

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1945-1975)

Interviewee Miriam Richardson

Interviewer Maurice Isserman

Date(s) of interview September 9, 1976

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

Interview took place in Mrs. Richardson's office at the Jewish Family Service. Mrs. Richardson was an excellent interview subject, friendly, eager to supply details and analysis.

Background of interviewee

Mrs. Richardson was born and raised in Rochester. Her parents were active Labor Zionists, helping found the Farbund and Pioneer Women. She was trained as a social worker, and has worked at the Jewish Family Service for the last seven years.

Interview abstract

Two subjects were discussed in detail: the early history of Labor Zionist activities in Rochester, and the activities of the Jewish Family Service. Of particular interest is Mrs. Richardson's discussion of relations between various Zionist groups in the city. She also discusses problems of recent Soviet Jewish immigrants in Rochester.

Interview index (corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder numbers)

<input type="checkbox"/> Social history	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish community
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	<input type="checkbox"/> community relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Demographic/residential	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious life
<input type="checkbox"/> Economic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jewish education
<input type="checkbox"/> Political/civic	<input type="checkbox"/> Anti-semitism
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Zionism/Israel	

Interview log

- corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder nos.
- including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s) --

Personal background

parents emigrate to Rochester from Russia

parents' occupations

their early experiences in Rochester, learning English (bilingual home)

Neighborhoods--Wilkins St. was center of Roch. labor zionism

parents religious observance

★ ★ ★ Labor Zionism

parents helped organize farbund folk shul. Conflict between Workmen's Circle and farbund.

Labor Zionism in Roch. small but active circle. Fund raising activities. Relations between different zionist groups--elections to World Zionist Congress. Differences in social basis of different zionist groups. Zionism a major force in Roch. Jewish community. "3rd Seder." Parents help organize labor zionist camp in Kendall, NY, 1934.

Education--attended Franklin High School. Recalls no anti-semitism. Homes in Irondequoit, Brighton.

Depression experiences--no real hardship.

College experiences--studies social work.

Marriage and two children. Joined Beth-El, children's religious experiences.

★ ★ ★ Golda Meier visit (1924?)--mother organized Roch. Pioneer Women--kept her home open to visitors from national Zionist organizations. Relations between Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse Labor Zionists. Other important zionist visitors--Ben Gurion, etc.

Socialist component of Labor Zionism declines.

Jewish shift of allegiance from Norman Thomas to FDR in 1932-36.

Negative feelings about organizational work.

★ ★ May 1948 Rochester meeting to celebrate founding of Israel.

Records of Labor Zionists sent to NYC.

★ ★ Labor Zionist cultural activities--sponsored visits by Yiddish theater, etc.

★ Changes in Zionist movement after 1948--more inclusive, but less intense.

★ ★ ★ Social work career--been at Jewish Family Service for 7 years--first job in a Jewish agency. Sees some stigma attached to going to JFS. Relations between Jewish values and social work. Reasons for Jews to come to agency. Focus has changed from welfare relief to counseling. Who comes to JFS and why. Changes in problems brought to agency. Why a Jewish family services? Problem of intermarriage. Availability of cumulative records at JFS. Soviet immigration program--immigrants problems in adjusting to life in Rochester.

Interview 1  
Tape 1  
Side A

Q. Speaking with Miriam Richardson on September 7, 1976 in the offices of the Jewish Family Service. All right, Mrs. Richardson, when were you born?

A. 1919.

Q. And was that in Rochester?

A. Yes.

Q. And when did your parents settle in Rochester?

A. In 1910.

Q. Where did they come from?

A. They came from Russia.

Q. Why did they come to Rochester?

A. There were other relatives and distant family members here.

Q. What did they do when they came here?

A. My father was a dental technician.

Q. Had he been that in Russia?

A. No, he was a very young man. He had been in jail in Russia, prison, as a Socialist dissenter against the Czarist regime. When he came here to Rochester he immediately was placed as an apprentice in a dental laboratory. And he learned the trade.

Q. Did your parents come over together or did they come. . .?

A. No, my father came maybe a month or two ahead of my mother.

Q. But they'd known each other. . .?

A. They'd known each other. Their families were good friends.

Q. And when did they marry?

A. They were married in . . . let's see. . . 1910 or 1911.

Q. But it was after they'd come to. . .?

A. After they'd come to Rochester.

Q. When your father came I imagine he didn't speak any English?

A. He spoke some English. He learned some English when he was in prison in Russia.

Q. So when he started dental school he didn't have that much trouble?

A. No. My mother learned English here. They both spoke Hebrew. They both spoke Yiddish. They both spoke fluent Russian and could read and write all the languages. So they had had some approach to learning linguistics. So learning English they knew how to go about it, and I think it was a little simpler for them than for many people who had never had any formal education.

Q. So your home when you grew up was multi-lingual?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you learn. . .?

A. I learned Yiddish, I speak Yiddish. Only because I spoke with my parents. There was no formal education. Then later on I learned some Hebrew through a private tutor. And my brothers also.

Q. Did your parents receive Yiddish language periodicals?

A. Oh, yes. My parents were very identified with Jewish identity. They were Labor Zionists before they even came here. They were interested in Israel, Palestine then, they were interested in the Zionist movement and were. . . my father was as a young boy, 13, 14 years old, interested in going to Israel, to Palestine, but couldn't do it financially at the time. So that they came to America and the story I always heard was that they arrived with books and periodicals and magazines and no clothes.

Q. And when they first came to Rochester where did they settle? Did they live with relatives?

A. No, well. . . that's not correct. They did. My father had a sister, very

- A. (Continued) close to him in age. And my mother had a brother very close to her in age. And they married, the brother and the sister married. The four of them were very close, the four of them were Zionists. The four of them had the same kinds of interests. They lived together.
- Q. And where did they live?
- A. I don't know what the first street was. I think it was somewhere around the . . . say Wilkins Street, Hudson Street. . . Avenue area. That's really where I was born in that area.
- Q. What was the . . . where was the home that you were born. . .?
- A. At 376 Wilkins Street.
- Q. So that was really sort of the heart of the Jewish community at that time?
- A. And Wilkins Street. . . all of the friends and most of the people who were the pioneers in Labor Zionism lived on that street. As a matter of fact, that was the street that Golda Meir came to visit us and slept in my bed on Wilkins Street.
- Q. Right, spoke to you about that.
- A. Yea.
- Q. How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- A. I have two brothers. They're older than I am. I'm the youngest.
- Q. Did they both settle in Rochester?
- A. Yea, one's an attorney here and one works for Neisner Distribution Center. They have families and they live in Rochester.
- Q. And are their children living in Rochester? Or are they of an age where they could move out?
- A. My children. . . you mean my children?
- Q. Yours and your brothers.
- A. All right. My children are both Ph.D. graduate students at Emory University

- A. (continued) in Georgia, and they're about to go back. My . . . I have a son and a daughter. My brother has a son and a daughter the same ages as my children. One lives in Boston and one's travelling, he's an actor on the stage. And my other brother has a daughter who's at the University of Buffalo.
- Q. Were your parents religious?
- A. My father was a Eugene B. Deb Socialist, which means that he was not. He came from a devout Orthodox family. My mother came from a devout Orthodox family. In their youth they were not religious. There was never a synagogue or a temple affiliation.
- Q. Did that put them in conflict with their own parents? Do you know?
- A. Not seriously because my father's father died before he came to this country. My father's mother was not so elderly as she was very passive. And she didn't make any demands. My mother, yes. My mother's father was a rabbi. And my mother's mother was extremely religious, very Orthodox, was a backbone of what we used to call the Morris Street Shul. That was the beginning of the Hasidim here in Rochester. They were Hasidim, my mother's parents. And they were devout and Orthodox. But my mother superficially met all of their needs and allowed them to have the boys Bar Mitzvahed. And went to the shul and took me with her all the time to the high holydays and all the holidays. Because I think not so much to satisfy them, which it did, but also because she had more of a conflict and didn't . . . had more . . . you know, more religious feelings than my father had.
- Q. So, despite your father's anti-religious feelings you . . .
- A. He had . . . yea . . .
- Q. . . you regard yourself as having a religious upbringing?
- A. Yea, well . . . by osmosis only. By . . . I was very fond of my mother's . . .

