Rosalie Harris Transcript

Ann Buffum: This is Sandy Gartner and Ann Buffum, meeting with Rosalie Harris to record a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today is April 10, 2007. We are at Rosalie's home on Dundee Street in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Rosalie, do we have your permission to record this interview with you?

Rosalie Harris: Yes, you do.

AB: Thank you, Rosalie. First, could we start with you telling us about your parents and where they were born and when they immigrated to the United States, perhaps speaking about your mother's life in Romania, and telling us any interesting stories you know?

RH: I don't know too much about my parents. My mother came over with the second wave of the (Signer?) family. The father came first with the oldest daughter. My grandfather was a shochet [butcher], a mohel [circumciser], and a teacher. He was skilled at many things, and he was a scribe. I have the the Book of Esther done in his handwriting, and each of his daughters got one. He was born in Poland, and he told us nothing about his background.

Sandy Gartner: This was your father?

RH: Yeah. He told us nothing about his background. I switched – I had started with my mother. My mother came, and I know she went to Montreal High School because I have her medtal from graduation. She was married to my father – what year? I was seven and a half when she died. She died in 1927. I was born in '19. My sister was born in 1918.

AB: We thought maybe you were twins, but just very close.

RH: Very close, sixteen months apart. My grandparents had just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, and my mother died suddenly.

AB: Do you want us to turn this off?

RH: Just for a minute.

AB: Certainly.

Sandy Gartner: Sure .

[Recording paused.]

AB: We also noticed that your father was much older than your mother. Do you think it was an arranged marriage? How did they meet?

RH: My mother had fallen in love with a young man from Ottawa that was attending McGill University. When he told his parents that he was in love with this girl in Montreal, his mother came down to Montreal, and broke up the whole thing, [and] took him back to Ottawa. My grandparents lived in the center of the Jewish quarter on St. Lawrence Boulevard. My grandmother ran a store, which had books and talleisim [prayer shawls], tefillin [phylacteries], and brass art objects[inaudible]. They were great in those years – plates to hang on the wall, candlesticks, and all that. She ran the household. She was tiny, stout, absolutely immaculate. I remember her with a long apron that she would make herself, and she never used straps up top; she had two little gold pins. She had a big bow in the back, and she could work in the store and in the kitchen. It was always spanking clean. I don’t know how she managed. She wore a sheitel [wig]. She had a round face. I could show you a picture. My mother was, I think, the third or fourth girl. My Aunt Fanny was the oldest. Then there were some boys, and then my mother, I think, and then the younger girls. They lived in this – I said my mother was disappointed in the loss of her connection with the Ottawa young man, and she told her brother, who

was sort of an arranger, like a shadchan [matchmaker] a little bit. She told her brother that she would marry the first man that gave her a fur coat and a diamond. My father came along, a self-made man, not bad looking – on the short side, but my mother wasn't terribly tall either. She was very, very beautiful. People used to turn to look at her. They were married, I think, a couple of years before my sister was born, so it could would have been maybe 1916, something like that. She died in 1927 at the age of thirty-three.

AB: Who in the family took care of you?

RH: My father.

AB: Just your dad?

RH: First, we had a housekeeper. We stayed in this – we moved right after she died. We lived in an apartment on Park Avenue in Montreal in the North End. This lady, a French lady from Newfoundland, I think, took care of the house and of us. It lasted for a few years. Then the Depression hit him hard. I was probably about nine years old when I was doing everything in the house that I do now – with my sister. It was difficult.

SG: Can I just ask just one question?

RH: Sure, keep asking questions.

SG: Not to distract you –

RH: No, no. You won't.

SG: Why did they break up the relationship? Why did the mother not want –?

RH: When the mother saw where the grandparents lived, she was ashamed.

SG: The woman from Ottawa didn't want her son to marry –?

AB: Even though it was also a Jewish family?

RH: Yeah. And even though the girl was beautiful, she had no [inaudible] and no wherewithal to go with her because they needed everything they were making as a livelihood for their own use, and there were other children.

SG: I see.

RH: She was just so put off by their poverty and their circumstance.

AB: Growing up then in Montreal as a young person, were you in a Jewish community at that time? What was the ethnic composition?

RH: The composition was, there were two main streets sort of, Park Avenue and St. Lawrence Boulevard.? Between those two streets, there were maybe six or seven others, and the Jewish people occupied most of the dwellings, the Jewish businesses.

AB: When you went to school, were there mostly Jewish children there?

