Susan Leader Transcript

Sandy Gartner: This is Sandy Gardner and Ann Buffum, meeting with Susan Leader to record a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today's July 23, 2008, and we are at Susan's home in Andover, Vermont. Susan, do we have your permission to record this interview?

Susan Leader: Yes.

SG: Great. Okay. The first question is, when did your father's family emigrate from Poland, and why did they leave? How did they find their way to Bennington, Vermont? Were there other Jewish families at that time in an organized community?

SL: My grandfather was named Isaac Kadischewitz. They changed his name to Leader when he came through Ellis Island, and he came in the early 1900s. There's not a specific – actually, there is a whole story about why he left, and it all gets garbled and confused. But I think it's pretty much the standard thing of running away from the Russian army and not wanting to have to be drafted into the Russian army. So, he escaped, and there's some story about you know – honestly, I don't know if I have it accurate. Anyway, so the story goes that he was one of many brothers. Apparently, he stayed at the home of some other Jewish family on his way. They didn't have a son, and maybe there was an exemption if you were an only son. Apparently, a deal was struck, and he ended up marrying the daughter of that family. Then, they made their merry way – I don't know how merry it was. I'm sure that they were escaping all kinds of pogroms and everything else, but I don't know the details of that. They made their way by way of England, where I know they had a baby who died. Then, they ended up in New York City sometime in the early 1900s. I think they got to Bennington somewhere around – it's never really been that clear to me exactly why they didn't stay in New York City. But

apparently, my grandfather just didn't want to be in the city. He didn't want to stay there. So, he left. I imagine he probably went up to Albany and then came over to Bennington. There was a small Jewish community there. I don't know how well-organized it was. So, he eventually – he had his mother there, also. I don't think they came over by themselves. There were many brothers. I have my family tree here. It might have been about five brothers. They each took a different name when they came through Ellis Island, so it's confusing. You better redirect me.

SG: Okay. How about your mother's family?

SL: Oh, okay.

SG: What is their immigration story? Where did they first settle in America?

SL: My mother came from a big family of Lithuanian Jews and also Polish Jews. I guess it was Russian Jews because I don't think they're – I don't know if officially there was really a Poland at that time. I think there was a White Russia. They never had a connection with Vermont until my mother moved to Vermont. She never had any other relatives who were connected with Vermont. But they had the whole huge family that came over and settled in. I guess they stopped in New York City. They ended up in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is where she grew up. Then they moved. No, that's where my grandmother grew – I'm getting confused. It's not my mother who came over.

AB: Yes, yes.

SG: It's her mother. It's your grandmother.

SL: Her mother came over when she was thirteen with a really big family. Then my mother – and they lived in Cincinnati. Then, my mother was born in Chicago, and then she grew up in a relatively upper-class family in Westchester County, in New Rochelle. So, that's where she grew up. But just going back to the Vermont thing, my grandfather,

my father's father, Isaac Kadischewitz, who changed his name to Leader, settled in Bennington in the early 1900s, in about 1910. My father was born there. My father's grandmother lived with them, I guess, until she died. There's a family cemetery in North Adams as part of the Jewish cemetery in North Adams, where they're all buried. My father's mother was named (Frieda?). She lived in Bennington, too.

SG: What kind of work did they do in Bennington?

SL: Well, my grandfather Isaac was a rabbi who came over. I don't think – I don't know what that word means because I think a lot of people were rabbis in the old country, and it didn't mean that they necessarily went through the same kind of formal training that's the case now. It's a little bit murky. But anyway, he was considered a rabbi, whatever that took to be a rabbi. I don't know. Actually, he did lead services in Bennington. He was not the rabbi that was hired by the congregation, but I know he led services, and he led some services in Manchester in the old synagogue in Manchester. It was in the [depot] – I think it was in the back of the train station. I'm not sure exactly what it was. I know that he did lead some services there also. So, he started out. Here's the thing about my family history is we've got some just fabulous stories that are written down. I don't know if – I have a story here that tells it all. I just don't know how much time you want me to spend.

SG: Actually, the next question is, did you know your grandparents?

SL: No.

SG: Okay. So, I guess not.

SL: They both died fairly young.

SG: Really?

SL: Anyway, even though my father started – I mean, my grandfather started out being rabbi, he did many, many other things. My father wrote it all down right here. My mother transcribed it. It tells the story eloquently. I don't know if –

SG: Would you be able to tell us – maybe there's a part of that story, or some [inaudible] story, in your own words, what you remember. That would be great.

SL: Yes. Basically, he got to Bennington, and he had to earn a living. He ended up – they ended up having a meat market. They had a grocery store. This is my grandfather and my grandmother that I'm talking about. They ended up with – they would go out – my grandfather would go out in the countryside, and he would give Hebrew lessons, buy and sell animals, and trade back and forth. He would end up with different kinds of livestock, and then he would bring them back, and I guess they butchered them. They had a little grocery store. Then my grandfather, I guess, was pretty enterprising. He started buying farms. He started just trading back and forth anything that he could. I mean, they certainly had nothing when they came. As it turned out, the family never actually got any wealth, but at one time, he accumulated a fair amount of real estate. Then he ended up building this very big tenement building right in the middle of Bennington. They had lots of boarders; all kinds of different workers would board there. It was usually a little room, maybe and so they basically had this big boarding house. My grandmother died quite young. She apparently was worked to death pretty much. She would heave big – this was in the early 1900s. The stories are that she would heave these huge carcasses of cows around and do all this work. Apparently, my grandfather did a lot of studying and trading. Anyway, she was definitely a workhorse. My father was one of – he had four sisters. He was the only son. His eldest sister was named Pauline. She wrote a couple of books; one of them I don't like so much, *A Room for the Night*, but the one – *And No Birds Sing* – it's just remarkable because she tells about all the borders. It's an amazing book. It should be brought out again. It's very, very clear documentation of a lower-middle-class family in Vermont in the early 1900s. It's a

remarkable document. I can't even begin to tell you that much about it without a lot – probably more time than we want to spend.

SG: So, those are non-fiction records of [inaudible].

SL: Yes, yes. But it's very well written. I don't know. There's a lot of – there were all these different kinds of ethnic groups. There were Polish people and Italian people, and they all lived in – they were all in Bennington, and it sounded like a major melting pot. A lot of them rented rooms in the tenement building. My aunt just lays it right on as it was, with all the racial slurs going back and forth between the – I won't even say all that. Everybody knows what everybody called each other. It's amazing. I mean, she wrote it all down just the way it came out. She told me all about my family. I mean, my aunts and my father and my grandparents. Anyway, that's what these books are.

SG: There was another part of the question. We wonder if your grandparents or other relatives were involved in the labor movement of the earlier part of the century.

SL: That was very much just – that was my parents, and actually, mostly my father.

SG: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

SL: Sure. So, my father's mother died when he was about three, and my father died when he was about to graduate from high school. He ended up going away to New York City. He went to City College. He became quite radicalized in that environment in the 19 – I guess it probably was in the 1930s. This book that just came out – I just got a copy of it a couple of days ago.

SG: What's the name of it?

SL: It's called *Almost Utopia*. I'm skipping a lot. But anyway, my father became quite a radical. He was actually a conscientious objector [CO] during World War II. It all started

in New York City, where he formed his adult identity pretty much in a very socialistic circle. Anyway, this is a book – actually, the photographs are by Rebecca Lepkoff, who took all these photographs. She's in her nineties now, and she was a really important photographer. She's still alive. She's quite alive. But that's a whole other subject. I'd like to read a little paragraph that was written by – somebody else wrote the text for this book. There are a lot of pictures of my parents in it. Anyway, by the late 1940s, or the mid-1940s, my father was back in Vermont. He had gone to City College. He had traveled all over the country. But this is what it says: "Another couple important to Pikes Falls," which is – it's up on Stratton Mountain before there was a ski area, where they lived. My parents lived in a community up there, a utopian kind of community. "Another couple important to Pikes Falls" – and this tax was written by Greg Joly; it's in this book. "Another couple important to Pikes Falls was Herb and Miriam Leader. Herb was a Bennington boy who went off to City College in New York and was radicalized by the Left's diagnosis of the Great Depression. He was also influenced by Ralph [Borsodi] and had spent time on the Borsodian farm in Suffern, New York. The beginning of World War II found him in a government office printing draft cards. Rejecting the implications of such a job, he became a conscientious objector, served his time in the red – blah, blah – and he got to know ..." Anyway, Scott Nearing was a very, very profound influence on my father, and Scott Nearing was kind of the leader of this community that was up on Stratton Mountain. My father got to know Scott Nearing as a speaker and a writer. He had the deepest effect on my father's thinking. So, this was a whole other – I'm probably getting everything all confused. I mean, not historically, but just chronologically.

SG: That's okay.