- A. (Continued) my maternal grandparents. They . . . they had a very strong influence on me.
- Q. Did you and your brothers go to Hebrew school?
- A. You see my parents were interested in Yiddish culture. So what happened was that my father and mother, along with a few . . . handful of people, organized the first Yiddish Folk Shul in Rochester, which was by the Labor Zionist movement. The Farbund, which is the Jewish National Workers Alliance, was the organization that organized a whole series of folk shuls through the country. And in the 1920's and '30's . . . in the thirties it was gone. It was in the twenties. Along with the Arbeiter Ring, the Workman's Circle. These two organizations were really in conflict with each other because the Workman's Circle was interested in Yiddish kite, and the Farbund, the Labor Zionists, were interested in Jewish culture but also in Hebrew and also in Israel and Palestine. And it was a conflict. They were arch enemies during the twenties when I was growing up as a little girl. And I remember that very well. So that these were the two places where you got a Yiddish education. If you went to the Farbund it was with a Zionist direction. And if you went to the Arbeiter Ring, to the Workman's Circle, it was not.
- Q. So your parents were members of the Farbund?
- A. Yea, Farbund. The Jewish National Workers Alliance.
- Q. Poale Zion?
- A. Poale Zion. . . the Farbund, the Poale Zion, the Pioneer Women, the Young Poale Zion which later became Habonim, were all in the family of the Labor Zionists.
- Q. You speak of it sort of as a small group of people. Was it a very large. . .?
- A. Yes. It was never large. It was always a very small group with a very active group. It accomplished, you know, so much work that it almost seemed as if

- A. (Continued) it was a tremendous organization. But there was a period in the twenties where it was extremely active.
- Q. One of the people I interviewed was Benajmin Owerbach, who I'm sure you know.
- A. Who was a Habonim member, and in my group when I was the leader. And he was one of the. . . he's not that much younger than I am, but we were the pioneers . . . organizers, our family. And he came into it. His father, as you probably heard from him, was one of the first Farbund members along with my father. He came in afterwards. They were good friends.
- Q. What other sort of activities did the whole Labor Zionist circle sponsor?
- A. Well, the Labor Zionist circle was very active in the Jewish National Fund, which was, you know, the redeeming. . . buying trees, planting. . . reforestation project. The general Zionist organization in Rochester, the Mizrachi in Rochester, and the Labor Zionists were very, very active. And they had a bond, a common bond, working to reforest Israel, Palestine. The other organizations that were very important, but only the Labor Zionists worked on was the Geverschaten campaign. That's a German-Yiddish word, Geverschaten, which was really a workers. . . the counterpart in Israel was the Histadrut, the beginning of the Histadrut, the Workmen's Alliance, you know? So they were. . . that was the Labor Zionist issue, the Geverschaten campaign, which later, you know, became. . . was disbanded and became the Histadrut. And it was the Histadrut campaign to raise money for the workers in Israel. . . in Palestine.
- Q. And you were the people who had the little cans and everybody. . .?
- A. No, that was the JNF. That was the Jewish National Fund. There were two organizations, the Keren Kayemet, which was the Jewish National Fund. And the Keren Hayasud, that meant the Foundation Fund. And those two organizations were dedicated to raising money for pioneers in Israel, for the Labor Zionists

- A. (Continued) in Israel. It was all transmitted to the central office in New York City, and they transmitted it to Palestine.
- Q. Was there any kind of conflict between the Labor Zionists and the more general Zionist organizations?
- A. Not really. They had a Zionist Council, which existed from . . . if you . . . if anybody talks to Julia Berlove, and I'm sure they will because she's been a predominate member of the general Zionists, Hadassah, She will recall the day when there was no State of Israel and there was only a sort of a Parliament, which did not carry tremendous weight in the country as a whole, but within the Jewish community it did. And it was a . . . they used to have ballots, there used to be votes for the World Zionist Congress in which there would be decisions as to which party would have the most delegates. Pretty much like our political system, our Republican/Democrat system. And those used to be held yearly, annually, and those were a good-natured competitive . . . they would sell what we called schkolen, which were ballots. And they would competitively try to sell as many as they could so they'd have greater representation at the World Zionist Congress. But, early in Rochester a committee was formed called the Zionist Council. And every Zionist organization, the Pioneer Women, the Labor Zionists, the Farbund, the . . . the general Zionists, the Mizrachi, the religious Zionists. And there was a left Zionist, Labor Zionist, at one point that organized. It was a youth group called the Hashomaia Hatzeir. And they were represented in that Council. And that Council did a number of things in unison. They worked for Jewish National Fund as a group. They worked for general funds as a group. And I think that Rochester was unusually fortunate in having people who learned to work together despite very, very different philosophies.
- Q. Apart from differences in philosophy, do you think there was a different

Q. (Continued) social basis in the support for these different groups?

A. Probably there was a difference between general Zionists and Labor Zionists. General Zionists were. . .

Q. Obvious. . .

A. Yea, obvious. They were with the professional, rather well. . . the German Jews. And the Labor Zionists were the Russian, Eastern European Jews who wanted. . . who had some feelings about Socialism, some feelings about labor's rights, you know. They were people who were in the building trade. . . in the clothing industry when they came to Rochester, and were people who would have been probably active in the AFL and in unions. And they were the Labor Zionists.

Q. Would you say that Zionism was a major force in the Jewish community in this period?

A. Yes, very much so.

Q. Well, for example, you said that there was this antagonism or this conflict between the Workman's Circle and the Farbund, Workman's Circle being much larger.

A. They were not part of the Zionist Council.

Q. No, I. . .

A. They. . . they have become interested in Zionism since the State of Israel was created, they changed their philosophy.

Q. But I mean at the time, their being that much larger, wouldn't that indicate that there was perhaps not such a great interest in Zionism?

A. The people that were in the Workman's Circle were not interested in Zionism and didn't believe in it. But they were interested in Jewish identity. And they had many Jewish lectures and Jewish speakers. And the Zionists participated in that. But, for a few. . . I have to talk about my father who was a real stubborn man and had very strong ideas. And my father wouldn't

- A. (Continued) even hear of this. He was very rigid about his feelings that never mind there is this kite, it wasn't good enough, it wasn't only half-baked. Because how could you be a Jew if you weren't interested in Zionism? And that was his philosophy. My mother was a milder person about that and had many friends among the people in the Arbeiter Ring, even though she didn't agree with them philosophically on their stand on Zionism, but she did on Yiddish kite. That. . . but despite the fact that they were a large group, they. . . I don't think had the impact in this Jewish community in the twenties and the thirties that the Zionists did.
- Q. And you attribute that to the organizational abilities. . . ?
- A. Yea, well you see the general Zionists were very large in number. There was the Hadassah, and the men's group and the Young Zionist Council. And they were a very large effective group. That's my recollection. I can't give you statistics 'cause I have no idea, I was a child then, you know. But I do know that I heard. . . everybody heard about them. And they were. . . and the Zionists were active, they were constantly running some kind of a. . . a campaign for money, always raising funds for Palestine. They were always having . . . it made no difference. When holiday came along they treated it as a cultural holiday rather than a religious. And they instituted very early in their being here the idea of the third seder, you know, on Passover you have two seders. And they instituted a third seder.
- Q. What was the third seder?
- A. That was a cultural meeting to talk about the Jews coming out of bondage and out of freedom in the diaspora and going to Palestine. And it started that way, and it started as a. . . as another renewal, another rebirth. As Pesach was supposed to be? Took it out of the Old Testament and put it into the present. And they began to use it. They'd get together in their headquarters

- A, (Continued) and they'd have the third seder and they'd. . . it would be replete, you know, with . . . with members reading Yiddish and speaking. And, of course, none of them knew Hebrew. So that Yiddish was the official language, even though they were Zionists.
- Q. Right. This wasn't something that happened in the home though? It happened in the. . .
- A. No, it was an organization thing. Mother used to put me in a buggy and wheel me to Buchan Park where the Labor Zionists headquarters were at the time. And I would sleep through every meeting. And I literally had my infancy at meetings. I don't remember them, but this is what was told to me.
- Q. Did you ever go to the summer camps that the. . .?
- A. Yea, yea. As a matter of fact, I went to the first one at Accord, New York in the Catskill Mountains when I was ten years old. And then Rochester decided to have its own camp at Accord, New York. . . . at Kendall, New York, not far from here. It was a Habonim camp. And we really organized it. My mother was the cook and I was a counselor. And New York sent in people who were organizational people the first two years, but after that I left Rochester and went on to college so I was not active anymore. But that was during my adolescent years.
- Q. Wasn't there another camp in Toronto?
- A. Yea, but that was not this district's camp. Many. . . that was later on. That was already in the forties.
- Q. Did many Jewish children of Rochester go to these camps?
- A. In the Kendall Camp I was the only Rochesterian at the Accord Camp, the first year it opened. But the Kendall Camp, that was only about 25 or 30 miles from Rochester, we drew people from any part of the country who wanted to come. We had Rochester children, we had Buffalo children, we had Syracuse children.

