



Vivienne Shub Transcript

ELAINE EFF: This is Elaine Eff, Oral Historian with the Women's Jewish Oral Archive "Weaving Women's Words" Project, and I'm in the home of Vivienne Shub in Baltimore, on September 4th, 2001, and we are going to talk about her life in Baltimore. Why don't we start by your telling me who you are, and where you came from?

VIVIENNE SHUB: Well, I'm Vivienne Shub, and my maiden was Slovin S-L-O-V-I-N. My father was a dentist; my mother was a, had been a seamstress, and they came from Russia. I think -- I'm not sure where my husband's parents came from, but my mother's family was from Miskigibornia [phonetic] in Borisov. She was brought up in a very...her mother was an ex...was really an extremely Orthodox observant woman. She was very busy; she used to work in a market, and there were a number of sisters and brothers and my grandmother was the oldest. The youngest sister, Tanta Chenia [ph.], Annie, was very active in the anti-tsarist movement, and at that time, it was ironically it was called the Bund. And her husband was also very active. He may have even been in prison.

I'm telling you this because she was one of the main influences in my mother's life, which dealt with social consciousness, standing up in protest, and actually at one time there was going to be a...they expected a pogrom. They expected the Cossacks to come, and my mother wore a little pin...they put a pinafore, my mother, and wrapped all the literature that was in the house and sent her into the woods.

So, I tell you this because the whole question of social consciousness and social action and activism started with my mother when she was a little girl, and carried on through my whole life. Now, my parents didn't know one another in Europe, my mother was about 14 when she came, and I think one of the reasons that she came...she did not come with



her family, her mother sent her with some cousins. She didn't like the influence that her younger sister had on her, and she sent her ahead to America. My father came with his family. Oh, they were actually from Bialystock, which was under Russian control at the time, and he was about 12 when they came. And his [father]...he enrolled in the...the put him in the...what was called not kindergarten then, but "baby class." He was 12 years old, it was the most humiliating experience. His father figured that after about three years of school he had enough, and the family were in the cigar making business, the women and their father, my grandfather...my husband's...my father's father – keep the relationships.

And so, he was taken out and put to work. He...The cigar makers in Baltimore they came to buy – my mother arrived in Baltimore, and she had been...her mother had sent her to learn to sew as a real skill, and when she came to America, she was only 14 years old, and she had to go to work right away. She worked in a very fine custom made tailor shop, clothes made to order, and at the time, the child labor laws were...they wanted to enact them. And an inspector came and she was sent out onto the...outside to hide while the inspector was there, and she had to go, they needed the money. So again, that was...she was involved in a social movement, against child labor. So anyway, they met...

EE: How was it that your parents came to Baltimore?

VS: Oh, because other family were here, and oh, her father already preceded her here. He met her...he met here down at Pier Four, down on Pratt Street, down at the...at Thames Street, at the foot of Broadway. He came right to Baltimore, because other members of the family had come to Baltimore.

EE: That's your mother's family.



VS: That's my mother's family. It may be true that...it may be true that my father's family came to Baltimore too, but he was on the boat...and I think their ...his father had preceded him, here. So, he was put to work in a factory. He um...uh...I guess he was...must have been 15, 16, and he went on working, and the factory workers were very...they felt very exploited, and he became, also trying to form a union. He spoke; he was very eloquent. And his thirst for knowledge was unlimited, and he and some of his sisters would exchange information. "How many words did you work today, did you learn today?" And they would write them down on a...on the inside of a closet door and then...and he read...he read everything he could get his hands on.

And he actually prepared himself to go to a high school. He actually qualified to go to a high school, and got a diploma. He graduated in about a year and a half. He loved words; he loved Latin and he instilled love for words in us. So the...and they met at a poetry club, which also was very interested in what was going on with immigrants and life in the new country. So they met. I was born ...I was born at the time of that dreadful flu, in America, that horrible world...after World War I, the flu. My mother was quarantined in the hospital when she had me; my father couldn't even come to visit. And uh, I may be going on, but you can edit it. So she...

EE: When were you born?

VS: In 1918. [pops for emphasis] And...how about that? So she didn't see my father; he couldn't visit, and at that time they had to get a birth certificate and put a name on it, and they couldn't...no telephones, nothing, and my mother was horrified by the terrible grief in the hospital, because people were dying and people were sobbing in the corridor, and it was a dreadful experience. When she had my sister, she refused to go to a hospital. So that was a home birth. But my father was...they lived in an apartment, he had an office on Broadway, South Broadway, and there were...they had apartments upstairs from the...from the office. He had an apartment; there was a woman living on the third floor.



So he had to put a name in the birth certificate. So this woman [hits microphone]...this woman thought that Edna was a beautiful. So this woman, this neighbor upstairs, thought that Edna was a beautiful name; he didn't have any...they didn't plan names. They knew what my Hebrew name would be, because I was named for my great-grandmother, Chaya Chana. So when my mother found out that my name was Edna, she couldn't stand it. She hated that name. So my father thought, chai...Chai means life, Vivre in French is life, and so I became Vivienne. Life. And that's the origin of my name. I was born...I think it was...what was the name of the hospital before Sinai? Baltimore Hebrew something? But it was Sinai Hospital, and that's where I was born. I lived in East Baltimore. My father's...as I said my father's office was on South Broadway. We moved to...we moved to Chester [street]

EE: What kind of office did your father have?

VS: Oh, my father was a dentist. My father was a dentist because when he went to that high school, he wanted to leave the factory life; he wanted to be a professional, and he figured that dentistry was only three years and medical school was four years, so he became a dentist. Yes, I left that out.

EE: You make it sound very simple. We left him in the cigar factory, and then he became...

VS: Well, but then, he already...but he studied and read so that he qualified to go directly to the University of Maryland Medical School, uh, Dental School. Uh, we moved to East Fayette Street, uh, in Baltimore, across from the little school on Fayette and Chester where I spent my kindergarten year.

EE: Now, where did you live before that?

VS: We lived on South Broadway. We lived upstairs from the office. I don't know why we moved. I can't tell you why. I think I was four years old, three years old, four years



old.

EE: Do you remember where that was on South Broadway?

VS: South Broadway, 109 South Broadway. We have a picture of the house, and it's still there, and with my father in his dental coat, and me with a bushy head of curls, and high top shoes. [chuckles] And I was three years old then. So...

EE: How do you remember that neighborhood? Do you remember that at all?

VS: I remember the hallway. I remember trying to skip up the steps and slipping on the steps, and I have the scar in my chin to these days, and I remember being carried upstairs bleeding, because it just bled profusely, and being put down on a leather couch, one-piece leather couch with a heavy back, heavy back of , you know...there was no comfort there; it was very solid. It was good for the back. So, and I remember that.

I remember running to the window; our bedroom was in the front, and every night a horse...a horse-pulled wagon for the mailman came, and it had a certain rattle of the...a certain rattle in the wheels, and they say that I ran wildly, wildly to the window, because I wanted to see "the letter man, the letter man." Okay, that's one of the stories about my early life. And then we moved...my father moved his office. I don't know why. We moved a number of times. We moved up to North Avenue, and I went to a school on Walbrook Avenue, I went there. We then...we moved again. It's hard to keep track, but then eventually, eventually we moved to the Pimlico area.

EE: Well, I'd like to track your moving, because that really says a lot about the Jewish communities...

VS: We lived on North Avenue in the 2600 block. As a matter of fact, there was a shul joining our house. Again, my father had the office on the first floor, and we lived on, we



had, we lived in the back and upstairs, and the back is the kitchen, and I think there was a back stairway, and we lived there for a number of years.

EE: Now, this is West North Avenue?

VS: West North Avenue, yes.

EE: So, do you ... so you moved from Broadway to Fayette and Chester, which was East Baltimore.

VS: Yes, East Baltimore.

EE: And then you moved over to North Avenue in West Baltimore.

VS: Yes, that's right.

EE: Can ... what ... how old were you, and do you re[member]...?

VS: I was six. I was six when we moved to West North Avenue, and I remember ... I remember ... I was in the ... six, seven, I remember being in the first and second grades in the school on Walbrook Avenue and maybe, I don't know, Payson or one of those cross intersecting streets of North Avenue. And...