SL: But when I was growing up here in Andover, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] was observing my family based on my father's history of being a radical, which was really silly because he was really a pretty harmless guy; he just had very deeply held convictions. Anyway, "in Scott Nearing's FBI files, Herb is referred to as an

enthusiastic follower. Indeed, for years afterward, Herb kept handy mounds of Scott's writings." My father "met Scott when he heard someone splitting wood while hiking the long trail through Stratton. Herb had met Miriam" my mother, "in Farmingdale, Long Island, at the State Agricultural College when they were assigned to eat dinner at the vegetarian table and found themselves to be the only vegetarians at the school. The night they married, which was in the 1940s. They hitchhiked to Suffren, and later they moved into a tent on a knoll of land up on Stratton. Miriam was brought up as a labor Zionist, hence her farming education." So, there was a lot of – I was brought up by some very radical parents. My mother was actually a labor Zionist. I think it was called the (Habonim?). I don't know if I have it right. Anyway, my mother – oh my gosh. Do you want to hear the most passionate letter that I've ever seen written about a twenty-year-old? My mother wrote this letter begging to be accepted as a pioneer in Palestine. It's quite remarkable. I don't have it right here. She went off to live on an agricultural training farm in Cream Ridge, New Jersey. That's where she got interested in – well, that's where she gained her first experience in rural life and farming. She was a privileged – she grew up a very privileged young woman in New Rochelle, New York, and she dropped all that for Zionism. She met my father. My father had already gone – he had had a job in a government printing office, printing draft cards during World War II, and he didn't want to do that. So, he quit that job. He actually became a conscientious objector himself. He explored many of the leftist movements of that time, and then I guess he was just drawn back to Vermont and his family. He came back, and then he got mixed up with the Nearing group up on the mountain where Stratton ski area is now, and my parents lived there. He had met my mother, and he became a Zionist, also. So, they lived up on Stratton with this utopian community there, and then they decided they wanted to go to Palestine. They waited until my sister was born. My older sister was born in 1947 – my older sister, Rosa. I think they waited until she was about six or seven months old, and then they went to Palestine. I've got all kinds of written stuff, but I guess, in my own words, I would say that they had a really remarkable experience, and

they were part of the settling of –part of the beginning of the kibbutz movement. That's not true because they were kibbutzing way before that. Anyway, they were there when Israel became Israel. They lived on a kibbutz, and they were shot at by the Arabs that were there. They have all kinds of stories. My sister had to be evacuated with the other little babies, and she didn't even recognize my parents a couple of months later when they were reunited. My mother very much worked in the gardens. Apparently, she was a really good leader. She was really good with the carrots. Apparently, they were shot at, and she had to crawl through this carrot field for hours to escape the gunfire. My father was really good at digging up rocks. Well, they had to get rid of the rocks to make land for agriculture. He worked a lot in the stables. Apparently, even though he – apparently, my father was actually quite heroic at different points. I mean, everybody was, I'm sure. Anyway, it turned out that the vegetarian thing was a really big issue for them because they were both vegetarians. They kept switching kibbutzim because they were always looking for a vegetarian one. I guess it must have been hard with my sister. It turned out that she was eating meat because she was in the children's house. I think that upset them quite a bit. There were a lot of different things going on. I think essentially what happened, though, is – well, my father had become a vegetarian when he went away from home to college because his family had kept kosher, and he just didn't want to keep track. I think just being a vegetarian was an easy way for him to keep kosher, actually. Then he was really influenced by Upton Sinclair and all that. So, this vegetarian thing was a major theme in our family. My mother became a vegetarian, I think, more for health reasons. But it turned out that my father actually was pretty much an anarchist when all was said and done, and he just really didn't want to have to function in such a group movement, such a communal situation. That's my evaluation.

SG: Is that why they came back to the United States?

SL: Yes, that's what I think. My belief is that my mother would have been happy to stay because she felt that this was where she belonged. The people that she had been on

the farm in New Jersey with, in preparation to go – I think my mother was really ready to just dedicate her whole life and just be there. I think my father just was a really restless guy and also pretty much an anarchist and didn't really want to fit into any such a structured system when all was said and done. There could have been – that was never really sad, but that's just what I think. For one reason or another, supposedly because they couldn't find a vegetarian kibbutz, they ended up coming back after three years. When they came back, they – so at that point, they were still extremely involved in an agricultural kind of view of – well, their approach to life was to want to be hands-on on the land, and they brought that back with them. It was a pretty wonderful thing because, in those days, there weren't very many – there was not really a tradition of Jewish farmers at all. I don't know what – I think they were kind of mixed up about how to have the Jewish element in their life and still have the farming element in their life because, at that time, there just were so few Jews in Vermont. When I grew up, there were no Jews anywhere; we didn't know any. Anyway, they came back in 19 – I don't know. I'm guessing 1949, probably. I don't really know. They lived up on – they went back to the Nearing community, where they lived in a tent. One of the biggest influences on my father's life, especially, was Scott Nearing. He's considered the guru of the back to the land movement. I don't know if most people have heard of him or not. It was a very intellectual group of people also. There were some amazing intellects living there in that group. I mean, they were farmers; they farmed, but they also just had – for my father, just splitting wood with Scott was like being at an advanced seminar because Scott was actually a former professor. Well, that's a whole other topic. Anyway, my mother – the women pretty much did the laundry and did whatever. I don't know if that group met my mother's needs that much. But they stayed there until about 1950. Then that community broke up. It sounds so silly because if anybody knows Andover, Vermont, it's got one gas station and a campground, but it has no commercial opportunities that anybody's ever heard of. But for some reason – anyway, up on Stratton at that time, there were no job opportunities, so that community kind of broke up, and the Nearings moved to Maine.

My father had this idea that there would be all these great job opportunities for him over in Andover. I think he must have been delirious, but he just went driving and bought a farm in Andover. So, he and my mother and my older sister moved here in 1950. Then I was born in 1951. I was born at the Springfield Hospital. I grew up in Andover. There's a whole big story to that. I started out growing up in Andover, and Andover has been my home all my life. I still live – my house that I live [in] with my family, my husband, and my kids – this is all part of our original land that I grew up on. But the buildings over here are – some of them are new, and one of them was here pretty much when I was a really little kid.

SG: Is your house still here, the one you grew up in?

SL: Yes. I don't own it, but it's across the pavement over there. It used to have a barn. Some people have fixed it up very nicely, but it doesn't look anything like what it used to look like. There was a big barn that got burnt down. Anyway, that's how our family got to Andover.

Ann Buffum: Can we back up for just a minute?

SL: Sure.

AB: Because we want to ask one other question about your father and then start talking about your life.

SL: Okay.

AB: Okay. We were curious. When he was a conscientious objector, did he do alternative service? Also, in the light of the Holocaust, was it hard for him to be a CO?

SL: My father's interesting. I don't know the answer to everything. But what I would say is he had a very leftist, extreme leftist analysis of politics. What he would always say, to

the extent that we talked about it – no, he never had any regrets about the position that he took. I'm just repeating what he always told me. What he said was that he believed that after World War I, things were handled very poorly politically in Europe in terms of the relationships that were set up between the different countries. He always said that the United States became super paranoid of [the] Soviet Union, to the extent that that we – I don't really know. I'll just tell you what he said. I don't know what I think. But basically, he felt that Germany – at some point in the development of Germany before World War Two, he felt that it was a convenient thing for the United States to have this powerful Hitler/Germany thing in between the United States and Soviet Union. So, he just felt that war was not an answer. He considered himself a conscientious objector. And, of course, he was as horrified by the Holocaust as everybody else was. But I think that his political analysis of it was not so simple. Other than that, I – he didn't make it up. He was one of many people who felt that way. I don't know. I'm not making a value judgment about it. I do know that he – I did grow up believing and understanding that he was a courageous kind of a guy in the situation that he was confronted with when he was in Palestine. But I don't know the details of him being a conscientious objector, except that he very much opposed the draft. I know that. He did some alternative service. It's kind of foggy what it was because I just don't know. Other family members might know. I think that it was out West, somewhere out West, and I don't really know what it consisted of. Maybe Seattle. I don't know exactly the specifics of what he did.

SG: We want to move on to more of your story, too. But you did mention that when your father's family was growing up during the Depression in Bennington, they did all sorts of different kinds of jobs.

SL: Oh, yeah.

SG: Was that when you were around?

SL: Oh, gosh, no.

SG: Was that when he was growing up? No, you weren't around. Of course not. The Depression. I'm sorry.

SL: No, but we had a permanent depression when I was growing up, financially. Is that what you mean? What my father did to earn a living when I was little?

SG: Well, you had also mentioned he was a book trader, a mill worker [inaudible].

SL: Yes, yes. Well, what happened is that my father was actually extremely well educated. That's what he did was he studied. My father was pretty much of an atheist, pretty much to the core, but extremely Jewish-identified. I think he took that passion for study that is the Jewish legacy and directed it to – he studied Greek; he studied Latin. He probably could have had – and then, later in his life, he spent a lot of time in Massachusetts, around Northampton, and that's what he did. He just took classes at all the colleges. He just had a tremendous appetite for studying whatever it was, and he never did get the spiritual, religious kind of thing, even at the end of his life. So, one reason that – in 1950, when my parents moved over here, my father had this idea that he could be a Latin teacher in the local public school system. I believe that he was qualified to be one. I think he had some – it's funny; when you ask specifically, I don't know what – he must have had some kind of teaching degree. I don't know. I know he started law school. He kept going to all these different school programs. Anyway, he thought he could get a job teaching in Chester. It turned out that they wouldn't hire him. He was essentially blacklisted. I mean, we have all these FBI files on him because of his political ideas. That was just a total no. They would not hire him to do any teaching. So basically, he supported our family until 1956. My parents bought our place in Andover. Their dream was to have a homestead anyway. Really, what they wanted to do was be subsistence farmers. It was this whole – to borrow some terms from the Catholic Worker Movement – "cult, culture, and agriculture." So, the idea was not to start some huge farm and just kill yourself milking hundreds of cows and growing lots of stuff. The main thing

was just – so, I grew up. We had a couple of goats. We had a cow. We had chickens. We had ducks. My parents very much – it all sounds normal now, but to grow up that way in the early ’50s around here, people just thought that you were crazy. This is a very, extremely conservative, Republican, Christian state, and specifically this town, also. Some people were quite tolerant of my family, and other people just – I’ve got all kinds of stories. We met somebody after they were grown up, who told them that when they were little, if they were bad, their parents threatened to leave them in our front yard because it was a pretty traumatic way for a little kid to try to get to know the world, speaking for myself.

SG: For yourself.