- A. (Continued) I had a couple of cousins living in Cleveland. I convinced them to come. So we had quite a variety of people that first and second year. And it was a very successful camp in that it was well attended, that. . . and the cost was little, and we used it as a learning experience in terms of real learning about Zionism. . . Labor Zionism. It wasn't just fun.
- Q. (Transcriber's note; Interviewer asks a question, but in such a soft voice, that it is not picked up clearly enough for transcription.)
- A. You know, I don't remember. I'll tell you. . . I can figure it out. It had to be in 1934. And I was there in '34 and '35 and after that I was no longer there because I graduated in '35 from high school and went on to college, so my summers were spent working.
- Q. How long did it continue?
- A. I think it functioned one or two years after that and then it fell apart. There was not enough. . . enough direction and leadership.
- Q. And that was Rochester people who ran the camp? Can you think of any names?
- A. Yea, well really my father and mother started it with help from some other Rochesterians, but mostly the national office staffed it. They staffed it.
- Q. From New York or. . .?
- A. And when my mother was not there anymore. . . I don't know what happened third year, but then there was. . . I don't think there was a fourth year. Now there are people here that got involved in it later like Nelson Kirschenbaum who's head of the Bond, you know, Bonds for Israel office. He became involved in it. And other people became involved in it. But, it. . . I think it only had a very short life after that. It was going very well those first two years but, you know, like any other enterprise especially a new one, you must have driving force and you must have enough people to come to the camp. And, you know, you need someone working on it all the time. And it just couldn't

A. (Continued) . . . it wasn't self-supporting.

Q. I'm getting a little ahead of myself here, go back a way.

Where did you go to school?

A. Well, you mean to college?

Q. No, no to grammar. . .

A. I went to a couple of grammar schools in Rochester and I went to Washington Junior High School.

Q. Do you remember which grammar schools?

A. Yea. Yea, I started at No. 26 School and then I went to. . . then we moved so I went to No. 20 and I went to No. 8 School for a while. There was some business about what side of the street I lived in. And then I went to Washington Junior High School in an advanced group. And then I went to Franklin. I graduated from high school quite young, you know, I moved ahead quite quickly.

Q. Were any of those schools largely or predominately Jewish?

A. Well, most of the Jewish people lived; you know, in those days there weren't that many high schools. Most of the Jewish people either lived on the north side of town where many live now in Irondequoit. And all of us went to Franklin. And they were. . . there was a considerable group of Jewish people who lived on the southeast side that catered. . . that Monroe High School catered to. So there was a substantial number of Jewish children in Monroe and a substantial number in Franklin. I think Franklin probably had a greater number.

Q. The Hudson/Joseph Avenue people went to Franklin?

A. Yea, Clinton Avenue, St. Paul Street, that whole north. . . not extreme north. Irondequoit then was mostly farmland, it wasn't until World War II that that really started growing. Prior to. . . just prior to World War II in the late thirties and forties that Irondequoit really started growing, as far as Jewish

- A. (Continued) people living there. But for the most part, the Jewish people were concentrated on the north end of town probably because of Hickey-Freeman and Barnes and all the clothing industries, you know, that were situated there.
- Q. Where. . . what was the background of the other students at Franklin High School?
- A. Most of them that I knew either were totally unaffiliated. . .
- Q. No, I'm talking about national background, social. . . students who weren't Jewish.
- A. Oh, oh. . . they. . . oh, well. . . We had a pretty good. . . Hudson Avenue has always had a good amount of Polish people and there were Italian people in the build. . . in the clothing industry, lots of them. And lots of Italian people, lots of Polish people. Some Lithuanian and Ukranian people, and a good number of Jewish people.
- Q. Were there any conflicts do you remember between the different groups?
- A. Not that I can recall.
- Q. You don't ever recall any incidents of anti-Semitism in your youth then?
- A. It would be. . . I would be a poor . . . I would be an inappropriate person to ask about that because my whole life, growing up as a child, was centered in the Jewish people. As a little girl and growing up as a teenager I had some non-Jewish friends, but they were non. . . they were choosing me, I wasn't choosing them. So I was not. . . I was very active in high school. I was President of the Foreign Policy Association. I was interested in history and, you know, many things. And so that . . . and I was a good student so I had no problems with school. And so the non-Jewish friends I had were choosing me as much as I was choosing them, so that obviously you know I would not be involved in any anti-Semitic. . . And all of my associations I derived from my parents. I really didn't seek out my own friends. All the friends I had

A. (Continued) were children of my parents' friends.

Q. So that they were also Labor Zionists?

A. They were Labor Zionists, or at least Yiddish in their interests.

Q. You . . . you mentioned that your family moved around a couple different places.

A. Yes.

Q. Where did they move?

A. Well, we lived in the north end of town and then we, you know, Wilkins Street. And then we moved to still the same school area geographically, up a little bit, to a, you know, close . . . closer . . . closer to the middle class Jews, Conkey Avenue, which was a nice neighborhood. Then we moved to Nazareth Terrace. We started moving more north. And then my parents bought a home in Irondequoit in 1940. We moved to Irondequoit, and then we lived there about 18 years. And the reason that we moved, my father had died and the war was over and I had come back home. My mother was alone. And the reason . . . reasons my husband and I moved was because everything we did was on this side of town, it was not in Irondequoit. My choice for temple membership was Temple Beth El. I worked at Hillside Children's Center as a social worker, it was off . . . you know, it's on Monroe Avenue which is on the more of the southeast side. And my choice of schools for my children, I wanted them to be in a heterogenous environment rather than in a homogenous. I wanted them to meet other kinds of people. The children started . . . my children went to the Hillel School for a couple of years. And for a number of reasons I wanted them in the public schools. So, we really moved because our interests were on this side of town.

Q. When you speak of "this side of town" you're referring to Brighton?

A. I live . . . I now live on Avon Road, which is in the Town of Brighton but it's in the Penfield School District. And we've been there eighteen years.

Q. You own your own home?

A. Yea, yea.

Q. The children really grew up in. . . in that house.

Q. Was that home in Irondequoit the first home your family really owned?

A. No, it was the second.

Q. Where was the other one?

A. On Conkey Avenue.

Q. Was your father a dental technician for all those years?

A. He died very young.

Q. Do you know how old. . . ?

A. Yea, he died when he was 57 years old, so he was quite young. But he, as a very young person, became a dental technician and did a great deal to become quite expert. He took a lot of continuing education work and went to Chicago and became quite good. He owned his own lab with another person when he died.

Q. How did your family fare during the Depression? It must have been. . .

A. We were OK. We were OK. We were never wealthy. My parents used money very unselfishly. They gave. . . contributed a great deal to Jewish causes and bought a lot of books and. . . But they were able to fare quite well. We weren't wealthy, and he had three kids in school, in college, all at one time. We all worked and had scholarships. But they managed. They were never wealthy. But, I would say that our choice of the way we used money is. . . you know, we had what we thought was important. We didn't have other things. You know, we always had a car, but we never had any fancy home or fancy furniture and. . . or clothing. My mother wasn't interested in that. My mother was a very good seamstress, and she made everything. She sewed everything for everybody. For Golda Meir, for all the people that came through Rochester, anybody who needed anything. And you know, there. . . their way of life. . . they chose their

- A. (Continued) way of life in the way that was most satisfying for them. And they fared, I would say, pretty well. We all did. . . we all worked. We never were able to be supported through college without that, but. . .
- Q. You worked before college also?
- A. Not. . . not really, I worked in the summers, but I really couldn't work like that. I didn't have any time to work. I was busy going to camp and setting up the Poale Zion Camp. And I was busy going to camp myself. And, of course, when you realize that I got out of high school before my sixteenth birthday, how much time would I. . . then I worked. When I got out of high school then I worked for a year, almost two years before I went to college.
- Q. Where did you work?
- A. I worked at Germanow-Simons and I was in the shipping room. And I worked there and I waited tables, and I did a lot of work at summer resorts. That's how I earned enough money to get started, because by that time my brother was in law school. And my other brother was just finishing school. And there wasn't that much money then.
- Q. Where did you go to school yourself?
- A. Well, I went to a lot of schools. I started at Elmira College for Women, which was a small school near Elmira, New York. And I went on from there to the University of Michigan, where I got my Bachelor's Degree. Then I had a year of medical school there and dropped out for a number of reasons. And then came home and worked a year and then went to Columbia University to do social work. And almost completed the MSW program when my mother became quite ill and I had to come home. So I came home, got a job in social work at the SPCC, which is now defunct. And finished that six months at the Univeristy of Buffalo on a . . .
- Q. What were the approximate dates of all this as far as college?

