



Sarah Kappelman Harris Transcript

Jean Freedman: This is an interview with Sarah Kappelman Harris. It's May 24, 2002. I'm Jean Freedman, recording this for the Jewish Women's Archive, Weaving Women's Words project. We're in Baltimore, Maryland. Well, I always start out my interviews the same way, and that's by asking the person I'm interviewing to tell me their full name and when and where they were born.

Sarah Kappelman Harris: My name is Sarah Kappelman Harris. I was born in Washington, DC, July 3, 1910.

JF: Can you tell me a bit about your family and where you grew up?

SH: My mother and father both were foreign-born, but they came to this country and soon became, I would say, Americanized in business, moved to Baltimore, and lived in Baltimore then the rest of my life. I came here when I was just a year old.

JF: Just a year old. Where did your family move to?

SH: We moved to Baltimore. My father had a grocery business on Saratoga Street, West Saratoga Street in West Baltimore, very close to the home of Edgar Allan Poe, interestingly enough.

JF: Oh, my word. [laughter]

SH: He then eventually owned that home, too.

JF: Really?

SH: Yes, he owned that house, which was finally bought by the city.



JR: Interesting.

SH: I was raised there until I was nine or ten years old, and then we moved up further to – as most of the Jewish people did – up and to – I wouldn't call it Forest Park. It was Callow Avenue. Are you familiar?

JF: A bit, yes. More now than I was.

SH: And I lived there, on the 2300 block of Callow Avenue, until I married from there.

JF: Can you tell me a bit about –? Do you remember the neighborhood you lived in until you were 9? The neighborhood you lived in when you were very small?

SH: On Saratoga Street?

JF: Yes.

SH: It was a neighborhood of mostly Black people, some white. In fact, the Hoffbergers had a business there too. I was able to walk to the Enoch Pratt Free Library from my house every Saturday afternoon. It is in the same place now as it was then. I'd walk every afternoon and get a book or a couple of books and bring it back. There was no worry about danger at that time. Other than that, I went to School 95, and every afternoon I had to go to Hebrew school, which was right across the street.

JF: Was that at a synagogue?

SH: That was a Talmud Torah.

JF: Talmud Torah.



SH: The principal, I remember, was Mr. (Tarshis?).

JF: What do you remember of Hebrew school? Do you have any memories of Hebrew school?

SH: I beg your pardon?

JF: Can you tell me any memories of Hebrew school?

SH: Hebrew school. Not too many. Joe Weinstein, who ultimately did a lot of work in this area, was also one of the teachers there and some of my friends that I later grew up with also went to Hebrew school there. It seemed to be we went four or five days a week. I can't recall exactly. That is where we learned some Hebrew. Then I also learned Hebrew when my brothers – I had two brothers younger than I – two step-brothers older, but I'm talking about the younger ones – were learning for their bar mitzvah. I sat with them so I learned a lot of Hebrew. We had what we called a melamed at that time. A melamed, he was a gentleman who came from Europe and he really needed to make a living. My father brought him in as a teacher in our house. So when I think of how we were taught Hebrew, we simply went through the Chumash over and over again.

JF: So, was it learning by rote or did you learn what it meant?

SH: Yes, we just learned the Hebrew and actually he did not know enough English, so much of it was translated into Yiddish. So, even today, when I try to read some Hebrew, in my mind I have to make a mental gymnastic and go from Yiddish to English because it still has stuck – [inaudible].

JF: Is that what your family spoke at home? Did you speak Yiddish at home?



SH: Very little. They tried to speak English and most of it was pretty good but we had some older people [who] came from Europe and stayed with us and my older aunt said, “I will teach you Yiddish if you will teach me English,” so we learned a lot that way, and I was able to pick up some Yiddish. Much later in life when I needed to speak for the Associated, I had to speak it some places where they only knew Yiddish, and I had to do the best I could with the Yiddish, a little speech about the Associated. [laughter]

JF: That's great. Wow.

SH: I mean that sort of carried over.

JF: That's great.

SH: And then, later on, I went to – Baltimore Hebrew College had a place on Park Avenue. I can't remember the exact street. When Dr. Lou Kaplan came to Baltimore and became the principal of the Baltimore Hebrew College. I took some courses with him. So I have a smattering of Hebrew. Not really a Hebraist but I can translate some.

JF: That's great.

SH: I can also translate the daily service or the Shabbas service, and so on.

JF: That's great.

SH: My father, if you want – my father belonged to a small synagogue, Orthodox. Trying to remember the name of the street, Druid Hill Avenue, I'm not sure of the street, and that was where we went on the High Holidays, was a small synagogue.

JF: What was the name of it?

SH: I can't really remember. My father was a Chasid, would you know what a Chasid is?

JF: Yes, yes.



SH: And so when the Rebbe came from the old country, Rebbe was the head of the Chasidim, and my father had to go to a meeting, he oft times took me, I don't know why he took me rather than the boys, and so I had a bit of experience where the Rebbe had to walk down the aisle and they grabbed me and put me on the other side because the Rebbe must not walk between two women, and at five years old I was still considered a woman.

JF: Really? Even at five. Wow.

SH: So that stuck with my mind forever.

JF: That's amazing.

SH: Because that was so long ago. Eighty-five years ago or more.

JF: What a memory. Wow. So you were raised in a Chasidic family.

SH: Well yes, and Orthodox and kosher and Sabbath observance. That's the way it went.

JF: You say your father had a store.

SH: He had a grocery store.

JF: A grocery store?

SH: My father was very clever in some ways and when my brother was born, he put a sign out that said – my maiden name is Fox – he put a sign out and said, “Come in and see the live Fox.”

JR: [laughter] That's great.



SH: My father was very clever. My father was an organization man, my mother was not. My mother was more of a retiring, dignified woman, wife, housewife.

JF: Would you say, were you close to your parents?

SH: Very close to my parents. My father, especially because I was an only daughter between four boys. I had two older step-brothers. My father had been a widower when he married my mother. And my two younger brothers. I was the only girl, and my father – they used to say I was spoiled but I don't know about that. However, we were very close, yes.

JF: And how about to your mother, were you close to her as well?

SH: Yes, although my mother and I disagreed often because she was a very dominant woman. But we were very close to the end. My mother was with me before she died. She was here for five years in my own home.

JF: That's nice.

SH: Yes.

JF: Now you say you have four brothers. Did you feel that there was a difference in the way you were treated from the boys or was it pretty much the same?

SH: It was not an issue. It was not an issue. One brother became a lawyer – my youngest brother. The next brother liked business so he did not have too much of an academic – did not go through college. My two older brothers, because they were older, they went in business together. They were very successful in the business together. They started the whole Austin peanut butter cracker sandwiches. They started that kind of a business which was probably one of the first in the country, and they were very successful in that. So later on my father became a founder of Beth Tfiloh, which is



Orthodox. Well, Beth Tfiloh is considered Conservative-Orthodox here. I don't know how well you know the categories here.

JF: A bit. The more you could explain, the clearer it will be. So Beth Tfiloh is not Chasidic or is Chasidic?

SH: No, I would say Chasidism is not an issue anymore. It is one of the side things that people liked or were part of and still are a part of but at present, when I married and my children had to go to school, we moved up here. My children started Hebrew school at Beth EI and so we joined Beth EI. But that's where we are now. Incidentally, my second husband was a founder of Beth EI, so it all worked out real well.

JF: I see. Well, let me go back just a bit. Can you tell me about the neighborhood?

SH: My education?

JF: Yes. And you say you moved when you were 9.

SH: Moved to Callow Avenue.

JF: To Callow. Did your father move his business there?

SH: No. Kept the business until he sold it because by that time he had accumulated some real estate and he ultimately went into the real estate business and that was his business always after that.

JF: So can you tell me about the move to Callow Avenue and the neighborhood there.?

SH: The neighborhood at Callow Avenue was a wonderful neighborhood, and we still know people who came from that neighborhood and lived in that neighborhood, and it was a very good neighborhood. Solid. Jewish. What shall I tell you? I went to School 61, which was right close by until I went to Western High School. Now before Western



High School, I went to 49. Do you know 49?

JF: Yes, my parents both went there.

SH: They did? Interesting. So I went to 49. My brother went to 49 also. And so from 49, I went to Western High which at that time was on Druid Hill Avenue.

JF: Druid Hill Avenue, okay. Can you tell me about school? What were those schools like?

SH: What was the school like? Which one? You talking about 49?

JF: 49 or Western.

SH: 49 yes. I had a Latin teacher. She was really tough. But ultimately I became a Latin major. I was a language major and I taught Latin for a while when I got out of college.

JF: Was it this teacher that made Latin so interesting? What was it?