RH: No, there was a big mixture because there's a Protestant board of school commissioners, a Catholic board of school commissioners, and those were the public, too two, and then there was a small Jewish group that worked. I think, in the system, they only went as far as about the third grade. The classes were mixed. There weren't a lot. There were a lot of non-Jews. There was prayer in the morning, and there was singing of hymns, and then class started because it was the Protestant board of school commissioners. They taught more or less, fairly. There's great emphasis on education in Quebec. Even the French are certainly now more than ever pursuing knowledge.

AB: So were you speaking –? Did you have to learn French?

RH: I spoke French from the time I was born because I was a year old in June. The family, the aunts, took a house in Saint-Bruno across the river on the farm that was no

longer a working farm. The couple that owned the farm, (Télesphore?)[inaudible] and (Adèlele Benoit?) didn't speak a word of English. So, when I started to chatter, I chattered in French.

SG: Wow.

AB: Wow. Growing up in Montreal, did you experience any prejudice or antisemitism?

RH: Oh, yes. There always was in the background. Schoolmates would yell at you if they had a reason or thought they had a reason and pester you like kids do. There was antisemitism. It was very difficult for many Jewish people, but many Jewish people were well-treated because they treated the French well. My father eventually went into his own business. When he did, it was a seasonal business. He was manufacturing coats and suits for ladies. He would go for upscale styles. He would go to New York for his patterns, and he would put them in to-- work them, so that they weren't affordable for a middle class, a lower class – the French could buy them. He used good furs and stuff, and he had a taste, a wonderful sense of taste for the fabrics. And he would pay the help minimum wage when they were not--not minimum wage, but a minimum allowance in between seasons so that they would come back when he started the next season.

AB: Yes.

RH: He was very, very clever. The first thing I remember about my father was he was reading Guy de Maupassant [19th century French author best known for short stories]. [laughter] I could hardly pronounce it, then. And when my mother died, we moved up-- We had been living on Sherbrooke Street, opposite (Park La Fontaine?), and we moved up on Park Avenue. And I think I went to (Fairmont?) school. I know I finished seventh grade at the Edward VII [School] and won a scholarship for a year, because we paid high school fees.

AB: Wow, that's different than here.

RH: Then; I don't know if they still do, I'm not aware. My sister had also won the scholarship the year before me.

AB: Okay, so also during your youth, did you belong to a synagogue or have Jewish education?

RH: What happened was my mother had sisters and the sisters had children. We were all sort of in an age group, maybe ten to fifteen years cross-section. There were boys and girls, and they did a lot to keep us together. Like on Shabbos [the Sabbath] we were not allowed to do certain things. However, we are allowed to listen to the radio for the Metropolitan Opera on Saturdays. You know, they were very much into culture; learning was very important to them.

AB: Did you have a bar mitzvah?

RH: No, not that early. They weren't started until the –

SG: 1920s?

RH: Later than that, ten years later I think.

AB: First you had a confirmation or something like that?

RH: No, no. And we learned Yiddish in cheder [class]. Not Hebrew, only the boys learned Hebrew. But my aunts, you know, would have the holidays, parties and have all the children as well as the adults. And we were friends all of us. You know, we were sort of in an age bracket where like, maybe ten years or so, between us, and we were all friendly. I think they pitied us a little and they did look after us a bit.

AB: So you have some memories of Passover spent together?

RH: Oh, yes. The Passover was at my grandparents' and there would be a long table this way [gestures], it was a huge "U," you know, and Grandpa and the men, his sons, would sit at the head, and the women and children would sit on the sides. I remember falling asleep in my plate. [laughter] Because the seders ran on and on and on. And you couldn't eat, you had to wait.

AB: Did your aunts teach you to cook?

RH: Well, we had to do a lot of cooking at home. My father was a good cook. He was using fresh garden vegetables for salads that the Europeans weren't using. He would do spinach, and a lot of things that he did very well. He wouldn't buy us candy. He would buy what they called flats, deep trays, like that, at the marketplace. It was always raisins and prunes and apricots and dates, and those were our sweets. He didn't bring candy home.

AB: Okay. And then, we noticed that both you and your sister went into nursing.

RH: Yes.

AB: Can you tell us a little about how that came about?

RH: Well, in our day, if you didn't have the money to go to college, or to business school--and business schools were not inexpensive in that culture and that time--you could become a waitress or a shop girl. Both of us wanted to be professionals. I think the women in the family had, I think the aunts talked to us both. Now she went to Ottawa, she's a graduate of the Ottawa Civic Hospital. I'm a graduate of a Woman's Hospital in Montreal [Women's General Hospital School of Nursing]. You know, a three year nursing program where you get an RN [Registered Nursing certification].