- A. (Continued) I started college in 1937 and I graduated and had my first year medical school by '41. And then I went to Columbia in '42. Then I left Columbia and travelled, we got married. And I travelled with my husband for about a year and a half around the country. He was a combat engineer, a camouflage engineer. And I worked for Red Cross Disaster really, I worked with the U.S.O. I was helping servicemen's families. And when he went overseas in November of 1944, I came back to Rochester where my family was. And finished my . . . went back to school to Columbia. And then came . . . went to work and so on. And I've been in Rochester since that time.
- Q. Where did you meet your husband?
- A. I knew him when I was ten years old.
- Q. Oh, so he's from Rochester also?
- A. He's a Rochesterian. Was a good friend of my older brother. And his family were not Zionists. They were not Labor Zionists, they were Orthodox Mizrachi. And his background is the same as mine in terms of Yiddish, but not in terms of Zionism.
- Q. And was he going to school then where you were?
- A. No, he's an artist and he has his graduate work. . . . went to the University of Syracuse and then he went to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. So he had all his graduate work in Boston. And I didn't see him during those years, but I did see him when he came back to Rochester after we graduated from college.
- Q. And you said you have two children?
- A. Yea.
- Q. When were they born?
- A. Well, Mark was born in 1951, Gail was born in 1953.
- Q. I see. And did you give them a religious upbringing?
- A. Yea. We belong. . . we joined Temple Beth El. We became members, both children

- A. (Continued) attended Temple Beth El right through their graduation from high school. They did not stop at 13. They were both Bar and Bat Mitzvahed there. And they attended Temple Beth El and were good students. And Mark had some reflections, some philosophical reflections as a young boy printed in the Beth El. . . in other words. . . magazine. . . in other words, he was interested in. . . used to do a lot of that. He did some writing on Job and his philosophy of Judaism and so on. And the cantor had some of that printed and Jay Stern did. And both children were not deeply religious. Even though they are not Orthodox, but they have a bond to Judaism.
- Q. So. . .
- A. They have a good education.
- Q. In your own family there really hasn't been a decline in piety, at least as. . .
- A. It's about the same as it's always been. I didn't. . . my husband came from a devout family, but he was. . . he was not an observant Jew. He is more observant now than he was as a child. Or at least, he is more motivated on his own personal, you know, he's older now, too.
- Q. When you say observant, observing holidays or keeping kosher?
- A. Yea.
- Q. All that?
- A. Right.
- Q. Find out where I am. All right. Let's go back to the . . . your parents' Zionist activities. How about the Golda Meir story, how did she happen to come to Rochester?
- A. All right. Well, Golda Meir, you know, Golda Meyerson, you know, lived in Milwaukee for. . . Milwaukee was a very, very active Jewish community. Matter of fact, a number, probably a very large number, of Jewish young Poale Zion people who were very active in the movement and became organizers and Executive

A. (Continued) Secretaries in the various branches, came from two very outstanding spots. One was Milwaukee and one was Toronto and Montreal. Montreal. And the Labor Zionists in Milwaukee were very active, they were very strong, day school years before anybody else did. And, of course, she lived there. She became a schleha. She became a . . . an emissary from Israel when she went to Israel, even prior to her going to Israel she became a national organizer for Pioneer Women. Which is the Moetzot Palote in Israel, the women's labor organization. And because she was in that capacity, she travelled around the country organizing, speaking to Pioneer Women groups. And my mother. . . I really don't know how my mother became interested in the Women's Division. I think what happened was that when they first arrived here there was a young cultural group that were the early Zionists, the forerunners of the Zionist group. And there were a group of young people that were very interested in Zionism. And they split and that was the forerunner of the Labor Zionist movement. And I think there's some delegates or emissaries came from the national organization, which was just formed in the 19. . . you know, prior to the turn of . . . you know 1920's, prior to that. And Rochester was one of the first communities that organized the group. And my mother organized the Pioneer Women and my father organized the Labor Zionist group and the Farbund, which came a little later, which was, you know, an insurance organization. And because my mother was a dynamic force in Labor. . . in Pioneer Women and she got all of her friends together and had a meeting and organized this. It was she to whom all the people came. My father was doing the same thing with the Labor Zionist organization per se. So it was to him they came. And my parents always had their house full to anybody at all. In those days there were no hotel rooms that anybody could stay at. So, one of the jokes my husband always tells when people ask him about our house, he would say that he can't ever

A. (Continued) walking into our house when there wasn't some strange . . . stranger sitting in a chair, an easy chair, with a Yiddish paper in front of his face or hers. Also, I can recall. . . I've always said jokingly that I can't ever remember coming home from college on a vacation and being able to sleep in my own bed. It was always occupied by somebody from New York, you know, New York. Somebody that was here. And so that takes us back to Golda Meir story when she was Golda Meyerson and she was travelling as an emissary. She stayed with us when we lived on Wilkins Street at the time. There is a woman here in Rochester whose name is Norma Salz, s-a-l-z, she was the Executive Secretary of the Rochester Association for the United Nations. And she was Norma Hoffman and she lived in Buffalo. And her mother . . . by the way, Dr. Salz just died, taught at R.I.T. And Norma's mother and father were our counterpart and the Wagners in Buffalo. And we used to travel back and . . . Buffalo and Syracuse were. . . all the Zionists. . . Labor Zionists in Buffalo and Syracuse and Rochester were constantly meeting. We were always doing things as a family. And when Farbund in Israel was formed, the American Kibbutz, it was an American Kibbutz. Most of those founders were from Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse. I often say if I go to Israel and I go to the Farbund if the people haven't passed away at this point I would see many of my friends that I knew many years ago. So, that was how I got, you know, how Golda Meir stayed in our house. Hanna Czick. . .

Q. When was that?

A. That had to be. . . I'm trying to remember. I can't place the date. It was when she was on her American tour. It had to be somewhere between 1924 and 1927. Somewhere in those years because when we left Wilkins Street I was 9 or 10 years old. And it was. . . so, it had to be before '29, you know, '28 when we moved. Oh, and my mother went to Israel the month it was declared a

A. (Continued) state, in May of 1948. And she was Golda Meir's house guest. She stayed. . . and my mother addressed a whole delegation of Pioneer Women at the time. That's how involved she was with the movement. Hanna Chzick, whose brother Friam and sister Sara both were killed defending one of the . . . not Tel Hai, it was another colony, another kibbutz, in the early years of the Jews settlement in Israel. Hanna Chzick became an emissary one year, and I have a whole string of pictures of Hanna Chzick and me at Niagara Falls and at Watkins Glen. We. . . she stayed with us a week and we . . . my father took her on her first airplane ride in Rochester. My father was interested in airplanes. And she stayed with us a whole week. She was an emissary from Palestine in those days, Labor Zionist woman. And she came from a very illustrious pioneer family in Israel, and she came to Rochester. The first David Ben Gurion was in Rochester briefly. Moshe Sharat was in Rochester. Boris Zuckerman, who was the first. . . one of the first organizers of the Histadrut movement, then went to Israel, came to Rochester. Tenhus Caruso, who has been. . . is still alive, an old man now, came and stayed with us. You know, Rhaul Katzanelson Rubashov, who was a poet and wrote and was a Labor Zionist. And her husband was active in the first Cabinet in Israel. All those people were in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse. They came through in the days when there was no state yet and they were early pioneers working for Zionism. And they all stayed at our house. So I have a real familiarity with them.

Q. So when they would come they'd address meetings, large groups. . . ?

A. They'd address meetings. My parents would be busy. They'd have sessions in our house all night talking about how to raise funds, talking about, you know, how to get the Hebrew language into the. . . into the use in the family. And there was a coterie of all very active people. And I think if I were to tell

- A. (Continued) you. . . (Transcriber's note: the next five seconds or so of tape are blurred, almost as if played at super high speed, and are not transcribable.)
- Q. . . . to Palestine and then to Israel?
- A. Oh, yes. There was always was, you know, aliyah, you know. And as a teenager up until I was about 17, 16 or 17 years old I was convinced that I would go to Israel, to Palestine, and I'd live there the rest of my life.
- Q. What. . . what made you change your mind?
- A. Probably my education. . . my college education, you know. I decided that I wasn't gonna be helpful to anybody. I got interested in Talmud. I got interested in learning, and I knew that if I went to Israel I couldn't do that. So my choice was to do that.
- Q. I'm interested in one thing. You described your father as a Eugene B. Deb Socialist. I know that. . . that Socialist ideology was sort of an integral part of early Labor Zionism, but also obviously there's been a decline in that element. What would you attribute that decline to? Or do you have any thoughts on that?
- A. Oh, I think it has to do with the complexity of American living in Israel, too, you know. That the ideal, you know, of collectives and that work should be what was most important and to each what. . . what he needed. No. . . I . . . I think the people became disillusioned, or at least became more realistic in terms of the way capitalism and the complexity of living. And you know they found that . . . that it was fine in Israel, but that the Labor Zionists in Israel themselves were having to have some changes in their philosophy in terms of the way Israel was developing. You know, not everything. . . not the whole State of Israel could not be a . . . could be made of a collective. They needed industry and cities and it became. . . You know, I don't think they