SL: Yes. You’ve got this socialist, vegetarian, basically poverty-stricken as far as money goes. Plus, I had red hair and old clothes. We felt perfectly normal and enjoyed – I mean, I liked my life a lot when I was at home. I’m jumping ahead. Anyway, that’s the environment that I – I’m trying to set the stage for when I came into the picture. I don’t think that my parents – I’m sure my parents loved us very much. But I think they were kind of – they weren’t like parents are now. I don’t think most – maybe some parents did, but a lot of parents of that generation didn’t really understand what the impact of a lot of things were on their kids, and maybe it wasn’t the most important thing to them anyway. Whereas me raising my kids, it’s like, “Are you happy? Is this okay? Am I doing the right thing?” My parents never said stuff like that. They had very strong ideals and beliefs, and they tried to set up a lifestyle that would reinforce that, and they didn’t seem to be that concerned; at least they never said anything to us about how we felt being such oddballs. [laughter] Anyway, I didn’t really answer your question. So, my mother didn’t drive. Look, my father was a classic – for all his grand ideals and everything and really, really idealistic guy, he was a classic Tevye kind of person. I mean, he was just very strong, very patriarchal, very domineering, very loving, and my mother was very submissive. What’s the word? My mother was probably the classic wife.

SG: More traditional?

LS: Yes, yes. He made pretty much most of the decisions, and she went along with things. She didn't drive. I think that was part of – maybe she could have learned; maybe she couldn't have. I don't really know. With my father as the only teacher available, I mean, she was intimidated about it. Maybe she shouldn't – I don't know. I mean, who knows? But in that day and age, lots of women didn't drive; it wasn't that unusual. So, basically, she was pretty much stuck on the farm. When my parents bought our farm in Andover, they ended up having – we ended up with a hundred acres. They got an extra sixty acres for two hundred dollars down the road. But the basic farm was about forty acres. I live on half of that now. I live on the part that mostly just had pastures. The house was on the other twenty-acre lot that's across the road. My mother was pretty much stuck here. I mean, there was a dirt road; there wasn't any paved road. You had one car that the husband drove. She had three little children. So, she was pretty much at home all the time. She had goats that she milked, and she baked all her own bread. Once again, this doesn't sound unusual for now because everybody's doing it, but she believed in whole wheat flour. We'd grind a lot of grain, and she cooked soybeans and lentil burgers and beets from the garden, and she just did all that stuff. That's what she did all the time. Then my father had a procession of different jobs. He tried to sell apples door to door, but nobody would buy them. Then he tried giving them away, and then everybody accused him of being a communist, and they wouldn't take them. Just all kinds of stuff like that. I could fill up a whole book just about my family. Anyway, then he got a job – he had a milk delivery route because, in the old days, they had milk cans. He would pick up the milk cans and bring them, and I think he maybe had a job as a janitor at one of the schools. He worked in some local mills. Honestly, it didn't take that much money in those days. I know their mortgage was like twenty-five dollars a month. I know that sometimes it was really hard to get twenty-five dollars a month. It all sounds insane now, but that's what it was like then. That kept going until 1956. But in 1956, my father actually got a benign brain tumor. That set off a whole different – so, my father was

doing all this manual labor and work and stuff, and he actually loved that. I mean, he still studied, and he was a very well-educated guy. He helped start a Democratic Party in Andover, which was totally like starting – it was like the Democrats were communists. Basically, that was totally radical. I think there was one and maybe two other – mostly this one other guy who wanted to have a Democratic Party, too. So, he would go to town meetings and be very outspoken. He really just enjoyed the whole – it's not that he gave up all his intellectual faculties, but he did do a lot of work. But he loved milking our cow, and he loved chopping brush. He loved that very much. So, it wasn't a big tragedy. Anyway, in 1956, he did get this brain tumor; nobody could figure out where it came from, but it appeared. That did change our family quite a bit because – well, the good part about it was that he became permanently and totally disabled just because it made him have seizures. They couldn't be controlled completely, but they could be controlled somewhat. He went up to Hanover, to Dartmouth; it was called Mary Hitchcock [Memorial Hospital], I think. They said, "You're dead meat; you're going to die, so just go home and do whatever you have to do and come back, and we'll operate on you." This was in 1956. He had a wonderful doctor. The doctor was able to remove the brain tumor without affecting any of his functions, except it made him limp. But I mean, you could easily become deaf, dumb, no eyesight. So, that was a total miracle. The good thing about it is that after that, Social Security declared him totally disabled, so he got a check every month. It was only for about two hundred dollars or something. So, that eliminated his struggle for trying to get jobs. I mean, not that you'd ever go get a brain tumor to do that. Anyway, Social Security really saved that situation financially. Then, after that, my mother started working part-time. So, that was good. She couldn't really get anywhere on her own very much. I don't know. Over the years, maybe she went and worked as a secretary. This was later on in the '60s. In the late '50 – anyway, after 1956, what happened was the winters were just too much for us to spend the whole winter here. So, when my father got his brain tumor, I was five years old, I guess because I was born in 1951. Starting then, we started going away for about two months every winter. This was

still our home. We didn't even lock it. I guess we must have given the animals away or lent them out to somebody. Until 1956, we just lived here all the time and did what we did. I have so many memories of all that. Then, after that, when I was in first grade through fourth grade, I would start school in a one-room schoolhouse down here. Actually, I think my first year, I went for the whole year. But I would start in the one-room schoolhouse. Well, my sister was older. So, she had been going to school here all along, and there was no school bus. She had to walk to school by herself. But starting, when I was coming along, we would go to school from September to probably December. Then, in late December until probably late February, we would just go somewhere. It was kind of random where we went, but we had a lot of adventures. A couple of winters we spent in Burlington, actually, where my father was hired by UVM [University of Vermont] at the Billings library. He was a librarian, and so he hadn't completely given up on working to earn money, but he couldn't really do the physical manual labor he was doing before. But it worked out pretty well actually for him to be a librarian. That's a whole other story that I can't even get into. But his politics caught up with him there also. So, we did that. Then, when we started going away in the winter, my mother would get odd secretarial jobs. So, we did that. We went to Florida for a couple of winters. We went to Spring Valley, New York. Then, starting in fifth grade, I didn't go to school here at all.

SG: Were you in school at these different places for a couple of months?

SL: Yes, yes. I would switch schools three times a year, basically. I would start in Andover in a one-room schoolhouse for the first part, and then I would go and get enrolled at some random – one winter, I went to a segregated school in Florida. Another winter, I went to a school in New York state. It was pretty difficult emotionally for a kid to do that. That was definitely a problem for me. But I mean, I was too little to really do anything about it. It's not like – basically, I think a lot because of that – my orientation of my life was very much our family. We were very – maybe in some ways that were lovely

– some ways that were healthy and some ways that were unhealthy, but we were very much a family unit. That's where our main – for me, that's where my main emotional sustenance continued to come from because I just had a really difficult time forming relationships with other kids. For one thing, there wasn't enough time, and then if there was enough time, like in Andover, they knew my crazy family background, and there was too little common ground.

SG: What you started to say – what happened?

AB: I'm going to stop here because this tape is going to run out.

SG: Okay, sure.

AB: Okay, just a minute. [Recording paused. End of Track One.]

SG: I was wondering, Susan, if you could talk a little bit about the elementary school you went to, what it was like to be in a one-room schoolhouse, and you were the only Jewish family in a small community. What was that like? How did you cope with those kinds of feelings?

SL: It was quite – [Telephone rings.]

AB: We'll stop.

SG: We'll stop. [Recording paused.]

AB: – turn this on. You can start saying –

SG: The question.

AB: The question.

SL: You better repeat the question.

SG: Where did you go to elementary school? What was it like to be in a one-room schoolhouse and the only Jewish family in a small-town community? How did you cope with the feelings of outsiders? Were there any teachers who were understanding and caring to you, or just any incident or particular story you might want to talk about?

SL: For first grade, second grade, third grade, and fourth grade, except for a couple of months in the middle of the winter when we went away, I mostly went to grade school in a one-room schoolhouse in Andover called the Peaseville School. I only had two teachers. Mrs. Hammond was my teacher for the first three years. Then I had Mrs. (Lewis?). Mrs. Hammond was a wonderful teacher. She was just great. She made me feel – she was my best friend at school. She really made me feel – she always encouraged me. She always made me feel – she made me feel that she was my friend. She made me feel like I was smart. She just always treated me really well. She was pretty much the bright spot in my life at school. I did have some – I did have some friendships with – there were a couple of kids – especially when I was [in] maybe first and second grade, I think there were some kids who were friendly to me, but I never could really tell. One day, they would be friendly, and another day, they wouldn't. I never really knew. I never knew what the reason was. Then, we had one fam – there were a few families in town that were friendly, in general, to my whole family. Sometimes, we would go over and visit them on the weekend, and we would have a wonderful time with them. But I couldn't depend on those same kids to be friendly to me at school. So, it was kind of tricky. Honestly, the Jewish part of me – it would be almost impossible for me to sort out what was the biggest source of my outsider status. The fact is that my older sister had a lot of friends at school, so it could have been a [combination]. I mean, I didn't realize this until much later; it could have been a part of my personality, too. So, I don't really know because, for instance, my older sister – when my parents moved to Andover, they sent my older sister to Vacation Bible School. This was my older sister, whose first language had been Hebrew on the kibbutz. They sent her to Vacation Bible School down at the Mennonite church in town because it was very clear that that's where the social