AB: And then you went to work right away?

RH: I went to work right away at the Jewish General [Hospital], which had recently opened at that time. Night duty, had to take on a year of night duty, because there were no students at the Jewish General. Now it's a tremendously expanded prestigious group. They make very good decisions, and people do well. And they are respected. They're known. There's a Catholic hospital a few blocks away, also respected. You know, very good health care.

AB: You then moved to – was it to Boston first?

RH: No. Before I went into nursing, we moved over to the west end of Montreal to live with the oldest sister, my mother's oldest sister, my sister and I, the last two years of high school. We both graduated from West Hill High School. At first, we had both been at Baron Byng [High School], which was a really – it had maybe three Christians in a class, that high school. Over the other way, we were the minority. Like our holidays were always in red on the calendar.

AB: And so then, when did you move to the United States?

RH: After I married. I married in Montreal and moved right after the wedding.

AB: Okay, well tell us how you met Ben.

RH: Oh, yes, on a blind date.

AB: We'd love to hear a wonderful story about that.

RH: I met him on a blind date, some Americans -- he would go home every weekend, he was living in Montpelier. And he'd already been in business since 1931, I think. They opened their store – '33, I think. They opened the store, the boys did, at the height of the Depression. They called it "Nate's." Ben's brother was Nathan. They tossed a coin, a friend of theirs said, "Toss a coin and you can pick the name," because my father was

still in business, and the name was Harris, so they wanted to have another name. I said, "It's too bad I wasn't in the family or would have been ("Ben-Nate's"?)." [laughter] But they were successful in St. Albans [Vermont], and three years later, he moved to Montpelier [Vermont] and opened the store there. But he would come home weekends because he was single. He would come home to spend Sunday, come home Saturday night after the store closed and spend the next day with his parents or with friends that he had in St. Albans. One of the summer visitors that the local boys had become acquainted with went up to a game at McGill [University], a football game. After the game, they started calling girls to go out to dinner at a nightclub. I had been to that nightclub twice in the same week. This was my third visit. When they brought the – because the boys were leaving for service, and everyone had a party. When we went with this group, I ate my meal. He ordered a steak for me and French fries, I think it was. He was absolutely fascinated that I cleaned the plate. [laughter] I'd seen the show before. I just ate. Anyway, I enjoyed it. There was some dancing, we did some dancing and when we went home – we had a little vestibule. I lived on the second floor. We stopped in the vestibule and he asked if he could kiss me goodnight. And I said, "Sure." Then he said, "You know, I'm going home and tell my mother I found the girl I'm going to marry." He was twenty-eight years old and had been looking for quite a while. He just knew. I don't know why I knew that it would be a good life with him, but I did.

AB: Did you take a while to decide or were you – ?

RH: No, this was October, the end of October, 26th I think of October. On November 11th, on Armistice Day, he came to Montreal to visit, and he said, "I would like you to come to St. Albans for Thanksgiving." I said, "No, I won't go unless your mother invites me." Well, his mother didn't write English too well, so she got her daughter-in-law to write me a lovely note inviting me down for the weekend. And I went down. I don't know how it all went, but my father-in-law, when I got off the train in St. Albans station, put his arms around me right away. He was a very shy man. He was quiet. My mother-in-law

was the voice. They took me home, and we stayed the weekend, and we visited Montpelier where Ben's store was, and the Barre Jewish community entertained us. Then we went over to visit his married sister in Chateaugay, New York, and then back to St. Albans, and then I came home engaged.

AB: Very nice.

SG: Wow.

AB: A whirlwind affair.

RH: Then I didn't see him again, because the Christmas business started – starts right at Thanksgiving. I didn't see him again until New Year's. [laughter]

AB: So when did you marry and then move to the States?

RH: First of February because he had to go into the Army in May, and he was moving his store from one location to another, and they gave him a leave of absence until May. So we were married in February and stayed in Montpelier until May when he had to report to Fort Devens.

AB: During the war, tell us about your life then.

