Hinda Miller Transcript

Sandy Gartner: Hello, everyone. This is Sandy Gardner and Ann Buffum, meeting with Hinda Miller to record a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today is December 5, 2006. We are at Hinda's home on Deforest Heights in Burlington, Vermont. Hinda, do we have your permission to record this interview?

Hinda Miller: Yes.

SG: So our first question today is, how and when did your family arrive in Canada? Also, as you speak about that, do you have any stories you can share with us about life in the old country and their journey here?

HM: So, let's see. I'll start with my mother's parents. My grandfather came to Canada in 1919, unusually, from a wealthy family. He came over to close the furniture store of his Uncle Joe Levitt in Montreal, and what he found was a bustling community. I guess he telegraphed his uncle and said, "I can make a go of this." So he kept this door open and created quite a successful business. It was called Woodhouse Furniture, and the warehouse was near the airport, in Dorval, in Montreal. Then he went back to Liverpool, where he had been living, although he was originally from Lithuania, and married my grandmother May (Elen Bolden?) Levitt. (Elen Bolden?) was her maiden name. And she came to Canada. At that time, it was sort of out in the sticks, so they never went through Ellis Island; they came directly to Canada, as many Jews did, I think, from England. So that is my mother's family. That was quite unusual to have a little bit of wealth because it was during the time when many Jews came with nothing. They became a family in Westmount that took care of a lot of Jewish families, I'm told. I guess that happened as immigrants came into the community. There were certain ones that had more resources

than others, and they helped each other. My father's parents were a different story. My grandfather came as a fourteen-year-old boy. That was, I think, 1910 or '12. He came from Austria. He came from a farm outside of Vienna, and he came alone – oh, no, came with one sister. He was taken care of by that sister. He came into the sort of bowels of Montreal, St. Paul Street. He was a furrier originally and then got into buying some buildings. My grandmother came from Herzegovina. That's probably not the right pronunciation. She came over with her sisters. They met here, and they married. I think my grandfather didn't really talk about the old country, and neither did my grandfather because all their relatives and family were killed in Plungyan, Lithuania. He didn't talk about it. My grandmother, May (Elen Bogan?), came from a large Jewish family, originally from Ireland, and her grandfather – (Isaacson?) was his name – he was a rabbi there for about nineteen years.

SG: How did they get to Ireland? Do you know?

HM: You know? I don't. I know people don't think about Jews in Ireland, but in that time frame – in fact, we went for a family reunion – I don't know if that's the time to talk about it. Is it?

SG: Any time.

HM: Any time is the time.

Ann Buffum: Any time.

HM: So I was incredibly blessed; within a time of two years, I had an opportunity to have reunions with my mother's family. I went on this incredible odyssey to Plungyan, Lithuania, with one of my uncles who was from Israel. What I learned about the Jews is the family grew up in Lithuania, and they had five sons. One went to South Africa, one went to England, and one went to America. One went to Israel or in that area because it wasn't safe to live in Lithuania. They sent their kids away. So you can imagine the

sorrow of the mother sending their children away, although it was a blessing because of the Holocaust. The reason why they went to South Africa is that South Africa was open to Jews, and they allowed them to create their own businesses. So there were known countries that were hospitable to Jews and those that weren't. We were forty-five people, all age groups, from Israel, Canada, the United States, London, Brussels, South Africa, and we were all children, descendants from these five brothers. It was the most amazing trip just to be with them. To get into a bus full of the chemistry of family was something I'd never experienced before. We had the honor of going to – in July, they have a ceremony in the woods, when these two thousand Jews were killed. Every July, they have a ceremony, and we were part of it. We met people who saw my grandfather's youngest brother Israel shot, and they talked to us – she was a survivor – about how he tried to run away, and he was last in line, and they shot him in the back. We actually talked to survivors, who knew this Levitt family, not everybody, but knew the family because everyone knew the family, and they were in the grain business. They didn't grow the grain, but they were a broker of grain, and that was their business. There was a monk, a Roman Catholic monk, or somebody in robes who asked forgiveness. There was a schoolteacher who was Lithuanian – because the Lithuanians started killing the Jews before the Germans came in because they wanted the Germans to like them, and they knew what the Germans had in mind, so they started killing them. So Lithuanians were complicit in killing – and I think this group of Jews was killed before the Germans came in by the Lithuanians. I forgot to mention that in this forest, there was an artist – in fact, see that sculpture over there? That little piece. Right near the deck. That was done by a sculptor who did huge totems of people, mothers with children crying, and all kinds of – and that was how they marked this place, where all these Jews were [killed].

