

ROCHESTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT (Rochester Jewish community 1925-1975)

Interviewee Mrs. Esther Cohen

Interviewer Tina Isaacs

Date(s) of interview 7/21/76 ; 7/24/76

Setting (place of interview, people present, impressions)

The interview took place in Mrs. Cohen's room in the Jewish Home and Infirmary, no one else was present. Mrs. Cohen was a delight to interview--although she has had some bad experiences in recent years (the loss of her husband, family members, and a recent amputation of her leg) she is bright cheerful and full of life. She plans her stay in the Home to be a temporary one, which might explain her lack of "waiting to die" syndrome that was apparent in many of the other people in the Home.

Background of interviewee

Mrs. Cohen is a native New Yorker, but moved to Rochester at the age of 13. During her married life, she and her husband ran a wholesale jewelry business in Rochester. She participated somewhat in the organized community and was actively affiliated with Beth El.

Interview abstract

The most striking thing in the interviews is Mrs. Cohen's positive attitudes about her life and about Rochester. We had two productive sessions--the most valuable conversations were about the jewelry business and its changes over the years. The interviews covered a broad range of material.

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

x Social history

x Jewish community

x Family

x community relations

x Demographic/residential

x Religious life

x Economic

x Jewish education

  Political/civic

x Anti-semitism

x Zionism/Israel

Interview log

a) corresponding to tape numbers, sides of tape, and cassette recorder nos  
b) including references to others in the Rochester community

--see following page(s)--

Mrs. Esther Cohen: Interview Log

Tape I Side A

Background: N.Y.C. born, 1899. At age 13 the family came to Rochester due to business opportunity. Marries a native Rochesterian. Husband died 9 years ago.

Children, grandchildren

\*\*Sickness: coming to the Home and adjustment to it  
Editing the Home newspaper

Going back to apartment once a week

Visitors, friends, relatives

Mother's immigration from Russia, Father's profession--tailor,  
Mother designs children's clothes

Education of sibs--family moves all over country

Neighborhood--Gorham St.

\*Husband's family--relatives in Rochester, father-in-law a peddler  
and oddjob man. First Jewish carpenter in the city of Roch.  
Neighborhood when first married--between Clinton and Joseph

\*Business beginnings

Monroe Ave. area, then near Cobbs Hill

Daughter's education. Business course, joins firm

Daughter has 3 children, one of whom intermarried

Tape I Side B

Grandchildren

Religious education--her own, her daughter's, her grandchildren's  
Younger generation

\*Intermarriage

Women working

Beth-El

Reform/Conservatvie/Orthodox friction

\*Eastern European Jewish/German Jewish friction

\*Changes in Beth-El. Members for 40 years. Reminiscences of old Temple  
5 Sisterhood of Beht-El

\*Cohen's Restaurant

\*Rabbi Bernstein

Holocaust, WW II

UN--changes of opinion

Israel--survival of Judaism

\*Anti-Semitism in Rochester--most of the customers were non-Jews  
Riots--reactions, causes, outside agitation, Anti-Semitism

Saul Alinsky

Local politics

JCC

Hadassah, Youth Aliyah, H.M.O., O.R.T.

Jews participating in non-Jewish activities

Integrating neighborhoods

Tape II Side A

\*\*\*Business

1936-7 started, 1940 on own, starts in home then a small office, gradually growing

Nature of business--wholesale

Son-in-law's participation

Type of jewelry sold

\*Changes in customers

Mrs. Esther Cohen: Interview Log cont.

4

Husband helping small businieessmen  
Watchmaking  
Decline of the jewelry business  
Mrs. Cohen's participation in the business  
Seasons in jewelry  
\*Employees--secretary, errand boys, Jewish?  
Customers mostly ;non-Jews  
Decline of the jewelry business  
\*Depression  
Typical customer  
Fashions in jewelry  
Flucuation in the gold market  
Fashions in jewelry  
Melting down gold  
Personal collection  
WW II's effect on the jewelry business  
Burke building as a jewelers building  
Changes in Rochester  
Culture in Rochester--changes

Interview 1  
Tape 1  
Side A

Q. This is Tina Isaacs interviewing Mrs. Esther Cohen. It is Wednesday, July 21, and it is 3:30. Mrs. Cohen, could you please tell me something about your background, where you were born and. . .?

A. Yes, I'll be glad to. I was born in New York City. And that was. . . and I just had a birthday Sunday, 77 years ago, quite ancient. And I went to school in New York City until I was thirteen, then my father and my mother and the family came to live in Rochester. And why did we come here of all the places in the world? We never knew anyone here, but my father was brought by the clothing people here. And we were delighted. We came. It was a new way of life. It. . . from living in an apartment house, it was quite crowded, we came to have a lovely little house, single house, today you call it a ranch house, and it was in at that time a lovely neighborhood. And so we came here. We, the family, it was a family of seven, we were, and there are only three of us left. And my folks, too, are gone. My. . . my father wasn't too happy here. My mother either. They didn't have too many friends at this part of their life. I'm trying to think. That would be when I was 13, we go back to that for the timing. And they decided after three years that they weren't too happy here. But we, the rest of the family, we loved it. I was planning on. . . on going into high school, and my. . . my. . . one of my other sisters was in high school. In fact, she only had three months to graduate high school when we came here, and I thought of it, today you wouldn't do a thing like that, you wouldn't take a child out of high school if she only had three months. You would leave here with a relative or something. Well, anyway, she was quite brilliant and she did. . . in fact,

A. (Continued) she did so well that they all knew her at East High School. And then my other sister had gone to Cooper Union in New York, had graduated. And of all the things she decided, all her friends were school teachers, well she was not going to be a school teacher. And she took telegraphy. And became manager of one of the offices here in the Powers Building when we came here. She was very young, as you see we were just about practically a year apart or a year and a half apart. And so we. . . and my brothers were all younger, and we weren't too happy about going back, I especially. Because I had so many friends and that's how I met my husband. We were thirteen. And we had quite a group, you know, boys and girls who went together and so forth. And so we moved back and I continued on my education just high school. And I had a great desire to be in the business world, I loved business. And so I continued my letterwriting with my friend here, and oh let's say this was about. . . well, we lived in Rochester for three years, so I was sixteen when I went back. I had gone to high school here for a little while. Then we went back. And he would come in to New York and visit and I would come here because I just loved it. I just. . . I wasn't much for New York. I didn't like New York, let's say. And so then we all came back to New York, and then when I was 19 we decided that we would. . . we were very mature for 19, that we would be married. So we were married in New York, and then I came back to Rochester. And I made my home here, and well that's. . . just I. . . I'm going through this phase went back. . . My husband passed away at 68, and that's nine years ago. He. . . he was always also in the business world, a person of great integrity and great sense of humor. Very athletically inclined, and we just had a beautiful life, 48 years of a beautiful life. And I. . . I just love Rochester. And, of course, here I am, and I have lost, as I say, during that same period, which was really quite tragic, I