SH: No. I don't know. I like it because Latin has a certain logic to it, and I like things that can follow a pattern or have a reason and you can find out the answer by going through the steps so Latin became that kind of a thing to me and has been a help, it seems to me all my life, that I have to figure – things have to follow a pattern. They have to subtotal equal. Not that I don't have anything to do with math. I also took French and Spanish and a little bit of Greek but it's so long ago I wouldn't want to have to be tested.

JF: You took Greek in public schools?

SH: Goucher.

JF: Oh at Goucher, I see. Do you remember any of the other teachers you had or any friends that you made in school?



SH: At Western High, yes. We made friends that were lifetime friends because I became the president of the class of '26. It was the class of '26, 1926.

JF: And you were class president?

SH: I became class president and every reunion, the whole committee used to meet at my house. I was already living here, if not here I was living on Duvall Avenue, and until one or two of them still stayed with me at Goucher. When we recently had a long reunion, a few of them were still part of the Western High group.

JF: Wow. Was it unusual for a girl to be class president in those days?

SH: Well it was a girls' school.

JF: Oh, of course, what am I thinking? [laughter] Silly me. So you graduated in '26

SH: Western High.

JF: Graduated Western in '26. And then went to Goucher?

SH: Yes, but there was a question about whether I should go to Goucher or go to the Maryland Institute because I had been – during the summer, I had an aptitude for art and wanted to be a fashion designer. So, I was doing some of that and I thought maybe I will do that as a career. So I go onto the Maryland Institute. But I had two aunts who used to feel like they almost owned me, so they had a meeting with my mother and father. They said, "No, she better go to Goucher now because she can always go back to the Maryland Institute later. But if she goes to Maryland Institute, she'll never go back to Goucher later." So that's the way they figured that one out. I was a very dutiful daughter, and I went to Goucher.

JF: Did you like it?



SH: Yes, but I always complain that Goucher really did not prepare you to go out to make a living if you had to make a living. And I needed to at that time. So I had to teach or else. I taught for a while and I didn't like the Caesar class they gave me to teach. It was Julius Caesar. All the wars about – I went back and – I'm jumping ahead because my father paid for my first year at Goucher and then he lost all of his business. It was during the Depression. So I had to go to work in order to make the rest of the tuition if I wanted to continue through school. So at that time, the May Company had just come to Baltimore – and your parents probably would know this if your parents are Baltimoreans. They bought out Bernheimer Leader, and they were very anxious to get college girls to come in to work any time they wanted to. So this friend of mine also needed to make her tuition. She and I went to work at the May Company, and they let us work any afternoon we wanted – any holidays, any Saturdays, and any time we wanted. We made enough money for tuition.

JF: That's great.

SH: So later on, when I didn't want to teach, I got sort of, I don't know, tired of teaching. I taught for a while. The May Company offered me a job and I went back to the May Company as an assistant buyer, then as a buyer, and I was in charge of the Bureau of Adjustment, where I had all the complaints. I did all of that. I was very young. I graduated. I was still nineteen. I was not twenty yet when I graduated Goucher. I had to make myself look older in order to have this job so I got a pair of pincher eyeglasses – I don't know, but they used to have pinchers [inaudible] and put my hair up in a big knot in the back of my head so that I would look older because all of the women that were working under me were all mature women and here I was only twenty years old by then.

JF: So, you started working for the May Company right out of Goucher?

SH: I beg your pardon?



JF: You started working for the May Company right out of Goucher?

SH: I taught Latin for a while and then I didn't like it and the salary was only twenty-five a week and the May Company offered me, I think, thirty dollars a week. I went to the May Company and liked it. It was a much more personable job. I enjoyed it more. During the time that I worked there, while I was still in school, they gave me some very pretty jobs. I became a hostess in a tearoom. The May Company had a beautiful tearoom on the eighth floor and people used to come from everywhere; they'd come and have lunch there, so they gave me their job as the hostess [of the] tearoom. I was a very pretty young girl, already about 18 then. I was in school. There was an elderly couple that used to – tell you this little anecdote. An elderly couple used to come in every day to eat lunch there and the lady of the couple complained that the hostess wore her skirt too short and her husband could not eat his lunch. So, I was called to the personnel and said, “You have to make your skirts a little bit longer.” Anyway, it was just a funny little anecdote.

JF: That is funny.

SH: But I had a lot of fun there. It was a fun job.

JF: It sounds like it.

SH: That was during the whole summer. The next summer, they gave me the job of demonstrating Val-kill furniture which was the furniture place owned by Mrs. Roosevelt. It was handmade furniture. Did you know it?

JF: Yes, I've heard of that.

SH: This was displayed out of Timonium, for the May Company displayed it out there. I had to go out every day on a streetcar and stand there and demonstrate and it was the first time that I had met Mrs. Roosevelt because later on in life, I had a very wonderful



experience with her.

JF: Really, can you tell me about that?

SH: Well, I thought you would know it because I've always been identified with Mrs. Roosevelt, with having had her as the first – I think it was the first time she came as a major speaker to Baltimore. She came for Hadassah when I was president of Hadassah.

JF: I see. Well, I definitely want to get that down on the tape.

SH: Yes. It was all over the newspaper. Also, Helen Keller. I still have – I'll tell you that about a year or two ago, Bernie Fishman from the Jewish Museum downtown came to my house, and he took two great big boxes of all my records, sat down on the floor, and took most of it home with him. He sat on my floor in my workroom. He took most of it with him down to the museum, and it was displayed on a wall, one time that they had a very big display. They had Eleanor Roosevelt up there, and my picture was under it, and so on. But I said the first time I ever met her was with the Val-Kill furniture and then so much later on in life, I met her in a different capacity where she had breakfast in my home. It was when I lived on Duvall Avenue before I came to live here. That was a whole section of my life.

JF: Well, we will definitely get to that. I definitely want to hear about that. Now were you still living at home when you were going to Goucher?

SH: Yes, I lived at home until I married.

JF: Until you got married.

SH: In those days, we did.

JF: Now, we sometimes get the impression that Chasidic families are very strict with girls and encourage them to marry –



SH: No, no. My father was never that kind of a Chasid, and we had no restrictions of that nature, so I wouldn't put too much emphasis on it.

JF: Well, that's good to know. You've corrected a misconception. So, can you tell me how you met your husband?

SH: Which husband?

JF: The first one.

SH: First husband. The first husband I met in a peculiar fashion. In those days, when we went to Goucher – in the '20s, girls smoked a lot. They just had started smoking. We had a special room at Goucher for smoking. You couldn't walk in there because the smoke was so thick. But all the girls were in there smoking. I went to Atlantic City with my aunt and her children, and I couldn't smoke on Shabbas because she was very strict – my aunt. So this friend of mine said, “Why don't you come down on my beach and you can smoke on Saturday.” I said, “Oh, I'll do that.” I wasn't that much of a smoker but the funny thing is that my husband was there with his mother, visiting his mother, and I was introduced to him. I said, “You know I've been here for a couple of weeks with my aunt. I'd like to go back to Baltimore.” He said, “I'm driving back tomorrow morning. I'll be glad to take you.” So, I thought oh, that's nice. He's a nice good-looking fellow, and I met his mother too. I forgot all about the smoking bit, but that was how – and he took me back to Baltimore. I'd been going with another young man, but he said, “If nobody knows you're back in Baltimore yet, how about going with me this evening? I have to go collect rent or something for my mother, and we'll have a cup of Coca-Cola or whatever.” So, that's how it started going. I was also going with another fellow. Anyway, that's how we first met and he was a very nice young man. He was a pharmacist.

JF: What's his name? Let me get his name.



SH: LeRoy F. Kappelman. That's why I still maintain that name as Sarah Kappelman Harris. For a long time, I was Sarah Fox Kappelman.

JF: So, how old were you when you met him?

SH: I was already – I was graduated already from Goucher so I was about twenty-one or twenty-two.

JF: And you were working at the May Company?

SH: I was working at the May Company.

JF: So you met on the Jersey shore, he drove you back, and then what happened?

SH: What did you say?

JF: You met. He drove you back to Baltimore.

SH: Oh yes. Well, then we started going out. I had to go back to Atlantic City. I was staying with my aunt for a couple of weeks because at that time I had the job at the May Company that was the complaint department, and it was very taxing and stressful, so I needed a couple of weeks that I was in Atlantic City with my aunt. Then, when I came back, I went into a different department of the May Company; I was an assistant buyer, then a buyer. During that period, I also became active in Hadassah.

JF: . Tell me about that.

SH: When I try to think how did I get to Hadassah –? Because Hadassah really was like the framework of my life almost. All the other things I did, I still had that in the background, and Hadassah has always been my thing. When I was a child – when I was still living on Saratoga Street and we went to Hebrew school, there was a girl there named Friedberg. Her sister was an advisor to little girls that had a little Adaas B'nai



Israel. I became secretary or something of that right away, too. From that, I would say that I went into Junior Hadassah as I got older. Went into Junior Hadassah, and I became a president of Junior Hadassah. I was always the [president]. I don't know why. Because of my size, I think.