AB: That's really amazing. You were very blessed to have this opportunity to meet all these people.

HM: Then we went to Dublin. Then we saw my mother's family. There were like a hundred people. They talked about the Jews going from Ireland to London because there were more Jews – because they were less and less [inaudible] Jews. But Rabbi (Isaacson?) was head of this synagogue, and we saw his grave for nineteen years, and he actually made a Torah, and we donated money to get it rehabilitated because it had been rotting. He went to actually the synagogue where he was the rabbi. It was amazing. I feel pretty Jewish after that experience.

SG: How did the family know about each branch? How did everyone know about each other to pull off this reunion?

HM: The two reunions because we had two different groups. Well, my mother is one that keeps up – she'll find a party in any family that we're possibly related to anywhere in the world. That's who she is. I have a little bit of that myself. So she kept up, and actually, in my family, two brothers married two sisters. My two grandparents – my grandfather (Sidney?), married May, and then May's sister married –

AB: The other brother.

HM: Yes, Henry. That was a really close connection. My mother went to England before the war, and then cousins came to Montreal during the war. So there was still that connection. Then, one person knows one person knows one person knows one person. My cousin in Israel had a very deep need to understand where his father was killed because his father was killed there. Then he's gone back every year, and we as a family have donated money to Plungyan. I'm not sure. It might be Kovno, the larger city around there. We've donated money for the education of children about the Holocaust.

SG: Do you know how you spell that? Kovno?

HM: [K]-O-V-N-O.

SG: And the other?

HM: Plungyan. P-L-U-N-G-Y-A-N

SG: Thank you. Well, if there are any other stories, this would be a good time to tell them; otherwise, we can move on to growing up in Montreal. We'd like you to talk about what was it like to grow up in a Jewish family in Montreal? Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood? Did you have Jewish education at that time?

HM: Well, it was great growing up in Montreal. It was a huge Jewish community, and many had a lot of resources. I grew up in Hampstead, and then we moved to Westmount, which had a very large Jewish population. So there were lots of places like Côte Saint-Luc, Westmount, Dorval – there were a lot of places where Jewish families – we belonged to the Shaar Hashomayim synagogue, which was a large Conservative synagogue. Young women my age didn't get bat mitzvahed or confirmed, but I went to Hebrew school. I actually went to a private Anglican girls' school because my mother was very British. She had that orientation because her parents came from England, and they brought in this kind of British look at the world. So I sang hymns in the morning and Jewish chants in the afternoon, which, in retrospect, I'm grateful for because I have a very broad sense of all spiritual paths. So there was no doubt that we were Jewish. We celebrated holidays. We went to bar mitzvahs. My parents weren't [religious]. In fact, my father, who came from a much poor background, had a lot to prove; he didn't want to be that Jewish because he was in real estate development, and he wanted to run away from that stuff so that he could establish himself and assimilate. But in my growing up, there was no need to really assimilate because there were so many. But I was the only Jewish kid in my class. So, every year, show and tell, I had to bring the menorah and talk about Hanukkah. I lived in both worlds …

AB: Well, you actually started to answer this because the question was about interacting with people of other ethnic or racial backgrounds when you were growing up. As this

only child in the Anglican school –?

HM: No, no. I wasn't the only Jewish child. In my class, I was the only Jewish – I had another friend in one above me, (Gail?). She was the only Jewish girl in her class, too.

AB: Did you ever experience antisemitism at that time?

HM: I did, as a matter of fact. I didn't growing up, or I didn't know about it. But when we started having dances or dating, I remember [distinctly] that I was dancing with this guy, and someone whispered, "Is she Jewish?" That made me stop and think. I asked my parents if I could go to the public school, which I did. So I went to the public school for the last two years of high school. There were a lot more Jewish – that public school in Westmount High School was half Jewish, half Protestant, and very, very few racial diversity, maybe some Afro-American kids, but I didn't know them. They were very, very few. We were all English, too. We lived in the English area of Montreal.

SG: So when you're growing up in – and I'm thinking this is the '60s, right?

HM: In the '60s, I was in my teens. Yes.

SG: In the '60s, you're in your teens. We know what was happening here in the United States with Vietnam and with racial issues. Were the young people in Canada hearing as much in responding as much to these issues as we were here in the States?

HM: Vietnam wasn't our issue. I came to the States early. I came to the States when I was seventeen. So the issues of the States became my issues. I really wasn't a young adult in Canada. I left high school, and then I went to McGill for a year, and then I went to Parsons School of Design, and I never left the United States after that. I mean, I never went home.