network was. I guess they figured that they would send her to Bible school. But then she started believing in Jesus and coming home and stuff – so, then my father freaked, and he pulled her out, of course, and so I think that was traumatic for her. But that happened to my sister, not me. So, by the time I came along, they were too smart to send me to Vacation Bible School, but at the same time, I never really was – I think that's why my sister had those relationships with those kids that lasted right through eighth grade. But for me, I didn't have that advantage or disadvantage. I don't know. I mean, I had bright red hair. I was very, very shy. I had bright red hair. I was a vegetarian. I was Jewish. I was really poor. I'm sure we violated all their stereotypes of what Jews were to the extent that they even thought about Jews because there weren't any. We ate health food. I had to bring homemade whole wheat sandwiches to school. Everything was just utterly embarrassing, is all I can say. I mean, surprisingly enough, it was not that specifically a religious environment. I think when my kids went to school locally, there were more religious things that I had to deal with, with my own kids. I remember we would sing Christmas carols, and I didn't want to sing them, and I think I probably didn't. The overtly Christian part of the curriculum was not the biggest deal. I mean, mostly, I just felt so utterly, utterly different. It actually surprises me that I didn't become totally hostile to all the different things that made me different. What it did was make me have this kind of inferiority/superiority complex or something. It made me really mixed up because when I was out in the world – I just felt like nothing when I was at school. I just felt like a total reject kid. But then, at home, I felt like I was at the top of the world, and I was really proud of being a vegetarian. I felt really proud of being a Jew. I didn't care what kinds of clothes I wore. Maybe that's the case with kids. I don't really know. That was just my experience. I mean, the one-room schoolhouse – I mean, look, there was this one kid who was – I think what it did was it made me really aware of social ranking. I always felt that there was one kid who was lower on the social rank than me, and then there were all these other kids who had it all made. There was this one kid that, during recess, the teacher would keep inside and spank. I remember all of us other kids would

gather around the outdoor ventilation system and listen. I always felt like, at least, she had it worse than me. Because the teacher would – if anything, the teacher was really, really good to me. I loved school just because I got so much reinforcement from her. I always loved school. I loved going to school. So, I must have really – I don't know. The worst part – I think the worst thing – worse than being Jewish was being a vegetarian. You just have no idea, no idea whatsoever. It was un-American. It would be like being a terrorist now. I just can't even describe it. Things have changed so much. But there's one awful moment that I will always remember when the teacher decided to have a weenie roast for a special occasion down by the river because it's just a one-room schoolhouse, and there was a little brook. She set up this hot dog roaster, and she had everybody have hot dogs. All I ever wanted to do was just not be noticed. That's all I wanted. She thought she was being so nice. So, she made this huge demonstration in front of all these kids. She got a carrot, and she roasted it instead of the hot dog. She put it in the hot dog bun. I would have been so thrilled to have a hot dog bun with some ketchup on it. I did not need anything special. She roasted this bright orange carrot – and me with my bright red hair – and she put it in this hot dog bun with some ketchup, and she handed it to me in front of everybody and made this big deal about it. "Here's something for you, Susan." That devastated me. But it never made me not want to be a vegetarian. I wouldn't even know how to describe how bad it made me feel. [laughter] I could go on and on. I have a lot of stories like that. But there were a lot of lovely things about the one-room schoolhouse. One of my gripes is I got very much – I was a very good student. I was the typical girl who can sit in the chair, and it was great to be – I mean, sit in the chair and not get distracted and do all the work. What was wonderful about the one-room schoolhouse is that even though I was in first grade, I was following all the second, third, and fourth-grade work, and I learned a lot. Just because of the dynamics, I became one of those kids that grubs for grades because I just was always wanting to get more positive reinforcement from the teacher because she's pretty much the only one that gave it to me. I feel like my love of learning was slightly diluted by just

doing it for grades. I think that's a problem that plagued me later on. Because things were not fancy then, they didn't bring in – [telephone rings]. I'm just going to take it off the hook and not answer it.

AB: I'm going to stop. [Recording paused.]

SG: I was going to ask you – I know you'd mentioned – are we –?

AB: Yes.

SG: You had said that you transitioned from a one-room schoolhouse to Northampton?

SL: Oh, yes.

SG: I was wondering what that was like?

SL: Oh, yes. Are we done with the schoolhouse?

SG: Unless you have something – if you had something else you wanted to add about the schoolhouse.

SL: I think I should say a little bit about our connection with – what we did Jewishly at home when we lived in Andover.

SG: Yes, because that was a question, actually. If you want to go back to that. Did you have a Jewish education? Were there Jewish traditions or holidays that you celebrated? You had also mentioned your family had been part of the synagogue, and then they were asked to leave.

SL: That was in Northampton.

SG: Okay. But if you want to talk about your Jewish education.

SL: Yes. Interestingly enough, I think the Rutland Jewish community was the only one that was particularly like a bigger community that I remember my father thinking that maybe we should go get involved with, but it never happened. Rutland was a really long way away at that point because we had a big old farm truck for a vehicle. We lived on a dirt road, and people just didn't drive around like that. I mean, it just wasn't going to happen. Basically, we just had our nuclear family. My mother pretty much always lit Shabbat candles, and we always sang the blessings over the candles. We celebrated Hanukkah, and we celebrated Passover. My parents would – mostly, my mother would use a lot of Hebrew words. She didn't really, in any organized fashion, try to teach us Hebrew, but she would use Hebrew phrases, and I kind of grew up being familiar with some Hebrew in that respect. My mother, actually, I think was – well, she still is a much more religiously Jewish person. She's definitely not an atheist like my father was. My father's dead now. So, we lit candles. Then, my grandmother, my mother's mother, would come to visit fairly regularly. A couple of winters we spent living at her home in Florida after my father had his brain tumor. So, we did go – and she was a Hebrew school teacher. We got to go to Hebrew school for a couple of winters and just enough, so we learned the alphabet. I remember Purim parties. Then, my father's sisters lived in Bennington, so we would go visit there a lot. We didn't tend to go for the Jewish holidays because, once again – from my point of view, it's really too bad. The food thing really divided my father from his family of birth a lot because my aunts, or at least one of them, was very much involved in the synagogue in Bennington. My first cousin was bar mitzvahed there, but we didn't go for Jewish holidays because she always cooked goose and duck and chicken. I think my father – they used to feed my sister meat when my father wasn't watching. It just infuriated him beyond anything. It precipitated some fairly violent situations, actually. But my younger brother and I just never wanted to eat meat, so that wasn't an issue. My parents just didn't want to go for Passover Seder with meat. They were very Jewish, and so just being with them was being in a Jewish environment. One of them kept kosher. So, I was aware. We went to Bennington all the time. We

probably went at least once a month. I'm not supposed to keep talking about my parents, so I'll try to go back to myself. Personally, that was my Jewish – of course, my parents would always tell us stories about when they were in Palestine because that was a very real presence in our lives. I never knew any other Jewish children or anything. I mean, sometimes they would go over – we would go over for parties and get-togethers near Stratton with – there were some remnants of the Nearing community, and they were probably a couple of people who were Jewish, but that was not the identity – that was not the context in which those relationships were, so that wasn't a [big] deal. Anyway, when I got into fifth grade, my sister, who was quite a bit older – when I got into fifth grade, my sister was a little bit older. I think my father became concerned that – honestly, I think he was really afraid that we would start getting involved with local guys, or my sister [would]. I think that was a very watershed – I mean, I don't know if any of this was said that explicitly, but this is just what I think. I think my father started getting really concerned about my sister when she got to be around seventh or eighth grade because she was still going to the one-room schoolhouse, and she was very well integrated socially. Once again, I think going to Vacation Bible School, maybe that set the stage for it. But I think my father became really worried that he needed to get us out of here culturally and also to have us get better education. I think he was worried about us in both respects. He found out that if you lived in Northampton, you could go to Smith College for free. That's just what it was like then. Northampton was also fairly close. There were a lot of Jews there because it's all college community. So, he decided to go explore that. He thought it would give us a chance to get to know some other Jews to be part of a more intellectual community. He saw that we were getting older. In fifth grade, at the beginning of the year, we loaded a bunch of stuff on the back of – we had a big ton-and-a-half farm truck. We kids used to just ride in the back of it.

SG: Your brother was –?

SL: My brother was in second grade, I was in fifth grade, and my sister was four years older. I guess she was going to high school. That must be what – she was going to high school. Well, first, he tried to get her to go into the Putney school, but she absolutely refused. That was a pretty radical place at that time. He thought that maybe we could go to some local private schools, but she absolutely refused. She desperately missed her friends in Andover, and she wanted to be an Andover kid. My sister would have been really happy to just be a total Andover kid. Me and my brother were much more removed. Actually, me and my brother were pretty much best friends. That's kind of what stayed in the family. I think when he brought my sister to the interview at Putney School, she said, "I don't want to go here. I want to go to school with my friends in Chester." I think he freaked out at that point and realized that he was losing control over us. He needed to just get us into a different environment. Not that there was anything wrong with being an Andover kid, but I think he just wanted us to have a wider experience of the world. You have to realize that this was a pretty limited place culturally at that time. It's really different now. So, went to Northampton when school started. He loaded all this stuff on the back of the farm track. We pulled into Northampton. He found a place to rent, and we lived there, and we went to school. We went to grade school. We did that for a couple of years. My mother got a regular job as a secretary. We actually got probably much more income at that point. He kept getting his social security check. My father was the househusband; even though he was like Tevye, bossy guy, he also did all the cleaning, all the dishwashing, most of the cooking. It's not like he just sat around [and] did nothing. Actually, he was probably the major nurturer in the family, and he would always do my homework with me and everything. He had his good points as well as his bad points. When we went to Northampton, he decided that we should join a synagogue. I guess my mother probably decided with him. We started going to the synagogue. I just loved school. I loved anything that was a classroom. I was good at it. I got a lot of reinforcement. Once again, I loved Sunday school, I guess it was. We went to Sunday school. I don't know how long we went, but it probably was a couple of years.

