundred years ago, but even then, I would walk into a class, and we used to have large classes at that time. And by the end of the first day, I knew every boy's name by heart. The girls [Laughter] were all a wave. I couldn't, there were very, very few that I would recognize if I walked across the street. So I don't know what that meant, except that at the point, the boys seemed much more individual. Each one was an individual. And the girls were a bit similar.

Q: Did it have anything to do with the fact that you had described yourself as a tomboy?

A: I don't know. Probably I was more tuned in to the boys' way of life.

Q: This is a little bit out of chronological order, but you just mentioned about your student teaching. Please tell us a little about that.

A: The student teaching, you went to a school, an elementary school. Now I went to one closer to home than at school.

Q: Do you remember which one you went to?

A: No. It was in the Bronx. And I taught one class that was really in today's age would be a specialized, disabled group. I mean, all the misfits were put in there.

Q: Discipline problems, you mean?

A: Well, they were everything. There was one child there that was deaf. There was one child there that had learning disabilities, a couple that were disciplinary problems. All kinds of, anybody that didn't fit was put in there.

Q: So how did you handle them?

A: And I enjoyed teaching them. It was a challenge to get everybody's attention. And, of course, sometimes you had to ignore one side of the room, because you wanted the attention of some particular children. But I did quite well with that group.

Q: Did you really want to become a teacher?

A: It seemed the right thing to want to do in that day and age, and then they, in New York, they didn't give the teaching exam, so it was a closed field for the group that graduated with me and a few years after.

Q: Why weren't they giving the exam then?

A: 'Cause they were overcrowded. Jobs weren't plentiful. That was for sure.

Q: You are right in saying in those days being a teacher was considered the thing to do.

How do you feel about nowadays where young women have so many more options?

A: I still think the need for teachers is very great today, and I don't think the emphasis is put so much on teaching as self-learning. It seems to me that many teachers just hand out lessons, and the children have to go ahead and do it for themselves, which is all right with English or read the next twelve chapters or something in a book. Then we can come in and discuss it, but I find that from where I sit, now I may be wrong, but they don't teach as they did years ago in math, for instance, in geometry, algebra. You have to know your fundamentals. I mean, if you don't have a basic knowledge, you can do all the examples that you find, but you don't know what you're doing. And you can't come up with the right answers.

Q: When I asked you before about your first grandchildren, I really made a mistake. Ben and Hannah are not your first grandchildren, because you had Eli.

A: Right.

Q: Yes. So when was Eli born?

A: He was, well, he's thirty-two, and he was born in December, so...

Q: In about '71?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did he look like when he was born?

A: He was cute. He was a very pretty, he was a pretty baby, and he still has very, very nice features.

Q: Whose personality does he have, besides his own?

A: He is definitely a combination of Irv and Kathy. I remember when he went to school at the Jewish Day School, and a friend of mine came along with me to see a play there,

and this was in the lower grades. And it was a play with the children all walking through and doing their part. And if you're a parent or a grandparent, you *kvell* a little bit. But it was just a child's play, and then Eli came on. And it was like a professional actor. It was amazing. He didn't fit in, [Laughter] because he was the play itself. He was absolutely out of his class. It was just wonderful.

Q: Did he continue with acting?

A: Whenever he did, he was great, but then he stopped, and I haven't seen him do anything like that since.

Q: What are his other talents?

A: He has natural musical ability, or he did have. In fact, he used to play many instruments. He could play by ear, had a perfect pitch. When he was being sponsored or taught at school with this Norma, who now has passed away, but she thought he was a genius. She never had a child like that, and whenever they had a group playing, and they had an instrument around, Eli never saw the instrument before. She said, "Gee, Eli, here take this." And she thought he was wonderful. And he was. And he did nothing with it, [Laughter] I mean, except to go to concerts and be in the audience.

Q: Also, for the record, could you please spell Irv's full name, Irvin Allen.

A: I-r-v-i-n, Allen A-l-l-e-n, Losman L-o-s-m-a-n.

Q: And Bruce Jack?

A: B-r-u-c-e, Jack J-a-c-k, Losman L-o-s-m-a-n. His Hebrew name is Baruch.

Q: Also, in discussing previous parts of the tape, you said that you would give us more information about Ohr Kodesh, and that will come at a later date.

A: Right.

Q: What was the name of Ohr Kodesh originally?

A: MCJC, Montgomery County Jewish Community.

Q: Not Center?

A: Oh, Jewish Center, I'm sorry.