RH: We work together a lot because my husband knew how to do shorthand and typing, and there weren't any clerks around. The officers were delighted to find somebody they could put in the office. The first thing he did when he landed at Fort Devens, they grabbed him, because he knew shorthand and typing, and put him in the Judge Advocate's Office. Every time his outfit moved, they took him out. However, in 1945, he was on board ship when the [Japanese] surrendered, on his way to the Far East. He did go to the Philippines. Now, he had a younger sister, a nurse, who served in the service, and a brother, a physician, a pediatrician who had just graduated college when he was

sent overseas. And Max, the older one, went – no, Max is younger than Ben. Ben stayed in Boston most of the time. And I worked at the blood bank in Copley Square, in an insurance building. I couldn't do nursing because I couldn't get reciprocity in Massachusetts. I would have had to go and do exams again, and I wasn't about to. But it was a good job because it was from nine to three one week and the next week from three to nine. You also were able to leave every time your husband could go home; you could go with them. They would excuse you and you went home. So I did hemoglobin there; that was my job. I'll tell you, Bostonians are not blue bloods. The sports people, the football men and the baseball men, are terrified of needles. Some of them pass out when you go to stick a little needle in to take a drop of blood. The Cabots aren't blue blooded either because they used to come through. That was one of the top families. So we were there about two, two and a half years, and he was transferred to Georgia, and then to Texas. Then he went on maneuvers. Then he left me and I went to my sister's, who was in North Dakota with her husband; he was a physician that couldn't go in the Army because they needed him. There was nobody else there in the thousand-mile radius. So he had to stay.

AB: How did your sister get to North Dakota?

RH: Because my brother-in-law had an internship at the Ottawa Civic, where my sister was training. He saw her in her white uniform. She was decorating the windows of the children's ward. He went home and told his mother that [laughter] he had seen the girl he was going to marry.

AB: And he was from North Dakota?

RH: Well, he was from Montreal, but he was practicing in North Dakota. He been out [inaudible]

AB: I ask because I have Jewish family in North Dakota.

SG: I know, we had [inaudible]

RH: You do?

AB: Yes, in Bismarck.

RH: He was in Velva, near the – what's the capital [Bismarck]?

AB: Is Bismarck...? No, Fargo is the capital.

RH: Fargo, it was near Fargo.

AB: Okay. That's just a side-story here. Right.

RH: So they were all in the service, and they all came out in January of '46. We came back, and we were in Montpelier for three years. There were too many young people in the store, and it was a small store. It was clothing. I didn't say that, did I? It was clothing and sportswear. They needed to look for another outlet. So somebody steered them over this way. We came here in 1949, and we've stayed.

AB: And did you help in the store at any point?

RH: Oh yes, at Thanksgiving, Father's Day, Christmas. Whenever I was needed. I was one of those people that couldn't get into the nursing business. I couldn't do what I wanted to do and raise a family and help my husband and have a – all the jobs would suffer. Ben really, in his heart of hearts, didn't want me to go and practice. But I volunteered in various ways. I worked for a blood bank, I don't know, fifty years, I think, total. The rest of it was volunteering after I came back. And then we moved over here in '49 and looked for a home and couldn't find a home that was oil heated. They were all furnaces, and he was not about to shovel coal. He had seen his father do it and he didn't want to do it, and he kept offering to change, and nobody responded to that. He put a picture of our baby daughter in the newspaper. [laughter] She was born in Montpelier.

He put a picture of her in the newspaper saying, "My mother and father are looking for a place so that I can come to St. Johnsbury," something like that. I don't remember exactly how it was worded. Then an employee went to a restaurant. It was actually a drugstore on the street where the store was, Railroad Street. He sat down at the counter to eat his lunch, and he heard the man next to him saying, "If I could sell my house, I'd move away. I built it. I got all the lumber and dried it during the war, and I'm pleased with the house and all, but I want to move." He was a car dealer. And the boy came and told Ben about it, and Ben called him and said, "Are you interested in selling your house? I'm interested in buying it." The man said, "I'll tell you by Wednesday." I think that was Monday. By Friday night, he brought me up here. I was pregnant with my second child. We came in, and the house looked gorgeous. The lights were on, and she had a fire going in the fireplace, and [a] very dramatic dining room with a red oval rug and black drapes with the figures on it and flowers, and black wallpaper; everything was done just so. We walked out, and I looked at him, and he looked at me, and he said, "Okay." He bought the house right away. They weren't ready to move, of course, they didn't know they were going to have to. So we had bought a cottage at Joe's Pond, ten miles away from here. I approached her in June, I think, and asked her if she had been taking care of emptying the house and fixing up things for herself. I said, "Would you move to the cottage until you're ready to move out of town?" She said, "Of course." So they spent the summer at the cottage, and when they were ready, they left. But I came to the house right away. In the meantime, I had delivered a child, of course.

AB: You had mentioned in your questionnaire that you would like to talk to us about passing on Jewish values and identity through the generations.