EE: How do you remember East Baltimore, versus West Baltimore? Was there any difference?

VS: No, I was not aware. I was three, four years old. My sister was born when I was four, four and a half, on that ... in the Fayette Street house, and born in the house, but my mother always had ... she had a specialist from Hopkins. She wanted to have the best care, but he had to come to the house. She would never go back to a hospital. So, I have no recollection of ... I remember playing on the street, I remember the school, from kindergarten, and I remember how freezing cold it was in the winter in the



bedrooms. They would put a heater and we'd have to come downstairs to the kitchen, to warm up.

EE: You didn't have ... there was no central heat?

VS: I think there was a furnace, but it didn't operate to the second floor. It wasn't warm enough.

EE: Now, were you renters, or did you own your houses?

VS: Rent. Renters. Always renters until, until we moved to Forest Park. We moved to Forest Park, I guess '27, '28, we were there in the crash, '29, and it was a desperate time. My father's patients were sometimes paying him with bartered goods. It was very desperate. And we actually lost our house.

EE: So, in fact, when you moved to Forest Park ...

VS: Oh, they actually bought that house. Things were good before the '29 crash. So it was a beautiful house. It was what's now Chatham Road. It was at El Dorado.

EE: Okay, so tell me about the house on Chatham Road.

VS: The house on Chatham Road, I remember that as being something very beautiful, with a beautiful yard. My mother planted a garden. We had a fireplace with, you know, lead glass windows on either side of the fireplace. I can see them. My mother ... I can see the slipcovers my mother made, because she sewed everything. Everything I wore, and my sister wore, was made by mother, from winter coats to summer clothes to everything. I never ... I didn't know what "ready made" was.

So we came to Chatham Road, and I went to School 69, went straight on through from ... there was an interim move.[chuckles] I forgot that. We moved to a house on Spaulding Avenue in the Denmore Avenue in the Pimlico area. There were two moves before that.



Ha. A lot of families moved a great deal. Sometimes it was the rent; sometimes it was the cost. And we moved around a great deal.

When we lost the house, as a matter of fact, we moved down near my father's office was then on Linden and North. And we moved to what was such a dreadful comedown. To a third floor apartment on Linden and McMechen Street, and it was a very depressing time. It was really a very depressing time. When I was about seven and a half, my mother took me to the Peabody to study violin. When I lived there, I was already in junior high school. I had to take a streetcar up to ... it was Forest Park. It was Forest Park High School, which had one whole section, it was the Forest Park Junior High. This preceded Garrison Junior High. This is a very long story, but you can always cut it. So, yes, and so we lived on Linden Avenue. We then moved to a lovely place on Linden Avenue, close to Druid Hill Park, and then we moved up to where my grandmother was living. The family had moved from East Baltimore. A lot of the family moved to Pimlico and my grandmother followed the rest of the family. They lived in a house in an area just being developed. The streets were still mud. And so we moved to a house around the corner, on Spaulding Avenue. Then ... and all these were rented.

And then we moved out to Marnat Road, which was total country. As a matter of fact, there was one row of houses where we rented a house with yard and a porch, and it was such a joyous move. The only problem was that we were one block into the county. I can tell this now, this was supposed to be a secret. But my address for continuing in Forest Park High School was my Bubby's, my Bubby's address on Denmore Avenue. And we lived there for a couple of years. I was uneasy because I always thought the school would find out that I didn't live in Baltimore City. One block away from Baltimore City, and a house became vacant on Shelburne Road, that within the city line. So I became legitimate. And I went to Forest Park High School. My Forest Park High School years were joyous ones. I was very, very active.



I played in the orchestra. I had continued to take violin lessons up until the Depression was so deep that they couldn't afford the tuition. But I played in the school orchestra, and was very active in the music. And I belonged to the Open Forum Club where we had discussions of civic events and social problems. In the meantime, I went to meetings with my parents, I heard lectures, I heard socialists, I heard from Democrats, and so really I ... as a child, I was exposed to all of that. My mother was very active.

My mother marched ...my mother marched. She marched when they had hunger marches for food, for food assistance, she marched for unemployment insurance. These things didn't come easily to America. These people marched for change. Then, of course, there was the bonus march of and for the veterans after World War I, because they had been promised a bonus. In the Depression, unemployment ran through all of the classes, professionals, business people, professionals unemployed. My mother, I remember coming from the Peabody and seeing a man who was very well dressed selling apples on the street.

And she took me to see a bread line. It was down at the ... what was now the Maryland [General] Hospital on Howard Street. The line ... they fed people in the back, in the back of Howard. They had long lines of ... and men, they would be men, mostly. And she took me to see ... to see what degradation can be. So that's a very important part of my background.

Well, I graduated from Forest Park High School. And I was destined, it could have been written in my birth certificate that I would be a schoolteacher, and I would go to Towson Normal School for teachers. I think it then became Teacher's College – it stopped being Normal School by the time I got there. And all through my school, I was in school plays. My teacher would have me read poetry to the class. And I think one of the most important influences in my life in being an actress was my father. He was a wonderful writer. As a matter of fact, he once was the editor of B'nai B'rith paper. He had rare



creative ability. He made up stories – he was like a pied piper. All of the kids in the neighborhood would want to hear his stories. He had such a wealth of expressiveness, that I heard in the voice, I heard how vocal expression could create suspense, terror, laughter. And then he would create such exciting adventure that my sister and I would start to cry, “Don’t let anything bad happen.”

And so, I think that the whole drama, the whole question of drama, as being able to be conveyed through the voice, it was a major influence on my life. So that as I read. I was encouraged to read, and encouraged to be in the school plays. We didn’t have any drama courses at that time. There was no such thing as Drama One, Drama Two which the high schools can have today, but there was a Dramatics Club. So I was very active. I think I was the President of the Dramatic Club. And I was in the junior play, and in my high school senior play.

And when I got to Towson, there was a whole group of people interested in theater, there was no theater department at Towson at that time. So, we just got together and did scenes from plays and went to theater. Our high school teacher had taken us to what was Ford’s Theater on Fayette Street, we got tickets in what they called “the pit,” which is up near the roof, and I got to see a lot of theater then.

Though I will tell you something about my high school teacher. She once told me that “I was an unusual Jewess.” The antisemitism just dripped from that. I was an unusual Jewess, and that was supposed to be a wonderful compliment. She also did send me to the Vagabond Theater... it is one of the oldest in the country, what they used to call Little Theater, now Community Theater, and they had a junior drama program for the summer doing plays. The first summer after my freshman year, I had heard about a drama studio in Baltimore, and I had met somebody, a couple of people in high school, who went there. Well, I decided ... I used to work on the weekends, I saved up money and stuff, and my parents also gave me money for tuition, and I went there for a whole summer. I



was immersed. I was immersed in scene after scene, in voice coaching, in movement, in ... we covered such a gamut of dramatic literature, from start ... one, I think of the first scenes I ever had to work on was Shakespeare, a scene from Shakespeare, and then contemporary theater. One of the first things that I had to overcome was my Balmer accent. The man who created that studio was Ramsey Street. He had been a teacher at the American Academy of Dramatic Art, in New York, and I really don't know what brought him to Baltimore. He established a studio, on a very, very high professional level. I went there for hours every day. When I wasn't at the studio, when ... and I would meet partners to work in double scenes, in addition to monologues.

When I thought that I was ready to show Mr. Street what work I had done, the first thing I had to do was take out my notebook and take down all the Baltimore accent corrections. We had to learn the phonetic alphabet for what was considered standard American diction, fine American diction. So the course was very intense. Before we... if we, when we passed a scene, it was a real achievement. We would work in pairs, we had little rehearsal rooms; now, it was in the basement on Biddle Street, near Biddle and Preston. I can see the place now.

The end of the summer came. My father heard me speaking to a very good friend, and saying, "I don't know how I can stop this. I don't know how I can stop doing this." So, he said, "I heard what you said. How many people in life do what they truly love, follow their passion?" "How would you like to go really enroll for the full course of three years? I'll let you work in my office as a receptionist." And my mother fully supported it. Though he was a very, very conscientious dentist. He was not happy in dentistry. He should have been a teacher, he should have been a writer. Actually, he did write, he did write. His poetry is very beautiful, and I have some of it. And he said that.