- A. (Continued) foresaw the . . . their pro. . . they couldn't prophesy that this would be the way it. . . They started with a pioneering society and in a pioneering society everybody had to work, and everybody had to consider the other fellow and it became, you know, it grew. . . it grew very fast.
- Q. I guess also there was a very early emphasis on agricultural enterprises?
- A. That's right. And when you go into, you know, industry and you have to survive and you have to start being as independent and self-sufficient as you can be, your whole philosophy has to have some changes.
- Q. So do you. . . would you agree with the statement that somehow just the . . . when Israel became a reality instead of a dream that necessity just stepped in and built it, sort of replaced the earlier ideals. . . ?
- A. I don't know if it replaced it. I think that it had to make some changes, like we all have to. And being in social work and in counseling I just got through, you know, seeing people this morning saying that we change a little bit every day without our even being aware that we've had to make some changes in our thinking because of our environment. You know, and because of the influences that affect us. We have to make some changes. We don't survive otherwise. I think that's true in a movement, in a philosophy.
- Q. Was your father a member of the Socialist party?
- A. Not in America.
- Q. You said that. . .
- A. He was interested . . . he always voted for Norman Thomas who was the perennial Socialist candidate. He always voted Socialist ticket. He enrolled. . . he enrolled as a voter in the party, but he didn't do anything. All of his efforts and my mother's efforts were directed. . . The first time my father voted non-Socialist was when Franklin D. Roosevelt ran.
- Q. Was that in '32 or '36?

A. The first time . . . the first time he became a candidate my father. . . and most Jews swung their votes to Franklin Roosevelt because of, you know, their realization that Norman Thomas wasn't gonna be elected and that Franklin Roosevelt had an appeal to Jews and Socialists, Labor, and to everybody.

Q. Right.

You mentioned that your mother was in Israel in May of '48. Was that her first visit?

A. Yea. She went three times after that before she died.

Q. And had your father ever gone?

A. No. He died before the. . . he died. . . he went to the State of Israel celebration in May in Rochester, big celebration when the state was declared. And a week later he died.

Q. And you've been, I imagine, over to Israel?

A. No, I've never. . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview I)

Interview I  
Tape I  
Side B

A. . . . to. . . there were a lot of complications. I had a long period of a very sick mother that I took care of. By that time my children were growing up and finances weren't that hot. We had had a lot of expenses with my mother being ill. My husband and I. . . and we were doing a great deal for our children. They were very costly. . . our children are graduates of the Eastman School of Music, and they went to Temple, and they've had a very fine education, which you know we were very delighted to do. And I really kind of devoted myself to that, plus the fact that I was always going to school. I have gone beyond my MSW and taken lots of courses and it's been expensive. I've had to do it while I worked. My husband came back from the service without a job. And being a fine artist no way, you know, equipped him for a job. So he started out teaching, which was very difficult. And it took him quite a while until he became an artist for Eastman Kodak Company, which is what he's doing now. But, he's only been there about 20 years and the children are 25 and 23. So there's always been that. Also, I have difficult motion illness. I am very, very ill in planes. I can't take any medication. So I can't hold out on a plane more than a couple of hours, I get pretty sick. And even though I think one of these days I'll make myself go to Israel 'cause I want very much to go, but it would create a real serious physical problem for me. And I went through a lot of testing to see if they could find some way short of putting me out completely of being able to survive. . . I haven't travelled by plane anywhere more than I have to because of this problem. So that plus a lot of other reasons is why I haven't gone. Would very much like to. My brother's been twice. My two brothers are also, you know, devoted to

- A. (Continued) Zionism, Labor Zionism. But they're not active. And I'm not active. I have not been active in the movement doing any kind of physical work for Zionism since the children were born. What I did was I did everything I could to help my mother. She sold \$100,000 worth of State of Israel bonds that first. . . She was the second lady of valour, Mrs. Hart was the first in Rochester. And what I did was I took her everywhere and I made sure she was able to do whatever she wanted to do. And I felt that was my way of doing it. But I have some negative feelings about organizational work. You know, I've lived my whole life within them. I'm not interested in being in organizations anymore. So, I have remained a member of the Pioneer Women's organization. I'm a donor. I contribute. I certainly give to the United Jewish Welfare Fund more than I can afford. But I'm not an active participant.
- Q., That. . . did you attend meetings in Rochester say in '48. . .? What was that like? Where. . .
- A. Terribly exciting. First of all it was . . . I'm trying to remember. Was it in the old convention hall or the Labor Lyceum? I can't remember where. . . it was one of these big. . . I can't remember now where it was. I'm sure somebody else will remember. But, you know, it was jammed with all the Labor Zionists and all. . . and many Jews who had never been Zionists. And, of course, what we had was Ben Gurion. . . we had the radio. They had it on the stage with microphones with the Ben Gurion's state announcement as it was being declared. And, you know, it was wild. It alternated between dead silence and everybody crying. I can still remember that. You know, I can remember my mother and father, tears streaming down their eyes. And I. . . I could cry right now 'cause I recall that. And that emotion, you know, pent up, you know. And the religious Jews praying. And it was really a. . . an experience. Movies should have been taken of it, it was really quite an

- A. (Continued) experience. We all went, everybody went. We . . . we didn't even have a place to sit.
- Q. Were there speakers as well at. . . ?
- A. Oh, yes. My father was on the stage on a podium. And general. . . every organization was represented. And . . . but there wasn't very much oratory. Most of it was listening to the announcement and proclamation. And a lot of it was the, you know, worry about partition. So that was. . . there were a lot of emotions going on at the time. But it was a very dramatic moment in Rochester. . . in the world. . . in Rochester. Everybody went to it. . . (Transcriber's note: Five seconds of blurred tape, same place as on Side A). . . . Rabbi Karp asked me that. And we had books of early readings and. . . written in Yiddish that my father wrote. And when he died and then when my mother died I was requested by the New York office to. . . that this was the earliest history of the beginnings of the movement and all the people. And I made a package and I delivered that all to New York to the main office. And left myself with nothing simply because I really didn't feel that I should keep it.
- Q. So someone was gonna do a history of it, they could go to the. . . ?
- A. They. . . they. . . they. . .
- Q. Headquarters. . .
- A. Yea, in New York and see what they retained, you know, what they incorporated. I don't even know if they've ever written the history of Labor Zionism in America.
- Q. Yea, I don't think I've ever seen anything about it. I mean. . .
- A. Yea.
- Q. Is there other material? Did Labor Zionists . . . had a newspaper I believe? Came out periodically?

A. Well not a local one.

Q. No, it was a national. . .

A. Oh, yes. Sure.

Q. Did that cover Rochester. . .?

A. They. . . well, they would send in news, but you know Chaim Greenberg, who was a very, very erudite and brilliant Labor Zionist, edited the Jewish Frontier for many, many years. And that was. . . that was the Labor Zionist magazine that was a very great intellectual and cultural quality, almost as good. . . you know, it was very scholarly. And then the Farbund still sends out a chapter news thing that we get occasionally, but it doesn't have. . . it's only filled with people who've done what in Farbund. The Young Poale Zion used to publish a magazine in English. Labor. . . the Jewish Frontier was a . . . was in English too. And there were some Hebrew periodicals at the national. . . The Labor Zionists did a great deal of publishing. They. . . they had many, many articles. They had histories of the Labor Zionist movement. I might have some of that yet, although I gave a lot of my parents' books away. Now you know. . . Erwin. . . Irving Howe mentions in his . . . early in his book, The Golden Chain, the golden acate, and that was a series of publications of Jewish poetry. And my father had every one of them that was ever published. And those were. . . I. . . we gave those. . . I think my mother gave those to Rabbi Karp if I'm not mistaken for the Temple Beth El library. When he died she turned over all the books.

Q. But there was a. . . seemed like there was a major cultural emphasis in Labor Zionism?

A. Yea. Tremendous.

Q. Did they sponsor like theatre. . .?

A. Oh, yes. And. . . well the Farbund did that. And they had the Yiddish

A. (Continued) theatre that came every year. And it was on a pretty high level. They had a lot of comedies. But it was on a pretty high level. And those people stayed with us. And there were. . . Al Harris who was one of the first Jewish really the legitimate Jewish theatre, you know, equity. . . an equity actor. Al Harris, who was quite an intelligent man, he'd come. And when the play was over, I'd go. I was a little girl. And when it was over we'd all go to our house or to somebody else's house and we'd stay up all night singing Hebrew, Israeli, you know, Palestinian Zionist songs, Yiddish songs. My mother had a very lovely voice and she used to sing all the time. And I learned all those songs when I was a little girl. And songs that, you know, and the Hora and all those things we used to do then, all night long. And there was a lot of emphasis on Yiddish music and Jewish art, you know, whatever there was.