RH: I am very, very much into l'dor vador [from generation to generation]. That's to me, is the purpose that a Jewish family should have – what they've learned, what they've learned about humanity, what they've learned about the Jewish culture, the memories they carry of their youth, with the old-fashioned ideas and the modern, and pass that

along to their kids, because there'll be more kids, another generation after that, that needs to know.

AB: So can you tell us about some of the things, the traditions that you carried on with your own children at your home?

RH: Oh, all of them. I didn't keep a kosher house after a while. That's another story. But I had given up being kosher when I left Montpelier, because I used to order meat from Burlington [Vermont], and one time I lost a whole order because they forgot to notify me to go pick it up. In those days to lose a fifteen-pound meat order was a hardship. My in-laws were eating in restaurants by that time and my family weren't critical. But I mean, I kept the style, the kosher style, all along. And what I did was I had festivals, always, whatever holiday was coming along. We had community members come, we had students from the schools, I used to put – I have them in the garage, two banquet tables. We used to move all the furniture back to the wall. We would have twenty or twenty-four people for a seder, or for an event that had to do with Jewish history. I'll show you a picture on the wall over there. They were in the newspaper, the children, lighting the candles for Chanukah. On the wall just outside the –

AB: Okay. We'll look later.

RH: And the other thing is storytelling; we did a lot of storytelling. My husband worked very hard. I really managed the house and the children. He worked very hard. But we always ate together. We always had the evening meal together. We went to shul [synagogue].

AB: So the shul here, when did that get established? And how did that get established?

RH: It's in the story that you were given. There were always Jewish families, a small number of Jewish families. By the time Ben and I came, they had dedicated the synagogue on Railroad Street. People came regularly to services and then they had a

nice oneg [casual party after Sabbath dinner on Friday night]. This is not to be put in the story –

SG: Do you want us to stop for a second? [Recording paused.]

RH: The community would play games in the common room, whatever you want to call it. They would always have a pushke [charity box] to put money in that was eventually to go for a building. So it paid for some of the building we have now . Another thing.

AB: Another stop? Okay. [Recording paused.]

RH: One evening, after a lengthy oneg, my husband and I got dressed and took two girls home, and I started to put them to bed and suddenly realized I had one child missing, and figured out that he was asleep in the sanctuary at the synagogue [laughter], brought him home, sound asleep, put him to bed.

AB: Found, safe and sound.

RH: Safe and sound.

AB: Okay. Do you have any favorite recipes that are your specialty, things that you really love to make?

RH: Yes, yes. I'm known for my kugel, lokshen kugel. My family can't get enough of a little pancake I make with cottage cheese, sour cream, and eggs and a little flour and do on a griddle, dollar size-like. When they come, the children, the grandchildren, they all want that for breakfast.

AB: Is there a name for that, a Yiddish name or something?

RH: Latkes, I suppose.

AB: Just latkes?

RH: Pancakes. Just not potato. But I did something this year, for Passover, that I never did before: instead of using the flour, I used matzah meal, but carefully, so it wouldn't get as heavy. And it worked beautifully. As long as there's a good wad of sour cream in there. [laughter] I have the recipe if you want it.

AB: Oh, that'd be wonderful.

RH: And I would give it to you.

AB: Very good.

RH: My son figured it out, because he's a good cook, and he wanted it.

AB: Okay. You did a lot of volunteer work over the years.

RH: Always, always. My husband was very generous with that. I could have a sitter and go and do real work. I was in the group that found -- I helped to found the Home Health Agency, and I served as president for two terms. I think that was four years. I volunteered at the hospital. At first, I was in the supply room cleaning equipment. Then that stopped because stuff began to arrive in packages. We didn't do the catheters and the syringes and boil them and all that stuff, and the gloves. So we weren't needed, and the control of the work was easier. We weren't the only volunteers, there were four or six of us that volunteered during the week. The security of having good clean, sterile stuff was compromised a little bit. [laughter] The hired help had a way of blaming the volunteers for whatever they were being scolded for.

AB: Yes. [laughter] [inaudible]

RH: And the nurse that was in charge found it very difficult to deal with that. And so when we weren't there, when the volunteers weren't there, she could have control, total control.

AB: Let’s stop for just a minute because we do have to turn this tape over.

RH: Good, okay.

AB: Okay, and we will have to set up what they call a new song. [End of track one.]

RH: We usually have a youngster that blows the shofar [ram’s horn] on Rosh Hashanah. I give that youngster a gift. I say, “You have to put it back into the community, into ours. But you have to put it back in community, and you have to tell me where to send it.”

SG: That’s great.