She loved the arts. My father was the dreamer. My father could create fantasies, my mother took us for lessons. My mother took us to concerts. My mother took us to



museums. He was the man of fantasy, which just fired our imagination. She actually took action. It was quite a difference between the two of them. [laughs] So, I was ecstatic.

I left Towson, and I enrolled full-time in this theater conservatory. I touched every classification of dramatic literature, from the Greeks, straight on through Shakespeare, through contemporary works. We had to do improvisations, and we had to study dialects. We had to study the pronunciation of dialects. Well, we did it phonetically, because we would get books on dialects because they didn't have dialect tapes. And I don't know how well we did; we thought we were doing very well. We thought we were talking very British and very Irish and very New York and Southern, [in dialect] and so, we thought we were great. So I graduated.

EE: What school was this?

VS: This is the Ramsey Street Theater Conservatory. And I worked, I worked part-time for my father. And then came graduation! What to do? There was no theater, no professional theater in Baltimore. The only theater that came here was from New York, ... there was another theater, there was the Maryland Theater, Baltimore Maryland had Fords, two legitimate theaters in Baltimore. One had to go to New York to audition. I went. I was like a babe in the woods. My mother and father wouldn't let me go to that big city by myself. My mother went with me to New York. And she had a very good old friend who in the Depression and the hard years rented a magnificent apartment on Riverside Drive, rented out every single room to ... except the kitchen and one small room for herself and her daughter. And she earned her rent by renting every other room in there. There must have been eight rooms in that beautiful, beautiful apartment, right there on Riverside Drive. And she had space for my mother and me.

The people that lived in the apartment were actors and artists. I met the director who married Melina Mercouri from later on in life was ... Jules Dassin a famous movie



director. And then I started to what they do call “make the rounds” of agents. There was no television. There were no commercials. There was no Off-Broadway, certainly no Off-Off Broadway, and if you didn’t have Broadway resume, you couldn’t break in, except some fluke or somebody would let you audition. And I was *not* aggressive. I was very timid. Somebody said, “You have to lie, Vivienne. Tell, find out a play that failed, and didn’t open or had one performance, and tell them you were in that.” And I couldn’t lie. I finally got an interview with somebody, with an agent, and she said, “What have you done?” and I said, “You mean, what have I done? I can show you what I studied and where I’ve performed ...” “In New York, honey.” “Well, I haven’t.” She said, “Well, then I don’t have anything for you.” I said, “But if you haven’t done it, how do you get to go on Broadway?” She said, “It’s a vicious cycle, isn’t it, honey?” And she said, “Well, I can send you one place.” She sent me to an address that didn’t exist. That was cruel! But I was very active in theater. Guess how? The Federal Theater Project was being cut out... after Roosevelt. The whole federal project... all the public works, were cut, and the protest movement for the cutting of the arts involved all kinds of skits and performances and cabaret performances, and these actors who were in the same apartment said, “Come on, be with us, you can be part of it,” so I definitely acted in New York to protest the cutting of Federal Theater. And I saw, I saw magnificent theater. The Mercury Theater – Orson Wells came out of that program. So I got to do a lot.

I didn’t know from what actors do today and what they’ve been doing for years. They become waiters. They become waitresses. They tend bars. They do anything to stay in New York and just make the rounds and try to get an agent, because you cant do anything without an agent in New York. So, after three months, of being supported by my father and I felt like a parasite. And I didn’t know to go out and consider getting a job in New York, the big city. So I said, I have to go home. I don’t see any end to this. Well, I came back to Baltimore, and some, there have been times when I don’t understand why I didn’t go back to Towson, because you could get tuition free if you promised to teach for two years in the Baltimore City schools. I just wanted to be indep[endent], self-



sufficient. So I went to a business school. And it was very depressing to me at first. It was quite a comedown, because I was an intellectual snob, and the girls in Forest Park High School who had to take commercial course, I thought they weren't academically qualified. That's a very, very snobbish outlook. So I felt, so I'm taking a business course. (sighs) I've come to this. But I did want to get skills.

What happened is that shorthand began to fascinate to me. Like a new language. It was so clever; I was caught up in it. And a friend had an uncle or a father who was in the real estate business, he needed somebody in the office. So he hired me for \$10 a week. It was pretty good then. So, I collected rents in the office, and I never stopped acting, because there was the Vagabond Theater, and I did play after play there. I was really practicing the skills that I had, and I had been through such intensive, wonderful training that I was welcomed, you know, and I did play after play there.

And then there was some radio work. You could get some radio work. Not for money, of course. They had a program which had to do with Maryland history. So, there would be episodes, like dramatic little skits from Maryland history. And uh, there was not much commercial work, and I wasn't ... some people did it. And I don't know, I, somebody sent me down to try out for something, like doing something silly like ... some soap serial like Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles. And I was a little self-conscious; I didn't make it. But I kept on acting. I got to work for a lawyer, so that upped me ... I left that real estate office. And then I applied for a job at the Maryland State Employment Office which, as we were coming to the war, became the United States Employment Office, and I started out in clerical work, and then I became an interviewer.

Now I've skipped a very important part of my life. In 1940, I met my husband... Louis Shub. He had just graduated from the Curtis Institute as a pianist, Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He had begun studies at the Peabody, and then gone to Julliard, but then he won a full scholarship with a living stipend from Curtis. They even had apartments for



the students there. It's like a sister school to Julliard. He graduated and came back to Baltimore, and we had a mutual friend who was ... considered herself – a poet, and she considered herself like a salon hostess. And she would have regular gatherings at her apartment of people representing the arts, and I represented theater. And she had known Louis for years. I think they had met at the Jewish Educational Alliance because his whole family lived in East Baltimore. His family – his father was a baker – Rokas Bakery. [laughs] Oh, they made wonderful rye bread. I wish I could get some today. So we would meet at that apartment, and it was something that she had regularly, so it wasn't a one time meeting, and he finally asked me to a concert. Well, we went on from there. My father rented a house on Penhurst Avenue. And uh, we were very active in politics (So, do you want to take a rest?) Later on, we became active in the Progressive Party, but that was after the war. I'm skipping around. But there were groups that got together to discuss social issues, and Louis was interested, and I was interested.

Anyway, we married in 1941, Louis and I. And we moved to an apartment on Charles Street in the 900 block. I was working at the Employment Service, and Louis started to teach here, and he would give some local concerts, and he was preparing to make a New York debut. Well, then came the war. He was deferred for several times, because his eyesight wasn't perfect, but then as the war went on, that didn't stop his being drafted. So, we lived at that apartment for nine months, and he left. I didn't see continuing to live there and live there alone, so I moved back home. Apartments were very, very difficult to get because the city was being flooded with people coming in to work in the industries.

My father ... my father, during the war, bought on Penhurst Avenue, Penhurst Avenue a block in from Garrison Boulevard. And in that house, all of my children were born. I continued to work all through the war, of course, but all through the war, all of the evenings were spent in doing theater. And there were a couple of theater groups. I did plays with the Vagabond. I never stopped acting. And except when my children were



born. For five years, I just left it. But after five years, I had been hearing about a wonderful, wonderful theater group at the ... not the Jewish ... there was no Jewish Community Center then, there was the Jewish Educational Alliance, and then there was the Young Men's and Young Hebrew Women's ... like the ... not the Y, the Hebrew Y, the Jewish Y, on Monument Street. And they had a most serious program of drama every, every year, and a very good friend of mine who had also studied some theater was in Baltimore, and we said, "Let's go back to it." It was such a dedicated serious drama program. They brought in a director from New York. He would put on a season of plays, it maybe follow a theme, Russian plays, early English plays, American plays. And the experience was marvelous, and he had theater workshops and classes. I was always going to workshops as well. When he left the city there was a young man – this is really – this is a crucial story in my life. There was a young man who had been a theater director. But, he was working in post-war – he was at Fort Holabird, where they had ... where they had, like Secret Service training going on, because there was the Cold War, and he was working with actors to teach soldiers how to reenact certain situations undercover. They would be acting parts, because they were working for Secret Service.