SG: Today, how do you identify yourself as a Jew? How has this changed over your lifetime? If it has?

HM: Well, I've always felt Jewish. I'm not learned in any way. I wasn't bat mitzvahed. I learned how to read in Hebrew and speak a little bit in Hebrew school. I never really was that enthused with the services. But I've always appreciated bar mitzvahs, bat mitzvahs, Passover, and the high holidays. I think that's what I've observed and appreciated, the cycle of Jewish ritual that corresponds to the yearly cycle. I always got that and appreciated that. I have a very, very strong spiritual practice, but it didn't come from Judaism. It came from my studying yoga. In my early twenties in New York, I started. I was lucky enough to come into contact with some absolutely wonderful Indian teachers. So I've been doing yoga for thirty years, and I just started to study a new yoga called Naam yoga that combines yoga and universal Kabbalah. I've always had these two tracks, and lately, I have been extremely attracted to the chanting, the Jewish chanting in synagogue, and I felt very comforted. Because my daughter had her bat mitzvah, I went to more than I usually do services in spring and summer. Now I'm on a path to integrate my two streams of spirituality. So, for me, that's very exciting.

AB: Do you want to tell us more about how you began in yoga? Who it was, in particular, that got you started with yoga, and how did that come about?

HM: I don't know how I was so lucky. But I was in the swirl of drugs, sex, and rock and roll, as well as anti-war marching and civil rights. Although I don't think I really understood civil rights then. I think I was much more in tune with the war. We shut down our school, and it was very chaotic. When I look at it – very chaotic times. I wandered into a yoga class, and I found Swami Satchidananda. He had come in '66, and I got to be in his presence in '72. There were so many of us that were – how can I say? – out of control, exploring, and he came at the right time. Nothing happens by accident. He came at the time when we needed structure, and he taught us how to eat. He taught us

how to exercise. He taught us how to breathe, how to relax, how to do service, and how to study. There were many, many, many famous people like Laura Nyro was a disciple and Peter Max. I can't remember the others, but there were many famous people as well as the rest of us. At that time, we were so close. Every second Saturday, we'd have Satsang, where he would talk, and we would sing, and he would teach us. I had an experience during that time – I think it was eight or ten years that I was with him. We went on a three-week retreat, and there was a rabbi, Rabbi Greenberg, a father, Father David, some kind of Roman Catholic person, and (Swamiji?). It was that time when I really felt deeply the roots of all paths. They talked about the common roots, and then the trunks and leaves and the different rituals. But I realized now I really got a sense of the essence of spirituality and how each religion manifested in study, in prayer, in chant, in ritual. I've been, for some reason, extremely blessed. I guess I've always had a yearning to understand my connection to the world.

AB: When you're exploring the Kabbalah, how did that get started? What's that all about?

HM: I don't know. I'm just starting. Well, when I lost the mayor's race, I looked up to God, and I said, "Okay, I'm not serving in Burlington. Where am I going to serve?" What am I going to do?" And I had just met a woman who I did not really know, and she looked so good. I said, "Well, what are you doing?" She talked about this Kabbalah and yoga, and I thought, "I want to try that. Where do I go?" So this happened in July.

SG: Just recently then.

HM: Yeah.

SG: Wow.

HM: I signed up for a teacher's training and have been going to New York once a month. I went to Portugal for a week with this new teacher. I think I'm going to sit on his board

of directors. I'm very enthusiastic about integration. He says that the world is going to go through so much chaos until 2012. That's when a lot of the prophecy says there's going to be a major change, that we have to take all the essence of all the mysteries wherever they come from and put them together so people can practice opening their heart, and so that we can move into the age of the heart, which starts then.

SG: What's his name? I was just curious.

HM: His name is Joseph Michael Levry, and he calls himself Gurunam. Gurunams are very common. It's just "the blessed teacher."

AB: On the questionnaire, we sent ahead of time, you mentioned that you had affiliated recently with the Orthodox congregation here.

HM: Oh, yeah.

AB: Is that part of this whole experience?

HM: Because I love that building, I love being in that building, and I learned recently that the Jews that came over to Burlington came from Kovno, which is right where my grandfather was. I just love that building. I can't take it for very long, but I go into the building. It's very small, citizen-run because they can't afford a rabbi – have you ever been in that building?

AB: No.

SG: I have.

HM: You must. You've been there, right, Sandy?

SG: That was back in the late '70s.

HM: It's amazing. There's this mudra, this hand thing. This is to ward off evil spirits and to bring the creator down.