Q. Cultural programs. . . ?

A. Cultural programs where the Zionists, Labor Zionists had these going every single week. They had some kind of a cultural program going at Buchan Park, at their headquarters. Usually free of charge.

Q. Was there any locally sponsored activity, or was it all just touring groups?

A. Oh, it was local a lot of it. You know, Melave Malke means to escort out the queen. And so every Saturday night when the Sabbath was over the Labor Zionists every Saturday night would have a cultural evening, every. . . locally. And they'd have a. . . not a dinner, there was just tea and coffee and cookies. But it was cultural. And there was a man here by the name of Louis Levin who was a. . . who had served in the Brigade in, you know, remember a bunch of Jews. . . I don't know if you remember. . .

Q. The First World War?

A. . . . the history of the First World War. Well, he was in that Brigade. And

- A. (Continued) he went to Palestine to serve in the British army. And he settled in Rochester and his wife. And they were very close friends of my parents. And he was a very, very excellent Yiddish storyteller and reader. He wrote. . . read very well. And he would always read something from Peretz or Shalom Aleyhem or one of the, you know, very famous. . . My father, my mother, they'd recite poetry, they'd read, put on Jewish plays. They did King Lear in Yiddish. They did a lot of Shapkespeare in Yiddish. They did it themselves, they translated it and they did it. My mother went on stage with a black stocking and a white stocking in King Lear and nobody cared because she was, you know, doing it in Yiddish. I remember that. And they really were very active.
- Q. After say in '48 when there was sort of a general shift to Zionism and to the Jewish community, do you think they were a much more powerful force after that?
- A. I think that it was more inclusive in terms of numbers. And it became, you know, almost "c'est la vie." You know, that was a way of life if you were a Jew, that was Israel, and it was a reality. But I don't think the intensity. And I don't think the struggle. And I don't think the . . . the personal involvement, at least I didn't see it. That. . . it died with my parents' generation as far as I'm concerned. It was diluted for me and for my children, much more diluted. And it was no longer the same kind of intensity, the same kind of meaning. Probably because, you know, it didn't. . . the need was. . . was shifting. You didn't have to really fight for it. It was fait accompli. It was there. And now it was a matter of raising money as always, and helping. But, the ideal of. . . you know, it wasn't next year in Jerusalem anymore. It was here and. . . and I just don't feel. . . now maybe that was because of my changes, you know, myself. But I don't feel that the same feeling was

A. (Continued) there anymore. I . . . I have yet to run into anybody who had that passionate love and almost fanatic dedication that my parents had, 'cause it really was fanatic. My mother neglected her children. I don't say that viciously or critically. But she neglected her children. The meeting was first. The movement was first. And I . . . when I say that she neglected them doesn't mean she didn't love 'em, didn't take care of us. But my brother stayed home and took care of me. They were considerably older. And there was no such thing as a babysitter. And there was no such thing as their going out as teenagers because they had to go to a meeting and that was that. And my relatives took care of me when I was a little girl when my parents wanted to go to Buffalo or Syracuse for a meeting.

Q. Do you think that could be generalized as an observation that there was a lack . . . a lessening of intensity to other phases of Jewish community life?

A. The same people were no longer there, they got old. And the younger people didn't have the same environment and didn't come from Russia, and didn't come from the same background and the same struggle. And I think that as anti-Semitism became more and more subtle and less and less overt, the way it was for our parents, I think that the American Jew didn't have that need. And the passion and the need, you know, my father always said, you know, what Jew is gonna get put in jail because he passed out a Zionist leaflet to a Czarist soldier? Which had happened to him. Fortunately at the age of 14 he was thrown into jail with Tolstoy's nephew. And Tolstoy's nephew taught him to read and write Russian and speak Russian fluently. And academically, scholarly he didn't know it. He grew up in the Jewish small village, you know. And this is where my father got his Russian education. And fortunately he wasn't mistreated, only 14 years old, he was a political prisoner. And he left prison and was escorted to the border to go to America, leaving his

A. (Continued) family, his mother and father behind and his brothers. Later he sent for them. But you hear. . . read about it in Irving Howe's book, which is exactly what happened to my parents.

Q. You got your first job as a social worker at the Hillside Center?

A. No.

Q. No.

A. My first job in Rochester was at the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It was an agency unto itself. Now it is incorporated. . .

Q. Was that a Jewish. . . ?

A. No, it was not a Jewish . . . job with a Jewish agency. One of the reasons I was never interested in working with a Jewish agency was because everybody knew me. Every Jew knew me, they all knew my parents. I would walk down the street and someone would stop me and say, you look just like your mother. You must be Fanny Atlas' daughter. And I felt as I became more and more professional that this would not do. It would be very difficult for me to work with people who knew my family and knew me.

Q. And here you are.

A. It's different. I came here seven years ago with a lot of questions in my mind. But I felt that. . . my mother had died. . . my mother has been gone now 11 years. And the people that come here, many of them I know their families and I knew them when they were babies, I'm older than they. And many I know. But you see you have to remember that not only is there a difference from where I sit now with my age and everything, but you have to remember that the whole concept of counselling is more open and more accepted now. And so people don't have the same kind of trepidation that they used to have about going to an agency.

Q. You think there was a stigma attached to. . . ?

- A. Oh, sure. Sure, especially among Jews. Because you see the whole concept of charity and good deeds, sadacka, in Jewish thinking is really one of the bases of social work. And even though many non-Jews were instrumental in the founding of the whole concept of social work as a profession, like Charlotte Towle and. . . and you know, and. . . and the settle. . .the Henry Street Settlement, which was Jewish. And many other people in Chicago who were the forerunners of modern social work, despite all of that. It really started, even private agencies, as welfare agencies, giving money to people, helping them through difficult times.
- Q. And that's how the Jewish Family Service.
- A. And that's how Jewish agencies. . . sure, that's how Jewish agencies had their beginning. That concept of giving and helping strangers without revealing what you're doing for them was, you know, one of the mitzvelt. And Jewish people did, in fact. . .the Jewish Family Service owned old records when I came here that I took out of their records, people had already been dead for years when. . . and the records were still sitting here. Came here really around two major concerns. One was child care, giving child care, foster care, adoptions, that kind of thing. And welfare, money needs. And the agency, like all other family agencies, spent most of their time doing that. Now there's been tremendous changes. When government stepped in to the welfare concept, you see, the whole picture changed. And we don't have funds for welfare. We still get old Jews travelling through the community going to rabbis and sending them to our agency. And on a very limited basis we can help them on a one-time basis. But we really don't have funds for welfare. It's all centered by the community in the Department of Social Services.
- Q. So you. . . you mainly do referrals and that sort of. . .?
- A. Well, what we try to do is to pave the way and to make it easier for the

- A. (Continued) person, not send them around from one source to another, which many agencies do. We try not to do that. I will. . .if I . . . I will take the time to evaluate, and if they really are in need of financial assistance, and it's an emergency, I will do everything I can to pave the way and make sure they'll get it at the Department of Social Services or a traveler's aide or wherever. If I can do that, which I usually do which works out. If they're out of jail and they say they're Jewish and they came here so they have no money. I will work with parole, parole and department to make sure that they get the help they need. . . they need. If they can't get it and they're destitute then the agency steps in.
- Q. How do they come to you? Do they come referred by . . . ?
- A. Usually because they see Jewish Family Service in the phone book or because they'll go upstairs to the Jewish Community Federation, or they'll go to a rabbi. Or they'll go to somebody who will say go to the Jewish agency, there is one in Rochester. And then they maybe can do something for you.
- Q. Is Rochester unique in having a Jewish Family Service?
- A. No. There are Jewish Family Services in every major community in the country. And in some small communities where there is no Jewish Family Service, there is a Jewish Community Federation or Jewish Community Center and they do that work.
- Q. I see. And when it comes to money. . .
- A. Either the Community Chest or the Federation. Now we're funded by the Jewish Community Federation for. . . for some of our strictly Jewish functions. They fund the Soviet Jewry program, resettlement of Jews. . . Soviet Jews who come to America and come to Rochester. They fund that completely, that is not Chest money. They fund our transportation for Jewish elderly.
- Q. Do you see any change in the . . . well, you've been here seven years now.