And the director had regular hours; there was no war, and he applied for this job at the Hebrew Y. And then ... he was truly professional, and his classes and his workshops were wonderful. He moved up with the Jewish Community ... when the Jewish Community Center came to Park Heights Avenue, and I went with him, and finally ... I did "Death of a Salesman." ... the list of plays that I did there, the "Tevya and His Daughters," which preceded "Fiddler on the Roof." It was a play before he became a musical. There were restoration plays from the early British, and it was such a marvelous experience. Well, his tour of duty ended, and he was going to leave the city. His plays were so well reviewed, and so well respected, that a committee from a group at the Jewish Community Center that got together with Hal Gardner, who was the reviewer for *The Sun*, a very, very excellent theater reviewer. They got together and formed a



committee, and at that was the time of the early days of regional professional theater. There was a theater in Dallas, there was one in Minneapolis, there was the beginning of Off-Broadway in New York, and they said, "Why can't Baltimore have a professional theater?" That was the birth of Center Stage. The name of this director was Edward Golden.

EE: What year was this?

VS: 1963. Maybe they started in '62 to plan, and to look for a venue. Center Stage was born. Ed Golden said to me, "Come with me into the company," because he knew, he knew my background, he knew the conservatory training – well, he worked with me. He worked with me in all kinds of drama. And so that's how I came to join a professional theater company, and I joined the union. In 1963 I became an Actors' Equity Association actress. And I was with Center Stage through some very tumultuous days. The theater committee, board did not think that the audience in Baltimore would support a play for longer than two weeks. So, there was a new play every two weeks. You would put on one at night, and start rehearsing immediately for the next... you had to take one day off and begin to rehearse the next play, for only two weeks. As a matter of fact, in the original company, Rhea Feiken was a member of the ... came to act with the company.

EE: Let me just go back a second. I want to ask you a question. You said opened in '63. Were your parents still living when that happened?

VS: Yes.

EE: How did they react to your ...?

VS: They were thrilled, they were absolutely thrilled. My father – they would come to perf[ormances] – they didn't see one performance. They would see as many as they possibly could. And the theater was on Preston and Cathedral, where the Theater Project is today.



EE: Let's talk a little about ... because I know we could go on forever about theater and we will go back to it, but I want to ... I imagine ... tell me about the birth of your children, and being a mother and ... how you fit that in.

VS: Okay, my first child was born in 1946, my daughter. She's a pianist.

EE: Tell me about her. What's her name?

VS: Amy Rothstein. She lives in Northern Virginia in McLean. My son, Daniel ... as I said, they were all born in the house. He's several years younger. And then my third child is Judith – Judy Shub, now Condliff. She's ... my son is a graphic designer, with his own company. And my daughter Judy is a lawyer, married to a lawyer. Her name is Judith Condliff now. And I have six grandchildren. My oldest daughter has two children. One is a nurse in San Francisco. One is a computer man - in Seattle. My son is married to a young woman from Thailand. My daughter Judy has four children, three by one husband, and her second husband is the lawyer, and she has the little six-year-old... and I have a little six-year-old grandchild, and her oldest daughter is in college.

EE: Tell me about your own ... you know, the birth of your children and what ... how that. Yeah, you were living with your parents at the time?

VS: Yes...we were all living in that house, all together, the whole house was filled to the top. It had three stories. And I have skipped a very...I mean, I mentioned it early on. We were very, very active in the Wallace Campaign, after the war, in 1948, the third party, the Progressive Party, very interested in that, very active in the fighting the...what was called the Ober law. That was a loyalty oath law, and anyone who worked for the State or for the government in Maryland had to sign a loyalty oath. This was through the McCarthy period, and the first three people who were fired from their jobs because they wouldn't sign that loyalty oath were three Quakers. My husband headed a committee to get a referendum to repeal the Oberlaw. Our activity, our political activity, was so intense



because every county in the state had to have a minimum number of petitions signed by registered voters, to get a referendum. And this was the election in 1950. So, we traveled, we covered the state with petitions, and then, but we had to check every petition against the voter registration because if one petition had 20 names, and if there was one unregistered, not legitimate voter, the entire petition was disqualified. So, we worked night and day. I had built-in babysitters with my mother and father.

EE: Now, what was it that made you so passionate about this?

VS: I grew up with a passion for social issues. I was born to it. I was made aware of what poverty is. We went through ourselves...we lost a house; that's traumatic. That was so traumatic I never wanted to have a mortgage again in my life...this is the first house I bought. I was in a panic – a mortgage, a mortgage. It was like a word of horror, carried over. So, social issues – my mother was very active in the peace movement after the war. I went with her, we worked again with petition so that no country should use nuclear power! That was what they want to throw out right now, Bush. So ...

EE: I want to get back to your kids, how ... Tell me what you ... you know, about being a mother, giving birth, having a family, what that meant to you.

VS: That along with our political activity was a prime acti[vity]... Oh, I had to stop working, my first pregnancy. I was so sick. We didn't have a car, and since for Louis – our home was always a piano studio as well. So he didn't have to go anywhere with a car, I would come home on the bus and get so sick that couldn't go back to work. I was a home mother.

EE: And where did you live then?

VS: Penhurst Avenue. Penhurst off of Garrison Boulevard. So – with my parents. My sister got married and moved, set up a little something in the third floor, which is a finished attic, and she lived there while her husband was getting his Ph.D. at Hopkins,



now astrophysicist, living in Holland, heads a department there.

EE: So you had three generations and three different families living under a single roof. That's a rather ... it was probably more usual for those times. But why don't you talk about that a little bit?

VS: Well, my father was absolutely crazy about my husband. They had such marvelous conversations about literature that I say there were times that I thought that Louis was courting my father, not me. So my parents both loved him. He brought such joy into the house. My brother-in-law was a dynamic person, Dr. Mayo Greenberg. He...when he was sort of courting my sister, he would...he would come over, and my father, we had to wait for my father to come home from his office, and so, we always ate dinner about seven, seven-thirty. And my mother would say, "Sit down and eat." "I already ate supper,"— he would eat second suppers. And he was delightful. He is delightful. And my parents loved him. They loved our husbands. My kids loved them. So, it was a very, very nice community. So then, as I said, I had built-in babysitters. My father adored the children. His storytelling passed onto the grandchildren. They just gathered around him. The kids in the neighborhood would want to come and hear. So, uh, so that's...that's how we could all live together. People wondered, but that was how it was. My sister didn't leave until my brother-in-law got his first job at the University of Delaware. And then after a while, the whole idea of a ... not having my own kitchen, my own domain, so what did my parents do? They moved out, they said, "I need the house." [giggles] And they bought a house on Liberty Heights Avenue down near Mondawmin.

EE: That must have quieted things down. How did you feel about that?

VS: I was fine; I was the lady of the house. It was my kitchen. Not that, you know, my mother was, you know, we had no conflicts about it, except that I felt I didn't have my own...my own, own place.



EE: So, did this become your own place?

VS: That, yes. One evening I went to Goucher College when the...the Director of Drama invited me to sit in on a final rehearsal he was having, and he wanted my opinion. And he said, "You know, we have a very interesting residential – residence program here." The Dean at that time had a program where she wanted people from different walks of life to be residents. She wanted them to bring their outside experience to the campus.

Louis and I represented music and theater. There was a businessman there, there was a lawyer living there, and there were some academics. There were people in all walks of life, and we had an apartment in one of the dorms, Simpson. I came home, and I told Louis about this, about looking into it, and I thought he would think, "Oh, I'm not going to live on a college campus." He was enchanted by the idea. So, we were required to write a whole story about why we thought we would be interested. I was also teaching; I was teaching at the Jewish Community Center in Children's Workshops. I went back because during the war, I had studied with...took workshops with Isabelle Berger with the Children's Theater Association, and I assisted her at times. So I did a lot of teaching at the JCC.

EE: Well, what year was this?

VS: In the 60s.

EE: So, where were your children? Did your children go with you to Goucher?