SG: It's what Dr. Spock did.

HM: Yeah, it's Dr. Spock, and it's on the bimah. You should see that bimah; it's like primitive art. It's amazing. I feel a real energetic connection to that building, and this guy talked me into joining because he said he'd get me a burial plot. [laughter] So that's why. I go hardly at all.

SG: You just pay for the cemetery privileges.

HM: Yes, cemetery privileges. But I went for high holidays for an hour and a half, and I had a great time.

SG: That's funny.

AB: Very good. Turning a little bit to your education, why don't you tell us about your high school and college education and your initial career choices?

HM: I told you I went to this private girls' school in Montreal called The Study. And then I went to Westmount High. Then I went to McGill for a year because I didn't know what to do. I studied English. Then my father was my great guide as a young person. He and I discussed things. I think he must have chosen environmental design, which is like architectural design. We went to visit schools, and I landed up at Parsons School of Design. I studied environmental design. It was at that time that I found Satchidananda. Then I took a year off, and I worked at Design Research. I don't know if you remember that store on West 57th Street.

SG: Yes.

AB: Yes.

HM: You do? Oh, God. I did the window display there, which was so much fun. Then, I said, “Okay, what am I going to do with all this” and still not knowing, so I thought I would apply all this work to theater design/set design, but when I got into – I went to NYU [New York University] for theater design, but I moved into costume design; I wasn’t really that good at it, but I loved the life. I liked the social life, and I liked the training, the creativity. I’m very right brain-oriented [and] conceptual, and that was wonderful. So that made me a creative thinker, I think, that theater education. Do you want me to go forward?

AB: Yes, you can go forward.

HM: What do you want to ask me?

AB: Well, we were wondering as you do go forward if you’ll also mention how feminism might have played – well, we’re going to hear about Jogbra, aren’t we?

HM: Yes, we are.

AB: Also, we wondered if, in your career – and you could address this at any point in this interview – if you had difficulties because you’re a woman or because you were Jewish if you ever ran into barriers or difficulties with that?

SG: Mine is just off the cuff, but did you do some theater design in New York? I have a theater company in Rutland. I’m curious.

HM: I worked for BAM for a year. I was an assistant costume designer.

SG: You did? Right.

HM: But I realized there that they were like four people that worked on Broadway, and I wasn’t going to be one of the talented ones to do that. I decided, “I’m not going to shop for shoes and fabric for my career.” That made me think –that made me give up everything to do Jogbra because I realized – actually, I went to South Carolina to see

how good I was. I went to the University of South Carolina with a boyfriend. I became an assistant professor of costume design because I wanted to see how good I was. Was I really good, or was I just mediocre? Because if I wasn't really outstanding, I wasn't going to go very far. I found out I was good, but not great, but that allowed me to let go of that. I came to Burlington to design costumes for the Champlain Shakespeare Festival. That's when Jogbra started. So, yes, I was definitely part of the feminist era. I didn't do women's studies or anything. But my chemistry is such that independence is one of my top values. I have a lot of Mars in me, and I'm an Aries, so I'm an initiator. My father brought me up to – he didn't know the difference between boys and girls, so I was very, very lucky. My mother is a lovely person, but she didn't have much – we didn't really connect the way my father and I did. I was the eldest child. He didn't know the difference between men and women. He told me to go out and experience the world, and you can do anything you want to do. If you're afraid of something, go do it. So I had feminist chemistry, and I had a father that saw no rules that were different for men and women. In fact, he told me, "You shouldn't be a nurse or a teacher because you don't have the personality for it." And he never talked to me about getting married. So, I didn't have this vision. I think I was a – I have so much Mars in me that I was always driven for work and accomplishment in all that stuff. But I was so lucky that I found my husband at thirty-five. I had my kids at thirty-eight and forty. I'm truly blessed in that way. Do you want the Jogbra story?

SG: Did that answer the question as far as feminism and antisemitism?

AB: I think so.

HM: Antisemitism. We didn't really – I don't know. Some people said there was antisemitism in the mayor's race, which I thought was interesting, but I don't know, and I don't care.

AB: Okay. So let's move on.

SG: Let's move on then.

AB: We've read about the Jogbra story in other interviews, and we think it's very fascinating. We'd be delighted if you'd like to tell it again.

HM: I can if you need it. Do you need it? I'd be happy to.

AB: Sure.

SG: Yes. Hear it from [inaudible]

AB: One of the things – a little different take on it than what we've read about, perhaps, would be if while you're telling the story, you could think about what was your best experience with Jogbra and this whole exciting business? What's your greatest achievement with Jogbra? Also, did you have any really bad experiences?