The dues were – I guess he felt that they were not within his budget to pay the dues. I don't actually know what they were, so I don't know. At one point, he told them that he couldn't afford to pay the dues. Believe it or not, they kicked us kids out of class. It was really awful. That was very traumatic. It was a really bad thing for them to have done. I mean, looking back at it, maybe my father could have offered to sweep the floor or traded something. I doubt he did offer that, but maybe he could have done something different. But that's insane. Basically, I had this wonderful Sunday School teacher named Mrs. August; she had red hair, too. I just felt I loved being in Sunday school so much. So, we were kicked out; we couldn't go to synagogue anymore. That was that. That happened – I don't know what year. Personally, I didn't have any better luck forming relationships with the other kids in school, even though probably a lot of them were Jewish. One of them I know was the child of a professor. I did not have any better luck forming relationships with the kids in school in Northampton than I did here. I didn't really make any – that's not true. Actually, interestingly enough – and I don't know if the fact that she was Jewish was a coincidence; it probably wasn't. She probably was in my Sunday school class. I had one really good Jewish girlfriend in fifth grade and maybe in probably sixth grade, too. I did go over to her house. I had another friend too. And the other friend wasn't Jewish. Anyway, I did have a couple of girlfriends, and that was probably one of my more sociable times as a child when we first moved to Northampton. Anyway, at the end of each school year, we would just put everything back on the truck and bring everything back to Andover, including the piano, the dog, and God knows what else. When I was little, and we had gone away just for a couple of months in the winter, sometimes we would have a chicken or maybe a goat and some rabbits. I don't remember. We brought a lot of things [to] a lot of places. In terms of Northampton, in seventh – even though we went to school there, we actually drove home to Andover every weekend, except in the middle of the winter and for the whole summer. So, I wasn't necessarily there to really consolidate those relationships with those kids on weekends and stuff. I don't know how much you have time to know about me. Anyway,

in the summer of sixth grade – no, actually in the fall of sixth grade – no, in the spring of sixth grade, we were sitting around the fireplace in Andover around the fire. My father loved to play anagrams. We all played anagrams and made popcorn in the fireplace. It was all very lovely in its own way. My father got this idea. He said, "If you guys go on a ship, it's like eating in a restaurant for free every time you go to eat." I just remember that was the first time I realized that he had the idea that he would take us to France for a year. That's actually what happened. It's just a long, absolutely insane, crazy story that, that I don't have to – we had no money, but they saved a little bit of money. We ended up with four hundred dollars in a mason jar, and my mother buried it under the rhubarb patch behind the farmhouse. [laughter] My mother and my older sister did not want to go away. They wanted to stay. Me and my brother and my father wanted to go. We saved up money, and then we ended up driving our car up to Montreal to look for a ship. We got there, and we realized we left the money in the mason jar under the rhubarb patch. That's a big family story. We had to come back and do it. We ended up getting on a ship. We didn't have enough money to get round-trip tickets. It was a Polish ship. It was this communist country. We got on the ship with one-way tickets, and then we wanted to go to France. My father decided that we would go to Montpellier, France, and spend a year. I think it suited his sense of symmetry. We tried to get off the ship in England, and in Denmark, and in Germany, and in Poland. We kept trying to get off, but nobody would let us off because we only had one-way tickets. They were afraid that we would – and we didn't have any extra money. They were afraid we would become wards of the state. We had to stay on the ship all the way to Finland. Then we made our way to France. We actually lived in France in a very, very tiny little village in southern France for a year. I think this was all part of my father's plan to get us out of Vermont and have us see the rest of the world, and he certainly managed it. While I was in France, actually that was – the whole thing was we had to leave – my birthday was August 17th, and I was going to turn twelve. So, if I was going to go for half price, we had to get on the ship – we got on the ship like August 16th in Montreal. The first part of the time we were in France, we

went to this one-room schoolhouse in France, actually, where kids are great. We learned French. I went from knowing no French to just being an A-plus student in France. I mean, it was definitely painful and traumatic because you had to go through this period of a couple of months of not knowing what's going on, and suddenly, you know everything. It was pretty exciting, really. A few months before we left, we moved down near (Antibes?) because it was warmer. We actually went to a synagogue there. My memory of that is very warm. I don't remember specifics that much, except that there was – is a kosher butcher a *shochet*?

SG: Yes, he is the one that kills the animal.

SL: Yes, yes. There was a *shochet* out in the backyard killing a chicken. I remember it was just out back of the synagogue. Well, the Girl Scouts were by religion in France. I don't know if they still are. So, I was part of that. I remember feeling a sense of belonging actually at that synagogue. I don't know why. Maybe because it was all in French. That was a very strong time of intellectual blossoming for me when I was in France. At the end of that, we came back to the United States. I was in eighth grade. I went to a public school, one year of junior high school in Northampton. By that time, any relationships I'd had with those kids in fifth and sixth grade in Northampton were long gone. The first night of school, we slept on the back of our truck because we didn't have a place to live yet because we'd just driven down from Vermont. I had this huge, big deal – I was just a total freak. You can't even imagine. I was a total freak there, too. While I had been gone in seventh grade, everybody had gotten into the Beatles, and they were all talking about the Beatles when we were standing in line. I didn't know what the hell a Beatle was. I remember I had this big, full, yellow-dotted Swiss dress with a little cape top. I just thought it was so nice, and I was so happy with myself. All the girls wore pink, round-collar blouses and maroon skirts. That's what you had to wear. I wore these tall, red knee socks. My mother didn't shave her legs, and I just refused to shave my legs. I was too embarrassed to shave my legs and too embarrassed not to shave my legs. I

didn’t know what to do. It was the worst time of my life, basically. This went on since sixth grade, actually. I remember that first day of school in eighth grade. I also had really tall red knee socks on because I didn’t want anybody to see my hairy legs, but I refuse to shave them, too. My mother never used any makeup or shaved her legs or anything. It wouldn’t have been a big deal if it was during the hippy time, but it was just a little bit too early for that. You just can’t even dream of how traumatic it was to not shave your legs in junior high school in 1964. [laughter] Anyway, I managed to establish no new friendships at all, basically, for years after that. It turned out that since I had been an A-plus student in France, and I had learned Latin and French – I had learned Latin in French, and I had done all the stuff, I knew everything that we were studying. It turned out that I was so socially backward. My parents could have decided, “Well, you can just work on getting to be sociable.” But they weren’t sociable either. If I had a kid like that, I might – the upshot of it was that I ended up with this full scholarship to this private all-girls school in Northampton called the Northampton School for Girls, where I actually graduated at the top of my class by the end of twelfth grade. I was obviously a very good student, but I was really miserable the whole time. I was pretty much totally miserable straight through from eighth grade to twelfth grade. In about eleventh or twelfth grade – probably twelfth grade, I made one friend. That’s because the hippie era was coming in. I’m trying to get to the good part of my life socially. First of all, being in an all-girl school, I was interested in boys, but I couldn’t even relate to girls. I certainly didn’t have any idea how to relate to boys. So, being in this all-girl school was not so great. In the meantime, my sister had gotten accepted at Smith and gone to Smith. Anyway, of course, I got accepted at Smith, and then I refused to go to Smith because I’d already been to this all-girls high school. That was really the first time I ever really rebelled against anything in my life. I just said, “I am not going to Smith. I don’t care.” I had gotten accepted at Antioch College in Ohio. From there on, my life has just been smooth sailing. Because I went to Antioch. I started in 1969. Everybody was a vegetarian. “Oh, yes. I’ve been a vegetarian forever.” Everybody wanted to wear secondhand clothes. “Oh, yeah, yeah, we’ve been

doing that." I just felt like I was – I wasn't boastful about it, but I just felt like, "Oh my god, I belong." All of a sudden, these are my people. I'm not talking about the Jewish thing so much, so you can bring that around again.

SG: Okay.

LS: In the meantime, starting in the mid-'60s – my first summer job was in Weston, Vermont. There was one other freaky local family who believed in whole wheat flour. Nobody ate brown flour around here. He had a whole wheat bakery. He hired me when I was thirteen to sit down in Weston – less than his name was Bill Newhall, and he was a wild character. But that's a whole other story. He hired me to try to sell his whole wheat bread. I couldn't sell it. I couldn't give it away. Nobody was interested in it. I'd sat there and read books all summer, but anyway, the way I got to work was by hitchhiking because my whole family hitchhiked. My mother didn't have a license, and my father would get these unpredictable epileptic – he didn't have epilepsy, but he had these seizures from the brain tumor. At some point, I guess he pretty much decided it was too dangerous for him to drive. So, we all hitchhiked. My mother hitchhiked. My father hitchhiked. We hitchhiked together. We hitchhiked separately. We just all hitchhiked for years and years. Throughout the '70s and early '80s, my parents hitchhiked back and forth between Northampton and Andover all the time. Everybody knew them, and they knew everybody. Starting in the late '60s, my brother and sister, and I were all hitchhiking. But guess what? Everybody else was hitchhiking. So, when I went out to Yellow Springs, Ohio, to go look at Antioch, my younger brother and I hitchhiked. Fortunately, nothing bad ever happened to any of us, and everybody else was hitchhiking, too, so it wasn't that big a deal. That was yet another thing; everybody was hitchhiking. Oh, my God, I finally found a nation of people that hitchhike. I was just always striving for that identity. I just had a grand time. I just loved Antioch so much. You can't even imagine. I was just so happy. Also, I was away from – my mother was very unintrusive to a fault. My father tried to direct our lives, and he was just ready to

direct everything we ever did. My mother, by nature, she's just a much more quiet private person anyway, but she probably backed off a lot because, to us, as her kids – I think I can speak for all of her kids – we felt that she should have sometimes offered some advice or tried to counsel us. But she was just pretty absent in a lot of ways. In the same way that my father was too present in a lot of things. My father made it very clear that he really wanted me and my siblings to marry other Jewish people. My brother actually did marry a Jewish woman, and my brother ended up going to Israel, being in the Israeli army, and really trying to convince himself – we grew up with all these amazing ideals. It seems like each of us kids grabbed on to one or two of them at different times. For my brother, he really needed to go explore being an Israeli because we had grown up with that theme. As it turned out, he came back, but he did spend quite a while there, and he was in the army and stuff. For me, I ended up – the reason I talk about this is because I think about it, and also because it was definitely a really big major source of contention and a real problem between me and my father anyway, as I got older, that I didn't marry a Jewish man. Thinking about it, I probably don't really have anything against Jewish men, really. But it was also part of my – the thing about my father is that I was just absolutely horrified by how he treated my mother. As my mother's daughter, that was the main vow of my life that I would never be this submissive wife. In my head, I think I decided that the way to not become a submissive wife was to not marry a Jewish man because my father was my model of what a Jewish man was. Even though he was so loving and so giving – he tried to be so empowering towards me. We studied Latin together for years. He always wanted to discuss every paper I wanted to write. I had a really fabulous intellectual relationship with him. He always wanted to brainstorm what topics I should choose for my paper, and just all this really – he was an amazing tutor. It was really wonderful. He had very set, very judgmental ideas about a lot of things. By nature, the little secret is I am actually fairly similar to my mother, I've discovered. I'm not really that aggressive when all is said and done. But I really felt that it was – sometimes I even wonder – sometimes I think it's a miracle that I even – well, this is probably