VS: Oh no, by the time...Goucher didn't come until '70s. My son was in college. My oldest daughter had graduated and gotten married. She had graduated from Oberlin Conservatory. She got married, and she later went, got a master's in the Manhattan School of Music. My youngest daughter was in college. I didn't have any babies anymore. When we left the house to go to Goucher, we asked, we told my son he could



invite some students to live there. The house shouldn't be empty. We didn't charge them anything. So, he had fellows living there. So we moved to Goucher, and it was the most magnificent experience. I was working a lot at Center Stage, and I would take students down to usher or to see the plays, to meet the actors. Louis had some of his students wanted to study with him privately. He continued to teach privately.

And then he started a whole program of concerts at Goucher. He did three concerts a year at Goucher for 15 years. After we left Goucher, (our stay at Goucher was for three years). It was marvelous, just marvelous. And we would have students in for study breaks and snacks, of course, my mother had a heart attack while we were living at Goucher, and when she came out of the hospital, I took her to live with us, because we had a room that had been a den, and I made that her room.

EE: At...Goucher?

VS: Yes. She loved it. She loved the campus. It was so beautiful. So, at the end of our Goucher tour ... oh, I did some workshops at Goucher. Another thing happened at Goucher. They had what they would call a "Country Intellectual fair," and Louis and I had done some joint programs together. As a matter of fact, we did one for Baltimore Hebrew. It was our first one together. They had a series for the season, and they wanted us to perform. I said, well, we can do that. Louis can play, and then I can do some readings or presentations. And they said, well, couldn't you do something together? I said, "I'll think about something possibly that we could do together." Well,

he was reading some biography on the life of Chopin, and I read it, and I said, "What about you play from Chopin, and I tell anecdotes from his life?"

Chopin had a liaison with George Sand, who was a liberated woman 80 years ago. Her life was so fascinating that I intertwined the story of her life, with what he composed during their life together. And we did this program, and we began to get booked. People



began to request us, and Goucher found out about it, as a result of that, they said, they asked us, “Could you develop a whole course on that, like a continuing ed. course, not on the regular Goucher curriculum?” We did that several times. We did ten sessions. We did all the music of the classical period, Beethoven, Bach, Chopin, Liszt, Mozart, Schubert, went on and on. So, we did that at Goucher while we were there, and we did, as a matter of fact, later on, one at the Jewish Community Center some years ago. I still meet people who attended some of those things. And I meet some people who were in the children’s workshops at Goucher, and at the Jewish Community Center too.

EE: I’m one of your students.

VS: Right, right, of course, of course.

EE: I’m your protégé.

VS: Right, right, and here we meet again. So, at the end of our residency, we had to buy a house which set my nerves into – because there was that mortgage that had been foreclosed, and that was my only memory of mortgage. Well, it’s okay. [laughs] So we came here ...

EE: What happened to the house on Penhurst?

VS: We finally sold it. It took us a year to get out of there. There was so much accumulated. I had so many costumes there from children’s plays because I did a workshop with a friend of mine. We set up a workshop, children’s workshop that we ran, took plays to the schools and so on. So, that was our life ‘till we came here, and I was working at Center Stage. Then I was asked to audition for Maryland Public Television, because they were producing so many productions right on the premises, right at Maryland Public Television. They did training films. They did whole series on the working mother. They did whole series on the adult educa[tion], returns to education. It would be like 10 or 12 episodes where they would have authorities come in and who



were interviewed, interspersed with dramatizations. So, I was very active in television.

And then people would say, well, why don't you contact some of the agents around? I went for interviews, and I worked for Central Casting in Washington, Central Casting in Baltimore, Maryland, Taylor Royal for Pat Moran, films. So from the stage, which is my first love and still my best one, I started to do all of that film and film commercial training films, voiceover. I did one for National Gallery of Art. So my professional life expanded.

In the meantime, my sister moved to Holland, because my brother-in-law got a job as the head of the Department of Astrophysics, and so our international travels began, all over.

EE: You know, one of the things I really do want to talk about, that we have not even touched, is your Jewish education, or your Jewish interests, both with your family, with your mother and father.

VS: My Jewish education ... my parents didn't belong to a congregation. My father was an iconoclast. He ... as a little boy, he would test, he went up in a little hidden closet and tore paper on a Saturday, and he waited for thunder and lightning. So he became very skeptical of ritual. The ritual that we got was from my Bubby, from my mother's mother. All holidays, every *Shabbos*, we got that from my mother's mother. I spoke Yiddish to her; I love that language. My father would read Shalom Aleichem to my sister and me, he would translate, tell us the Yiddish and tell us the translation, simultaneous translation. Our love for Yiddish literature, and Jewish culture, is so much a part of me that if I hear any bit of Klezmer music, I can jump for joy. But it's secular. And it's very strong within me.

The Jewish consciousness, the fight against antisemitism, and for all civil rights, every active in the civil rights movement. I was in Washington when Martin Luther King gave that memorable address. It was all part – freedom for everyone. We were at a rally after rally – this goes back during the Progressive Party years – to break the segregation ... to



break the segregation ...

END OF CD 1

EE: This is Elaine Eff. of the Jewish Women's Archive "Weaving Women's Words," and this is the second tape on September 4th, 2001, of an interview with Vivienne Shub, in her home, in Baltimore, Maryland. And we were talking about Civil Rights and activism, and Druid Hill Park.

VS: The tennis courts were segregated; there was the white tennis court which is ... very much in the open near the botanical garden, and we weren't even aware that there was a black tennis court, and a black swimming pool. We had some friends who were tennis players, and they invited some African American, black tennis players to come with them. They called the police and told them what they were going to do, and they went, and they played tennis together on the white court. Many of us were there to observe it. And we waited for the police, and they came, and they took them, and then we were in a sort of a caravan to follow them to the police station. And eventually, when that went to court, that segregation was broken. So...where else were we?

EE: Well, actually, we were starting to talk about Judaism, sort of secularism.

VS: Yes, that's right. But as I said, my Jewish contact with ... I call what my father and my mother gave me *yiddishkeit*. But the...as far as the rituals, we would go to visit my grandmother in the *shul* on the holidays, and we were at the house every *Shabbos*, and, of course, when we would come there for Friday night and for Saturday, the Tantas, we all meet there, come back from my music lesson and meet there, and then I would get my 10 cents to run like a dervish to the Pimlico movie every afternoon and sit in there for three hours – more – it was a continuous showing; you didn't have to get out at the end of one. So they'd have to come and pull me out because I was pulled in by those actors. Like Loretta Young walking down the street, when I came out as if she had come into my



soul. So, yeah, question?

EE: Yeah, um, I understand, you always ... I'm thinking about the trajectory, the moves, the constant moves you made, literally every move from East Baltimore to West Baltimore to Park Heights to Upper Park Heights, you were always very much within the Jewish corridor. You were always moving within extremely Jewish ...

VS: That's true, except past Belvedere Avenue, of course, that was, later on, it was the Jewish Community Center, that was not...that was not the Jewish community that it is today. When we moved out to Marnat Road, there were no Jews. There were no Jews there. I say, we moved to Upper Park Heights before there was an Upper Park Heights. I used to take the bus; We had to walk down to a streetcar, not a bus, had to take the streetcar to go to rehearsals all the way downtown to the Vagabonds. I could come back 11, 12 o'clock at night from a rehearsal, and walk several blocks to Marnat Road; there was no fear. There was no Jewish community there. There were no temples. Around Glen Avenue, there was that old *shul*, and my father had a very dear friend that we used to visit there, and I became ... we may have gone into that *shul* from time to time, but he lived next door. But past Glen Avenue? Wasn't Jewish.

EE: Who lived there?

VS: Uh, middle class, our whole street of Shelburne Road and Marnat Road were not Jewish. Middle-class people. Gentiles.

EE: How were you treated by those people?

VS: Well, um, we were very friendly with our neighbors. We never ran into neighbors' houses or anything like that. I mean, there wasn't that kind of thing, but it was very friendly. I had one experience on Chatham Road. I was, what, eight or nine years old, and there was a little girl living two doors from me, Doris was her name. And she said ... we would come home for lunch. We walked home for lunch. And she said, "I hate



Howard. He's a Jew." And I said, "I'm Jewish. Do you hate me?" She says, "I guess so." [laughs] But we...and I didn't go to her house, and my parents were incensed, but she came down and played with me. But we didn't encounter that in Shelburne Road or Marnat Road, we didn't encounter any of that.