Q: All right, and so we'll now add the list of the founders.

A: Right. Here is the list of the founders of what became Ohr Kodesh: Pete and I, Jack and Shirley Serber, Clarence and Ruth Berman, Sam and Mary Brecher, Samuel and Mindell Bricken, Solomon and Ruth Colker, Morris and Madeline Davidson, Joe and Claire Dratch, Meyer and Evelyn Freyman, Zoltan and Lily Hoffmann, Sam and Helen Kalb, Stanley and Helen Kamerow, Ben and Bertha Kirsch, Zoe Lefkowitz, Moe and Cissie Lerner, Herman and Jeannette Lewis, Marvin and Muriel Marcus, Saul and Bertha Mindel, Harry and Rose Penn, Allen and Priscilla Rice, Herbert and Evelyn Sacks, Samuel and Ruth Salzberg, and Charles and Dorothy Zipperman.

Q: All right, we are now after Pete's death in 1982, and you are continuing to work at Tiara. When did you decide that it was time to move the location of Tiara?

A: Well, by then, Irv really was in charge, and that was seven years ago.

Q: Seven years ago you moved?

A: Yeah.

Q: So in 1995?

A: Gee, yes, it must be.

Q: How was the decision made to move it to Congressional Plaza?

A: We had been looking around for some property that would be suitable, a free standing property, and it was really very difficult to find.

Q: Because it didn't exist, or it was too expensive?

A: There was only one place, and that was very, very expensive. And it would have required a tremendous amount of remodeling. So this came up, and Irv picked that.

Q: Has it been a good decision?

A: I think so, yes. He's a very good merchant.

Q: What makes him so good?

A: He is aware of everything, all changes. There has been a tremendous amount of change in retailing, in the industry all told, the computer age. And the manufacturer and the retailer are not on the same level as they used to be. The manufacturer did everything for the retailer. Now the retailer takes orders.

Q: What's an example of that?

A: Many manufacturers have opened their own retail stores in areas where their retailers exist. Some call it a museum. Some call it a showplace, but they do sell, and it makes a little bit more difficult having that kind of competition.

Q: Why did you think it was time to leave Wheaton Plaza?

A: The change in the area, and the management wasn't what it was originally.

Q: How did it feel upon leaving that store?

A: Good. [Laughter]

Q: Because you were looking forward to the next chapter?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Just to clarify the record, the actual name of the first store was...?

A: Tiara Gifts.

Q: And the name of the new store?

A: Tiara Galleries and Gifts, trading as Tiara Gifts, or is it the other way around? Tiara Gifts, trading as Tiara Galleries and Gifts, but we're incorporated as Tiara Gifts.

Q: There was much more square footage in the new store.

A: Oh, much.

Q: So how did you adjust to that?

A: Well, we have much more merchandize, many more not only items but different manufacturing the different, huh, what do you call it? We have galleries, and the displays are very much better. See, originally, we had cards in Wheaton Plaza along the window sections, so that people wouldn't be afraid to come in. You could always come in and browse.

Q: Do you have something to draw people into the new store?

A: Yes, the displays are very, very much more interesting and exciting.

Q: The windows are beautiful.

A: Yes.

Q: Now do you have a brand new clientele or part of your old clientele?

A: Yes, we have some of the old people, the older clientele, but, of course, so many of them have moved away, have retired, and passed on. We draw from a larger area than Wheaton.

Q: So it was a good move?

A: Yes.

Q: What do you do in the store now, you personally?

A: Just books, just the books.

Q: Are people happy to see that you are still there?

A: There aren't too many that I see. Of course, I'm in the back, and every once in a while, somebody does come in and ask, and they're shown to the back. [Laughter]

Q: Do you work part-time now?

A: Oh, five, six days a week.

Q: Which is more than fulltime for most people.

A: Well, what else would I do?

Q: Do you see yourself retiring?

A: No.

Q: That was emphatic.

A: [Laughter] No.

Q: What do you still enjoy about going into the store?

A: Being active, being a little more active than I would otherwise be, 'cause I am handicapped in that I don't drive anymore. I don't get around as well as I should or don't get around as well as I want to, so it gives you a purpose.

Q: What else keeps you busy during this time of your life?

A: Oh, reading, complaining. [Laughter]

Q: About what do you complain?

A: The universe. I don't know if it's the media or what, but it doesn't seem that people care about people in this world today. Maybe it's because the media picks up this shooting and that shooting, and people all have guns. I'll make a political comment on [Laughter] not being a gun person. And there're a lot of things people don't seem to pay attention to. I don't think we're gaining in wisdom.