JF: I don't think so. [laughter]

SH: And I became president of Junior Hadassah, which was very active in Baltimore at that time. It's no longer active now but were you ever—

JF: I've never been a member of Hadassah, no.

SH: You're not a member of Hadassah? Ooh.

JF: Oh, I'm terrible. What was it that made you —?

SH: Junior Hadassah. Yes. Well, Junior Hadassah raised money for a children's home over in Israel. That was three thousand miles away from me, and it seemed so remarkable that we were able to effect so much good for those people over there that needed it because the whole history of Hadassah is they went over there when there was disease all around, and nobody knew anything about health. There was no food or nutrition or anything of that nature, and Hadassah started all of that in Israel. There were leaders who said if not for Hadassah, the State of Israel might not have been able to have been created at the time it was because they laid the groundwork for the health of the people. So, I gave it to you in one capsule.

JF: No, that's very nice.

SH: I was very active in Junior Hadassah, which is so many years ago. Sunday night we were at a dinner and a woman came over to me that I had not seen since Junior Hadassah, which is seventy-some years, walked over to me and she said, “Were you not



president of Junior Hadassah?” I said, “Yes, I was.” “We used to meet at the Southern Hotel?” “Yes, I was.” She told me her name. I said, “How did you know me?” She said, “You look just the same.” [laughter]

JF: I believe it. I believe it, looking at you. So what did being president involve? What did being president involve? What did you do as president?

SH: Oh, I had a lot of officers. I had a lot of people. I had meetings all the time. We raised money. You had to raise money. You had to raise a donor by your own work, doing – you couldn't just ask your mother for five dollars. So, what was I going to do? I said I would give them manicures at fifty cents for each manicure, and I would raise enough money to give five dollars to Hadassah. It took a whole evening for me to do one manicure [for] fifty cents. My father said, “You'd better learn something else to make a living. You won't be able to be a manicurist.” We raised money and we sent it through New York to Israel but we did such a good job that I was called to national Hadassah to find out what is going on in Baltimore with Junior Hadassah; they're doing so well. While I was in New York, at the time – maybe this might not strike you – I bumped into a little lady. Her name later I learned was Henrietta Szold.

JF: Oh my word.

SH: I shook hands with Henrietta Szold. When I tell people today that I shook hands with Henrietta Szold – I did not know then that she would become a world leader and the woman that she was and raise Hadassah to the level it is today. But that was when I was president of Junior Hadassah. And then when we got a little older, they said, “Well you're too old to stay in Junior Hadassah. You have to go.” So they started a business and professional group, and I was part of that. By that time I got married, moved to Washington, and lived in Washington for five years. My husband had a drugstore in Washington. My eldest daughter was born in Washington. She and I are native Washingtonians. My oldest daughter and I – can you follow that?



JF: Yes. My daughter is a native Washingtonian too.

SH: Oh, really? I was born on First and L Southeast, which is no longer there but my father used to run that into my head, First and L, right opposite the White House. The Capitol. While I was in Washington, I was invited to join the board in Washington and so on, but I couldn't. I lost a child in Washington, so I didn't want to stay there any longer. I had a bad experience, and my husband got rid of the drugstore and came back to Baltimore. He no longer bought another drugstore, but he went into the real estate business with my brother and my father and so that became his occupation and his career afterward. He no longer went back to the pharmacy.

JF: And so you remained active in Hadassah all this time.

SH: When I came back to Baltimore, I had just one child then. I had lost my other little girl. It was another little girl. So, I was invited by Anne Adler, this person who later became one of my mentors, to join her group and so on, and little by little I became president of that group and ultimately I became president of the chapter.

JF: That must have involved a lot of responsibility.

SH: Yes, it did. Because the Baltimore chapter, which had at that time eight thousand members – today we're down to about five or six, whatever – and it's part of 300,000 in the country. We still raised a lot of money here in Baltimore. I mixed up a lot of things because my life has been mixed up like that.

JF: That's okay. I'm enjoying hearing about your work in Hadassah. You were president of the Baltimore chapter.

SH: First I was president of a group, and then I became an officer of the chapter, and I became ultimately president of the chapter in 1958. In '59, they gave me those candelabra which need cleaning way over there.



JF: That's lovely, lovely.

SH: They need cleaning.

JF: What did that involve? I mean, being president of a chapter is a big job.

SH: Very big job.

JF: What did you have to do?

SH: Well, first place, you had to be an organization person to organize this whole chapter because the chapter, by that time, had been divided into groups. Each group was almost autonomous. They had their own little president and officers but you had the top level and you had to have chapter board meetings and chapter executive meetings, and you had to be concerned with the raising of funds. You had to be concerned with the education, which was a very big factor – education of what Hadassah is doing for Israel and education Jewish-wise. We also taught Hebrew, the language, so it was a very all-consuming job for a president. I felt it very keenly, very seriously, and during the whole period that I was president for a couple of years I never went on vacation or anything, I took it very seriously. Today it is far different because they have lots more staff. They have staff.

JF: And you were doing this as a volunteer.

SH: It was just me and one secretary.

JF: Was this a paid position?

SH: No.

JF: This was volunteer. Oh, my word. That's a full-time job, though, really.



SH: Yes, I know. But if you were really dedicated, that was your reward. And that's the way it was. And so then, during that period too, I did Associated work. You know the Associated?

JF: Yes.

SH: I also, it was – now I cannot draw a line and say when I did one or the other. They seemed to go together. I did the Associated work, and I was on the speaker's committee. I went around for the Associated speaking, and I was pregnant.

JF: No, no. I just wanted to make it clear to whoever will listen to this recording that the Associated is the Associated Jewish Charities.

SH: Associated Jewish Charities and Federation. Is that what it's called today? And that is all the Jewish charities in Baltimore under one heading. I was on the speaker's bureau and that was when I said oftentimes had to speak in Yiddish because I was invited to a Sisterhood or a ladies' auxiliary to speak for the Associated. When I came in, they couldn't understand English. I had to transfix myself into Yiddish language. I did the best I could. I was pregnant then with my third daughter. It was my fourth pregnancy. I had lost a child. But my third daughter, Carol – when I went, I was already seven or eight months pregnant. I went around speaking, and it didn't matter what I said because they said any woman who will come in that condition, it must be a worthy cause.

JF: What did you speak on when you went around?

SH: I spoke on what the Associated was doing and why it was necessary for every Jewish person to donate to the Associated, to give, to give part of whatever they could. Because all of this now was going toward the needy people in this community and some of it even was going overseas, the needy overseas, and that's where the money went. Of course, I had to enlarge upon it and make it a whole speech and tell some case histories and so forth, case stories and so forth. Now along with that, now comes the time I'm



already finished with my presidency of Hadassah but I am still working in Hadassah when I was invited by (Amalie Katz?) to come to a HIAS meeting. She said, “Sarah, I'd like to you to come to this HIAS board meeting. Would you come with me?”

JF: When was this? Approximately?

SH: So hard to pinpoint exactly. I went with her to the HIAS board meeting. I became hooked. They needed somebody tomorrow morning to go to the airport to pick up some of the people coming in from Czechoslovakia. They didn't have anybody to go. I said, “I will go.”

JF: So, to physically go to the airport and pick them up. Just go to the airport.

SH: Physically. I would say was the most rewarding work I did besides Hadassah was the work I did for HIAS. For years and years, I was the airport girl.

JF: Well, I want to hear more about that. I just want to again make clear for the recording that HIAS is the –

SH: HIAS is the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. It is one of the largest immigration organizations – I was going to say in the world because it was able to take in so many people into this country from Russia, from wherever they were persecuted, in foreign places. As a matter of fact, we were even paid by the government to bring in some Vietnamese. I remember going out to pick up a couple Vietnamese. We brought them to a certain place where there were other Vietnamese. But we got paid a hundred dollars a head by the Vietnamese. The government got paid, not me. But to go out to the airport to pick up somebody who has come from a different world, from a different culture, from a different land, now you have brought them into freedom where they can be free. There is a certain something that you cannot match with how you feel when they kiss your hand and they bow down. The first few people that I brought in, I never forgot. It was a woman with a couple children. Her husband had been a jeweler in Czechoslovakia, I



guess it was. They put him in jail because they thought all his jewels were stolen or whatever. And finally, they got out through HIAS. HIAS was able to bring them here, but they brought them to this country. They had to take them to Denver because they thought maybe he would have some kind of disease or something so they had to clear all of that. So they brought her here and with these two little children. And I saw all the suitcases, I said I was going to get a porter to pick them up, the little children wouldn't let anybody touch the suitcases. They were in such fear, always lived in such fear. When you have brought them into this country, and you make them realize they are free now, nothing matches it. So, I had that experience for weeks and months, and then I gave up other things and just did that. That's Inge Weinberger – I worked with her.