HM: Oh, tons. Every other day. So you heard the story that Lisa and I were running, and our breasts were bouncing. Lisa's sister said, "Why isn't there a jockstrap for women?" It was Lisa's idea. She asked a friend of hers, Polly, who didn't have breasts and didn't run. I did, and I was very interested. So, we went to [inaudible]. We tried on samples. I tore them apart because I was a costume designer, and that's what you do; You just put different things together and see how they work. Then Lisa's soon to be ex-husband took a jockstrap from a laundry basket, put it against his chest, and said, "Look, jock-bra." We said, "Well, maybe we do the same thing that men have been doing, pull everything close to the body." So we bought two jockstraps at the university bookstore at UVM [University of Vermont]. I don't think they sell jockstraps anymore because I looked. Anyway, we got them. We sewed them together. Polly sewed them together, and we ran with them. In defiance, as feminists, we were determined that this product would be functional first. We didn't care what it looked like. We found out later that there weren't many women bra designers. In fact, I knew from my costume design that women's underwear reflects – if you study women's underwear through the ages, it

reflects the social, economic, and political status of women at the time. This was an afterthought. But I had studied with the curator of the Metropolitan because, in costume design, you go up there, and you sketch [inaudible] girls and you talk about the period and what women's status was, etc. What did we discover or invent was something that pulled the breast close to the body, that the breast was supported by the chest, while all the seams would be outside of the garment, so it wouldn't rub against – wide ribband, so it wouldn't go up and down, and straps the crossed. Because I was a designer and we had design criteria – and Polly did, too; she was a big help in the beginning. I knew how to fabricate something because, in costume design, you see a sketch, and then you shop for fabric, and that's how it's created. We went to New York, and we knew New York because I lived in New York. Polly lived in New York. We found poly cotton lycra fabric. We were the first ones to use that. We were driven – absolutely passionately driven to create a product that we needed, and it was very – Polly left us because she wanted to sell it to a corporation. But Lisa and I wanted to do grassroots, give it to our sisters, and contribute to women's lives. In fact, the Jogbra – now that I see that I was just a channeler for this product, the Jogbra is in the Smithsonian Institute, and it's in the Metropolitan Museum of Art costume collection because I wrote to – her name was Adler, and I said, "This is a very important piece of women's underwear, and it shows the evolution." It's like the icon of women in the '70s that increased their status on the playing field and in the working area as well. The Washington Post said that Title IX and the sports bra were the two most important innovations to help the increase of women's participation – women and girls participation in sports and fitness. It's a very, very important piece of equipment. We always saw it as a piece of equipment. We boxed it in a black box, and we sold it in sporting goods. We taught men how to say nipples and breasts and everything else. We were a women's company, serving women, by women, for women. I mean, it was an outpouring. I think the part that I look at most often about Jogbra is that Lisa and I had a very bad relationship. We weren't friends, and we both were young. We came from fear and insecurity because we had never been in business,

and it brought out the worst in us. I think, had we been a little more sophisticated in our evolution, we could have done it a different way. However, you can't look down on success. We created a partnership where we were extreme opposites, and we found the middle way. But we had a lot of ups and downs in our relationship, and it wasn't pretty a lot of the time. But from that came an understanding that if we couldn't get it together, our company wouldn't succeed. So we created these operating principles with our management team. Before we knew what corporate culture was, or anything – so we had this little card; it said, "Assume good intentions. Respect other people. Listen. Ask for help. Don't take things personally." There was a very – that was the good thing that happened because Lisa and I didn't get along. I think that you could say that that was the extreme lesson. The best thing was just to be part of an incredibly exciting growing business and stepping out always on that cliff and not knowing exactly what the next thing is. That suited me and my chemistry – and offering great jobs for women who evolved. I mean, we started small, and we grew big. Our people started small, grew big, and created wonderful careers for themselves.

AB: Having sold the business at a certain point in time, were you able to watch what it's doing now and have pangs?

HM: No, no.

AB: It's a baby, and it's launched, and it's gone?

HM: It's a dream. Yes. That baby went to college. Has its own – no, I don't care a damn about – I don't even like wearing bras anymore. [laughter] I hate bras, actually. I'm trying like crazy to find something. So, no, I don't know. No.

AB: That's interesting.

SG: So you're no longer part of any of the corporations or on the boards or anything?

HM: No. You mean on their boards?

SG: Yes.