A. (Continued) lost two of my sisters, in a very short time, and I lost a brother who was 57 in California. Also, that was at that time. . . that was three and then about three years ago I lost my youngest brother, 61. So it. . . it was hard to bear, you know? But, anyways, we went on. And then I decided I could never live by myself in a. . . in a home, so I sold my home and I. . . I must mention that I have one daughter, and I wish I had had more because she is what you call a real prize package, a marvelous person. And her husband, too, just marvelous in every way. So, and I have two grandchildren. So, that made up for quite a bit of many of the losses, but we always had a very wonderful family life. My husband loved tennis. And we talk about it now 'cause everybody. . . and it's my. . . so we say. . . and I say to my daughter, remember when Dad used to take you to Cobbs Hill? And. . . 'cause we lived right then. . . oh, we played tennis, or skating, and he was great with young people. But he. . . he loved to be with them, and he was always with many of the young people. So, I. . . as I say I have my daughter and then after my husband passed away I decided that I could not stay in the house by myself, too many memories. And so I took an apartment because this was with the help of my family. And, so I've been in my apartment about . . . let's say, seven years at least when suddenly, and I had been away, I wasn't feeling very well, I'd been away. And suddenly I took sick, and had to go in the hospital that we thought would be a very small operation of the circulation and so forth. But it turned out to be a lot worse because they had to amputate. So, this is a whole new life. And it was really very trying because I. . . I have been with my husband in business side-by-side, twenty-four hours a day, for about 35 years. And we were in the wholesale jewelry. And it was a. . . a great life. It was wonderful. I loved people, and I loved the type of business. And, I was aware of what

A. (Continued) was happening in the world. And so this was quite a change when . . . after he passed away because I knew then that I couldn't follow after that at all. And so when I took sick it was quite a . . . to me it was quite a . . . a tragedy because it was something that's very rare, it only happens once in a million that anything like this could happen. And it happened to me. And I . . . I really did not want to go on. I was in Genesee Hospital for four months, practically four months. And I did, I felt they should let me go because I had had it. I had a wonderful life, we traveled, we had a beautiful life. And but my doctors didn't feel that way, they felt that I had still a lot to give, and they gave me the ultimatum that, especially my family doctor, that if I didn't go on he would have my family on his hands in the hospital, and he said do you want that? And I realized that I couldn't do that. So I said well I'll try. And I was. . . I did and it was. . . it was rough. And, then after four months. . . well, sort of going on this way. . .

Q. That's all right.

A. After four months of being there they kept saying well the last three months. . . you know, just as soon as we think there'll be a place here at the Jewish Home, you will be going. And I thought to myself, they're crazy, why the Jewish Home? Here's something. . . never in my life have I ever thought, although we were affiliated with the Home and with the auxiliary, and I thought it was a wonderful place, but how could I ever go to a Jewish Home? I wasn't. . . I really wasn't even listening to them. I thought, well, they'll forget about it. But they didn't. And they felt that I would have the best care in here, the type of care that I needed. And when doctors tell you that you feel that they must know what they're talking about. Well, anyways, I. . . I decided I'll forget about this whole thing, what the future holds I don't

A. (Continued) know, but I certainly wasn't thinking of the Home. So, one day my surgeon came into me, and it was 11:00 in the morning, I can remember that. And he said, Esther, you're going to the Jewish Home today at 1:00. Well, it was a terrible traumatic experience. And I thought to myself, this can't be. This can't be. Something like this happening to me. And he said guess what? And, he said, we let your daughter know and she'll be here as soon as. . . and so forth and so on. And, you know, I used to come to all the luncheons here at the auxiliary. And many a time. . . in fact, I came to a luncheon the year just before this happened. And, it was lovely and as I walked out I said, you know, this is such a lovely place, but not for me. You know? And as I walked out I thought, and I thought, gee, I should have never said that, you know? You know how you do, you say I never should say that. And little did I think that this could ever happen to me. So anyway, I decided that if this is what they wanted to do with me, it was all right. And so they brought me here. And they. . . I told about this to a board meeting here one day, too, the experience of going into the . . . the ambulance. I said to the fellows, now look here, I'm not lying down, I'm sitting up. And they looked at me. They said, you're the first person ever said that in all the years I've. . . I said, well, let me see what the outside world looks like again. And I think that that was the beginning of my determination to go on. And so I came here, and it. . . it was quite an experience. I was overwhelmed by the attention, by the nurses, by everyone who greeted me. I thought this can't be true. And, then of course, I never knew I would have a room to myself. I kept thinking, oh G-d, will I have to share a room with someone else? I had never done that, you know? I thought this is never. . . we went on. . . my husband, of course, we had the room, but by myself always I had my own room. So when I opened my eyes and they

A. (Continued) brought me up here, and I saw this room, I said oh this is. . . G-d has been good to me, you know? So the experience was really. . . it was overwhelming. I just could never get over it. And, so that's how I began. And I've been here now April, May, June, July, oh I've been here fifteen months. And I was very, very sick. And it took a lot of care, a lot of care. And doctors and nurses and all to take care of me because I had. . . as I said, I was unusually sick and I couldn't move. I had to. . . when I had that. . . and the only way I could move was holding on, you know? And everybody really worked with me, they were marvelous. The nurses, the aides, the doctors, all of them. And everytime they saw a little improvement they were. . . they were so happy about it. And so I did, I improved. It took a long time, maybe a little longer than average, but to the point where they said well now you will be ready for your prothesis. And I thought, well, if this is what it is, it will be. And my whole way of life changed. By that I mean I was. . . I was leaving everything in back of me. You know, I said. . . I thought to myself, oh, I'm not gonna be thinking of what's going to be, I'm just gonna think about the past, why think about this? It's not. . . it's not going to happen. But the minute I got here I sort of changed. I thought to myself, these people are wonderful. Never knew so many people who were so wonderful, and so many people here to adjust to. And each day as I got a little better, and was able to get out in a chair, when they'd put me out to sit, and I wasn't able to, you know, take care of myself at all, and I couldn't wheel the chair. I just had to stop. . . started walking just a trifle when I came here, so this was quite an experience. It was real rought. I never thought I. . . I could make it, but I began to see people. And I thought to myself, well this is another world entirely. And I related to people. I. . . I knew that I could always. . . I always

A. (Continued) related to people. I . . . I loved people, and I think people like me a little. But I never could. . . thought that I could look at so many people here and not feel sorry for them because they're here. I could see so many things that were wonderful about these people, they all had so much to give. And I became very interested in the Home. I decided just as soon as I could get in a chair and go to meetings I would go to everything that was here. And so I began to work on the newspaper here, and I really . . . maybe saying this. . . but I think I've done quite a bit to bring that paper even a little better than it was, this is what they all tell me. And I started to write, and I love to write. I never knew that I could write so many poems or write speeches or give so many talks to our. . . many a time I've been downstairs and I speak before all the residents when we have birthday parties or other occasions. In fact, we were televised one day. I didn't expect it, and there I was on television. It was great. And my family said, oh, we always knew we had a star in the family, you know. And I wrote, and I'm still writing, and I just love it. I never knew that I had that. . . I knew there were certain things I always said I wanted to do, but I never knew that I could write the way I feel. I do. I get around. I see people, I talk to them. I'm in everything. And, this is my way of life. Of course, it's not easy because I. . . I plan on going back to my apartment and what I do, they take me to my apartment once a week, and I have to climb stairs, which is very, very difficult, although I'm doing some of it here. But, it's harder there because they're not the kind of steps that are as easy. And I didn't think I could make it, I really didn't. But, I decided that I will make it. And, I have great determination. And, so I go back now every week. And every week we do a little bit. We take one room at a time, I'm becoming acquainted already. . . it's another