JF: A wonderful lady.

SH: At that time, I think when I first started working there, Inge was already head of the HIAS, I think. Then, later we got somebody else, but I worked with Inge for quite a while, so I know her very well. I saw her the other night again. She's doing wonderfully. She's great.

JF: Do you have any other stories about your work –?

SH: Lots of stories. I have lots of stories. Oftentimes you did not know if they had money or not when you went to pick them up. So I always had some food in my freezer, and when I brought them in, and if it was especially toward the weekend, and I put them into an apartment, I would go back home and go to my freezer and take a chicken out or something and then bring it to them – a challah – bring it to them. And we brought one couple with children – as I say, you never know, really. This couple, on their way over, stopped in France, in Paris. They were there for a while. So that when I brought her a challah and some chicken, she wouldn't take it at all. She wanted me to take her to the grocery store to buy some things, and she bought the most fantastic things – turtles, turtle soup, and things like that. You did not know always whether you were on the right



track with them or not. You had to play it by ear. I would say that ninety-nine percent were not like that. So, I brought in whole families. I brought in one family where there was a young man and his girlfriend. He wanted to get married with her, but they're not married yet, so the grandmother said, "You can't live in the same apartment." So, we had to get them two apartments. And then they didn't like me for that because I did that. About a week later I saw them in a grocery store, and they were so mad at me because I didn't put those two in the right apartment. So, I had many such little personality things that happened. But you're dealing with people from another land, from another country, and you have to understand that. They don't understand you, and they don't understand the American way.

JF: What language would you use with these people?

SH: The language of laughing and crying and hugging and kissing is the same in every language. That's the only way I could explain it. I hug and kiss them all. Sometimes, there was a grandmother that knew a little Yiddish, then I was all right. But very often, the younger people knew no Yiddish at all. Some of them on the way over would be able to go, there was a camp at the end of – trying to remember where it was – where they let them stay for two weeks and learn a little bit of English so that they'd know how to say hello, goodbye, how are you, something like that nature. But probably the most wonderful experiences of my life were at HIAS. Later on in life – I never wanted to be president of HIAS; I just worked at HIAS. But later on, they came to me and begged me to be president for a reason. There was a special reason. I never expected to be, I didn't want to be, I had enough presidency. But this young girl was to become president, and her husband died, and she couldn't take it at that time. But if I would take it for a year or two and hold it for her, she wanted it, and I did exactly that. So, I became president. I was already in my seventies; they didn't know it.

JF: I believe that. I'm sure you looked about forty-five. [laughter]



SH: No, no. I have pictures taken then when I was installed as president, and my children, my grandchildren came.

JF: So what did you do as president? What did that involve?

SH: HIAS? Well, you were never president, I presume, because a president just has to be a head, just like a CEO. A president has to be the head of the organization and has to call the shots and be able to organize it and do the project and know the goals of your organization and be able to carry them out. That's the important thing – and to get the right people to do it for you. You don't do it all yourself. So, I enjoyed that too – president of HIAS. I was president of HIAS a couple of years. And Inge was still there. Then I became another president, too. Later on, I became president of the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations of Maryland.

JF: So, that includes Hadassah and other organizations?

SH: Include Hadassah. And that was a revelation because I then learned about many Jewish – we had, at that time, seventy-five Jewish women's organizations. I learned the wonderful things that these other organizations do. I had been wrapped up in Hadassah all these years and did not know what else was going on until I became president of the Federation of Jewish Women. I've got a picture here of all the presidents of the Jewish – somewhere around here. Here. This was at the annual convention. See me at the end? That's some of the presidents that were present there.

JF: You mentioned there were lots of different Jewish women's organizations in Maryland. What sorts of things did they do?

SH: They worked for cancer. They worked for sisterhoods. Many sisterhoods. The cancer organizations. And tuberculosis. They did all kinds of different projects, and they did marvelously and raised a lot of money that went toward wonderful causes. But I said I didn't learn it until I really became so involved with the Federation. You might know



some of these – Shoshana Cardin is at the end of there.

JF: Yes.

SH: There, I followed her in office, but here I am.

JF: So, again, what did that involve? What did being president of this –?

SH: Of the Federation?

JF: Yes. What was involved?

SH: Well, you have conventions like this, and you get all of the organizations, the leaders together, and they get to know one another, what each one is doing, and sometimes they dovetail, they can help one another too. And very, very many of them – you've heard of Dorothy Friedman Caplan Guild? Did you ever hear of them?

JF: No.

SH: Mildred Mindell – You've heard of that? You never. Well, you're not a Baltimorean, really because these –

JF: But tell the recording machine about these people. Tell posterity about these people.

SH: These people? These people all did – Dorothy Friedman Caplan Guild – Dorothy Friedman Caplan died, and they formed a guild in her name. They are still living today, and they still do a lot of work. Mildred Mindell is one of the largest cancer organizations here, still doing a lot of work. Also, I was the organizer of the Arlene Rosenblum Wyman Guild. Have you heard of that?

JF: What is that?



SH: Arlene Rosenblum Wyman, a young girl, died of cancer, and at that time, I was president of the Federation. They begged me to come and organize them. And I did come, and they had to get fifteen people together, and they organized and started raising money for the relatives of cancer people who come in. They had so many young people working there; it was remarkable what they did and how much money they raised, how much money they gave to the cancer societies and so on of Baltimore, and they existed until last year, twenty-five years they were existing. They went out of existence because they have no more young people that want to be president, and they took the rest of their money, and they gave it to the cancer fund. But they did a marvelous – they used to call me their – what do you call it? I guess I was like their grandmother or something because every time they had a meeting, they would call on me. They did beautifully, they had hundreds of members and they did so many – they had dances. They did all kinds of fundraising things. That was part of my Federation, too.

JF: How long were you president of that?

SH: Three years.

JF: And so when did you stop being president of that, approximately?

SH: Hard to know the dates.

JF: Let me ask you some questions on other topics. I'd like to hear more about your personal life, about your husband and children. When we left off, you were just starting to date your first husband.

SH: My first husband.

JF: And so what happened?

SH: Well, you want to know the romantic part?



JF: Well, nothing personal but –

SH: Well, I was dating another young man too, and finally I decided to marry him. We have three daughters. Our three daughters are from the first marriage.

JF: When did you get married? What year?

SH: In '38.

JF: In '38.

SH: 1938. Married thirty-six years. My husband died very suddenly. Right in this – my husband built this house, and that's why I'm still here because he always said – well, he died in this house. Then my present husband I met at Beth El, and he was a founder of Beth El.

JF: So, you married him –?

SH: He had no children at all, so he took all my children. The first time that we had – we had all our holiday meals here. Believe it or not, we stretch this room all out to have twenty-five people in here and so on. I'm married now twenty-two years.

JF: Mazel tov.

SH: Thank you.

JF: So getting back to, after you – just trying to get the chronology.

SH: My children?

JF: Yes, after you married, you moved out of your parents' house, right?



SH: Oh, sure. I married and moved to Washington. I lived in Washington a few years. My eldest daughter was born there.

JF: Where in Washington did you live?

SH: Well, he had a drugstore on the corner of 5th and K Street.

JF: Okay. And you had been working –?

SH: It was a market on that side and a drugstore there.

JF: You had been working at the May Company here, right?

SH: Yes, but then I married, went to Washington. I helped him in the store for a while, then I had one child. Then I had another one that I had a bad experience with. I really didn't want to stay there any longer, so he got rid of the store and came back to Baltimore. We couldn't get an apartment, so we had to take a little house on Dolfield Avenue. Mr. Harris, you want to say hello to Miss Freedman?

[Recording paused.]

JF: So, you're going to tell me about when you were president of Hadassah.

SH: When I was president of Hadassah, I was very fortunate to be able to get as the main speaker at our donor luncheon, Eleanor Roosevelt, who at that time was a widow and considered one of the women of the world. As a matter of fact, I introduced her as the "First Lady of the world," and the Baltimore newspapers all picked that up, and that's the way she was called from then on. Fortunately, when she came in that morning, I took her to my home for breakfast. I have pictures of her in my house.

JF: Wonderful. What year was this?

SH: This was in 1960.



JF: 1960?

SH: No, this is '55.

JF: '55. So, tell me about having Eleanor Roosevelt over for breakfast.

SH: Eleanor Roosevelt had been to Israel, and she was willing to tell us what she saw there and how remarkable the work that we were doing. Here is [she] sitting in my living room, not in this house; it was Duvall Avenue. Here she is, and my mother is sitting with her. My husband at that time said that this is such an important occasion, let's bring the children home from school, so that they can meet her. We called up the school, and Miss Nichols was the principal there, and she said, "Eleanor Roosevelt in your home? Impossible. Can I come too?" And she came. We took a picture of her with Eleanor Roosevelt. She had it blown up to wall size, and it's still in that school, number 67. I think the picture is still there. My children, meeting her. My father sat with her and talked because my father and mother had just come back from Israel too. They had been there for three months so they were able to sit and talk to Eleanor Roosevelt. Here she is ready to give the speech. Here I am, introducing her – when I introduced her. It was a very famous day because – here she is.