RH: The children help with the Christmas dinner thing. They help when they’re asked to. We’ve had times when we have packaged things and sent them to a place that needed diapers and nursery stuff and stuff like that. You know, a tzedakah [charity].

AB: Yes.

SG: Yes.

RH: Yes. And when my oldest daughter graduated in 1964, her teacher used to run a book club. When she retired in the same year, she wanted to keep it going. I’m still keeping that same club going. I'm going to the meeting tonight.

SG: Is that for the kids or is it for adults?

RH: No, no, that's for adults. We meet every month except December and the two summer months. In June, we have a potluck dinner and pick the selections for the following year. The hostesses take – they have very light refreshment when you go. But the dinner is always lots of fun, they're creative, and they come with their list of what to read. You get to read things you would never explore on your own. Tonight is the – I’ll

show you the book. It’s about Chinese foot binding.

AB: It’s a novel?

RH: Yes. It tells about how it’s done and what the whole lot of background rules are, and stuff like that.

AB: Do you have any questions, Sandy?

SG: Well, when we first sat down, you said that you and Ben were one of the oldest couples or something?

RH: We came here in 1949. We’ll go out feet first. [laughter] We’ve had opportunities to change, both socially and to move elsewhere. When my brother in law died suddenly in 1977, there was a question of whether Ben would move over to Burlington.

SG: Is this store Nate's?

RH: Yes.

SG: My husband, when he was a teenager –

RH: Worked?

SG: No, he didn’t work there, but he went to Nate’s, and he wanted a suit. I got to shut this off for a second. I got to tell you. I just have to tell you a personal story. [Recording paused.]

RH: – back to business, even when they weren’t present in the store, and the hired help was there. A judge just retired recently. I’m sorry, I forget his name. When he went to college, he went to Norwich [University]. The day his father took him for the interview, they forgot to bring his suit. So the father said, "Don’t worry." They ran into Montpelier. They asked the store if they could rent a suit. And they said, "Oh, yeah, we’ll fix you up,"

and in no time flat, they had him dressed and sent him back, and he was accepted at Norwich right away. And then he wanted to return the suit and pay for it. The manager, which was neither Ben nor his brother, said to him, "There is no charge." He has just retired, and he repeats the story, which is a wonderful way to be remembered as a businessperson.

SG: Absolutely.

AB: It certainly is.

RH: They were very, very nice; always very good relationships with their competitors, and they always put themselves out to be a part of the community. Ben and I are both on the Board of Visitors of Lyndon State College, [now part of Northern Vermont University] and we have established a Nursing Scholarship [The Harris Nursing Endowment at Northern Vermont University]. When they announced that the program was coming in, my husband, without even looking at me, wrote out a check. It was for a scholarship, they built it up into an endowment, so it's there. We have a prize at the [St. Johnsbury] Academy in our name, and we put it into the trades part because there were very few prizes. There are an awful lot for the academic side, and not too much for the trades. I thought if we gave once a few others would follow, and that's what happened.

SG: Very good.

RH: And what I wanted to tell you about my part in the community that has been very important to me is, right in 1949, shortly after we came, everybody was talking about fraternity, to get to know each other, and brotherhood, and so on. So the synagogue made a move and invited four members from every church in the area. The Catholics didn't come, but in those days, they didn't. The Baptists probably didn't either – whatever. But they did send me invitation to everyone, and they had a Friday night service. And the [Women's?] Auxiliary, of which I had become a part just being here, they

wanted someone to get up and talk about the Aron Kodesh [Holy Ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept], the curtains, what the designs meant, why we didn't wear hats, why we wore prayer shawls, and why we have no pictures. So it was really quite [a] simple little talk that I could handle, because I had enough education for that. And I got up and did it. From that, I have spoken to every church group, almost, except the ones that stay entirely alone and don't mingle. And I still do. I've spoken at the college. I've spoken at Lyndon School. When they have anything that they want explained, they call on me. Now recently, there was a question; a minister's wife called me. She's a schoolteacher here in the middle school; that would be seventh and eighth grade. She said, "Rosalie, I'm doing a unit on the Holocaust. Would you come and talk about it?" I said, "No." And she said, "You won't?" I said, "Well, it's not within my experience. I don't have first-hand knowledge. My relatives weren't damaged that way, or if they were we never heard about it." I said, "We helped during that time, but I don't feel equipped to speak about it. But I'll get you a speaker." So I called the [synagogue] president – the president is a woman this year, Nancy (Frank?) – and Nancy wasn't home. But her husband answered the phone. He's a lawyer. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I'll tell you what I want," and I explained. He said, "Oh, the seniors have a project that they have to complete before they leave school." It's called a capstone, I think? He said, "My son, Jake, that's his capstone, is the Holocaust. He's telling about it and doing something." I said, "Would he do it?" He said, "Of course he would." I thought maybe he would or his wife. No, no, he would send his son. It was a perfect opportunity. That's exactly what happened. I talked to Zachary – that's his name.