A. (Continued) . . . it's another way of life. It's. . . it's. . . like being another person because I will never be able to do the things that I did before because I can't reach like I did, I can't stand like I did. I will. . . I use these all the time, and maybe as I get stronger I will be able to do more things, but this is what I hope to do in September and I have a little. . . I've had a little trouble with my fingers, and so we're going to correct that with a little surgery. So, instead of going out a month earlier it'll be probably six weeks later, but these are the things I've had to face. And, while I'm not a Pollyanna, 'cause I do cry once in a while and I get a little low, but then I think to myself well it could be worse, because we've had so many people here who are so sick. And also I think the. . . the entire thing has been a revelation because I always had many, many friends and acquaintances. But I never knew that there were so many wonderful people who came to see me. I had so much mail that they could wallpaper all the rooms in the hospital. They could do it here, too. I received many letters, I still receive gifts. I receive . . . and I have continuous company seeing me, continuously besides my family. And that's a beautiful thing to think that people really want to come to see you. And maybe one of the reasons. . . I may be talking too much about myself, I tell how lucky they are that they can get up in the morning and can take care of themselves, and they understand what I mean. And, so that. . . that has been, I think, one of the greatest factors in my getting better, my family, my relatives who are marvelous, and friends:they never forget. I have a little. . . I have a little waitress who used to wait on me. . . I used to. . . I'm one of those, you know, when I had time I'd say, oh, I'd better stop and have a cup of coffee, and I'd go to one particular place. And the minute I came in she'd know, hot coffee for Mrs. Cohen, and there'd

A. (Continued) be . . . and it was a nice relationship. So I've known her for many, many years, but I've never been to her home, she's never been to my home. Just say, hello, how are you and so forth. And do you know she has never missed one week that I don't get a card from her.

Q. That's incredible.

A. Isn't that incredible? And many others that used to wait on us when my husband was alive. We used to go out a great deal to eat because I didn't have too much time to cook, I was always at the office, and they, too, they remember me. So often I receive mass cards, it's really incredible. And gifts galore forever, always getting gifts it's. . . I think that's helped a great deal. I said, well, who could be so lucky? You know? And I am because when I look around here, and I see so many people who never have a soul that comes to see them, maybe once in a while. I mean I really. . . very lucky. So that's part of this, and going home 'cause that'll be another. . . that's another part of my life. That. . . and that will be . . . it can never be what it was, and it'll be entirely different way of life. And I'll just try to make it, that's all I know. I don't know. I'm taking everyday as it comes. I don't look further. I will say I go out, my family take me out. I enjoy the car, I manage to get in the car very well, and I have a marvelous son-in-law and daughter as I told you, and they. . . they get me going. We always go to restaurants where there. . . you can walk in or if there's one step, no trouble, you know. And so we. . . we go on like that, and I do go out a lot, surprisingly go out a great deal. So, I have that to look forward to, but of course, once I get to my apartment I realize that I will have to be stuck quite a bit, yea.

Q. Were your parents Americans?

A. No, my. . . my father. . . my father came here when he was 17 to New York

A. (Continued) City. My mother came when she was 17, and they were married in New York City.

Q. Where were they from?

A. They were from Russia. I can't even remember where, what part of Russia. But, it was always very cute. My. . . my mother came was. . . I think she knew my father in. . . in their country, but there was some other young man who came to America and he loved. . . he was. . . just loved my mother, and he thought well if he sent for her that that would be a marriage, but I guess when she saw my father, she always liked him, that didn't go. So we always kidded her, did you ever give him back the money for that? Steamship amount, and so they had a kind of a hard life, but everybody did in those days when they came. But, my father was very talented. He could do many. . . in the clothing industry, greatly talented. In fact, he. . . he had a. . . a. . . pattern on a reversible coat when they first came out. But his was different, and he was the first one in that, and he did many things. Worked for many years for this big firm before he came to Rochester, and he was considered quite. . . quite a personality. So, that he did. And my mother designed ladies clothing and children's clothing beautifully, just beautifully, great talent. And they both had a. . . a sense of beauty and I think they passed it on to us. What beautiful things. . . I always tell the story when we talk about china and I say I can remember as a little girl we had Havelin china. Now I know my folks couldn't afford Havelin china at that time, but I. . . my mother said she loved them, and she used to buy her coffee or tea from some company, and they used to come around, I don't know, once a month or once a week, and you would get a cup and saucer for a pound or two of coffee. And then she had the most beautiful set. And we. . . we could have

A. (Continued) that kind of china in our home, you know, for breakfast or whatever it was or for dairy things. And so that was handed down to all of us because we all, the entire family, had a wonderful sense of beautiful things, lovely things. In fact, when I spoke to my father of designing this beautiful coat, I can remember the people at this clothing factory come to our home. We had a . . . just a meager apartment, there were seven, nine of us, pretty crowded. But, they came and my father instead of asking for money, they asked him what he wanted, he said he thought we would like rugs in the living room. Now no one had rugs in those days, you know, in the living room, only the people that were very, very wealthy I guess. And so they sent him a beautiful green plush rug in my. . . in our living room and three beautiful vases, just beautiful, vases. And I can remember that. But I can remember my mother saying, now why didn't you ask for money instead of this? We could have used it more. And incidentally these three vases are still in the home of my brother who lives in Washington, who lives at the Watergate. . . (Laughter) And so this is what happened to. . . we girls, the boys went on to college, and they made nice lives for themselves. They all went into business, did very well. And, so it was for my mother traveling around, seeing us all. . . the boys even wanted to live far away. They moved to Washington. One of my brothers lived in Detroit until a year ago and then moved to Baltimore because he was retired and his wife lived . . . lived in Baltimore and decided they'd live there. And so we. . . we all loved being out of New York, somehow we didn't care for it very much.

Q. Now when you first moved to Rochester where did you move to?

A. We lived on Gorham Street, and that was just lovely. And incidentally we lived right next door to the St. Bridget Church. And everybody along there . . . they. . . they were the nicest people that we met. And when we tell

A. (Continued) the story our next door neighbors were people by the name of Brooks, they had a furniture store. They were very well known here. And when they heard that people were coming from New York with all these kids they. . . they told someone, well they must be a bunch of Indians, they had never heard of so many people coming from New York. But then they realized that we were very nice. And, in fact, Mrs. Brooks and my mother became very good friends. And I did, too, with one of their daughters who was. . . became the wife of Dr. Cross who lived here then moved to New York. And there are still a few sisters, I think, living here. But, there were many of the older families. . . They were the Goldmans who had also I think seven boys or so, and the Silversteins, and there were the Rosenthals. Then there were. . . my very dear friend who comes up here very often is Etta Sopman, she was a Ruder, they lived there. There was people by the name of Robfogel, you know, here? Kramers, that was part of their family. People by the name of Turk. And we got. . . of course, the younger one was my husband's age, he was in the jewelry business, too, so we knew them very well. And many, many of them. . . it was just beautiful.