politically incorrect. When I went to college, we had these consciousness-raising groups; the women did. If I hadn't already had the experience of being such a minority, I think I might have decided to explore being a lesbian, to tell you the truth, not because of any sexual feelings, but just politically because I was just so deeply, deeply offended by my father's patriarchal – looking at it now, I see that my mother contributed just as much. She didn't assert herself. It's not all my father's fault. But as my mother's daughter, I just felt like – it's just amazing I even wanted to be with a man after what I saw in terms of that kind of Tevye or whatever – everybody knows what I'm saying. Maybe I'm not unusual; I don't really know. Anyway, I didn't have any need to be a lesbian, like hormonally or whatever. Also, I knew that I was not trying to be another minority, so I decided to stick with being a heterosexual. But in my mind, I decided that I was just never going to go anywhere near Jewish men. I really, for years and years, did not think about Jews very much at all. Interestingly enough – I'm jumping a lot because I don't know how long you want to talk – this was in college. In college, I had no Jewish – I would go over for Passover. We would have Passover and stuff. But I never sought out any Jewish organizations in college. I was always very hyper aware of who's Jewish and who's not. I can't always tell, but I've always been really hyper aware of knowing who I think is Jewish and who isn't. I know that I've always been extremely attracted to being friends with other Jewish women, and there's something really special for me in that. The Jewish male thing just – I really just pretty much avoided Jewish men, I would say. I think that I just couldn't handle it because of the fear of becoming like my mother. Anyway, I go along for a lot of years. I was at Antioch only four years. That's a whole crazy story in itself, but we don't need to talk about –

SG: What I was interested in, as far as Antioch, was how you chose to go into pottery and your art, too.

SL: There's something that was really great about the old days when I was little, and there weren't so many opportunities for everything. With my kids, they would just say,

"I'm interested in weaving," or "I'm interested in cello." The next day, I'd have them at a cello lesson. But that's not how it was growing up in Vermont in the 1950s and '60s. Another summer job I had was down in Weston at the grist mill; it's a museum, and there's a craft shop down there in Weston. They used to have a program of visiting craftspeople who could come. Part of my job was to watch their stuff while they went out to lunch. There was a man who worked with clay. I don't know if he was exactly a potter, but he made pots. His name was (Armin Hino?) actually, and he was from Quechee. He was a very eccentric, wild character, a much older man. He left me with his clay and his equipment. I was there for probably about an hour or two by myself. I decided I just really wanted to make pottery. Maybe he gave me some clay to play with. It was the first time I'd ever experienced clay. I just totally fell in love with it. But as it turned out, it was many years before I had a chance to actually do any pottery. What I'm saying is that if somebody had said, "We'll go sign you up for a pottery class tomorrow," maybe I would have gotten it out of my system and not thought about it. I don't know if that would be a good thing or bad thing. In any case, it took many years, but I never forgot that I wanted to do pottery. When I went away to Antioch, as soon as the hippie movement broke, I went with it. Part of it for me was an anti-intellectual strain. I had all these strains from my background anyway of working the land and being close to the land and earth, and money's not important. My parents never had any money, but we managed to do all this amazing stuff and have all these great adventures. The thing about my father is he really – I knew him mostly after his operation. But after his brain tumor operation, he really lived day by day. He just enjoyed his life so much. Everything was an adventure.

AB: We have to stop a second. We're running out of tape. [End of track two.]

SG: – triumphs and some disappointments within the art and how that all came together.

SL: Why don't I try to do the pottery thing? I'll try to make it – I could stretch it out a lot more, but I'll try to make it – we'll see how fast I can make it.

SG: The other part was that you were going to also talk about how once you had children –

AB: That'd be next.

SL: That's really important because it is Jewish-focused. With pottery, I got the idea when I was a teenager. When I went to Antioch, it was 1969. At Antioch, you didn't necessarily have to sign up for any classes. They were doing an experiment in just having a free-form college. So, of course, I decided that what I wanted to do was make pottery. I ended up in the pot shop, [which] is what it was called. It was just wonderful. The people who wanted to do – the other students that did pottery. We were this great little community, and we were there all night working and all day. When I started to use the potter's wheel, I felt I had this – it was like a spiritual experience. It was like a meditation. It was the rhythm of working on the potter's wheel and working with my hands and the community of people. There was a lot of meditating, and this maharishi and that maharishi was – they were all fads. Working on the potter's wheel made me feel – not to be too cliché, but it made me feel totally centered and totally – it's a certain emptying of the mind and total involvement in the moment that I loved about it. I had always enjoyed making things anyway. I have a deep-seated impulse to create. Anyway, that's what I did with pottery. I did take some other classes, but I mostly did pottery, actually. I was at Antioch for four years, and I made a lot of great friends. When you go to Antioch, you're on campus for three months, and then you go off-campus for a co-op job. So I lived all over the whole United States, and I did pottery at different apprenticeships and did different things. I did all kinds of non-pottery-related things, too, that I don't think we have time to tell about. My first period with pottery was just the act of making it, in the moment, with this clay and what I can create. After I was at Antioch, by

the time I was a senior, most of my class had dropped out. But most of the kids who entered Antioch at that time did drop out. I didn't want to drop out, but I didn't want to stay there anymore. I had completely fallen in love with Japanese pottery specifically. I loved the spontaneity of it. I loved the fact that it was fired in wood kilns. So, I started to go – the long and the short of it was that I went to Japan for a year and a half by myself. I went totally cold. I didn't know a word of Japanese. I didn't know any Japanese people. I had no idea about Japanese culture. I knew nothing except that I was totally, passionately, deeply in love with Japanese pottery. I would date my switch from it being a pretty spiritual experience to make pottery, and I went into this lifestyle expression. The whole back-to-the-land movement spoke to me completely. Even though my family – we had moved, and I had lived in so many different places, I felt – which I still feel – a deep rootedness in the land and the soil of Vermont, specifically this place. Making pottery and working with clay, for me, was another way of being connected to the earth. It is the earth that you're making things out of when you work with clay. As it turned out, it was in style to be feeling that way anyway. That suited me fine because I was right in the swing of things. I still maintain that spiritual feeling, making pottery, but then I started feeling like I wanted to make pottery also because I want to dig my own clay. I want to fire it in wood kilns. At the same time, I don't want to participate in a consumer society. My friends and I didn't believe in electricity. While I was at Antioch, I was involved in starting this commune in Kentucky, where we just lived off the land, and we lived together. As it turned out, there were several other kids who were Jews. Probably half the potters I've ever met of my generation were Jews. Usually, it's never really come up to the surface of it being – interestingly, in all that time that I was involved in this communal thing in Kentucky, overtly talking about being Jewish just didn't come up. It's not what we were about, even though we were just being so Jewish by having these ideals and this idea of repairing the world through lifestyle. Everybody and everything and our whole country realizes it now, and it's a really sexy thing to be involved with. But at that time, it was pretty – even though I wasn't all by myself with my family, it was still

like being a hippie – in Kentucky there, it was totally on the fringe. Anyway, I wanted to make pottery go along with my lifestyle and my philosophy. So Japanese pottery it's actually very controlled in its own way, but it's also – the finished products that Japanese potters have traditionally made. Some of it's very finished, like the porcelain. But the pottery of the ancient kilns that I was attracted to, like Shigaraki and Tanba Yaki specifically – you can see the earth that the pots are made of. You can see it and feel it. It's a completely tactile, wonderful spontaneous thing. I wanted to go to Japan. I wanted to live and breathe the air where the stuff was made. I had no clue what I was getting into – no clue. Antioch was pretty loose. They gave me my money and said, "Go have fun, send in reports, and you can get credit." So, I went. I was one of the few kids who didn't drop out because I did that. So, I went to Japan, and I bumbled my way through. I guess I had the model of having gone to France and learned French. I was there in Japan for a year and a half on my own. I learned enough Japanese, so I could trick people into thinking that I knew Japanese. I could understand. I was an apprentice in several different places. I got to fire wood kilns and help dig clay. It was all that stuff I was dreaming of. At the same time, it was a very difficult situation emotionally because I discovered that Japanese culture does not agree with me whatsoever. In my innocence, I thought that Japanese pottery and Japanese art, in general, was some kind of reflection of a culture that I would love. But on the contrary, the workshops I lived in were just anathema to me. But I kept on torturing myself and saying, "I'm going to stay here anyway, even though I can't stand to see how the women are treated and nobody thinks that girls can do anything." I had to keep proving myself, and I had to keep pushing. I don't even know why – I lived in these really rural towns, where there weren't any other westerners, and I kept having to push. They would let me do things that women weren't allowed to do, like help fire the kiln. You just learn so much going into another culture. After I had gone to Japan, I felt like I could land on Mars and land on my feet, and figure out what's going on. It's nothing to do with being Jewish, really, I don't think, particularly, except maybe – I don't know – the wanderlust that I inherited from my family. Anyway, I

was in Japan for a year and a half. When I left, I needed to leave Japan. I needed to be with other Americans and other people. Japanese social structure is just so incredibly structured and rigid. It wasn't me. But I did learn a lot, and I had a wonderful time with the pottery part. I came back to this country. As it turned out, I ended up coming back to Andover because my parents had – you need to correct me if I'm going off the track. It turned out that my parents had been – I forgot. In ninth grade, my parents actually bought a house in Northampton, so we, from then on – my mother pretty much wanted to live in Northampton a lot of the time. My father was still wanting to come up here a lot. There was this whole huge thing with – in the meantime, my younger brother had gotten interested in pottery also. When I came back to this country from Japan, I came and lived in Andover on our land, in the backfield here. My brother and I dug clay up on Lake Champlain. We built some wood kilns. We did a lot of really fun stuff with clay that just made us feel good. I guess it was one step along the way of our learning processes. During that period of my life, I would say the finished product was not what my work was about. It was about the process and what materials I would use and not buy anything and doing it all from scratch. Then, I had several years when I wandered around and lived in different places, mostly New England. Then, in 1978, actually, I met the – I had different boyfriends and whatever. In 1978, I met the man that I eventually married. His name was John Specker. He actually is not Jewish. But interestingly enough, when I got involved with him is when –

SG: Where did you meet [inaudible]?