AB: That's his name?

RH: Zachary. I talked to Zach and I told him; he knows the teacher. I said, "Will you call her?" and he did. I asked him afterwards – he didn't call and tell me, and I haven't seen her, so she hasn't told me. But he said it was the best experience. He had a wonderful time telling what he had to tell.

SG: Very good.

RH: I'm glad I remembered that little item. But we are asked often to help with something like that.

AB: Right, to help the public learn about Judaism.

RH: Oh, and we--there's a triumvirate; three churches that take the Thanksgiving service. There's song, prayer, and breaking of the bread. We are one of those, and the other one is the North Congregational Church, and the third one is the South Congregational Church. Methodist? Anyway, three churches do it. Oh, the Catholic Church is in there. That's the three. The North Church brings in the other common denominators. We take our turn. When we do it, we have a full house that come to visit. Now the other churches are big, but what's a full house for us fills two rows sometimes in the North Church, which is huge. But they look forward to it.

AB: So this is at Thanksgiving time, you said?

RH: Yes.

AB: Okay, like a community Thanksgiving? I understand.

RH: Well, it's just an observation. It's done before Thanksgiving Day.

AB: Okay. So we're about to wrap up. If you have something more to share about anything at all.

RH: I have three children. We have three children. We're very, very proud of them. The oldest daughter graduated from Tufts [University], and she's a computer person. But her language isn't being used anymore. So she was downsized. She knew she was getting towards sixty, and they've downsized her. She stayed home for a while because her husband is the Commissioner of Health for the city of Newton [Massachusetts]. She

doesn’t need to work but she wants to. So she’s gone back to work, and she’s working in an assisted living place run by the Grey Nuns. Now, here’s a little funny – they are the presence; they just own it and run it. When I was a little girl, we lived in downtown Montreal, where there wasn’t a decent school, and my father and mother decided to send us to the convent, which was the cleanest, the nicest place to go to right there. So I went to kindergarten, and my sister went to first grade, just for one year, and then we moved out to [inaudible] Street. But you can imagine, those days, my grandfather would have frowned terribly. Some of the sisters were upset. But it didn’t do us any harm at all. However, one time my father came home. We had an umbrella stand, oak umbrella stand with the brass basin in the bottom, if you remember the [inaudible] square?

SG: Yes.

AB: Yes.

RH: I had put a pillow on the top, I had a curtain over me, and I was kneeling on the pillow. And I was telling my beads, when he came home from work. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I’m having my first communion."

AB: [laughter]

SG: Wow.

RH: He was not alarmed at all because we had been told that we didn’t have to participate. We used to go to chapel when they went, and we just sat on the chairs and listened. But you mimic what you see. [It] always tickled me that he made no punishment, no outcry, no nothing. It was what I was supposed to be doing. He had told us that in – see, in the Protestant schools, you sing all these hymns, and at holiday time, the Christmas carols and all that. He had told me, "Look upon them as folk songs. And the ones you don’t want to sing, if you don’t want to sing 'Jesus Loves Me’, don’t. But the others, they’re folk songs. They’re like your own traditions. They were handed down [by]

word of mouth." Right?

SG: Right.

AB: Yes. Right.

RH: Okay. Now the oldest child, Andrea, who's the middle daughter, went to Bay Path Junior College [now Bay Path University] near Springfield [Massachusetts], right across the line from Springfield. Then she went to Boston College, finished there, and went to University of Michigan which came out with a librarian's degree.

SG: Wait, which daughter is this?

RH: The second daughter.

SG: Her name is?

RH: Andrea.

SG: Okay, I thought you said he had gone to Tufts. No?

RH: No, Gertrude.

SG: Gertrude went to Tufts. Okay. I've got you.

RH: And Andrea has not married, and she's a very caring and concerned person. She's the nurturer of the three children. They ask her, "What shall we do for the folks?" They're very generous with time and things; they come to visit often. My son Bill is – oh, and I did it well. The first child is my height, five feet probably. I'm a little below that now, 4'10". The second child, Andrea, is about 5'4", and Bill is almost six feet. [laughter] Thank goodness. He's flourished. He's an architect. He went to UPenn [University of Pennsylvania] and then on to the Harvard School of Design. Yes, at Harvard, graduated from Harvard. He married a lovely lady who graduated from Brandeis [University], came

from Pennsylvania. We have three grandchildren now, as I told you. The oldest one was Amy, the one who died. Then the next child was her brother; her little brother was Mark. He's in advertising in Las Vegas, doing nicely. He’s thirty-one years old. Then we have Bill's two boys, Sam and Jake. Sam is a junior and Jake is a freshman.