Q. Was it a Jewish neighborhood primarily?

A. No, I wouldn't. . . I would think there were non-Jews, too, yes, because the church was there, you see?

Q. Right.

A. So there were many. But, these were lovely. And, everybody came and were very friendly, so we made loads and loads of friends. And, my mother and father were the sort that loved open house, everybody came, very well. . . So, that. . . that was an era of when we lived in Rochester. Now on my husband's side, now they're. . . there were eight sons. My husband was the youngest. And this, incidentally, is very good history. My. . . my mother-

A. (Continued) in-law came here to America when she was 14. Her uncle. . . there were a couple of uncles who were living out west who were trading with the Indians at that time. Became quite wealthy. She was only here for a short time at a city in the west, and she was very lonesome for her family, and they sent her back home. So, that she went back and she married my father-in-law there. And then they came to America, they came to New York, too. But, I guess there wasn't much for them to do there, so they had heard. . . some of their relatives, you know, landslike like they say, were here, and they decided to come here. That's how they came. And my father-in-law decided he would look around, must have been rough at that time, too. And, he would do all kinds of odd jobs, and go into the country. I used to love to hear those stories with the horse and wagon, and go to these little cities and stay a week because you couldn't get back and forth, and he was very religious. So he would take his own bread, his own butter, imagine how hard that bread would be at the end of the week. And exchange some of his services for maybe poultry or other things and come back. Well, anyways, he did that for many years, but he was a wonderful carpenter. And he was actually the first Jewish carpenter in the City of Rochester.

Q. Really?

A. And the first one to make the . . . the coffins, Jewish coffins, at that time, there was no one else that would make it. And they would call him, and he would make all these. . . isn't that something?

Q. Yea. And when. . . when you got married, where did you settle down in Rochester?

A. Our first apartment. . . house was on Hudson Street, that's off of Clinton. Between Clinton and Joseph. It was quite nice. In fact, the. . . the first apartment had been . . . didn't even have electric lights, they had just the

A. (Continued) . . . the gas bulbs. But, they immediately changed it. Because to me coming out of New York this was ridiculous, you know? But, anyway, we lived there for about . . . oh, I'd say about four years or five years. My daughter was born after we were married about four years, and then my husband decided that we had a very good offer in New York, decided he would go into business with a brother-in-law of mine. My sister's husband. And that was jewelry, too, that he knew a great deal about. So, we went to New York and we were there four years. Of course, I loved it. I was going back to my family and all. But, he still. . . New York, and traveling a great deal, he wasn't too happy with it, so he had an offer to come back here, and he said well I'll decide to. . . to take it. And so that's. . . that's what he did, came back and worked for many years, jewelry stores and so forth and so on. And then one day he said I think I'd like to do something for myself, I know I can do it. And he went into wholesale and he was terrific. So, we didn't have money. We had. . . we had little money, we had the four. . . before we moved to New York we had invested in. . . no, when we came back from New York, we had invested in a. . . in a house. . . oh, another part of the city. Someone told us about it, we thought it was a good buy, maybe we could do something with it. And, it was. . . that was bad timing 'cause we lost whatever we put in there, so we didn't have any money. And, you know, in those days you just never asked your parents for anything. And my. . . as it so happened my husband's people were really financially very well set. They had built a lot, they had many, many big pieces of property. And they did, they were really doing beautiful. But we would no more ask them for a lift or to help you, that was the error there. You did things on your own. And you tried to make the best of it. Today the young people tend to fall back on their parents, so the parents see that and say well we'll give 'em a

A. (Continued) hand, you know? But, we didn't. And so he said, you know what? I'll borrow on my insurance, and so we won't be obligated to anyone. I said great. So we did. And we worked out of our home for quite a few years, and it got better all the time. Then we took an office downtown, gradually it got larger, and it was a lot of hard work. I enjoyed it though. I was down everyday early, he was on the road, I was in the office. I would answer letters, do typing, 'cause that. . . I loved business, and that was what I took up, business course. And, we would. . . I would pack packages, and then go home 'cause my daughter was going to at that time . . . to school. I had to do cooking and all that sort of stuff, the house. But, I never found it that hard. And don't forget those were the time when you didn't have gas heat or oil heat in the earlier years, there were furnaces, and we had to do the furnaces. And when he was on the road I had to do the furnace, take care of a young child, you know. But we did it all. You. . . you make a go of it no matter how hard it was, you know, you just didn't give up.

Q. Where were you living then?

A. After. . . we. . . we lived on Laburnham Crescent, right next to the school. That's off of Monroe Avenue. And we always loved that part of the city. And there were many of our contemporaries, many of our friends who were living around there. But, you know, that was the era when you knew every family, every single family there. Because those were the people you knew for many years. So we lived there for quite a while, and it was right next to the school, which I liked because it was easy for my daughter to go back and forth. And, after that we moved to Kinsdale Street. We were there, I think, about eleven years. That was nice, right near Cobbs Hill, that's how the kids all used to come to our home, and they'd all go skating, leave

A. (Continued) their things and go skating with Mr. Cohen, he loved to skate. And they'd come back and toast marshmallows and . . . oh, it was great. And hot chocolate. And they played tennis all the time. And I used to play a little, but not much, but he was terrific tennis player, very good. And also a violinist, that was his hobby, wonderful violinist. But, as he said, that was something he loved but he knew he would never be a Haifitz. And he didn't particularly think he'd care to be in an orchestra, but as a hobby he loved it. And, you know, even till the last day he . . . he could go every Sunday, we called it musical, 'cause every Sunday morning there was music in our home. The records, and he would accompany the records with his violin. Or many of the records he would play, he loved. . . he had a wonderful collection of those. And, . . . and then he'd go and practice for a few hours, always practiced, loved it. And my daughter, he taught her how to play, which of course a father shouldn't. And she was very good. She played in the orchestra all through high school, Monroe High. And had a great talent for it, and then after high school that was it, never did it again. Never played again, so she was, she was very talented.

Q. Did your daughter go to college?

A. No, she went to IBI. She had also for business. . . and we wanted her to go. But she decided that she would wait a year, and we asked her why, and that was the year when we were just beginning to grow. And she understood that it might have been a little too hard at that time for us to . . . to send her to college. 'Cause, you know, those were the days you couldn't go to a . . . a bank and get a loan for your children going to college like you can today. And, it would have been. . . it would have been quite hard at the time, but she realized it without us telling her. So, she said no I'll wait for a year. And after the year she said, you know what, I think . . . I love

A. (Continued) business, I think I'll take a course. And so she went to the RBI, and she was very good. And so the second year, after she took the course, we were really doing so well, my husband said to her, now don't you want to go back, go to college, she said no, I don't think so. He said, would you like to travel a little? She says I'd love that. So we said, well all right. She said I've always wanted to go to Mexico. Now this is. . . I think 31 or 32 years ago when she decided she wanted to go on a trip. And he says, good, take . . . I. . . I'll see that . . . make all the plans and you go, you go. So she went to . . . she went to Chicago because we had friends there, relatives. Then she went to San Antonio, we had wonderful relatives down there on my mother-in-law's side. They used to come up here quite a lot, and they would go down to visit there. And from there she moved to Mexico, had everything arranged, so she was gone for a while. Had a beautiful trip, but she felt that she had really got something out of it. And she's never particularly been too sorry. She's always been . . . always a very busy person, very happy person, and always doing things and working. So, then she came into the firm, she decided she may as well work for the firm. And we had her for help, so that was very nice, too. And, she has three children. And my oldest grandson is Stan Kriskin, he is 27. He graduated Brighton High, and that was the year when Uncle Sam was calling all. . . you know, come Uncle Sam wants you. And, we said to him, well what are your plans? Do you want to go to college? He said I don't know what I want to do right now, he said. I don't know if I want to go to college right now. He did love business, he loved it. And so . . . well, his father said to him, well you better think it over because, you know, the year is going to fly by and you will have to go into the service otherwise. And he said, well I'll think about it. Well, the year came along, and he

A. (Continued) still decided. . . well, let's say he wasn't college material, that's all. And he has a wonderful mother and father who would not say you must go, this is the most important. . . and at that time most mothers and fathers were making their children go so they wouldn't have to go into the service, you know. That was bad timing. And he said no. So my son-in-law said, well, if this is your decision, make up your mind to enlist because I was in the army for five years, and I know how rough it is. And, he said, don't go into the navy, go to the air. . . but try the. . .