HM: No, it was bought by Sara Lee, and they don't need founder entrepreneurs –

SG: Hanging out?

HM: It's no use. Yes.

SG: We're getting close to forty minutes.

AB: Let's take a break.

SG: We've got a few more minutes. Okay.

AB: Let's take a break … [Recording paused. End of Track one.]

HM: Want me to say that again?

AB: Yes, please …

HM: Then I got into politics, so I put it aside. That was a time I needed to really raise money. It was called – I can't remember, but I'll give you a flier; I've got millions of them. I made a lot of fliers because I was going to raise a lot of money at the time.

AB: Do you think it's something you might be turned to?

HM: I don't know. I don't know. I think as you guys know, you have to have fire in the belly for the projects that you do. You have your fire in your belly for this. I found a lot of free thinkers have come to live in Vermont. A lot of hippies came from the '60s and '70s and put their roots down here. [Technical issues.] I guess your investigation and your wanting to know will reveal what it means to be Jewish in this place, in this time, how

does it impact your life, etc.

AB: Let's move on to another important part of your life, which is politics. Why did you decide to go into politics in the first place? What issues are most important to you now as a Vermont State Senator?

HM: Well, I didn't really decide. I told you I'm Canadian. I decided that at a certain point, the United States had given me so much opportunity that I ought to become a citizen because I wanted to vote. I think it was after Al Gore lost that I realized I've got to participate. I became a citizen. I met a man when I was voting, my first voting – he said, "I thought you were Canadian." I said, "No, I became American." He said, "Well, why don't you run for Senate?" I said, "Well, what does that mean?" He was a Republican. I spoke with him. I'd always sort of wondered what could I do with my deep passion for women and girls. With the little bit of name recognition that I had gotten with Jogbra, what could I do with that? What would be the next cycle? So I thought about it, and then I was – what I care deeply about is economic development as it deals with job creation as it deals with people's ability to earn a living and support their family. So because I had that experience in Jogbra, and I had the experience of the creation of jobs, and I saw what an incredible community we built and what wonderful families we had together. We were a small successful growing business, and we created a wonderful, prosperous family essentially. I saw the benefits of that for family. So that's what I really care about. That certainly includes children and how we educate them and how they're educated for what jobs, etc. I thought that I was a Republican because I care so deeply about that end of life, but of course, I'm pro-choice, and I'm pro-choice in everything. I'm pro-gay marriage. I'm pro anything that promotes love and commitment and living according to universal laws, that we have to do what we think is right for ourselves. So some people said, "You might think your policies are Republican, but your heart is Democratic." I got that. Then I became the most popular girl for one morning. Senator [Patrick] Leahy called me, and Howard Dean called me, and Madeleine Kunin called me, and they said,

“You’re not a Republican. You’re a Democrat.”

SG: What year was that?

HM: I ran in 2002. I came in January ’03. So Senator Leahy, God bless him – and he does this for a lot of novices – said, “Look, I’ll find you a campaign manager, and they’ll teach you the ropes.” And he did. I raised money, and I got elected. It’s taken me a while to understand the Senate. It’s not that I wasn’t political; it’s that I had no time. I was running a business, and I was traveling a lot. I hardly knew what was going on here. So that’s how I started my career.

AB: So now you’re going to have another chance, right? Another couple of years.

HM: It’s very hard work. My real passion is job creation. Sounds like a very – people can’t relate to it. But I think that everything has to do with economic development – childcare and health care and after school. It is about the cradle of the prosperity of a community that people can find the work that speaks to them; they can earn a livable wage and support a family because poverty is a horrible thing. My issues now this session – this session, I feel very strongly about complementary medicine getting reimbursed by health care, particularly as we age and particularly because we know that eighty percent of healthcare dollars go to chronic care. By that, I mean acupuncture, chiropractic, and naturopathic because of my yoga and because I believe that health comes from the electromagnetic energetic fields, as well as your bones and your organs. There’s something beyond that, and you have to get into that realm, which is what these people do. Chiropractors do get reimbursement but not in Medicaid, and why should poor people not be able to –? They can have back surgery, which doesn’t help them, but they can’t go to a chiropractor, which is one of those areas that make no sense. So that’s number one. And number two, I’m very interested in ecological tax reform. That means that we really begin to look at taxes in a different way. We start taxing polluters. These are not my ideas, but we do carbon capping. We figure out how –there’s a very

interesting concept now. It's by this fellow named Peter Barnes. He talks about three sectors: private sector, public sector – maybe we should stop.

SG: Maybe we should stop. [Recording paused.] Yes, it's going.