EE: What kind of neighborhood was that then, and when are we talking about?

VS: 1933, '34, '35, '36. Yeah, around that time.

EE: How would you describe the neighborhood?

VS: I would describe the neighborhood as middle-class, maybe some working in industry, business, some business owners. We didn't even know what everybody did.

EE: What did it look like? Can you describe it?

VS: Well, I can...the street is still...I think it was 3300 block, the houses are still there. The houses on Marnat Road had been built, they had already been built before the crash, and across the street from us were about four or five foundations that never got built, because the crash came and everything stopped. Just foundations across the street.

At the end of our block, there was just forest. We used to walk through, there was a little railroad track, and we used to walk to (what's now Green spring Shopping Center) an airport. We used to go there to watch the planes take off. There was not a Jewish community. There was some exquisite houses along Seven Mile Lane farther up near the airport, I mean, like manor houses of sorts. We had moved from the country from Linden Avenue, and it was heaven. We had no lack of children to play with. There weren't a lot of Jewish children. On Seven Mile Lane, which now I think Nerak Road was a big farm. My sister used to play with the kid who lived in a barn. They jumped on the hay. So it was not a Jewish neighborhood.



EE: When you were raising your own children, did you think about raising them within a Jewish community? Was that important to you?

VS: Well, Garrison - well, it was very mixed, very mixed. The children in the school were very mixed. They had Jewish friends, they had non-Jewish friends. Our next-door neighbors were not Jewish and the friendliest people in the world. They ... just dear, dear people; we were very, very close. We had wonderful relationships with our next-door neighbor.

EE: But did you think about raising – how did you raise your children?

VS: As I was raised. I would do programs in Yiddish, but I couldn't read the Yiddish. I have a book of the most marvelous anecdotes, they're all transliterated. Tell them in Yiddish. I love them. I love the Jewish humor, I love the history of the Jews. So I mean, I feel like I'm immersed in *yiddishkeit*. My father brought *traif* into the house. My mother almost got sick.

EE: Did you parents keep Kosher?

VS: Oh, no, no. My father didn't pay any attention to it. He mixed up her dishes right from the beginning, so she just gave up.

EE: So, you and your husband never belonged to a synagogue?

VS: No, no. His family were religious, but they didn't...I don't know, maybe my father-in-law might have had some tie, no.

EE: What about on the high holidays? How did you observe them? Or do you?

VS: Well, we're very much aware of them. We, in our adult life, as a matter of fact, (we're very decimated now,) but we have had a group of very, very dear friends, and we had a *seder* every year. But we would read a special *Hagaddah* that dealt with, when it



came to slavery, we talked about, we would sing...we would sing some of the songs from *Pesach* and sing "Go Down Moses, Let My People Go." Because slavery was slavery, is slavery to us. And we ordered from the caterer. We had the full *Pesach* dinner, and we went through...and we would read from the Hagaddah and then have something else to eat, have the full menu, the *Pesadicha* menu, it was wonderful. Years, years we went, we had these wonderful *seders*. And we would come together, and celebrate freedom, all around. For everybody.

EE: Are any of your children observant?

VS: No. No, my son is married to a dear girl from Thailand. My oldest daughter is married to someone Jewish. And now my younger...my daughter's first husband was not Jewish. His mother is our dear grandmother, their children love her. And the divorce made no difference in our relationship. My son-in-law's father was not Jewish. His mother was...escaped from the Holocaust. Her father had been head of a medical clinic, and they escaped. They got word. They left for Switzerland. Like Anne Frank. So, there is that great awareness.

EE: It's a living Judaism.

VS: It's very, very much living. And anytime I can find somebody who can speak Yiddish, I just ... we just *kvell* from joy.

EE: Did you ever take any of the courses at the ...

VS: No, I didn't. I regret that. I wish I had actually learned to read the Yiddish. I belong...I support the Yiddish Book Project, you know, where they ... where is it now, in New Haven? They are collecting Yiddish books from all over the world. They are now getting translations of them. It's a vast library. It's a vast movement. It's the...I support that. I send money to the Yiddish Theater in New York, to keep it up, help, my little contribution, because it's alive and kicking.



EE: What was your knowledge of Yiddish Theater? Did you follow that at all? You were pretty young.

VS: Of course, when Yiddish Theater was playing in Baltimore, my aunt, and friends to save their quarters to go see Yiddish Theater. And I've done ... I've given talks on the history of Yiddish Theater. It was, as a matter of fact, the Jewish History, they had a big seminar maybe 10 years ago, and I was asked to discuss Yiddish Theater, and I did some very interesting research at the time. It's fascinating. I spoke about it last year to Baltimore Hebrew.

EE: Where was Yiddish Theater...

VS: Down in East Baltimore, in the...I don't know what the halls were. They may be not existing anymore. But my father went, Shalom Aliechem came to Baltimore. There was such excitement. Shalom Aliechem came to Baltimore! I mean, this Shalom Aliechem stories, which I have to read in English, but I hear them, my father gave them to us in Yiddish and English. It's very deep within me. He...he was very...he was an iconoclast. He was...His philosophy...you can't fast and go back for one day and then go back and do the same practices as before. That doesn't take care of it. You're your own responsibility for your morals. You have to answer to humanity.

EE: You really have been fortunate to have quite a few strong moral influences in your life.

VS: Very. Very, very strong.

EE: And that's so, some of them were part of your family, too, were quite wonderful.

VS: Yes.



EE: Are there any things that you...besides your drama teachers, you acting teachers, were there any other adults who influenced you over the years?

VS: Well, some of the teachers who are outstanding in my mind are those who encouraged me to read and perform and present. I have many teachers, which I – whom I adored at Forest Park. It was a history teacher who led that Open Forum Club to discuss social issues. I didn't go to the football games. (laughs) I was never much of an athlete.

EE: But what did you think of Forest Park as a high school? I know there was a lot of...probably a lot of class and intellectual cliques...

VS: It was, oh yeah, there were, and there were even sororities, so a group of us Jewish girls got together and formed...we called ourselves the Beth Alpha Club. And we, for several years, oh, we used to meet every...the mothers used to prepare a table for us, and we would go places together, and, of course, we would commiserate together, if we didn't have a date on Saturday night. It was a very close group. I still see a couple of the people now and then. I bump into them.

EE: Have you maintained any of your friendships from those early years in Forest Park?

VS: My closest friend – I have one sister, we never had any brothers. My closest friend went to junior high school with my sister. She's my closest friend today. And ...

EE: Who is that?

VS: Beatrice Mancuso, who went on a trip to Italy and married the most wonderful Italian man, the most romantic story; they didn't speak each other's language; that's a whole romance in itself. Her mother took her traveling. And her story is quite a story...Yes, that friendship goes all the way back, and I do have another couple friends, one that I see on a fairly regular basis, I mean, from time to time, we were in the same class together. We



see each other at people's homes rather than in a theater lobby or concert lobby.

EE: Are your friends Jewish? Do you have Jewish friends or...

VS: Oh yes, oh sure. All our friends who had the seder were Yiddish, Jewish. Oh, sure.

EE: I mean, I only ask because I want to...I'd love to talk about sort of your sense of the Jewish community in Baltimore because it is a fairly insular one.

VS: Yes, well, we were very close because we had ideals, the same ideas. We came together because we had the same social ideals. And we had been close...and their marriages are good. When my kids were getting divorced, they said, my friends, wonder if, your whole group of friends, you've all been married for all these many, many years. I mean, there's like one 50th anniversary after another, was. Now, so many are gone. Came together because we had ideals together, and we were Jewish.

EE: How would you describe the Baltimore Jewish community or communities?