Q. The Marines?

A. No, not the marines. . . there's another service. Oh, boy, just left me.

Q. The Coast Guard?

A. Coast Guard. And, so he went down, and it was quite rough at the time. They didn't have too many openings, and the tests were really. . . the I.Q. was. . . you had to be really good, and he passed. And, so he enlisted. And, he had many months of training, and that was real training down at Cape May. And I guess they had asked them on some of their papers where would you like to go, and he said Florida or Hawaii. Well, he got Hawaii. So he was there five years. My daughter and I we were out in Hawaii to visit him, and he had quite a position. He was finally put into personnel. He was very good. And I think probably the only one possibly that didn't have a college background that was in personnel. And after five years, you know, you have to move on, so they sent him to Bangkok, and he was there for two years. Also in personnel. And also was attached to the. . . took someone's place of personnel in the American Embassy in Zagan while we wer having . . . while it was at war for one week or ten days there. He was subbing for someone. So that was quite an experience for him. And so while he was in Bangkok he met this lovely little girl from Thailand, and he called

A. (Continued) us and said he expected. . . he wanted to marry her. And of course this was very surprising to his mother and father. And, of course, to me as a grandmother I was quite upset about it. But then we realized if this. . . if this was what he wanted and he was going to be happy, it was going to be all right, this was his life, you know. He had been away so long, and also from what he told us about it she seemed nice. And they came for a visit and we just fell in love with her. Just a beautiful girl, with a lovely background. And you can't help but love her. So, then he was shipped to Washington. Right now he's in Washington. Also in personnel, Coast Guard. Now, how many years. . . he'll be here for about three years, and I've been here for a year and a half, so it's a very interesting life. And I think he'll stay in, I hope so. He's been in quite a bit. So, that's Mark. And, oh, it's been great because he calls at least once a week, and she does, too. She'll call and my daughter will say, now what's wrong, anything wrong there? She says no mother I just wanted to speak to you that's all. A very sweet, real nice girl. They have a beautiful apartment. They bought many of their things there. And you know, with the furniture and their carvings and things from there, bought many beautiful. . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A (Interview 1)

Interview with ESTHER COHEN  
July 21, 1976  
By Tina Isaacs

Page 20

Interview I  
Tape 1  
Side B

Blank side. Must have been a mechanical error of some sort. Interviewer's log indicates Side B of Tape 1 is a full side.

July 24, 1976

By Tina Isaacs

Interview II

Tape 1

Side A

A. . . . back. . . probably 19. . . 1937 or 1940, I can't remember. And my husband was always interested in the jewelry business even as a youngster. He worked for many concerns here in Rochester, there were just a few, but he. . . he went on the road for them, I guess, or worked inside. And then he worked for a . . . several jewelry stores for quite a few years. And, then he decided he would like to do something for himself. Well, that was about in 1940, I think. And with very little money, but with great ambition, he said that's what he wanted to do, and I said great, go along with you. So we borrowed money, we had no money. We had done something, foolishly bought a house and it just didn't work out, lost whatever we had in it. So, we. . . he started. And I. . . I stayed home and he went on the road, was constantly away. And I would sort of fill orders or write orders and people would call, and surprisingly people would come to the home. Yes. Those were the days when. . . when people who became customers were customers, you know? They. . . they liked you for your integrity or for what you meant to them and the kind of goods you could give them. So that we went that way for quite a few years, and then as we progressed, we took an office in the Burke Building, small office. And that was the same thing. I got up real early in the morning, you know, and take care of the mail, do the ordering maybe, and even do the. . . the packing and sending it out to the Post Office. But, you know, at that time you're young, you can do a lot of things. And keeping a. . . a house, and my daughter was going to school at the time, she was young. And cooking, and all that. And we did, we really worked very hard, and we did, we progressed along until we took. . .

A. (Continued) finally we needed more space, we took another small office next to it. And then I think we decided we would have some help, which we did, brought in help. And then as we grew, we . . . we outgrew our. . . our offices, and at that time the Social Security offices were in the Burke Building and they. . . that was when it was very small offices and just so many people in it, and I watched it. . . you know, that's something. I watched it from just a little place, Social Security, and I knew all the girls in it, to what it is today, my goodness. And so we took that office when they vacated, 'cause they went to larger quarters. So then we did, we had to. . . help. . . my daughter came into it after she decided she wanted to. I still remained, all those years. And we went on working hard, and twenty-four hours a day, as I used to say. We're there twenty-four hours a day with you. And we really did. . . did well. By that I mean we never were millionaires, but we did well, yes we made a nice livelihood. We enjoyed it, we enjoyed that type of business. And my husband especially enjoyed every minute of it.

Q. Did you sell to stores in Rochester?

A. We were strictly wholesale. And this is what he believed in. As I told you, my husband was a man of great integrity and he felt that if he was selling stores he was not gonna sell to the individual, that was the way he felt about it. And so we sold. . . oh, yes, we sold many of the stores in Rochester. And. . . and out of town, all the small. . . oh, so many small little cities, you have no idea. It was great because I got to know them, and I got to know the people. You know, Wednesdays in the small towns they closed Wednesday afternoons, and they come in. . . and they used to come in the city to buy and do whatever they wanted. And it used to be like an old home week. We used to have more people on Wednesday come in to. . . to

A. (Continued) visit, to buy. And it was a great day, really was. And, . . . and so this went on for quite a while. And then when my daughter married, and her husband had been with a . . . a wholesale watch people when he was younger, before he went into the service, and so we thought, well, if he'd like, OK, to get in, you know. And he said, yes, he thought he would like to start with it. So that was kind of good because it gave us a little relief because we could never get away together, never. And if I would go away, which I did, I used to go to New York to visit every once in a while, but I never stayed too long because I knew it was kind of difficult for him to be left by himself like this. And so it was nice, we could take a vacation sometimes, and we would. . . it became much easier. And then he. . . he was going on the road more than my husband because this was getting a little too hard, we had to have someone inside to. . . so it was very, very nice until 1968 when my husband passed away. And then that was the finish of that.

Q. Does your son-in-law still run. . .?

A. He runs his own business. He's in the jewelry business, but he decided to stay in and go on with that, so it's under the same name, but this is all on his own.

Q. What kind of jewelry did you sell?

A. Oh, that's it. We never sold costume. We sold only solid gold and gold filled. All the real . . . real good things, because you see in those days . . . especially even now perhaps the stores. . . Rochester, the small stores are conservative and what went somewhere else would never go here. So they. . . they bought simple things, but very good things. And so that. . . you know your customers, you knew what they liked, and you bought accordingly. I know many times when salesmen used to come to us, I'd say, oh this would be beautiful. And my husband would say, yes, that's good taste for you, but

A. (Continued) maybe our customers won't like it, you know? So, that's how we did. But, as the years have gone by, even during our. . . there was a change. Many of the jewelers found it difficult to keep on going and many of them just gave up. They left. They felt they had made some money, and they decided they would retire because things were changing. People were changing. They weren't . . . the. . . the same type of people that you had in the beginning of the business. By that I mean, the people that came in, the customers, they were a customer and a friend. And they appreciated if you went out of your way for them. But after a while regardless if you went out of your way for them or gave them the best that you had to give, it didn't matter. They would. . . they would roam anyplace, and if it was a little less or so. . . people forget, you know, how nice you've been to them.