HM: Do you want to hear about this?

AB: Yes.

SG: Yes.

HM: Private sector and public sector, which we all know about, but the common sector, and the common sector owns the air, owns the water; it owns our natural resources. When a company either pollutes our natural resources, or they have to pay for that, or when a company who sells water pulls water out of our ground, they have to pay for that. So we become shareholders in our common sector. And so that's what I'm exploring. I'm exploring that with the Gunde Institute [for Environment]. That's a very wonderful organization at UVM. They are into looking at – instead of the gross national product where people look at the prosperity of a nation or a community, they're looking at something called the genuine progress indicator, which takes into account and accounts for things like working in the home, takes into account transportation costs. It takes into account the education. It puts a price on what we call quality of life. I think that's the key now of restructuring. So you can buy a Hummer if you want, but you have to pay a very big tax because why should I pay with allergies and emphysema and lung cancer because you want to have a Hummer? So that's what I'm hoping – to change the conversation this year.

AB: Do you already feel there are other people in the state legislature who are interested in the things you're talking about?

HM: Yes, absolutely. Yes, I do. Because we have to do things differently. We don't have the luxury anymore to do things the same way.

AB: I hear you. So we're going to stop again for Lucy … [Recording paused.]

SG: Mine's going.

AB: Actually, you may have answered some of this already. But going back to your family – you didn't really tell us – how did you meet your husband? Did you?

HM: No, I didn't.

AB: What brought you to Vermont to work? But actually, it was the other way around. You came here first?

HM: I did. I came to Vermont to start – I mean, I came to Vermont, I told you, as an assistant costume designer for the Champlain Shakespeare Festival, which was wonderful. If you were a student in New York, and you were looking for a summer job, to come up to the University of Vermont Shakespeare Festival was a real coup. So I had come up – my family from Montreal. My father was the first Montrealer to come to Stowe and build a little motel there. So we had a country house in Stowe when I was fourteen, and that's how I grew up and loved Vermont – on the ski hill.

SG: Did you know the Bronfmans?

HM: Yes.

SG: I'm good friends with Brian Bronfman.

HM: I don't know who Brian is.

SG: He's the younger one.

HM: He's the younger one?

SG: Yes, but his family had a place in Stowe. That's where they first came to Vermont, too.

HM: The Bronfmans and my grandfather's family, the Levitts, were one of the key big families in Montreal.

AB: How did you meet your husband?

HM: How did I meet my husband? So I used to go to a lot of these self-awareness – what were they called? – workshops in the '70s, early '80s. I went for myself, but I was looking for a fellow who would understand this kind of spiritual path. I met him at the last one. I told my friends, "I'm not going anymore. I'm finished."

SG: Where was this retreat?

HM: This was in Stowe, actually. And it was a Zen retreat. It was about non-attachment. And then I saw Joel. I had decided I had a lot of boyfriends that didn't work out. I said, "Okay, I'm going to try and find Jewish because I'm beginning to feel that I should, that that's where it would be in sync." There weren't a lot of Jewish single guys in Burlington that I could find out. When I went, well, Joel was there. I became so attached to him. I went to my room, and I said, "I know this is about non-attachment, but I really like that guy." So I tried to get on the chairlift with him and go riding with him. But I lived in Vermont, and he lived in Atlantic City. But I had an apartment in New York. I had kept my own apartment. So I said, "Oh, I'm going to be in New York this weekend. Do you want to come? "He said, "Yes." I said, "I'm going to Puerto Rico to the factories. Do you want to come?" He'd say, "Yes." "I'm going skiing with my parents. Do you want to come?" He kept saying yes. It was lovely. It was so blessed. So, we met on Labor Day. Then, I wanted a four-day workweek. I wanted Lisa to know that this was someone special. So I said, "Listen, I really want to get engaged," and Joel said, "When I want to

get engaged, I'll ask you." I said, "Well, I'll engage myself to you. When you're ready, if you want to, you can." I said, "But I'm not going to be engaged forever because my therapist said take care of your own needs." And Joel's a therapist, so he said, "Do what you need to do." So I said, "Okay, I'm engaging myself to you." I called his mother. His mother said, "Mazel tov." My mother said, "Don't call me unless Joel is engaged to you." [laughter] So anyway, I got engaged to him in January, and then he decided to get engaged to me in March. And then I said, I want to get married in June. Of course, he said, "Well, I said we could get engaged, but I didn't really know we were going to get married." So we got married in June. We had a commuter relationship for seven years because he wasn't ready to give up his practice, and I was running a business, and I couldn't move to him. The last two years, I had Noah. And then when Macey came, my daughter, my second child, it was Tuesday. He'd always leave Tuesday. I said, "Well, it's Tuesday. Aren't you leaving?" He said, "No, I decided to live with you." I said, "What? Two children and a full-time husband? No way." Anyway, that's how – I don't know. Maybe I paid my dues, or maybe I began to understand life, but I've just been very lucky. We had our two kids. Joel had two kids before with another wife.