SG: At university?

RH: Cambridge, the high school.

SG: Oh, high school.

AB: A family to be proud of.

SG: Yes.

RH: Absolutely. And immensely grateful, because Ben spent little time at home. He worked. He was the old-fashioned kind of man, had his breakfast and went right downtown to work, and then in the evening, closed, and came home just in time for supper, and the kids went off to bed. I had a great deal to do with their growing up. I am very, very proud that I was able to do so much. Maybe I’m more proud of the way I was able to do it.

SG: Good. So tell me, did your husband close the store? Or is the store still going on?

RH: No, no. We closed the St. Johnsbury one for – his brother died suddenly in '77. And in '82, we closed the St. Johnsbury one. Within the next few years, the nephew who was running them closed St. Albans and Burlington.

AB: Okay, good. Anything else, Sandy?

SG: No, I think I'm okay.

AB: Anything else, Rosalie? Very nice. Thank you so much.

SG: Thank you.

RH: Does it tell you what you wanted –?

[Recording paused.]

AB: – the point is that every story tells us what we want to know, because it just fills – [Recording paused.] – again, about growing up with your husband?

RH: Oh, yes. We married quickly with a very short courtship and not –

AB: Just a sec. It didn't go on.

[Recording paused.]

RH: – because of circumstances and the years and how we met, which I've already told you. So we have grown up together. He left much of the supervision of the children and the household to me, and he allowed me many hours of community service – the library, the school, the health organizations, the hospital. I was everywhere. [laughter] I brought home much from those experiences. He has a very sunny disposition. He wakes up every morning to a new day, as if he had a new page to write on. He doesn't carry over things, or brood – he never broods. In the sixty-five years we've been married I have never known him to be depressed. He can be cranky or angry at times, but not depression as you and I understand and know it, and as my brother-in-law was depressive.

AB: Hold on. Did we run out of tape? Have we been talking that long? My goodness.

SG: I've got it on this, though.

AB: If we're going to finish, we should get it on this because that's what our – [Recording paused.] Okay, so tell us more about Ben's sunny disposition and playing cards.

RH: Yes. He sleeps a good deal because when you're ninety-four that's the way it is. You're sleepy, you're tired, and you don't have all the energy you used to. When he asks to play a game of cards, he wakes right up and is competitive. He likes to win.

SG: What's the name of the game again, you said?

RH: Spite and Malice. The whole family plays – well no, not all of them. Chips [Gertrude, eldest child] and Andrea play with us. My son doesn't and neither does his wife. But that's okay.

SG: What are those children's names again? Jake and –?

RH: Samuel is the oldest one.

SG: Oh, and Jake?

RH: And Jake, Jacob. The daughter that I call Chips, her name is Gertrude. She's Gertrude Martha because my mother-in-law said, "You have to give her a name of somebody who lived out their life." My grandmother's name was Malka. So she's Gittel Malka [Hebrew name]. And Andrea is – I wanted to call her Abby in the worst way because she's named after my father, and not so much – my father was difficult, and we had a kind of cool relation because he was waiting for a son, and I was a girl, and he was disappointed. [laughter] He showed it in many ways. But I still wanted to call her Abby, and Ben wouldn't have it. I don't know why he didn't like it. So we opened the baby book, and we went down the list. And when we came to Andrea, he said, "That's it." So she's Andrea (Marcia?), because we had a brother-in-law Morris that died, too, that we wanted to name. Incidentally, Ben is the middle child of five, and there is nobody left except Ben. And his parents are gone. His sisters and his brothers – two brothers and two sisters.

AB: So when is your next wedding anniversary?

RH: We just had it, first of February.

AB: Congratulations.

SG: And that was your Sixty-five?

RH: Sixty-five.

SG: Did you have a big party?

RH: Just family. And we went – there's a restaurant here called Elements that's doing very well and serves marvelous food. [laughter]

SG: That's what I want to try soon.

AB: Yes, Sandy wants to go there.

SG: Not this trip, but some time I'd like to go there.

RH: Oh, yes. Call and make a reservation.

AB: So I'm going to turn this off now?

SG: Yeah.

AB: Fantastic.

[END OF INTERVIEW]