Q. Why do you think that happens?

A. Well, it was a change. A change of timing and a change of people. And you know, people are funny. When they need you it's great, but then if things go well they forget. Oh, I know, we. . . we set up many people in business and my husband had a. . . he was great for. . . if the person came in he could tell in one moment even if he didn't have any money and he'd say, gee, I would like to start a store Mr. Cohen, I came in, and this so and so I'm going to this city or this place, what do you think? My husband'd say, if he knew about it, I think it's a good spot, do you have any money? And he'd say no, but I'd hoped maybe you'd give me credit. And my husband would say well, how do you think you're going to pay for this? And usually they were watchmakers, good jewelers, you see, so that they could make enough in watchmaking even if they didn't sell so much jewelry. But, he would always say to them, well I think you look honest enough, but I want you to promise one thing that as soon as you find yourself going well that you will, even if it's

A. (Continued) \$5 or \$10, but every week. And, you know, it always worked out beautiful. And some of them became some large jewelers and very, very prominent. And not only that they. . . they were great successes, they were. But after a while things changed. Many of the big jewelry manufacturers decided they would go right to the jewelry store instead of the wholesaler, so they found that possibly they would rather buy a little from them. And. . . and it was a whole new revolution about the business. And today there are very few in the city that you can count on. I. . . I know we used to have jewelers out of town, a great many of them in certain cities, and they've all gone out of business, just a few of the real old ones because it's. . . it's rough these days. They. . . they look out of their window to make sure who you are before you come in. And, the old-timers as well call them, who've been in a long time, decide well I've had it. This is time to retire. So you have many, many young ones in the business, and . . . and it's not. . . it's not like it used to be. But, my son-in-law does go out and he travels a great deal, but he does travel in directions where they still enjoy having him come because many of the salesmen do not go out anymore. One of the reasons is it's treacherous to . . . to go out with jewel cases, and it's hard work to pull in all those cases, you know, one after another. And, sometimes I get really worried about my son-in-law when he's out. Because, you know, in these days you just don't know what's happening. So, as I say, now we. . . oh, I know there was a time that we lost many accounts because the old-timers were going out of business, they just weren't gonna stay in. That was it. But, there are enough jewelers to . . . for people in Rochester. Now I know we always had E.J. Scheer's, it's very fine. And I think my son-in-law still has them. And a few others, very nice stores, who do sell very nice jewelry. I don't say they buy everything from my son-in-law, but

A. (Continued) they do give a certain amount of business, and we remember them when they just started. You know, when they would come up, begin. So, it goes back to fathers and sons and so forth. In fact, my daughter told me yesterday that one of the jewelers was up and he asked about me, now his father originally out Lake Avenue, George Scheer, he was in the business. And related, a cousin of the other Scheers downtown, and his son was with him. And then when he passed away, the son has been continuing all through the years. And so, you see, you . . . you get to know all the family, and it becomes part of your family. And . . . and jewelry is very intricate. It's a very fascinating business. You're never tired of it, you never say you're bored, never. And, you know what? I learned . . . I learned so much about it, do you know that I could even sell at the time diamonds, show. . . this was one of our big things, and mountings and show them to customers and. . . and take the diamond and show them how it would look into a mounting. It was great. I always enjoyed it. It was wonderful. And I knew what I was talking about. And, . . . and many times a small jeweler would not have enough stock, you know? So he would give a written order or he'd call up and say I'm sending up this customer, this man, and you. . . you can sell him anything he wants and bill it to us. Well, of course, then we knew it would like. . . he would be selling them, but we would take care of it, see? And that happened many, many times that we had. . . we did this. And I enjoyed it. Oh, there were so many times when I helped people, especially Christmas, many men from stores who would come up and they didn't have some of the things they were looking at, they'd ask me to help them. And I. . . I had lot of fun helping them with. . . and then he'd come back and say, oh, my wife just loved it. It was just the thing she liked, you know? And the jeweler, too, it was no. . . he didn't have to fuss or worry and there was

- A. (Continued) the. . . the sale was made for him. So that was years ago, and quite a number of years ago.
- Q. Where did you do your buying?
- A. Well, our buying was all from Providence and from New York.
- Q. And did your husband go out there to. . . ?
- A. Oh, yes. We used to go. . . we used to go about. . . a few times a year to Providence to buy, oh yes, some of the largest manufacturers in the country . . . or the gold people. . . the people that make chains and fancy jewelry and rings and so forth. And many of them from New York, too. And they would come. You know, two or three times a year they would come on a regular timing like they do before spring, before fall and all. And you knew they were coming because, of course, they would let you know and then you would buy their lines.
- Q. Are there seasons in the jewelry business?
- A. There was. There was a time when you would buy, say, for. . . oh, I have to have all this for Easter or have to have this all for June, you know. I have to have it all for June, for bridesmaids and ushers and so forth. But, actually that. . . that isn't anymore. You have. . . you buy and you have it, and this is something special that they want, then you order it for them. And, no, things have changed the whole. . . You know, young people today. . . well, a lot of them are making their own rings; you know, or making their own jewelry and so forth. But, I remember when we first started to sell wedding rings. Oh, my goodness! We had hundreds of styles and in every size. And I can remember when we first started when a man began to wear a wedding ring, yea, that. . . that was slow, but it finally got there, and it was great. I had a lot of fun selling them. So, this. . . things change. I think everything. My son-in-law says mother you would never believe what's

A. (Continued) going on. Now, it's a complete change all the way around. So everything changes with the time. But it was fun at that time, and it was hard work, but it. . . it was rewarding because you enjoyed it. You enjoyed what you did. And my husband especially enjoyed every minute of it. And he liked what he was doing. In fact, in 1965, and that was his retire. . . was supposed to be his retirement of Social Security, you know? And this is funny, and I said well, you're 65, time to get your Social Security because you've been in it from the very beginnings. And he said, no, I'm not retiring number one. And second, he says, I'm not even going to take Social Security because I want to work all day long. And if you take Social Security you can only have a few hours because you can only. . . at that time you could only earn a certain amount of money. He said, I don't need it and I don't want it. Imagine! Until he passed away for three years, he never took Social Security. As I say, there was a man with. . . oh, he was. . . he was really one of the very few, let's say, that you meet and in these days or those days of business. And this is what he believed in, and this is what he did.

Q. When you hired people, you said first you hired one person and then you hired

. . .

Q. We had a. . . we had a. . . a young girl, in fact, I just received a note from her. They live in Texas. She came out of Mercy High School, and we had a man who had an office right next to us in the Burke Building, a Mr. Hayes, gentleman. And he was quite a. . . a. . . well, now I'm not sure I should say a. . . and I think he was in oil or something, had his own little office. And he always admired the way we worked and the way we did things. And when. . . we said to him one day, would you know of a. . . a young girl to start, we figured that was a beginning. And he said, you know, I think I. . . I think I can get someone for you, I know just the type that you would want.