Q. (Continued) Are you aware of what went on earlier? Changes in kinds of problems people bring to the agency?

A. I would say that they bring the same. . . the same problems, with many new ones added. In other words, they used to come wanting to adopt children, wanting to place children. Now those have changed. The child welfare program has changed tremendously. There are no babies available for adoption. And those, you know, those have a lot of. . . there are a variety of reasons for that, it's very complicated. Population Zero and everything else. But they do come for assistance and for problems with their elderly parents and problems with their children. And that has always been the case. But now they're coming saying that Jewish families are beginning to have some of the same problems that non-Jewish families have had, and that we are getting divorced and we are not keeping the families intact. And we do want to be our own person, we are interested in Women's Lib. And we are discarding the role of the Jewish woman. And while I'm Jewish I still have some of needs as an American. And so they're coming with new concerns, some of the old concerns are still there.

Q. So the problems really seem to be problems of families in society at large?

A. Right, exactly.

Q. Well, then why. . . why a Jewish Family Service?

A. OK. That's what we've asked ourselves. What do we do that makes us Jewish identified? And I want you to know that this is a current problem all through America. Every single Jewish Family Service is asking, how do we put the Jewish into Jewish Family Service? What do we have to offer Jewish people that's different from what a Family Service of Rochester or Catholic Family Service? So to that end, that's what's going. . . every conference of the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, and every

- A. (Continued) conference of Jewish Community Federation that meets nationally has that on its agenda, Jewish identity. And everybody's struggling with it. We think we have some answers. So as a result of that we have started a new program a couple years ago called Jewish Family Life Education. And we are trying to bring back into our staff and into the community the ingredients that makes a Jewish family Jewish. And can we recapture or review or . . . or go back to what we consider strictly Jewish attitudes? And can we get people to see that we can still be very good Americans and keep some of our Jewish identity. Such as, you know, practically Jewish holidays and the essence of them, what makes a Jewish marriage different. Our whole concept of family, our concept of extended family, our relatives, our aging parents. Our concept of education, our concept of Jewish education. How do we get women who want to be professionals, who want to work and realize themselves, still see that their children get a Jewish education after public school. You know, that kind of thing. That's why we started. . . but it's a struggle, it's hard to do because it's been, you know, diluted.
- Q. Well what does that campaign take? What form does that. . . counselling?
- A. It takes setting up any kind of . . . of program that anybody wants. For example, last year I did a whole series of five for Temple Beth El Sisterhood on the American Jewish woman. And we talked about the Jewish feminist movement, where Jewish women want to be involved in Jewish rituals, that kind of thing. We also did a Len Gravitz, who's Director of the School for Social Work at R.I.T., who's Jewish. He and I did a group discussion with couples on how to make a good marriage better on a Jewish basis. What are some of the Jewish things, you know, Jewish qualities and Jewish values that we can introduce into counselling. So, it's an educational, not a therapeutic program. But a preventative educational program, talking about what makes people Jewish, and

- A. (Continued) how counselling can be helpful and what kind of education. For example, what's the Jewish attitude on sex? And human sexuality? And on abortion? And on everything else. Teenagers. And can we involve Jewish teenagers in a dialogue with their parents about how they feel about this?
- Q. Right. As an agency are you concerned with intermarriage?
- A. Very much so.
- Q. And if someone comes in and says I'm considering marrying outside of Judaism, do you say don't do it, or what do you say?
- A. No. Counselling in itself is not advice giving procedure. It's a facilitating procedure to help people take a look. So we say as a Jewish agency we must point out to you what happens in an intermarriage and how people do get their identity diluted. And how . . . what are the liklihoods of things happening in an intermarriage. And let's talk about it, and is this the kind of thing you want for yourself and for your. . . In other words, to help a person take a good look at the reality and help him make some choices in terms of what he wants. He says to me I don't care, that's one thing. But if he says, you know, I don't want to lose my Jewish identity, I would say. . . or I'm very religious, how am I gonna practice my religion? I would say then you need two people, you need a rabbi and you need a counsellor. But, we facilitate a good look at all the pros and cons the realities. What might happen and help a person take a look at it without being judgmental.
- Q. Do you think from your perspective here, do you think that intermarriage is on the increase? Do you have more people coming in now?
- A. The people that we get coming in around intermarriage are people that are troubling with it.
- Q. Are there more now than there were a few years ago?
- A. I don't think so. Not for me. But that's not. . . I'm not a good judge.

A. (Continued) And this is not a good place to judge from and I'll tell you why. People don't come here unless they have problems. So if we're getting an increase in intermarriage, and we know we are, all you have to do is look in the newspaper, they are not troubled with it. What we might get later on is all kinds of problems, later on. And it's difficult to say whether it's a direct result of the intermarriage. It's difficult. I would have hesitate to. . . to use that as a contributing factor, in my own personal experience. But you see you must remember that the people we get here are traditionally, like every other agency, about 10% of the population has trouble with living. And we get 10% maybe or a little less of the Jewish population. Now we get many non-Jews by the way, that's interesting. It's the other side of the coin in terms of what's Jewish identity and why a Jewish agency. And when I get them I'll say, why did you come here? Well, somebody knew you and told me you were good. I says, yea, but there are good people in other agencies. I'm Jewish. Why did you come here? There is a mystique still about the Jewish family. Somehow it'll rub off on us, Jewish families are good, they're solid, they're stable. That mystique remains in the eyes of the. . . of the non-Jewish population as well as the Jewish.

Q. Well, what do you do for someone who's not Jewish comes here?

A. Well, we. . . we give them counselling services, but it's in terms of their own personal adjustment. We don't refuse to see them because we're a Community Chest agency and in. . . in from that point of view we are supposed to give service to the entire community. We don't turn anybody away.

Q. This is a question I think I know the answer to, but I imagine over the years the agency has accumulated a great deal of records and people's troubles, and is there any way that an historian could use those to see what kind of problems existed among individuals in the Jewish community?

A. Yea, you could not use the records. They are completely barred from even other social workers reading them. And the records that we have accumulated have taken a tremendous change in. . . in our methodology. I have always been very strong about people who are professional and well-trained doing their own studies of people, also I have strong feeling that everybody changes a little everyday. And I don't feel that what somebody else perceived last year about you. . . if I perceived something about you last year when you came to see me with a problem, I don't think that I should transmit that today to somebody because you may have made many changes in how you see things. And I think that that could be used judgmentally or prejudicially. And I don't think that's good 'cause we're not here to use information about people. We're here to be helpful to them. So that I wouldn't use it, but I could very easily give you a written composite of the kinds of problems. I'd be glad to do that.

Q. Does that exist anywhere? I mean are there reports written annually?

A. Yea, you see, one of the things we do all the time is Mike Boyer, the Executive Director, has to do a report to the Community Chest along with his new budget. He also presents report to the Board of Directors in terms. . .

Q. Annual. . .

A. An annual report of the kinds. . . if you were interested in coming to our annual meeting, which is always in May, you would get a kaleidoscope of the kinds of things we did. We do that at Board meetings. There is always one worker going into a Board meeting here or there, talking about the kind of jobs she does, without identifying who they are. And we also have a service sheet that we send into the Community Chest which gives every service we give, counselling, parent/child relationships, marital counselling, personal adjustment, refugees. We did a Vietnamese resettlement project here which

- A. (Continued) wasn't Jewish. But we did it at the request of the United States government. We resettled 103 Vietnamese last year here in Rochester. Which was a tremendous amount for this agency. So we did that, we resettled Soviet Jews. We do Jewish Family Life Education. We do child placing if it's needed, it's. . . we're open and we haven't been requested to do it. And a whole other group, you see, of services. So that certainly we could give you a . . . a picture of the kinds of clients who come. . . the kinds of problems they have.
- Q. That might be possible, say, by going back to the annual reports to reconstruct, you know, some kind of chart on different strengths. . . different problems, say alcoholism over the years. . .
- A. We can tell you that, sure, very easily. The. . . I do a report for the Community Chest every year on the number of individuals we served, broken down into the kinds of services. And statistically every year the major amount of our work is marriage counselling. The next one that runs a close second is personal counselling. The next one that runs a close third is parent/child relationships. Alcoholism is non-existent virtually in the Jewish agency. And if we have any they're not Jewish people usually. We have no wife beating. We have almost no child abuse, a few. But they're emotional things, not physical. We have very few protective cases, but the ones that we do have among Jewish people are usually as a result of mental illness, that the parent in no way could handle, the parent needed help. Or they're usually on the part of people who are immigrants into this country from other communities where there has been a great deal of trauma for them, for the family. So that our problems are not . . . still not . . . if you want to say typically non-Jewish or non-American. . . American, they aren't.
- Q. Right.