VS: Well, it's very...through all the years, Elaine, there was always the Jewish section. Louis in East Baltimore had to stand up against awful antisemitism. My father did, too, when they came to America. I mean, there were the other ethnic groups; I mean, Polish...and they...sometimes they got things actually thrown at them. They were very...but it was a close-knit East Baltimore community of Jews. There was Jewish Educational Alliance, they, the...and a socialist group, with the Forward Paper, and they had all kinds of lectures. It was a very, very strong community. Then when it began to move out, they moved into Pimlico. When they moved from downtown, they moved to Pimlico, and from Carlins Park up. And also, around Mondawmin, all of that area, Jewish people were moving from East Baltimore, moving up. And then they moved out when the Blacks came in.



EE: Do you remember replacing anybody, any ethnic group, as you moved into neighborhoods?

VS: Sure. The one we're in now. The owners were Jewish. They were moving away. I think some of the neighbors wondered why we moved in. We found this house, it was near the Beltway. I did a lot...I worked at Arena Stage in Washington, the Studio Theater in Washington, Rep Stage in Silver Spring. I was...I...the Catholic University. Oh, I forgot to tell you.

When I came back, in 1967, '68, I felt that my theater education had been limited to the craft of acting. And I went to Catholic University for several summers to get history of theater, directing. I also took an acting course there to see their approach, advanced directing. So, I wanted to enlarge my theater background, so it wasn't just the acting.

EE: You said when you came back ...

VS: I came ... well, I went to a wonderful theater workshop on improvisation at Brandeis University, for an entire summer, in 1967.

EE: Could you talk a little about ... as one of your students, one of your drama students, I know you had a certainly...

VS: Oh, I skipped my whole Towson career.

EE: You skipped your entire teaching career, I mean, including from the Young Women and Young Men's Hebrew Association all the way up, and I'd love to hear a little about how you influenced other people and...

VS: Well, when I was at Center Stage, one of the...a daughter of one of the professors at Towson was in my class. And I had known Dick Gillespie, Chairman Towson Theater Department because I had gone back to Towson and taken some workshops there with



him. At Center Stage, they brought a new director who knew that I had been teaching, found out that I had been teaching children's theater classes. And he came from a theater that had children's workshops, in Cincinnati. And he asked me to establish a series of workshops at Center Stage, which I taught for ten years. (chuckles) Skipped that. Ten years. I had children's classes every Saturday starting in the morning, every hour, every hour and a half, moving up and Monday afternoons were – because there were no performance on Monday, so we were free to come in there, and I did high school workshops there, for ten years and adults also. When I came to Center Stage, I left Jewish Community Center. I also had done a senior citizen program in that Jewish Community Center. I have some...there are some hysterically funny stories to tell about that - The population that I had in my class at JCC were my mother's peers.

EE: Well, tell me some.

VS: They were my mother's peers. So, we spoke a lot of Yiddish, and we sang a lot of Yiddish songs, and I wrote shows, and at one time, we did a Purim show. And the Purim show was a marvelous vehicle, because everybody would come up to me, "Miss Vivienne, Miss Vivienne, you got a part for me? Got a part for me, a part?" Everybody gets a part, so I had to think about projects to include everybody. So I figured the contest for Ahasuerus' wife would have everybody, and they could each do a little performance, as a matter of fact.

So, one of the stories was that a woman called me up, and she said, "Vivienne, I gotta tell you something. Molly says she's out of it." I said, "What's the matter? Why? She's one of the contestants to be the queen." We didn't have any budget, so I knew we had to do something dresses that was out of the period, so I said, "Everybody's got beautiful sheets. We'll drape them, and we'll wear scarves on our heads, this will be our Purim costumes." And everybody was happy. But one of the women called me and says, "Molly said if you're not going to let her, she should wear her beautiful new cocktail dress,



she should make a nice appearance on the stage, she ain't gonna wear no sheet." I said, "I'll talk to Molly. Let her talk to me." So I talked...Molly was a little tiny lady, and uh, I said, "Molly, I have something beautiful for you. You don't have to wear a sheet," because I had some costumes, that my dear friend Bea's mother sewed for our kids' productions, and they were all like princesses, and I had a white satin one with turquoise and gold lace, big sleeves, and she made a vest of turquoise and gold lace. I said, "Molly, this is going to fit you beautifully." Molly wore it. It was a kid's costume, but it fit. And she went on the stage! I made up a story where we're going to have a big celebration of a wedding. So having a lot of guests, it was a wonderful vehicle, and there were men in there. And...

So, one day ... and my rehearsals, we were making this up as we went along. I was trying to script it, and my problem was to keep...was to try to keep the script as similar, in some way, from week to week of rehearsal. So, this one woman came in, she said, "Vivienne, I was awake the whole night. I was listening...I was thinking of something we could have in the play." "What is it? I said. She said, "If you wouldn't like it, it's all right with me." "Well, what is it, Bessie? What would you like to say?" "I would like to come in, and the whole crowd is there, and I would like to look around and say, "Oh, what a beautiful group." I said, "You got it. It was marvelous. It was wonderful. And we had music – a JCC musician accompanied all our songs. The songs were marvelous because they help to solidify everything. So I had, you know, we did "My Fair Lakey" like "Mein Greeneh Couzineh" came to America. *Alles is gut* in America, it had Yiddish parodies. It was amazing.

So, I did a big program with Jewish senior citizens. The first one we did was a mock wedding, and we had a wonderful man. He was...he liked to be my assistant. "Turn around, everybody, and face the public. Listen for the clue." So, the morning of the big event, and it was going to be a mock wedding, and this one woman made herself an exquisite wedding gown, the bride, she's a wonderful sewer. And they decided we would



have refreshments afterwards because that would be the reception, and all the relatives and the grandchildren and everybody came. For once, they were seeing the grandparents on the stage. It was the most exciting event. And there was an old man, he was in his 80s, he was so frail, but he had been a performer in his youth, and he had a hat and a black satin coat with long tails, and he used to tell me, “*Ich ken nit shterben*. I can’t die before June 9th,” because that was the day of the play. And this frail little man would come dancing down the aisle.

Well, on the morning of the play, I got an emergency call, Mr. Vickler who was going to be the groom, his brother-in-law died. So, I arrive at the JCC. All the women are there. They’re putting on their makeup, and I said, “We don’t have the groom. What are we going to do?” So, the bride said, we’d been rehearsing for weeks. But she said, “There’s a man out there, grab him.” So, the head of the program was Stan...and I said, “I know what we’re going to do? Go home and get me a suit. I’m going to be the groom.” So we put on the play! And at the reception afterwards, people brought a cake and cookies etc...And the senior citizen program was just wonderful.

Anyway, after 10 years at Center Stage, the chairman asked me to come to the faculty at Towson. So, ironically, I returned to Towson, on the faculty of the Theater Department – the Towson that I left in my freshman year. And I taught there for about 22 years, ‘till about two years ago.

EE: So, why did you give that up?

VS: Why did I give it up? Interesting question. We wanted to start ... they asked me if I would be interested in starting a class for senior people. It was put in the catalog for audit or credit, and it was for a whole season’s a whole semester’s commitment. It was to be on Saturday. But we had telephone calls, “Will, I have to take exams? Will, I have to memorize a lot?” Well, we needed a minimum of 12 people and we didn’t get it. But I had said, I want to give up my regular class section because I really want to devote



myself to developing this senior program. So, we didn't have enough. So, I didn't teach that semester. For 22 years, I had been getting up at quarter of six, 'cause I always taught an eight o'clock class, because I did not want a class in the middle of the day. It would keep me from doing a play, going to Washington to a play, Center Stage, anywhere. I taught eight o'clock in the morning. And it felt not bad. I was asked to come back if I wanted to take a section, but then Louis and I were able to travel. We didn't have to wait for the end of the semester. We'd go to Holland a little earlier because we always went to Holland, and then my sister and brother-in-law, and Louis and I would go off – Italy, France, Venice, uh. So, that's it.

EE: Well, it's not quite it. You've taken up with a new theater.

VS: Good lord, yes.

EE: Tell me about that.

VS: Well, this I wouldn't want in the copy. But it seemed to be a policy at Center Stage to hire and audition only in New York. So, I wasn't being used anymore. But, of course, I was going to Washington. I was working in professional theaters over there and commuting. And then, I used to...and I used to love to see any, all...as much theater as I could in Baltimore. And I went...before Vincent Lancisi had Everyman, he had the company...he had actors...He did one at Theater Project. He did a play at Vagabond. They did one at St. John's Church. So he was, you know, like a vagabond company. When he opened this theater, he asked me to become a company member.