JF: That's wonderful. So what was she like?

SH: She was a remarkable woman. She was a worldwide remarkable woman. In the car, when we were coming in from the airport, I said, "How do you get to do all the things that you" – she said, "I always do the things that come to me to be done." That was her motto. But she fell asleep in the car for a while. She was a wonderful, wonderful woman. I think I told you I had met her many years earlier when I was displaying her furniture. I think she was wonderful. The following year, I was lucky enough to get Hellen Keller. Now here, this is the news: "Helen Keller speaks for Hadassah." Let me see what date this is. Now, this is not the newspaper. This is the Baltimore – the



Hadassah paper that put it out. But anyway – you know who Helen Keller was?

JF: Yes.

SH: Helen Keller. We also wanted my children to always have my children to – [Recording paused.] I had to go to the railroad station to get her.

JF: To get Helen Keller?

SH: Yes, she came in on the railroad station. Now, Eleanor Roosevelt had come by plane, and we went to the airport to get her. My husband took the children down to the railroad station to meet her. So they met her, and many years later, in school, when they studied Helen Keller, my children were always able to say they shook hands with Helen Keller.

JF: Did you meet her as well?

SH: I met her at the train, and I took her with me.

JF: I thought you said your husband took her.

SH: I took her. No, my husband took the children, and he just wanted the children to see her at the railroad station. I took her to the Belvedere Hotel, where she stayed overnight with her companion.

JF: How did you talk with her?

SH: Well, the companion does the – everything is guttural, and you can't talk with her, you just make motions. On the way back from the railroad station, the Belvedere – she can smell where she is. When she was in Druid Hill Park, she said, "It's a park. It's trees." She smells the trees and the flowers and so on. What is it I wanted to tell you? So, we got to the Belvedere Hotel, and they had a room for her and flowers. As soon as



we came in the room, she smelled the flowers. Her companion opened up her suitcase, took out a whole bottle of liquor, and poured her out a tumbler full of rye whiskey, and she drank it up before she ordered dinner for her. I was aghast. She asked me did I want some. No. At the Mayo Clinic, where she is examined every year, they recommend she drink a full glass of rye whiskey before her dinner every night. I just thought I'd tell you. Then she makes – now, the next day, she was the speaker. She was the speaker. She spoke with guttural tones, and her companion translates everything for the audience. Right after her speech, we had a young man play the piano as a part of the afternoon program. She stood up there, and she could tell – she beat with her foot the notes of the piano. She couldn't hear what it was, but she felt the rhythm of the piano. We always said there never was a dry eye in the place. Everybody just cried to think that she could at least sense in that – to be able to sense that much of the program.

JF: What did she talk about in her speech?

SH: She had been to the Arab countries, and then she went to Israel, and what she was finally able to convey to us was that it was so dark in Arab countries and so bright and light in Israel. When she came to Israel, everything seemed bright and light, and she learned all about it through her companion. Her companion was able to transmit everything to her. So, those are some of the exciting things that I was able to experience.

JF: As president of Hadassah, right.

SH: I was elected to go this time, there was a World Zionist Congress in Israel, which still, I think, doesn't meet annually. It used to meet annually in those days, and in order to get in attendance, you have to have somebody representing different organizations and so on. You had to elect a person in this area for one person to go from this – this was called the Northeast area. I don't know. This was the Middle East, whatever. I was



elected to go as the representative of the men's and women's organizations of this area. When I went, I stayed a whole month.

JF: And this was in Jerusalem?

SH: In Jerusalem.

JF: And what year was this?

SH: I don't know [inaudible]. I guess it was '65.

JF: '65.

SH: And then this picture also appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*. While I was there, they shipped the picture here. I was holding a baby. The Hoffbergers here in Baltimore had given the money for this whole children's wing, and so I was in that children's wing. I don't know if that tells you that or not. But this was at the 26th World Zionist Congress. [inaudible] You can read it.

JF: So what was that like? Tell me about that [inaudible]?

SH: I had to go to meetings every day, and the speeches were day-long. They didn't speak for an hour, they spoke for a whole day. A man got up to speak all day. I had meetings every single day. I was there for one whole month.

JF: What were the meetings about?

SH: The meetings were about – it was a Zionist organization. The meetings are about Israel. How can we get all the Jews to come to Israel? We want to get all the Jews to come to Israel because the Jews are being persecuted all through the countries and everywhere. Jewish people want to have their own land. They got it [inaudible] they're fighting for it. So that's what the Zionist organization is all about. Hadassah was part of



the World Zionist Organization. Since then, there have been a lot of politics which have been very divisive, and some of them have broken apart. I don't know exactly the status of the World Zionist Organization today, but it was very powerful then, and they had powerful people and powerful speakers – Ben-Gurion and people of that ilk. That's what we did every day, all day – meetings.

JF: Was it interesting? I mean, you're looking as if –

SH: Well, for me, I never was really a politician, so it wasn't really my thing but it was a lot going on, and they were able to accomplish a lot. That's what they said they did anyway. And finally, when we got there, we were supposed to stay at the King David Hotel, which is gorgeous. Have you been to Israel? We were supposed to stay at the King David, but they were renovating the King David, so they put a whole bunch of us at the King's Hotel. What's it called? (Malan Ha Mlochim?). (Malan?) means hotel. (Ha Mlochim?) – it was the Hotel of Kings, called the King's Hotel. There, we had to sleep on something as hard as this. No mattress. Anyway, a whole month of that. At the time, my sister-in-law's brother was very active in the politics of Israel, and he came to see me in Jerusalem several times. He took me to his office and so on. I had a good time anyway. It was four weeks of it. A lot of things happened while I was gone, too. I lost a brother-in-law and so on.

JF: Here you are in the Hadassah Medical Center. Was that part of the official visit to go visit places like the Hadassah Medical Center?

SH: No, I just went there.

JF: You just went there.

SH: It wasn't part of the Zionist program, but it was part of Hadassah for me, and I went there. Also, I did another thing. My daughter's girlfriend's mother had a baby while I was there. Had a baby, told me that on the telephone, and I went – one morning, I went to



the Jewish National Fund and took a shovel myself and dug a tree in honor of that baby. Every time I see them, I say, "I wonder what that tree looks like." I know what the young man looks like now. [He's] thirty-something years old. They sent a receipt showing that I had planted a tree in his honor. That was exciting, too.

JF: That's lovely. Can I ask you a few more questions?

SH: You want to hear about my children?

JF: Yes, about your children. Your eldest child was born in Washington?

SH: My eldest child married a doctor. He was in the service, and so they wound up in California, and she was there thirty years.

JF: What is her name?

SH: Marsha.

JF: Marsha.

SH: She was there thirty years, and just three years ago – she got a divorce, and three years ago, she decided to come back and live in Baltimore after thirty years. She's a nurse, and right now, she is very interested in dogs and cats. and she always wanted to be a veterinarian but never achieved that, so instead, she's working for the SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals].

JF: I see.

SH: She's one of their prime people. She just loves it there, and she was working for nursing homes here, but she decided to work for animals. They don't talk back, she says.

JF: And she was born in what year?



SH: She was born in 1930. No, '40. Wait a minute. She will be sixty-two.

JF: Yes, 1940.

SH: She was born in 1940. She was my eldest.

JF: She was born in Washington.

SH: I was pregnant five times. I had a miscarriage first. Then Marsha was born in 1940. My second child, I lost, I told you, in Washington. Then I came back to Baltimore, and then Vicki and Carol were born here. Vicki is fifty-six, and Carol is fifty-two.

JF: Can you tell me about the neighborhood you lived in when you moved back to Baltimore?

SH: We moved back to Baltimore. We wanted to get a little apartment. I had lost the child, and I just wanted – and I had one child. I wanted an apartment. But that was the year – Marsha was only a year old then. That was the year that you couldn't get an apartment if you had a child. Nobody wanted a child. Would you believe that?

JF: Was this during the war?

SH: Yes. Nobody wanted – so, we had to try to find someplace to live, and this little house became available on Dolfield Avenue. This man had built all these homes. They had one house that the man who bought it failed to go through with it – didn't have the money. So we were able to get that little house. So we stayed there fourteen years until we moved. And that's where –

JF: Until you moved here?

SH: What?

JF: Until you moved here?



SH: No. No. But by that time, I had three little girls, and girls were wearing crinoline skirts. You don't remember that era.

JF: No.