Q. One thing interesting is the new wave of Russian Jews coming in. . .

A. About twenty families a year.

Q. Do you think that their problems any sort of recapitulate that of the earlier wave of Russian Jews?

A. The only problems that one could say is a constant problem is that of the immigrant who has to adjust to a whole new way of living. And the new Russian Jews coming to this country this year and last year, since 1974, is a problem in itself, unique. They come as professionally trained people. They come as people skilled in certain areas most of them where they never had to look for a job, where their job and their education were paid. . . taken care of by the government. They did not have to worry. They come here thinking that they can go to college and finish their education at our expense 'cause that's the way the Russian government handles it. And we. . . we don't. . . you know what American education is like, I don't need to tell you. They come with all kinds of different perceptions. Even though HIAS, the national. . . international resettlement organization that brings them from Rome or Vienna where they come from Russia to the United States and gets them to the cities of their destination, gets them in the interim placement. Even though HIAS tells them the truth and the reality they come with fantasies, and that's our problem.

Q. Disillusionment.

A. It's a disillusionment. It's not only a disillusionment, but their expectations are completely false. It's. . . it's just. . . no way can they conceive. . . I can give you an example. Very small example. In the bureaucracy people don't make appointments, you walk in and you sit down on a chair and you wait until the official can see you. We don't see people that way. You know how hard it is to get it across to the Soviet Jew that

- A. (Continued) he must not walk in here and sit down because he has nothing else to do and wait to be seen? We do things by appointment because we consider the individual more and we don't want people to have to sit and wait. And we find it very difficult to get that . . . it takes us months to get across to them that he must not do that, that we can serve him much better and he will not have to wait, and he will be a unique person if he makes an appointment. And they can't see it.
- Q. So what kind of services do you provide?
- A. Everything. From the minute the Russian gets to this country, to this city, we support him completely financially. We get his housing ready for him before he comes, we get apartments. He is taken . . . met at the airport by the caseworker and taken to the apartment. The apartment is stocked with food that he needs, basic staples. And a minimal amount of furniture. We cannot buy living room furniture, but we get a lamp and a little table. But we get the bedroom furniture and the kitchen stuff so they can sleep and eat. And then we get contributions from the community. Currently the Council of Jewish Women is beginning, starting next week they're having small orientation meetings, are offering to be our coordinator for volunteer work, which we have not had as an organization. We've had volunteers, but it's just whoever . . . and we've had some good individual volunteers, they've been marvelous, but it hasn't been coordinated. Now they're gonna do it for us. To take them around to the temples, to introduce them to the Jewish community. The Jewish Community Center gives them a free membership. We arrange it. We get the children to Jewish Community Center overnight camp and day camp if they come in the summer. We get them registered in schools. We see that they get English lessons right away. We do all of the . . . we facilitate everything. It's a very involved difficult program.

- Q. How are. . . how are they assigned to Rochester? Do they choose Rochester?
- A. No. HIAS in New York gets a list of the people in Rome, visas have been cleared, who are waiting to come to the United States. HIAS goes down through all of the communities that have not yet completed their quotas, everybody has a quota as to what they can absorb, and then for those people who have as yet not met their quota. . . fulfilled their quota, and it runs on a fiscal year basis, they will choose a community where they think this particular Russian can fit in in terms of his vocational and cultural interests and employment possibilities. Sometimes they make a mistake. They think they should send a musician to Rochester. I keep telling them that that's like sending Poles to Newcastle. We got so many graduates in the Eastman School of Music we don't need any more musicians. But one of our musicians got a job in the Philharmonic.
- Q. So you help them find jobs. What if they can't find a job?
- A. They can't. We have terrible problems. That's our biggest problem. We have a few rather influential, hard-working Jewish men who have volunteered to form a committee, we've asked them to form a committee. And our biggest problem is if we could get them all placed in jobs within the first few months our. . . we could take more Russians, our budget wouldn't be over extended. We have people who sometimes are here a year and they still don't have a job.
- Q. Can you support them that long?
- A. We can't, but we do. It's very difficult.
- Q. I think I read a story about Russian Jews in New York City where they offered them six months' support and that was it.
- A. Well, we have another problem that we didn't anticipate. We have some that refuse to depart from their fantasies and won't accept reality. There are

- A. (Continued) always people like that no matter where they come from. And we have people who will not take what we offer them in the way of a job. It's the . . . it's the demeaning, beneath them, and they're gonna hold out. We tell them you can't. We have. . . our first attempt to find something that suits you, but we can't . . . you see the technological development in Russia is different from here. And a mechanical engineer here may not. . . from Russia may not be able to be anything but a technician here. So we have many problems. We have doctors, dentists, you know, and they can't qualify. They have to pass all kinds of exams here. So it's a real problem for them.
- Q. Does anybody want to go back?
- A. Nobody has told us they want to go back, a lot of them want to leave this community, and a lot of them do.
- Q. They want to go to Israel say. . .?
- A. We have a couple who. . . whose families are in Israel who think they'd like to go. Usually the ones that come here have already refused to go to Israel. Or have been. . . we've had some who've been to Israel and have not been able to adjust there. And there's a lot of feeling about that on the part of the community. You know, they're there, they ought to stay there, we can't resettle people more than once. And HIAS will not resettle them more than once anymore.
- Q. You'd think that Israel might actually be an easier place because it so much of an immigrant community.
- A. Except that in Israel with all of the influx of immigrants, you know, immigration, with the high tax for defense and the overabundance of professionally trained people who cannot. . . you know how many doctors do they need? You know. And the community being so much smaller than

- A. (Continued) America, you know, people feel that they're never going to get rich. They all. . . a lot of them have the American dream. They still think they can come here and get rich quick, which you can't do in Israel. Or at least nobody's that successful in doing it.
- Q. It's hard to do it here.
- A. Yea.
- Q. You said earlier. . . you spoke earlier of social work itself had all begun on Jewish tradition of service. Do you think that that influenced your own decision to become a professional social worker?
- A. Well, I don't really know. I wanted. . . I wanted to go into medicine, which is a helping profession also. I was a science major. I was a Biology major in college. And I've always been interested, though, in people, in helping them. I think the big decision was was I going to be in service to people's bodies or to their mental and emotional life. And really I was in medical school and decided that wasn't gonna work for me for a number of reasons. And I had a professor who said to me, you know, you really ought to do social work. You're just cut out for that. You're a natural. And I thought about it at length and thought I'd look into it. And went to work in a few agencies before I went to school to see if I'd like it. But I would say that maybe subconsciously even wanting to be in medicine would have been an outgrowth of my background even though, you know, I didn't become an organizational person, I expressed that same kind of service in my profession. I imagine that it was an unconscious motive, sure.
- Q. There's another vague question I always end up with about changes in the Jewish community through the years. What are your feelings about the way the Jewish community has changed since your childhood?
- A. Well, I'm not sure that I have any feeling that more young families are coming

A. (Continued) to be temple affiliated, formally affiliated with temples. I think there's been a change in that because I think temples and synagogues offer more, you know, they have become youth-oriented. They have become family-oriented. They offer, you know, adult education. So I do think that, you know, concurrently I don't know which came first, but there has been I think more Jewish people. . . well, you have to look at my parents who did not become temple affiliated or synagogue affiliated at all and never gave any money to temples and synagogues. But I did. My brother never did. And one brother did, one didn't. So I think that's a change. And the passionate dedication to Zionism has changed, become more formalized, it's become more organized, more structured, you know. And that's a change with. . . you know, with the environment and what's happened. And I think Jewish people are not as ghettoized as they were when my day. . . we lived among Jews, and if we didn't live among Jews, we certainly spent all of our active hours among Jews. My children don't. So I think there's been a lot of dilution and cultural assimilation.

Q. Yea. Would you look at that as a positive or a negative sense?

A. I think it's very good. I think it's very good. I think it has to be. I think it's good and positive, it always has, you know, the other side of the coin. And I think maybe that is what's gonna force us into this whole Jewish identity crisis. I think that will make us maybe the pendulum swing, and maybe because we've become more assimilated culturally in America because America has been good to the Jews and the Jews have been good to America, then maybe because of that dilution that maybe we are going to have to swing that pendulum back and start getting, in some ways if you will, more ghettoized. It's the kind of thing Rabbi Karp has mentioned. He thinks so,

A. (Continued)           too. He thinks that we're gonna have to really concentrate on Judaism if we want some changes in Jewish identity. And I'm not so sure that he isn't right. I don't know to what extent, but I'm speaking philosophically. I don't really know personally an argument about that. I'm convinced though that Jewish identity is needed, and that's why I'm interested in Jewish Family Life Education. And I've really been a motivating force in this whole JFLE program. I have always separated social work with Jewish identity until I came to this agency and saw a challenge. It's one of the. . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B (Interview 1)