EE: Tell me what theater that is.

VS: Everyman Theater. The Everyman Theater, which is blossoming exquisitely. So, I've been with them since they were in Charles Street.

EE: Where were they before that?



VS: All over. I mean, you know, wherever they could get a place to perform.

EE: It's a wonderful group.

VS: Yes.

EE: Now, one of the things we haven't talked about, which, you can take every stage of your life with such grace. I know you...

VS: The loss of my husband. Well, we were married...the day after he died would have been our 58th anniversary. We were...Louis was...had performed in Holland with a two-piano recital with our daughter. They did a number of two piano recitals in his Goucher series over the years. And they played in Holland. And a[n] entrepreneur or somebody from a music series heard that concert and asked them to play in a series in Amsterdam, 1997, January 19th. Also, my son was going to Thailand from Holland, to marry.

On January 15th, Louis' legs had edema. He went to the doctor. And he was put into the hospital, with lymphoma. He had some wonderful remission, during which time he had a five-part bypass operation, came out of that with the strength of his heart ... he felt, he always felt he had a new heart. Went into, you know, all kinds of the physical ed and rehab program and was gung ho, and we went to Holland, we went to Holland twice, two summers in a row, at the end of the second summer, in '99, he had a...another bout.

And he sort of...suffered along with that, sometimes better, sometimes worse. And he died November 11th, 1999, because he had nothing in his bone marrow, so that he would have to exist on transfusions. And he was weakened. His...He had had shingles which had got into his eye and affected the retina, and he had macular degeneration in the other eye, and he could not longer read...we had a big reading machine, which is very ingenious, so that he could put a book on the platform, a little moveable platform, with a monitor, it was connected to it, and he could see enlarged...what he was reading on the



page, he could read on the monitor screen. And he got all different kinds of glasses. He was...he was valiant, I mean he...but when he...when he couldn't see the music score, and...he had such a repertory of music in his memory, that he could play for hours. As a matter of fact, we thought we would invite some friends and have a house concert. But he began to fail, and when he found out that he could exist only on transfusions, and he couldn't see, and he couldn't play, he said, "I don't want anymore." And he wanted me to understand. I did. Because I saw what he was reduced to, the rehab person coming here, and big deal, he walked across the room. But I was a very fortunate woman. We had a wonderful life. We had a wonderful life. We even had that professional joint programs that we did together. He was caught up in everything I did, and I felt the same way about his concerts. And we have this...we had a wonderful family,

EE: But you...you've such a, really always been an incredibly strong person. You seem to be a real model for living alone now, even. I mean, you still seem to operate from a tremendous base of strength. I'm just wondering...

VS: Well, my work is a passion.

EE: Well, I think this has been great. Is there anything I've forgotten to ask you that you wanted to talk about?

VS: No, I was the one who forgot. I have my sister, my dearest friend, we've always been very close. God's sake, we slept in the same bed 'till I got married.

EE: Tell me her name.

VS: Naomi. Naomi Greenberg. Her husband is Mayo Greenberg. He's going through some ups and downs now.

EE: Tell me how your...why don't you just tell me a little bit about how your... as a sister, it's nice to know how sisters grow over time, or change.



VS: We ... We were so close as little ones. That never changed. We were part of each other's lives. She went to Europe to one of the first meetings her husband ever attended in Europe, science meeting. I took her children. We always felt we had...we had our children, our children are a family of children. And we are very happy that they are close to one another. No, sometimes my younger daughter and I have blow-ups, and I'll answer the phone, and I don't have the right tone; "What's the matter? What's the matter, Ma?" "Nothing, nothing." "You didn't sound right." "Okay." Or, I have to bite my tongue sometimes. I don't think her youngest little girl eats enough, and I don't see them catering to her. She doesn't eat, they don't...

EE: What kind of grandmother are you?

VS: Well, I tell you. The children love me, and with my rehearsal schedule, I don't see them like continually or that often. I like to have a Sunday morning breakfast. That sometimes is one of the easiest things for me, have them over. And I'm invited to, you know, now all of the holidays, the big things like Thanksgiving, it's all at her house. She has a bigger dining room.

EE: What kind of cook are you?

VS: Oh, you know, okay. I mean, I'm not a gourmet cook, but I like to cook. I even cook things for myself and freeze them, and have leftovers. It's not the same being alone.

EE: And do you have any dish that your kids always say, "That's what we want you to make?"

VS: No. No. Nothing that they don't have anyway. If I make Italian, you know, or like a good breakfast.

EE: Are there any traditions, food traditions in particular that you've carried over from your own mother?



VS: Sure. Borscht, shav, do you know what shav is?

EE: Tell me what it is.

VS: It used to be made from...or it is still made from...sorrel grass, it's called 'sour grass.' There's another name for it. But it's so sour that you know...like lemon. So I couldn't get that; my mother started using spinach to which we add a lot of lemon juice, and then you bring it to just enough to come to a boil, but then you beat up eggs with salt, and you just drip it in, so it doesn't solidify, and you mix it all through, serve it with sour cream, spring onions. So that and beet borscht, hot and cold.

My mother made meatballs like with potatoes and stuff. That's...one of the kids once asked me, "How did Nanny make it?" She's Nanny, I'm Bubby. Louis was 'Zaide Lou.' We decided we'd like to be called that. I told my little six-year-old grandchild, "Do you know my name? I'm Bubby Vivi, your Bubby." All right. And my grandson, he just turned 16, I can't believe it, He's I'm 'Bubbles.' Okay. They want to introduce me to their friends, they say, "This is Bubby." I said, "That means grandmother." So it's 'Bubby and Zaide Lou.' He loved them, and my son, and he and my son, were fishermen from the time Danny was five years old, go out at dawn, had a little rowboat at Loch Raven Fishing Center. And one day, last spring, Danny and I went out; the boat was still there. And we went out to the reservoir there. And it was so beautiful. It was an exquisite day. And we laughed, we cried. They had spent so much time together in that boat... on that reservoir.

So, I feel that he has to live in me. I got a wonderful, a wonderful card from... we were at the...for the last five days of his life, he was in hospice at Mercy Hospital. And they sent me, on the anniversary, they sent me a card with a quote, "Memory is the only paradise from which you cannot be dismissed." And that's true. We bought this house because that living room could hold two pianos because he used the pianos...well, first of all, for two piano recital rehearsals with Amy, and also with his students, he could play, he could



accompany them, he could play an orchestra part while they did a concerto or do two piano pieces. So that's why we have two pianos. I've never taken his picture off the piano. So...he has to live in my memory, and there were wonderful memories. I was fortunate. I never felt that I'm going to rehearsal, I'm running to rehearsal, I'm running out to the performances, poor Louis is left alone. No. He had the piano. He was also a musicologist. He, for 30 years, he wrote the concert notes for the Shriver Hall Concert Series. So, he was always doing research. He was at the computer. He had to meet deadlines with the program reviews, I mean, you know, discussions of the composers, of their music. He had his life, I had mine. We had this joint interest so that I never 'left him' to do all my work.

So, we had a very beautiful memorial for him at Goucher. And I spoke. I said I was not going to talk about the loss, but my good fortune. So, I told about... and we had *yiddishkeit* in common. We loved to talk Yiddish together, or if we studied other languages. He had a master's degree in romance languages in French and Italian as well as his music. So every time we went to Italy, I'd study some Italian. Every time we went to France, I'd study some French. And we'd practice in the kitchen. It's wonderful. But I could not go on...he could not endure it, and I could not have endured him, to see him struggle.

EE: Well, that's a wonderful place that you're seeing it from. I think to see it as ...it's just a wonderful thing that you really did have those years. You have so much.

VS: I'm fortunate, very fortunate, and those children, all those children. Yeah, yes, indeed.

EE: This has been a treat for me. I've really enjoyed it. Thank you so much, Vivienne.

VS: It's a big *mechaieh*, "pleasure."

EE: It is a big *mechaieh*. Thank you.



[END OF INTERVIEW]