SH: So we only had two little – and my husband said, "We have to get a house where these ...". I've got three girls and no place to put – they would come up the steps with all these ... So, we finally got a house right near my mother and father on Duvall Avenue. It was a big house, and it was beautiful, and we only stayed there a short time because though my parents lived around the corner, which made it very nice ...

[END OF CD 1]

JF: This is disc number two, the interview with Sarah Harris. It's May 24, 2002. We're in Baltimore, Maryland, and I'm Jean Freedman, recording this for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words project. [Recording paused.]

SH: – whole affair in which I was the honored guest, and this is a picture of my family that came that evening.

JF: That's lovely. What year is that taken?

SH: I think it was 1995.

JF: '95.

SH: One daughter is missing; she was in the hospital. Carol had a problem which later resolved itself. But other than that, my three daughters and my granddaughter here. My granddaughter is the one who got married.

JF: That's great. You were telling me –

SH: I was telling you about Marsha in California.



JF: Well, you were telling me you moved from Duvall Avenue and then the reasons that you moved from Duvall Avenue.

SH: Duvall Avenue. When Marsha used to walk up the street to the library, there were little Black boys used to whistle at her, and I realized then that I couldn't let her go up by herself anymore because it was a little bit dangerous. So, my husband said, "We have to build a house," and that's when he bought this lot and built this house. So that's about – I'll be here forty-four years, I think.

JF: So mid-'60s.

SH: We have more closet space, we could rent out to anybody who has any crinolines.

JF: You've been living here ever since.

SH: He lived here until he died in '74. He died very suddenly, right in the living room.

JF: That was a shock. So then, what did you do?

SH: That was really terrible. Then I had to go downtown to his office. I used to go in the office once in a while, but I never knew what really what kind of property I owned or what I owned. He died so suddenly. My son-in-law helped me. Went down and tried to find out what I had and tried to take care of what I had and learn something about the real estate business, which actually was my father's business. I sold off some of it, and I still maintained some of it. I still have some ground rents and so on. Do you know what ground rents are? Do you? That's funny. Most people don't know what ground rents are.

JF: My parents are Baltimoreans.

SH: What are your parents' names?



JF: My father's name is Freedman, and my mother's name was (Niestadt?); her maiden name was (Niestadt?). It's an unusual name.

SH: Yes. Well, ground rents are peculiar to Baltimore.

JF: You want to explain what they are for the recording? You want to explain what ground rents are for the recording?

SH: Well, ground rents are the rental of the ground on which your property stands.

JF: So, you can own a house but not the land.

SH: You can own the house and not the land. So you will have to pay a certain amount of money to the man who owns your ground. It all started with the Indians. My husband used to tell me that the Indians used to give a feather. It started with a feather, and then it started with a penny, and then a dollar, and so forth, and there was a whole history to ground rents. But why it just remained in Baltimore – I think there's some in Philadelphia, not many, but it's definitely peculiar to Baltimore. My father had a lot of ground rents. That was his major portfolio. My first husband had a lot of ground rents, too. So that's what I'm left with, some ground rents, which sometimes are a headache. They are peculiar. But that's what ground rents are. My son-in-law is the ground-rent czar of Baltimore. He's on the back page of – Jerry Engelman on the back page – I'll give him a plug. He buys and sells ground rents. So my daughter Marsha married a doctor. She left California, got a divorce, and came back with one son. She left a daughter there who got married to a dentist and has two of my great-grandchildren out there – real cute ones. Left another son out there with his father. Vicki is the next one, and she was married to a lawyer. Unfortunately, she got divorced, too, but she has two wonderful children. Her daughter is a lawyer, her son-in-law is a lawyer, and her other son is doing well. So Vicki has been with Levindale [Hebrew Geriatric Center]; she was the director of all admissions at Levindale. Coincidentally, you came on the day – she just left



Levindale yesterday.

JF: She retired?

SH: No. Well, they are reorganizing Levindale's positions, and her position was really deleted, so she left them, and she's going – and Carol works for Levindale as a social worker. She's the youngest. She is married to Jerry Engelman, who buys and sells real estate, and she has two children, and one of them is going to have a baby in July.

JF: Oh, lovely.

SH: The other one is not married. The other one is David. He's doing very well. They're just graduating college. So there I am.

JF: I have a few more questions if you're not too tired out. One is that you grew up in an Orthodox home. Were the homes that you established, were they Orthodox as well? Did you remain Orthodox?

SH: Well, after I married?

JF: Yes.

SH: After I married, my mother-in-law was American-born, although her husband was foreign-born. Nevertheless, she adhered to the kashruth, and I would say that that is about as far as she went. She did not necessarily observe the Sabbath so strictly, but we raised the children – went to Hebrew school. All three of them graduated Hebrew school and were bat mitzvah.

JF: Did you keep kosher?

SH: Yes. I still do keep kosher.

JF: And you belong to Beth El?



SH: Now we belong to Beth El because the children started going to Hebrew school here at Beth El even though we lived closer to Chizuk Amuno. Chizuk Amuno is across the way.

JF: Right, we passed it on the way here.

SH: And Beth El is a little further up Park Heights. They're almost back-to-back, these two synagogues.

JF: Is Beth El Orthodox?

SH: No. Conservative. This is Chizuk Amuno, which is Conservative also. And they are back-to-back. Ironically enough, the rabbi of Chizuk Amuno, this one, and his wife were my very dearest friends as well as our own rabbi. But Mildred Goldman was one of my dearest friends. That was Rabbi Goldman's wife. Do you remember the name Rabbi Goldman?

JF: No, I don't know.

SH: Your parents probably know.

JF: Probably do. So, would you consider yourself Conservative now rather than Orthodox?

SH: Yes. We're Conservative.

JF: I forgot to ask you, please tell me how you met your present husband and about that marriage.

SH: Well, he had become a widower, and I had become a widow. I started going to synagogue every Friday night, and he would see me there on Friday night too. One time, I said – a lot of ladies were running for him, but I said I wanted to get a cup of coffee, but



there's no cups. He said, "Oh, I'll go in the kitchen and get you a cup." From then on, he wanted to take me to dinner, but I had another widower there who was also interested in me. All of a sudden, after five years – I was a widow for six years. On Rosh Hashanah, he used to come sit with me, and then the other fellow used to come sit with me. I had one on both sides. Two real nice. Everybody was jealous; I had two widowers.

JF: So, how did you choose?

SH: He never had any children. So suddenly, he inherited a whole gang of kids. For a while, it was a little too much for him because he had a quiet family. Although he's one of nine children, six boys and three girls.

JF: And let me get his name spelled correctly.

SH: His name is S. Herbert Harris.

JF: And you have been married how long now?

SH: Twenty-two years. It will be twenty-two years this fall. We never thought it would last this long. Well, I was already seventy, and he was seventy-three. He's ninety-five now.

JF: You'll both see one hundred. Knock on wood.

SH: Well, he's not feeling too good. I'm not, either. I have a bad knee, and now I broke – that's the worst part is that I broke my arm, and I can't do anything with the right hand. Always tell people if you took your right arm and just tie it up for a whole day – I can't comb my hair right. I can't get dressed right to suit me.

JF: I'd like to ask a few more questions, if I may. You have seen a lot of change in your lifetime. You've seen a lot of major world events. You lived through World War II, you lived through the Depression, the '60s, and I was wondering if you'd like to comment on



how any of these world events have touched your life.

SH: Well, I'd like to comment on people, and that is people have become more – well, we talk about Americans, I guess – are more relaxed and casual in every aspect of their lives, in their clothes. My husband, who was a litigation lawyer all his life, has more clothes because he always said in court, you are almost like an actor; you have to dress right. So, he has an awful lot of clothes. But today, you see fellows come to court with short sleeves and this and that. But we still maintained a lot of dress decorum at synagogue anyway. The synagogue sort of constricts us so much so you don't run wild like some organizations [and] some people are doing. But people as a whole, everything is relaxed. Business is relaxed. One particular instance of mine – now that I have a hard time signing my name. It doesn't matter. You can sign my name and cash my check. This is part of the relaxation of business [and] of people. Nothing is as formal as it used to be. Nothing is as strict as it used to be. This is very upsetting for us, who were raised to believe that it had to be done a certain way. We also were raised to believe that America [does] it best. An American did it best. But we found out that that isn't true. Other cultures and other peoples live differently, and yet they are right also. They don't have to adhere to what we believe is just the democratic way. So there's a great deal of relaxation. You wonder if it will ever return. I think it will never return to the time of strict behavior that I was raised with.

JF: Do you think this is an improvement or not?