A. (Continued) So he went to Mercy High School, and they were just graduating. No, this was the last year. And I guess he spoke to the teachers there, and they had two girls who they said they would send out, both. . . one came, and that was Betty. And she came, and she said yes she thought she would like to work, and start. And right from the beginning we knew she was great because she was smart, she took to it. And don't forget she didn't have that much training in. . . in typing or secretarial work, this is secretarial work and typing. But, she. . . she got on and she would come I think from one to five. And she did that until she graduated, came in on full time, was with us for 22 years. She was part of our family. We watched her getting married, having her five children, and I don't think she would have left my son-in-law's office only that her husband was with Hickock and they were going down south and he was said either take this job down south or remain. They felt they were quite young, and so they would go along with it. They had nothing to lose. Oh, we felt terrible, you know, but we felt it was a wonderful thing for them. So they went and they really. . . they've been down there now about four years and they're really doing so well. She is brilliant. She has a very large position, and we always knew. But she said her best training always came from us, and so I. . . we hear from her and she'll pick up the phone for a birthday or anything and call us. And then the bookkeeper is still with my son-in-law. And I think she's been with the firm about 15 years. And then my daughter was always in it. We always had an. . . an errand boy, you know, to run errands, to do the packing after a while because we just couldn't do it on ourselves, and I had to take it a little easy. And, you know, out of that. . . that. . . I called it the backroom, came boys who became priests, who became doctors, who became officials. And each one has always come back to tell us that the training. . . and they

A. (Continued) felt so at home. And. . . and they. . . they loved this working. And don't forget these were just errand boys. But, when they came, I know my husband used to give them, sit down I want to talk to you. Now you will begin to work here, but one thing we want is honesty. And if I ever find that you aren't you're going right out, and remember if you have anything to say, you see things are wrong, you just don't like what you see, you're not enjoying it, just let us know. But, they all stayed. And, as I said, there was this one young man worked for us a number of years while going to college and coming or going to the R.I.T. That's where we got many of our boys, from the R.I.T. and working and coming to work for us part-time. And they all come back. In fact, not long ago, just before I took sick we went to a wedding of one of the boys that used to work for us, and invited us all, yes. We. . . we really had a relationship with our. . . with our help was always great because we treated them just as we want to be treated, and they became our family.

Q. Were most of your customers Jewish? Or were many of them. . .?

A. No, honey,, very few were Jewish. Most of them were non-Jewish. Non-Jewish. And as I said, we became great friends. And my. . . my husband could walk in there and just have his pad maybe and pencil, and they'd say well, all right, Hyman, look over and see what we need. They knew that he would never order more than. . . that they. . . than they wanted to. And that they. . . he would always do the right thing, they never. . . they were always aware that everything would be right. I remember one particular time we were in Erie with my oldest grandson. We had gone on a visit, and we had a very good account there, and they. . . they also have gone out of business. And my husband said to my grandson, come on, I'll show you how it's being done, he said. 'Cause he loved. . . he loved business, you know. And he went into

A. (Continued) this firm and he said, well, I'm here visiting but I thought I'd come and see you, he said. Well, you got your pad and pencil, Hyman? He says, sure, he said well all right, let's go ahead and let's do some ordering. And my grandson said he'll never get over it. He says, Grandpops, he said, got an order for \$1,000 that he didn't expect, you know. And this is the type of people we had. But, my son-in-law still has some of them, but most of them have gone out of business. And, in fact, recently he was in Buffalo, and a very fine concern, and he said it was getting too rough there, they were eventually thinking of giving up. But when he. . . he'd go in there, he was always sure of getting an order. Integrity, that's what they found in his work.

Q. Were there any cyclical, sort of ups and downs in the business as the economy went, you know?

A. Oh, of course there were. There were. . .

Q. Can you remember any?

A. Oh, yes. There were. . . oh, many years that things. . . as I said the first years, you know, we. . . when we started actually that was a bad time. That was a struggle when things were bad, who's buying jewelry at that time? So, it was really rough. And, there were many times, you know, when the economy is good, people buy. And when it isn't, they stop buying. So that. . . oh, there were many times. . . but, of course, then the war came along, you know, and people were buying. They were working overtime, making a lot of money, you know, and so they were buying a lot of jewelry. And. . . and then it became fashion. . . real fashionable for people to have a lot of jewelry, you know? So, this went along the same patterns, you know, that people would buy. And even today I often wonder about the way the jewelry business is. But, there are still people who have a great amount of money to buy a lot of

A. (Continued) jewelry. You have people who just don't buy any at all. So, it changes though, changes. Right now I think there's a great change because, you see, young people actually don't have money. They're going to school or they're starting, getting married or getting started. So, if their parents have a little to give them, very well. And so otherwise, they're more interested in what they can do, their homes, their apartments. And that takes a lot of money today to live. So, I can say that it's the older people who are maybe retired or have. . . have a good retirement plans who are buying, I think, see? I really haven't discussed that too much with my son-in-law, you know, often. But, a lot of people have money who are buying. And there are stores that are doing very well, and they have a very fine clientele who will always come back. You know, there are people who will go back to the same. . . this is Rochester, see? Will go back to the same store because they believe that this is the store will give them the. . . what they're looking for and that their. . . their methods of doing business are on the level. And then there are people who will go around to any old place to buy. It doesn't matter where they'll go, and they'll buy a diamond. Or all they're looking for is a diamond they couldn't care more or less where they're buying it. So, you have all kinds of people and. . . and what. . . what they think about buying, what they. . . what they want to do. But, I don't think actually young people have that much money to buy. And still I hear some of them say, well, they're getting a diamond ring and so forth and so on. But, I. . . I really don't know. I don't think that much today.

Q. Do jewelry fashions change the way the dress fashions change?

A. No, not the way. . . no. Gold is always gold, you know. And simplicity. . . being conservative you never can go wrong because it's gold, see? And even . . . as my husband used to say, there's a customer for everything. What you

A. (Continued) will think won't go, well, a certain person will like. It's very conservative and sold separately you'll say, who's gonna like that? There's always someone who will like that. And so you always bought . . . that's what we always did, we bought the best. And so even if it just didn't sell, maybe at that particular time, it would sell later. 'Course, that's really not a good business practice because turnover is the idea of doing good business. But, gold is sound. Gold is always good, you can't go wrong with diamonds, you can't go wrong with solid gold. 'Course then, these later years, the way the gold shot up, everything went so high, sky high, it was. . . it was really tough because I know my son-in-law would say I. . . I'm out selling rings, for instance, at this price. And, when I come back to reorder it's so much more, and yet you've sold it this price. This is what you want to sell it, customer wants it that way. So, you reorder and a new price, and this is. . . this was really rough for them to deal with the change of prices, oh there was no stopping there for a while. There was no stopping.

Q. It's gone back down now, though.

A. Yes, it has. But, if you have it, you see, but if you've bought . . . we'll say, supposing you bought a lot of solid gold chains, you know, and you bought them at the high price, you still have them. All right, they're lower, but you can't sell them for lower. You bought them at that, see? And depending the quality and the. . . the fashions, you know? But, on the whole if you're conservative you can't lose. . . you can't lose too much. But, you have . . . sometimes you were stuck. I particularly remember about twenty years ago, twenty-five . . . you got enough time?