SL: You're going to be talking to us for a long time. In my mid-twenties, I did pottery. But I felt that if I sold the pottery or got it mixed up with money that that would really pollute the experience. I just did not want to have anything to – my dream was to make pottery – put pottery in a backpack on my back, and just go around and give it to people. I felt that accepting money for it or anything like that would just defile it as an experience. What I did for money – I didn't need much money because I could live – my father and

my brother built a lot of different cabins over the years, little cabins in the woods. We had the woods, and so we had these cabins. So, it didn't cost anything. I didn't have any electricity, and I hitchhiked. So, I didn't really need any money. For years and years, I was on these apple picking crews. They were these hippie apple crews and pruning in the winter – pruning apple tree crews, mostly in New Hampshire and then a little bit in Vermont. John was originally from New York City, and he grew up in the Catskills, actually, right in the Borscht Belt. He lived in Ithaca, New York, and other places, also, obviously. He's a fiddle player. There was a whole community of fiddle players that were picking apples also. It's a long story. It's a whole other interesting chunk of history. He was on an apple picking crew, it turned out, different years, but we met through apple-picking friends. Interestingly enough, most of his friends were Jewish. He had all these guys that were – all his friends were Jewish. He grew up in New York City. I never met as many Jews in my whole life as he had for his best friends. I don't even think my family even knows this because I don't think I've ever even told anybody anything about this. But it's interesting because, for him – he's actually from a German background. I don't know if it was a coincidence that all his friends were Jewish or what, but he seemed to be very attracted to Jewish people, not just women, men too. Maybe because he plays the violin, and there seem to be a lot of Jews that really love the violin. I don't know. Maybe just because he was from Queens, and there's so many Jews in Queens. If you're from New York City, Jews are not a big deal. They're just a big deal in Vermont. It's really interesting. Actually, through becoming involved with a non-Jewish man, I started to break down my ideas. I started to think that maybe it would be cool to be Jewish again, even though I always was. Probably because it was something that he felt so positively about, I was able to decide that it was something I felt positive about, too. For me, it was one of this whole bunch of freakish things about myself. That was the beginning of me feeling better about being Jewish. It probably sounds really peculiar, but anyway, that's how I would date it. We had two daughters before we got married. I lived with John for a while in a nearby town with a group of other people, actually a lot of musicians. Really,

still, through this whole time, the only Jewish things I ever did was with my nuclear family pretty much for Passover and maybe building a sukkah and stuff. We met in 1978, and probably about a year later, we were living together nearby. I kept talking about this piece of land that I owned at that point. My parents were still alive when they decided to give us their Vermont property. So, the three of us divided it up because it was too much for them to deal with. They had nurtured our roots here so much that they felt they wanted to give it to us, and they really wanted us to be involved with our land. This land and this chunk of Vermont, there's a lot of deep family history in it for me now. Anyway, I kept mentioning to John, "Well, I do own this piece of land up in Andover, but there's not any people like us that live up there. I couldn't imagine ever living there." Not that everybody in Andover was mean; they weren't. They were just being themselves. My family was who we were. There actually were a lot of people in Andover who actually were very friendly towards us. We used to go – there's a lot of Finnish people that live in Andover, and we used to go take saunas at people's houses. There were a lot of lovely people. There were a lot of people. But in general, there wasn't a community here. There might be one or two families that we had friendships with, but it wasn't a real community. At that point in my life, I had been living in communes. That's what I was all about was being part of this community of people. I never dreamt that I would ever live in Andover. I had no idea how to integrate Andover into my life. But John was like, "Well, let's go up there and look." He comes from New York City. It's, once again, the New York City people that you would never dream – they're the ones that are the most – a lot of times, the people from – he's just totally into being way out in the woods in the country. He was like, "Oh my god, this is a dream. There's nobody around." We ended up living here. Actually, I've lived here since 1978 straight without ever living anywhere else, which surprises me because I moved around so much when I was little. It's funny. One thing that my father said to me a long time ago that I still remember was, "If you stay in one place long enough, everything will come to you." It's interesting with this chunk of land here in Andover, Vermont, that so much has come to me. There's a lot that hasn't

come. I feel like there are still things that I'm going to go out looking for. Hopefully, I will have a lot of time to still go find them. There's just been a lot that has come here. This whole area and Andover has just changed so much. There are vegetarians all over the place. There are health food stores. There are Jews up the wazoo. I really just feel like a perfectly normal average Vermonter now. I feel very positive. Even though I am a native Vermonter, even though when I was little, nobody would have considered us Vermonters because we had such a different profile. For me, the changes that have come to Vermont have just been so totally for the better. I can't even begin to tell you how wonderful it is to feel that I can be myself and feel like I'm part of something here in Vermont. Anyway, we did have these two girls. One of them's twenty-one, Ida Mae, and one of them's twenty-four, Lila. After they were born, the doo-doo hit the fan, so to speak, because one thing I think that John and I really had in common was both of us were very, very passionate; he about his violin and his fiddle playing, and me about my pottery. Neither of us wanted to give an inch. Both of us were perfectly willing and eager to be able to support ourselves at that point from what we were doing, but neither of us were willing to go get a job doing something we didn't want to do. Both of us were totally, totally committed to doing what we do, and neither of us really cared about money that much at that point. I wasn't about to go try to make him get a job. He wasn't about to go try to get me to have a job. We just lived in the little cabin for years on a few thousand dollars a year. Of course, my parents had helped by giving me the property, and our taxes were like four hundred dollars a year on the cabin, so you didn't have to earn a lot of money. His parents were quite generous about giving us money to fix the roof or whatever we needed. So, we picked apples and pruned apple trees and lived on not much of anything at all and had a vegetable garden and all that business. We did that for a few years. The problem is then we had children. All of a sudden, everything changed for me. Totally. I was thirty-three, I guess, by that point. First of all, I went and got a driver's license. I was thirty-three when my first daughter was born, and that's when I suddenly – we lived in the cabin until Lila was seven – she's my older daughter. By the

time she was two or three, it was dawning on me that we would have to earn some money. John is an incredible fiddle player; he's actually quite well-known. The kind of music that he plays is called old-time music, and it just doesn't have a commercial space out in the world. Although, we're always hoping it will attain one because it's incredible music. Once again, he was very much into – we complement each other very well because he's a real homebody. He calls it being a hearth witch. He loves washing dishes and vacuuming and cleaning. I don't have an immaculate house, but he likes to go around and scrub toilets. He grew up in the Catskills in the summer, and so he loves to scythe and cut wood and all that good stuff. We just really had a lot in common even though we're really, really so amazingly different that people can't figure it out. Anyway, we did have our things in common. So, he was not willing to go give violin lessons or anything. So, at some point, I just thought – honestly, I wouldn't have even wanted to be with him if he wanted to go and – a lot of my attraction to him was that he was just – he's such an incredible player and brings so much passion to his work, I probably would have broken up with him if he said, "I'll go be a carpenter instead." I wasn't even interested in that. I really wanted him to do what I admired. It turned out that I actually – it turned out that I had some other development of my own that I needed to do that actually revolved around money because my parents – I had grown up with this idea that money is evil and unnecessary. I don't believe that at all now. I needed to go through some process. I think the process that was offered to me in my life was that we had to earn a living, and nobody was going to do it except me. I had no role models from either of my parents. My mother was a secretary when she had to be. That's not what my father was about. Over the years, in the late '80s, we had actually – I had built my pottery making into a really great business. We had a really good business. We built this whole house just out of current income, without getting a mortgage of which we were really proud. We kept living in the cabin. Part of what I had decided when I was in Japan – in Japan, there's a lot of family potteries. I really wanted to have a family pottery, so I actually worked with my brother a lot. He lived here until he sold his house and moved somewhere else. We

made pottery together for years. My husband started making pottery with me at some point because, at some point, we had a really good pottery business, and the economy was really good, mostly in the Reagan era there. My husband was perfectly happy to make pottery because what happened was when we had the children, the babies, we both worked at home. As long as he could do it at home, it was fine. We would switch off. We have a really little studio; it's in a little cabin where we used to live, actually. We would switch off, and I would take the kid, and he would go – I'm really fortunate because, as he is always saying, if I had married a lawyer or a doctor, I would have had some advantages, I'm sure. But I wouldn't have been able to pull them out of my back pocket all of a sudden when I had more work to do. He'll play the fiddle all day, but if there's something else that needs to be done, he'll do that. All of a sudden, I started getting orders and stuff. He's got his creative outlet. My creative outlet is making pottery. But as it turns out, pottery making is a pretty messy activity, and I never liked to clean anyway. Glazing it – not decorating it, but glazing it is pretty much just manual labor. It's like mindless factory work. I had no desire to do that, but that's what he was looking for because he's got his creative outlet in his violin. He wasn't a doctor going off to work; he was here, and he had a lot of extra time. We became partners in pottery making. We didn't plan it; it just kind of happened in a pretty organic way. It was great for me because I get to do the creative part, which is making the pots and decorating them. He was like the studio manager, and he hauls stuff around. Unfortunately, he's really bad at selling things, and he hates doing it, so I always had to be the saleslady. That was probably a good lesson for me to learn how to deal with the public and how to start feeling good about charging a fair price for the fruit of my labor. That's been going on since – as it turns out, the economy went down in recent years, and we don't have a big business anymore at all. At one point, I was hiring five or six different potters to make pots for me, and I would do all the decorating because, in my business, what I became known for was the way I decorated it. When the kids were really little, it was simpler for me to just do one thing all the time, which was decorate, but that's not much fun because