SH: In some ways, it might be an improvement because it gives people an opportunity to express themselves more easily. In other ways, it is not good because there's a looseness in business, in money, in the expenditure of money, in the respect for money. There's a different respect for money. My husband is still of the school that you respect money. He worked hard to get it, as I did too. Today, money is only there to buy what you want, and you need what you want. And you see people – people spend money,



and you realize that they really, I'm trying to say, they really can't afford some of the things that they are buying, but it's there, I want it, and I have the money for it. If not, you'll put it on my credit card, and if not on this credit card, it can go on ten other credit cards. This is, I think, a great fallacy. The whole credit system is very bad. Young people can get tied up for thousands and thousands of dollars. I happen to know a young man who owes thirty-thousand dollars because he's on how many credit cards? Every day of the week, I get invitations to join another credit organization. I don't want it, and I don't need it. But people do that. So, people will experience all kinds of luxuries that they cannot really afford but want, so there is more of a feeling of I want it today because tomorrow I may not be here. I may not be here tomorrow. People have that kind of temporary feeling. They don't have a feeling for the future like we used to have. I wonder if your parents would feel that way.

JF: I don't know.

SH: Your parents are not as old as we are, though.

JF: Another thing that I'm very interested in is – talking about how things have changed – and that is how things have changed for women, and you've seen a lot of changes there, how your life might be different from your mother's and your daughter's and your granddaughter's.

SH: Right.

[Recording paused.]

JF: We were talking about how things have changed for women during your lifetime.

SH: Yes. Well, when I graduated college, I had to either teach or work in a department store, as I did. My salary was very minimal. But maybe that was the average salary then for men, too. I don't remember. Because my first husband was a pharmacist. In those



days, a pharmacist got fifty cents an hour. Today, they get fifty dollars an hour or close to it. So, that makes a drastic change. Now for women, my daughters, I would say – [one is a] social worker, or a director of admissions. Marsha is a nurse. But none of them, I think, get a salary equivalent to what a man would get in the same position. So that is the very big difference. But women are – we do have a cousin in our family who is an airport pilot.

JF: A woman?

SH: A woman. She went up with one of the major shots, where they went up to the moon. Yes, she did. [inaudible] think of her name. She's one of the cousins in our family. Yes. So women can do a whole lot more today than they used to be able to do. My mother, on the other hand, was only able to be a housewife, a mother, and a grandmother. She was president of a ladies' auxiliary, but that was it. She wasn't trained to do anything more than that. But girls can now be engineers, and they can be airport pilots. As I say, and they can go into almost any field.

JF: Did you ever feel that being a woman held you back, or did you ever experience any prejudice about that?

SH: I would not say that. No. Because I'm one of the old-fashioned people who still believe that a woman's first role is as a wife and a mother. She can do anything else she wants, but I believe that's the major thing that she should be occupied with. I like to believe that a woman can get a certain amount of courtesies, also. My husband is still of that belief, too. He comes from that school. So, if you think women have progressed a lot –

JF: What do you think?

SH: I think so. I think they've progressed. They've broadened out their opportunities. I think so. They have opportunities they didn't used to have in my time. I think so. I don't



know what else.

JF: Do you ever discuss these things with your daughters or your granddaughters?

SH: Very rarely. My one granddaughter wanted to be here while you were interviewing, but unfortunately, they left this morning. She's the one that has the two little children. They went on a trip with a whole group of families, so they left this morning. I was just as happy. I didn't want her here anyway. She's the one who, when I was introduced this time I was honored – she's the one – Lisa. She's a lawyer, and she wanted – she has a copy of the speech that was given when they introduced me, and I was the honored person of the evening. I don't know what else I can tell you about myself.

JF: I do have a few more questions. When you got married, you had been working at the May Company, right?

SH: When I got married?

JF: Did you stop working at the May Company?

SH: Oh, sure. Well, see, my husband had a drugstore in Washington. I went over there to live.

JF: So, did you have a job after you got married?

SH: No. I never had a paying job after that.

JF: But you worked very hard.

SH: I worked very hard, and my husband used to say if I ever gave him one-tenth of the time that I gave to Hadassah – in those days, it was Hadassah, day and night, always, and I was very committed, and my children were too. I took the children along with everything I did. Like when Eleanor Roosevelt was here, the children were there with the



principal and everything. And Helen Keller. Oh, and the year after this – I said these were two acts that were hard to follow. I had Hubert Humphrey. Do you remember that name?

JF: Oh, yes. Yes absolutely.

SH: He was the speaker the year after. After that, everything started going downhill. [laughter] But Mr. Humphrey, I went to the airport to get him. No, he came in by train, I think. Anyway, I had a little Chevrolet car and my father said, “You cannot go get Mr. Humphrey.” I said, “I am. That's where I'm going.” I got him at the railroad station. He came in on a train from Washington. I picked him up. I said, “Mr. Humphrey, before we leave, I want to ask you a question. Do you mind driving in a little Chevrolet?” He says, “I love the little [Chevrolet].” He was really great. If he had run for president that day, Hadassah would have all voted, all 300,000 Hadassah women would have voted for him.

JF: That's a great story.

SH: Yes, it was a lot of fun.

JF: Talking about change, you've also seen a lot of changes in Baltimore. I'm wondering if you want to comment on that.

SH: Oh, Baltimore. Oh, sure. Well, see the Jewish people in Baltimore who started way down in West Baltimore where we had a grocery store and right near there was also a synagogue because – it's called the Franklin Street shul, I think it was. There were a lot of Jewish people in that neighborhood that were in business of one kind or another. From there, they moved up to – well, it was Forest Park. We moved to Dolfield Avenue [which] was sort of on the edge. That's Ashburton, Forest Park, whatever. The Black people have been following the Jewish people right along. So, when the Black people started coming into Ashburton and Forest Park, then we moved up to Upper Park Heights or Lower Park Heights, and then Upper Park Heights. Then the Jewish people – it would



seem as if they're running away, but that isn't true, they're just advancing themselves in all kinds of ways and in educational ways and in religious institutions. We have more religious institutions here than any other city, I believe. I mean, right up and down Park Heights Avenue, you have about twenty synagogues – little ones, big ones, all kinds. So, the change has been that if you find there's one person still left down in West Baltimore, he's a lonely person or else. But now the Jewish people have gone out further in Owings Mills and so on. I don't know if you're familiar. But right near Beth El are some gorgeous areas right behind – you know where Beth El is?

JF: Yes.

SH: Right behind Beth El. It's a place called the Enclave. Homes are way over a million dollars to begin, and so on. By and large then, Caves Road – way out Caves Road, so all that, the whole area is – so that's the advancement, and the Jewish people have led the advancement. I guess that's the way you would say. But now, when we had a gentleman to speak at our congregation meeting Wednesday night, he spoke from the Associated because they've done a demographic study, and they have learned that thirty percent of the Jewish people here do not belong to any synagogue, any religious institution. Thirty percent, that's a big – and he was telling us that – I lost my thought – that the Jewish people that have moved way out there, they are now – most of the major synagogues have a branch out there now. Out there means Owings Mills, Reisterstown, not Randallstown. Randallstown is on that side. Reisterstown. All of the major synagogues now have branches out there and schools. The Jewish Community Center has its big place out, it's in Owings Mills. It's a big Jewish Community Center. It's also attached to the Gordon Theater. You ever hear of the Gordon Theater?

JF: What is that?

SH: Gordon Theater? There was a young man named Yale Gordon who happened to have coincidentally been my husband's very best friend who never had any children and



left millions and millions and millions of dollars, and his money has gone into educational and musical things. So actually, they opened this theater out there called the Gordon Theater, and they have concerts there, they have theater there, and it's also attached to the Jewish Community Center that's part of it. So it's like a large compound of education and athletics and children and school, like a little compound now. And it's out off of Owings Mills. It's Owings Mills. What's the name of the street? He's done a lot of good with all that money that he left. They say he didn't enjoy his money. Yes, he did. He enjoyed amassing it. I don't know if he knew what was going to be done with it, but they've been doing wonderful things with it. What else do I want to tell you? I don't know.

JF: Well, I'd like to ask you a little bit more since this is the Jewish Women's Archive about being Jewish.

SH: About being Jewish.

JF: And how that has manifested itself in your life? You started an Orthodox family and —

SH: Well, that's true. When I was president of the Federation, I was invited to many groups that were not Jewish, and I was accepted. I had no problem with it. I never had a problem being Jewish anywhere. I don't think I ever had a problem being Jewish anywhere. I was invited someplace where I thought it would be all gentile women. I'm trying to remember. And I, at that time, owned a mink coat. It was my mother's anyway. It doesn't matter, but I said, "I'm not going to wear it because I don't want them to say, 'That Jewish woman with the mink coat.'" So I wore my old cloth coat. When I got there, they were all wearing fur coats. All these people were not Jewish, so, I said, sometimes we have a sensitivity to things that are not really so. Isn't that something? But I've never had any problem being Jewish. I am thrown into Jewish atmosphere most of the time, I guess. Would you say? I'm thrown in with Jewish people [and] Jewish things, whether



it's voluntary or involuntary or whatever have you. But being a Jewish woman today, I think, is a source of pride, and we stand up. We are exemplars of society.