Q. Oh, plenty.

A. Twenty-five years ago, we bought from an outfit these chokers, these snake chokers? And the earrings and the bracelets and many beautiful things. Well,

A. (Continued) it went quite well at the time. Then suddenly, plop. So, in order to buy that particular line you had to buy everything. You know, this was something years ago. If you wanted a certain line you had to buy everything they had. You may not have liked some of the things that you had to buy, you had to be a pretty good salesman to sell these things, some of them. So, there we sold a great many of these snake things, oh, it was going over big, pendants and the chokers and earrings, beautiful earrings. And, you know what? Both earrings and bracelets, beautiful bracelets, and then there was a lull after a couple of years, just couldn't sell them. They were laying in trays, what we had left. And, actually I guess we sold them time after time, but they were laying. . . that was lost, money lost. And, today I have some of them, you know? And I. . . I always kept it because it was so beautiful. Today it's just what they're showing now are the chokers. And, in fact, I gave my granddaughter one or two of them, and I have a few pieces that are positively beautiful. And it's exactly what they're showing now, see?

Q. You must have a wonderful collection.

A. I. . . I do. I have some very, very simple things, they're nice. And, you know, this is funny. My husband always. . . always thought this was crazy, but I never particularly cared about diamonds, but I did love beautiful rings, a collection of nice rings. And when the salesman would come through and I would see something that was unusual that I wanted, I would get it. So I have a nice collection of rings. . . rings, earrings and things like that. But, they do. . . they change as you. . . now especially there's a great change, you know? In jewelry, fashionable, because people are wearing so many rings on their fingers, you know? And everything is this high stuff and, oh, many of these things that we never thought we could even sell. You know?

Q. When you couldn't sell something, could you sell it to somebody and have it melted back down to gold?

A. We never did that, no we never did that. But, there were people. . . see, if you had many old rings, I would say, like wedding rings or anything that was plain gold and it didn't go for many, many years and you kept it and you kept it, then you could send it away to a firm, legitimate firm, and they weighed it, told you how much it weighed and what you would get for it. So that was better than having it lay around, you know, because it was absolutely no use of any kind. So, something you took back and you couldn't resell, you know, or something like that. So, oh no, we never . . . never had too much of this, but there. . . they did, they did, many people did. I'm sure other firms must have done a lot of this. After all, we were just a small firm, you know, we're not talking about these great big ones. But, it. . . it. . . as I say, it was very. . . very intriguing business, just lovely. In fact, I found a pin yesterday when I went to my apartment, I was home to my apartment. And there's one of the girls from the beauty parlor here getting married. She's been married before and been divorced, had rather a rough life. She's a very nice person and this is finally come into her life; it's a beautiful thing and I. . . I feel real happy for her. And she kept saying I just bought my gown, and it's light blue and if I could only have something old, silver pin, I. . . I would love it. I said are you sure you want silver and she said yes. Well, I went. . . yesterday, it was the only thing I did. I rummaged through my drawers and there I found a beautiful silver pin with a blue stone, and when I gave it to her I think she was overwhelmed. She says I'm only borrowing it, and I said no. This is a present. And it was. . . oh, it's probably twenty-five, thirty years old. But, just as beautiful today as it was then. But, I've had it. I'm a saver.

- A. (Continued) I do give things away, you know, here and there to my family, to different ones, I have a pretty nice collection. So, . . .
- Q. Can. . . can you think of any facet of the business that I've neglected to ask you questions about or anything, stories, or anything like that?
- A. Yes. I can think of one thing. You know, during the war it was hard to get jewelry, you know, because the factories were making many things for. . . they were. . . became war plants. So, many of the factories were making jewelry but there was such a demand, as I told you, for jewelry. And so my husband would go down more often to Providence because the men would not come through because the people were coming there to get whatever they could. He would go down there and because he had a wonderful reputation all the men in all these large outfits were very loyal to him. And they'd say to him, well, we'll give you some extra this and we'll give you some extra . . . and he would come home with great amounts of jewelry. And, . . . and many of the stores and the individual small. . . you know, there were at that time many small jewelers who did work like in offices and buildings and sold to their individual customers. And many of them. . . now the Burke Building was known as the jewelry building. We had so many of them that did that. And they would come up to buy from us, see? Or to any other jew. . . you know, wholesale jewelers. And so when he came home, oh, they all began flocking home. They came up and say, is Mr. Cohen back yet? I'd say no he's gone. And I'd say no, but he'll be back maybe tomorrow or the next day. And they would wait till he'd come back. And, do you know what? At that time I know that many of the people were getting any price they asked. Well, we'll take for instance a watch band on a watch. And if you sold it for wholesale at \$3 then, and he bought it as the regular price, there wasn't any difference at the factory, and he could come back and he could command any price because

A. (Continued) at that time there was no price on things, you could get anything you wanted. And do you know what? It was still the same price with him. And, you know, he used to dish it out like ice-cream. And I . . . I remember many a jeweler would say to him, now Mr. Cohen can't you give me five or six, I'll give you much more. And not three, I'll give you six and seven. He'd say, I'm sorry, I've got to treat every one of my customers alike. And they all have to have one or two. He said I make. . . I make no favorites. And he would sell it to them for the same prices he did before. And, I did a . . . I thought it was rather silly, this was a good timing for him, but you could not change his principles or his way of life. And this is the story we tell because many of our customers would come up and tell us that was. . . that only. . . only. . . he was the only one that they ever heard of doing anything like that. And that's what he did right through the . . . during the war. We would sell. . . we did. . . he'd say, well I'm doing all right. And I'm selling a lot of jewelry. And I always made a profit, even at \$3, so why. . . why should I take it out on . . .?

Q. OK. Well, I've got one last question.

A. Yea.

Q. And that is what kinds of changes. . . what kinds of changes have you seen in Rochester over the time you've been here, and what direction do you think it's going in? The city.

A. Changes in' the city?

Q. Just, you know, in general. Just. . .

A. Oh, I think. . . oh, I've seen so many changes. So many new buildings, so many . . . well, let's see, new buildings and cultural things.

Q. Do you think the lifestyle has changed?

A. Lifestyle? Well, I think so. I think it. . . it has. You know, we're so

A. (continued) near New York that in an hour you can get there. And that's where so many people go, always went. But, a cultural. . . we've always had wonderful things here. We used to go to all the concerts. In fact, I saw things that people have never seen even in New York, you know? Like ballet, the Russian ballet and things like this came here. And, so that has improved our . . . our galleries have improved. And. . . and many, many things. . . the city has improved taking care of people a little better. I think the . . . the black people have progressed a great deal with their own offices and have people speak before them and something to say in politics. I think on the whole that we're. . . we're speaking out. And I think there's been great changes in everything. In radio, in T.V., motion pictures I don't know. I don't. . . some of the things we've been seeing in these last years I don't approve of, but there've been great changes on the whole I think. In building, yes. And a great deal of building, a great deal of building for the senior citizens that has gone on in the city, loads of them as you go through the city. And, they've been given more opportunities. Like we have today, we have what we call the people from Seneca Towers, now that is for senior citizens, the rent is for senior citizens. And it's a beautiful, big place. I don't know how many hundreds of people. . . and they're brought here once a week and they have a full day here, and it's all free from lunch right through the day. So, they've improved on many, many things that I don't know about: But, I know there are many things. I think Rochester is very outstanding in. . . in trying to do many things that other cities have not tried yet. I think it's civic pride.

Q. Well, I want to thank you very much for participating in the. . .

A. Well, it's been. . . it's been. . .