AB: Bringing up your children here in Vermont, are you providing any religious education for them?

HM: Yes. No matter what, they have to go to Hebrew school. Each of them said, "I hate Hebrew school." I said to them, "I hated Hebrew school. Your father hated Hebrew school. I don't really care whether you hate it or like it. You're going. You get bar mitzvahed, bat mitzvahed, and then you can do whatever you want." I know they feel really Jewish. My son went away to a really Protestant boarding school for his sport that he loved. He asked for a chai, a big one, too. I thought, "Wow." So they have their own relationship with it.

AB: And how old are they now?

HM: Noah is a freshman at UVM. He's eighteen, and Macey's fourteen.

AB: And she's here at Burlington High School?

HM: I don't know. Maybe. She's going into high school. So she's looking at Burlington High School today, actually. She's shadowing someone today.

AB: Can you tell us a little about what kind of Jewish traditions you have in your home or at this point in your life?

HM: Well, I like to have meals together. I have done, for several years – I think about five years, I always do a big meal with a lot of people for high holidays, and sometimes two meals. Then we always do a big Passover. I would say pretty much – and then Hanukkah, we do. Because of my deepening spiritual practice, I brought that deepening spiritual practice into Hanukkah, although last year, I did an Indian Hanukkah because I had just traveled to India, and I had all these Indian decorations.

SG: That's cool.

HM: So I'm fairly eclectic, but all I care about is that my kids understand that there's something beyond what we see and know and that we're part of something larger than ourselves. It has to do with spirit, however you define it. The Jewish is because we're Jewish. I like to get people together. I don't have a lot of dinner parties. We stop during the year, but I really like to get people together.

AB: Our last question is –

SG: Can I just ask one before you ask the last one?

AB: Okay. Sure.

SG: You said before you –

AB: Speak loud, so you're on tape.

SG: Before you went into politics, you were involved in a business, and I was wondering what that business was. You said there was another business or something.

AB: That's not getting recorded.

HM: Say it again, Sandy.

SG: Was there something in between Jogbra and politics that you did?

HM: There were five years before [politics]. I did a lot then. I found out who I was in middle age, but I don't think I said it.

SG: Consulting or anything? That's fine.

AB: The last question is, Hinda, are there any other things that you'd like to tell us that we didn't ask about, something poignant or humorous or interesting that we didn't think to ask?

HM: Well, what I like about being Jewish is that I love the chemistry of being Jewish. I like entering a room and being able to hug every Jew in the room. There's some kind of special – in my mind because, I guess, I'm part of this tribe, there's something – I think the word is Hamish – like, touch the cheeks about Jewish, and I really like being part of that. I haven't studied yet, and maybe I will, but I totally respect the idea of a bat mitzvah or bar mitzvah about welcoming and honoring children into adults. I mean, that ritual is so strong. I love the story of Passover. The other thing I really love is – psychologically, I love the fact that between New Year's and Yom Kippur, you're supposed to – all the people that you've messed up with, you go and ask forgiveness, so you don't carry it along. I've sort of been joking. So when I mess up, I go to someone and say, "Look, I'm not waiting for Yom Kippur. I'm doing you now. I'm getting it over with. I'm telling you

that I messed up, and it won't happen again or whatever." I think as I age, there's something so rich. As I understand the Kabbalistic universal laws and know that some Jews have always been into the mysticisms and the mysteries of the world, I feel very proud. Of course, I feel very proud of all the amazing Jewish people there have been in history and alive today. I have my own theory. My theory is that the rabbis were encouraged to have kids, so they didn't take the best DNA out of the tribe. They kept it in as an ongoing part of life. I really, really respect that. So I think I have a lot of respect for the religion, but I don't know all the ins and outs because I don't go to shul every Saturday, and I'm not kosher. I'm a happy Jew. I'm happy to be part of this group. I think that's it.

SG: Great.

AB: Great. Thank you so much, Hinda.

HM: Thank you for asking. My goodness, no one ever asked me.

AB: I'm happy, too. I'm getting teary.

[END OF INTERVIEW]