JF: You moved away from Orthodoxy. You grew up in an Orthodox home, and you moved away from that.

SH: Well, yes, I wouldn't say that Conservative is that far removed from Orthodox.

JF: What would you say the difference is?

SH: The difference is that Conservative is a little more contemporary. I would say it that way. But when it comes to holidays, a rabbi sends out all these notifications on how to keep your Passover and all that. Now, I always change dishes on Passover. I have one cabinet that's never touched all year except Passover. We always change dishes. Then we have another cabinet, and so on. And this year, because we – a strange thing. My husband and I went on a beautiful cruise to the Panama Canal. We came back two days before the seder. So what was I going to do? Seventeen people coming here for a seder.

JF: Oh, my word.

SH: So my daughters decided to forget about the dishes; we're buying all new plastic dishes. So they went, and it wasn't that expensive either. They bought sets and sets of plastic dishes. Very nice, firm dishes. Just as firm as this. Not little paper thing. I ordered things from caterers, and we had seventeen people for seder. We had a wonderful time, and it went very well. Unfortunately, two days later, this had to happen to me. Two days afterwards.

JF: Your arm was broken.



SH: March 29th. I walked out the front door here. My husband and I were sitting so relaxed, everything went so well, the seder and everything, and we don't need to worry with dishes. We'll use the dishes, throw them away, and so on. But he was feeling tired, and I said, "I'll go out and get the mail." I opened the front door, and I don't know why, I just tripped. I went right down on my front step. I lay there because the door slammed behind me, and I couldn't have gotten in any way, and he fell asleep for a while. So, I lay there about an hour or two.

JF: You were lying there with a broken arm?

SH: Broken arm. It was broken here. I couldn't move. So finally about an hour later he decided, he wondered why I hadn't come back with the mail, so he looked in every room, he never dreamt I would still be outside. He looked in every room and where was I? He said, "I'll open the front door." There I was, laying there. And when I tell my little granddaughter, this Sarah, this one – real smart, smart. She's got my name. That's another thing. Now, my mother would never have allowed a name. Actually, she's named for my mother, which is Menucha, but her mother, Lisa, says she wants to call – my mother's name was Menucha – Minnie. But she wants to call her Sarah Menucha. So she called me up one day. She said, "Nanny" – they call me Nanny – "do you mind if we call her Sarah?" I hadn't thought about it. I said to my husband, "Is it all right?" He said, "You're not going to die young." So I said, "Okay." So, she's Sarah. So she was asking me what happened. The first cast I had was very impressive because it was, what do you call it? Plaster. Real heavy. So she put her name on it, and she said, "How did it happen?" She asked me. She's three and a half. So, I said, "Well, I had to go out to get the mail. I wanted to go out and get the mail, I stepped, I tripped, and I fell, and they took me to the hospital." And she's listening and listening, and then she says, "So who got the mail?" [laughter] That's where she had her mind. She never even said, "Did it hurt you or anything?" She said, "So, who got the mail?" She's real smart.



JF: When do you get the cast off?

SH: Well, I take it off to take a shower now. Oh, I have to. But it's swollen. It doesn't look like this hand yet. Last night, we went out to eat, I picked up a fork, I tried to do something, and it fell out of my hand, so I don't have enough strength. And you saw how I sign my name – very poorly. That's not my signature. But if I need money, I go to the bank and anybody could sign my name, and they'd give me money. That's why I say it's such a looseness. Is that a loose way of handling? Well, I don't know. You're young enough to believe that's the right way. Maybe your parents would think otherwise.

JF: Well, I can't think of any more questions right off, but I was wondering if there's anything that I haven't asked that I should have asked. Anything else that you would like to share with future generations?

SH: To share with future generations? Well, I do believe that my daughters, who keep kosher – two of them keep kosher, one does not particularly, but nevertheless, as soon as they have children, they are concerned with Friday night candle lighting because they go to Hebrew school. She went to Hebrew school when she was two. Is yours in school yet?

JF: Not yet. In the fall.

SH: Well, you will pretty soon. They come home, and they say, “Are you going to light candles tonight?” Well, that's what's started. Her mother is very strict now with the candles and the Sabbath. Well, I don't observe the Sabbath that strictly, but it's very Jewish. My granddaughter, this one here, who married a boy in Washington – she lives in Rockville, on Wootton Place, I told you. She married a fellow from a very, very Orthodox family, and I don't think they even belong to a synagogue, but they're very observant. She and her husband – he's not on here – are so concerned with kashruth that they'll eat in my house, but they won't eat in somebody else's house. They're very,



very concerned. Now, she is going to keep the strictest of kashruth and Saturday. Her husband does ride, I think, on Saturday if necessary. But she does what she – but they keep a certain amount. So, we say that we hope that Judaism will still reside with the woman.

JF: With the woman?

SH: I believe that.

JF: That's an interesting way of putting it. Why with the woman?

SH: Because the woman is the one who cares about when the child's going to Hebrew school or not. My very dearest friend, all three of her children went to Beth Tfiloh Day School. Her husband never was bar mitzvah or anything, but they were all on account of her. I can name you any number of women who are the ones who were concerned with the Jewish education of the children.

JF: That's interesting.

SH: I am a firm believer that the woman has a great part, I don't say – the man has to go out and be concerned with making a living. Now, that isn't always the case today. The living is made by both of them jointly. However, it is still the woman – it's her household, and it's her job to keep the holidays alive and to have the children participate in all the holidays and to see to it that they go – my eldest daughter, when she was first engaged to a very religious boy, she went to synagogue with his mother. His mother said, “Do you think you know what this is?” She said, “I can read Hebrew. I was bat mitzvah.” The woman said, “I can't believe it.” So she called me up. “Mother, thank you for making me go to Hebrew school.” Now, I made them go. Their father would have been more lax and said, “If you don't want to go, don't go,” but I made them. I do believe that the great deal of strength is in the Jewish woman. That's been my experience, and in our family, I think it's been that way. Even though it looks like the men are the ones who carry the



Torah and all that. We have women who carry the Torah, too, now, that's why we're Conservative. Because we get an aliyah. I got an aliyah last week. We had a Sisterhood Sabbath. And we get an aliyah, and when we do, we have to read the Torah just as well, and the Sisterhood Sabbath oftentimes outshines the Brotherhood Sabbath very often. The men can't read as well. So that is – you don't believe – you're not sure you believe that.

JF: Believe what?

SH: That the strength of Judaism is a great deal in a woman's role.

JF: Oh, I believe that. Yes.

SH: Do you?

JF: Oh, yes.

SH: Oh, I thought you were surprised when I said that.

JF: No, I just never heard anyone say it quite like that, and I thought that was a very interesting way to put it.

SH: I think the strength of Judaism is in the women, and that's why you have to educate women. That's why your little girl will have to go to Hebrew school. In years back – now, my husband has sisters who never went to Hebrew school of his generation. He has a sister who is ninety-something years old today. She never went to Hebrew school. In those days, the man had to go. But not in our family. My husband believed. My father believed that I should know as much as the boys.

JF: Was he unusual in those days?



SH: He was. My father was – here's another thing. My father was the principal person who brought in a whole family from Europe. An entire family. Father, grandfather, and seven children with consorts and engaged and getting ready to get married. He brought them from Europe because they wanted to come along to America, so they got engaged to somebody they didn't intend to get married when they got here. But anyway, he brought in this entire family, went to New York, and brought them in. That's when the elder man became the rebbe, the melamed, and taught us Hebrew. But each one of these people were adults – all the children, were adults. He bought them each a grocery store in Baltimore City in different locations. He himself knew a lot about the grocery – my father. And every Sunday morning, he used to go around to every grocery store to see how they were doing. And there were seven children, and seven grocery stores were all over Baltimore that my father had put them in and got them started in America. I thought that was very interesting thing. Those people already are several generations are down since then. But out of one of those families, that girl who became a pilot, and I don't remember her name, but we used to – you don't know many people here, do you? Do you know Shirley Liederman?

JF: No.

SH: Okay. Well, every time I see Shirley she talks about the other cousin. She's a cousin, too. She talks about the cousins. I just thought that was an interesting thing. I don't know. I might think of some things afterward that – but you've got the gist of what I did in my lifetime. I would say I had three separate lives. I lived more than one life.

JF: And what are those three separate lives?

SH: Well, Hadassah was a life. My family is a life. And my HIAS part with the immigrants was a whole life separate from anything. Separate from anything – always made cry. Always touched my heart because you're touching people. With Hadassah, I had to imagine – when I gave a speech for Hadassah, I always said, “We have to be



imaginative to think three thousand miles away.” Our work is being done. HIAS – I touched the woman when she got off the plane, and she hugged and kissed me and cried. Can't beat it.

JF: Well, thank you very much.

SH: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]