Q: How can that be changed?

A: That's a good question. [Laughter] That's a good question. [Laughter] How can it be changed? The world today with the bombings and what's going on everywhere today, we're afraid to live in a high building. We're told to watch out for high buildings. We're told to watch the mail, so that you don't become infested with anthrax. And we don't know what else is coming.

Q: After Pete died, how much longer did you live in the Parkside Plaza Apartments?

A: Oh, about four or five years.

Q: And then where did you move?

A: We built on here. I moved here.

Q: And this is Northline Court.

A: Northline Court. I'm sorry. Yes.

Q: How was that decision reached?

A: Irv and Kate asked me to or told me to. [Laughter]

Q: Well, which one was it?

A: Well, after all, it's nice to be invited. They said it. [Laughter]

Q: Did you have a hand in the architecture of the addition?

A: A friend of Irv's, somebody that we've known almost all our lives, I mean they were friends thirteen on, is a very fine architect.

Q: Who is that?

A: Alan Mushinsky. He's done a lot of things in the area. And he measured my furniture and then did these two rooms from that.

Q: How does it feel to live with family?

A: Well, this is wonderful, because you have your privacy, and yet you have the family.

You're part of the family. So you close the door, and you're completely private, and you open the door and come and are part of everything. It's been lovely being with the grandchildren.

Q: From the time you moved here to Northline Court, did you do any more traveling?

A: Not very much, but we did go to Israel twice. Of course, Pete and I used to go once a year.

Q: So when you say we, with whom did you go these times?

A: Irv and Kate. Let's see, one time it was just Irv and Kate, because she was pregnant with Ben, and then the next time, it was the whole family, Irv, Kate, Ben, Hannah. And Eli was there for a while.

Q: Is there any other place you would like to travel to?

A: Yes, there are a lot of places. I'd like to go back to London. I'd like to go back to Paris, to Spain, Italy. I'd like to go, [Laughter] but I don't think I'll make it this life.

Q: How has your health been?

A: Oh, I'm not the one to ask, 'cause I always, I had been fortunate in having good health up to, oh, to my sixties or early seventies. And I'm deteriorating, I suppose.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: Older. [Laughter]

Q: And yet you have quite a busy social life.

A: I really don't have many friends that I socialize with. Shirley Serber is a very, very dear friend of mine, and I do see her usually twice a week. My other friends were all older. Pete and I were "the kids," as they'd call us. So you know they are not with us any more. Then not driving you sort of drop your friends, too, you know. I like Kehila.

The Services are so very vital and exhilarating at times, and the people that I have met there have been very interesting. And, of course, Diane and David are very dear friends and lovely, lovely people, to be admired. So are Rosana and her husband and Sue Zemsky. It's just a very nice group of people.

Q: So you have really always been part of a community no matter where you've been.

A: Right, yes.

Q: What are your future plans?

A: Just staying well, well enough to enjoy Ben's graduation from high school, and Hannah's graduation from high school in some years, in three more years, and Ben's college, and their future lives, being part of their future lives. And that will be enough.

Q: What has the impact of religion meant in your life?

A: I think I've just taken religion as a moral thing and enjoyed the holidays. I think had I come to Kehila earlier in my life, I would have been closer to things.

Q: This is Tape 5, Side B. You were talking about the impact of religion on your life.

A: Yeah.

Q: That you had gone to Hebrew School, but it wasn't as meaningful to you as what you've learned at Kehila.

A: Right.

Q: What has the word "family" meant to you in your life?

A: Family, I think, is very, very important, probably the most important thing in life and the center of everything. That's about it.

Q: What has this process of recording your life story meant to you?

A: I don't think anybody, well, the children might be interested. I really am doing this

because of them.

Q: What advice do you have for your family?

A: To keep in touch with the family unit itself. Never let anything break up the family, whether it's the children or the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren after that, but that is the most important thing in life and the only thing that really makes life worthwhile.

Q: To keep in touch with each other?

A: Right.

Q: How do you want to be remembered?

A: As the *bubbe* who really cared. [Laughter]

Q: And about what do you really care?

A: All in one sentence?

Q: As many sentences as you like.

A: [Laughter] What do I care about? Honesty, morals, human dignity, human relationships, and a whole lot of luck.

Q: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

A: No.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Well, thank you. Thank you. You're so patient.

Q: It's been my pleasure.