if there's any beauty to being a potter and to being a studio potter, it's to be able to do a little bit of different things in the course of the day and the weak. It's really lovely to be able to just make a few pots at a time and then decorate a few, fire a few, instead of just sitting there only decorating. I love doing the whole process from start to finish. I let go of the lifestyle statement a little bit about the pottery. In other words, I ended up with an electric kiln and buying my clay. That's okay. I don't think I ever even care about having a wood kiln again. It was exciting when it lasted, but I moved on to something else, which was creating a business. So far, we've managed to raise two kids, and one of them is a senior in college. She's just got one more year. We have managed to raise two kids and not really compromise our two passions. It's really been pretty exciting. The last few years, business has actually been … the last few years, actually probably the last ten years, business – we built this house in the late '80s and the early '90s, just when we could afford to do it. It was just a miracle because, after that, our business started getting slower and slower. I used to ship things all over the country, and I had things in department stores and stuff. It's funny. Just over the last ten years, I started virtually everything I make, probably within a hundred miles of my house. I really like it that way. I don't ship anymore. I make everything myself with the help of my husband, who actually helps to design some of the decorations at this point, but we don't have to get into that. I'm really proud of the fact that I have a really local business, and I seem to be able to sell just about all locally. I've formed some wonderful relationships with a few of the shopkeepers that I sell wholesale to. I've had some for almost twenty-four years, and they've been some of the biggest relationships of my life. As far as pottery – I still, believe it or not, really do enjoy making pottery. But I'm always looking for what my next stage of making – so, I started out; it was a spiritual experience. Then my second stage was a back-to-the-land political statement. My third phase has been to have a business. I feel so emotionally well healed as far as my relationship with money – not that I have any, but I feel like I'm not scared. I don't think it's bad. I realized that I could earn it, and it was okay. It sounds stupid, but it is what it is. My business experience – the last few

years, I've been going into my next experience, which I think is teaching. During the winter, I've been doing these workshops in a lot of the public schools. It's really interesting. I'm not boasting, but I do seem to have some kind of gift for teaching pottery. That's really unusual. I know it's unusual because I go in, and people tell me about what other people who tried to teach pottery did. So I'm really good at it, apparently. I never wanted to be a teacher. I don't want to be a full-time teacher, but I do a lot of that in the winter. Actually, I have some exciting projects for this coming winter. I'm going to be working – I'm doing an empty bowl dinner with the teacher in Springfield that they got a grant to do. It's just a lot of really – I've been doing some after-school programs. You know where that pottery teaching thing started? When my kids were little, and they were in grade school in Chester, John would always go in with his fiddle. The teacher would have him volunteer, and he would do fiddling. One time, when Ida was in first grade, I had my potter's wheel winter in her first-grade teacher's class. It's not a one-room school. It's a fairly large elementary school. But it's just a lovely, lovely place in Chester. I did a lot of volunteering. I noticed how much the kids loved to make pottery. A lot of the rowdy kids who might not be quote/unquote "so good" in school were consistently my highest performers making pottery. My kids would say – before we'd go in, my kids would say, "Watch out for that boy. He won't concentrate, and he won't be any good at it." Every time they would tell me the kids who would not be good at it, those were the kids that were the stars. I just realized that it's just a wonderful thing. It's so enjoyable to see different kinds of kids – find something that different kinds of kids can succeed at, not that the quote/unquote "good" girls can't have fun making pottery too. Anyway, that's a whole other thing. I'm going to be doing more teaching pottery. I don't know. I don't know what my next transformation will be. I'm trying to cram a lot in pretty fast. Meanwhile, we've been raising these girls. They're both pretty great. They've always been really close. As soon as I had kids, I realized that I wanted them to grow up being Jewish. I didn't think about it much before. It's amazing how lucky I've been, considering that my husband is not Jewish. He's pretty much an extreme atheist. I was

lucky that he didn't belong – he was actually raised a Lutheran. Maybe he's not such an extreme atheist, but he always claims he is. He was brought up in a very Lutheran church. He's got a lot of very strong moral values that he got from there. You can't deny it; he comes from a Christian background. His parents were wonderful, and his mother has been wonderful. But there was a lot of agony and a lot of issues that came up for me when my kids were little because my husband's mother – they're very close to her. Of course, she would send all kinds of Christmas presents, and she would send the whole Christmas thing in the box. Every year, we would come up with a different – once again, even though here's my husband who's completely unreligious – he really is pretty much opposed to most religions if you hear what he says. Then, once again, at Christmas, he hates Christmas. We've accommodated to each other in one way or another. Some years, I would get really upset about it. Some years, not so upset. Some years, it was okay. It turned out, actually, that as soon as the kids got older – at first, having a Christmas tree in the house really severely offended me. It still kept offending me even towards the end. It still offends me. As it turns out, he doesn't want to have anything to do with it either. He was trying to do it when they were little. So, I have to say, around Christmas, there was a Christmas tree. I don't know what kind of Jew has Christmas trees. It's definitely an unanswered question for me. In the meantime, I did join a synagogue in Manchester. That was a really great experience. We had that most fabulous rabbi, Michael Cohen, when the kids were little. He's just wonderful. I can't say how wonderful he is because he's just wonderful. Both of my girls went to Hebrew School there. Actually, at the beginning, it was really fun because it was a new congregation. In the classes, the parents would stay. I got to stay with Lila when she was in Hebrew school at the beginning. That was great for both of us. Both of my daughters ended up being bat mitzvahed there. We did that whole thing. That was some of the most wonderful time that I had with them as far as learning stuff. I seem to have inherited what my father gave me as far as being a tutor and working with them. To whatever extent my kids would let me – at some point, they don’t need any more help.

But they were very generous to include me in their bat mitzvah learning experiences. In the meantime, actually, my mother became bat mitzvahed probably about ten years ago, which was a really great thing for our family. She just never had a chance to do it when she was little. It wasn't some revelation. In the meantime, she rejoined the synagogue. After my father died – after we got kicked out of the synagogue in Northampton, my parents joined the Unitarians. They were in the Unitarian society. But us kids didn't ever get involved there. My mother never really liked it, I don't think. After my father died, she went and joined the synagogue on her own in Northampton. She became a bat mitzvah. Actually, I'm planning on doing that, too. I just have to wait until I get a little bit older and finish raising kids. That is in one of my plans. John has been very – he was totally supportive of them becoming bat mitzvah. I'm relatively happy with their level of Jewish identity. I'd probably like it more if they – well, the thing is, is that I don't do that much. I'm not sitting here lighting candles every Friday night either, even though I'd like to, and I think about it. I just don't keep it up. Considering everything, I'm not unhappy with how I raised them. As I say, I'm really lucky because I never thought about it as something to talk about with my husband before we even had kids. I think I was lucky because if he had wanted to raise them –

SG: Lutheran?

SL: – Lutheran or something – which he wouldn't – but if I had married somebody that wanted that, it would have been a really intolerable situation to me. I think I was just lucky.

SG: You had mentioned you wanted to say something about Sadie.

SL: I didn't end on a very uplifting note.

AB: That's okay because this will be edited.

SG: Not a problem. You've said some wonderful things.

SL: So, this is a sign.

AB: Why don't you read it?

SG: Can you read it to us?

SL: It's on an old piece of wood. It's black paint, hand-painted. It says, "See Sadie for a warm room." Sadie was one of the big characters from my childhood. She was my aunt, my father's sister. She lived in Bennington. She never married. She never had children. I remember her from my childhood. She was a pretty fat lady with big boobs who didn't wear a bra. She was up on her roof – she inherited my grandfather's tenements, actually, after a lot of majorly vicious fights between all the siblings. She's the one who inherited them. I think they were her doom, actually. She inherited these huge, rambling, old tenement buildings, and she got sucked into it. Anyway, when we went to Bennington when I was little, she was like a cat lady. She had tall, tall grass among the tenement buildings. My father would go with us three children trailing behind him. We had no idea where she'd be. We would go walking along. We'd go, "Sadie, Sadie." We would do that for a long time. Eventually, she'd pop up from somewhere. One time, I remember, she was up there in a dress with no bra. This is in the '50s. Pretty chubby, very Jewish-looking lady. She'd be up on the roof, tarring it. She was a cat lady. She had millions of cats and old refrigerators in her lot. So, it says, "See Sadie for a warm room" because she ran the tenement buildings, and the boarders would rent from her. One of my most amazing memories was one time we drove into downtown Bennington in the '50s, in my father's ton and a half old Chevy truck. I think it was a Chevy; I'm not sure what it was. Anyway, it was a big old farm truck. All of us kids were riding on the back. We saw this fat Jewish lady with no bra pushing a wheelbarrow right through the middle of town in Bennington. The wheelbarrow was full of overripe bananas that she had gotten from the fruit manager at the A&P, probably for free. She was on her way home with her bananas. She was one of these enigmatic women from my

childhood. But she was a vegetarian. She was a real health food nut. She actually started a thing called the Green Mountain Home for Vegetarian Orphans. She never managed to get any orphans, but I have the stationary. She set it all up as official business. That was her dream to fill up those old buildings with Vermont vegetarian orphans. [laughter] She's long gone now, but I think each of her nieces feels a certain desire to keep her memory alive because she didn't have any children. She was a real Vermont character, old Jewish lady; I'll tell you that much – born and raised and died here.

AB: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]