Sara Stone Transcript

Rosalind Hinton: ...at her home 12-G 1 River Place in New Orleans, Louisiana. Today is February 7th, 2008. I'm conducting the interview for the Katrina Jewish Voices Project of the Jewish Women's Archive in the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Mrs. Stone, do you agree to be interviewed and understand that the interview will be video recorded?

Sara Stone: I do.

RH: You do? Are you sure?

SS: I'm positive.

RH: OK. Let's start with your childhood, and what year you were born, what city you were born.

SS: I was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana. August the 23rd, 1915.

RH: And tell me a little bit about Bogalusa and growing up in Bogalusa.

SS: Bogalusa was a sawmill town then. Now it's a paper mill, but it was a sawmill town, and it was very new. My father, who was in New Orleans at the time. Very young. He had come from Poland. Don't ask me how he got to New Orleans because I really don't know, except that there was some family here. And he came down and heard that somebody was going to build a sawmill in a little place near Orleans and decided that would be a good place to go and that he would grow with the town, and he did.

RH: What did he do?

SS: He was a merchant. He opened a store after he was there a few -- he worked for somebody else, and then opened his own store, and eventually opened some picture shows and grew with the town, and was a good part of the town. Got a lot from Bogalusa, and he gave back a lot. Living in Bogalusa was really quite pleasant. That always surprises people. I was interviewed once by somebody from the Times-Picayune, and he said, “Well, what was it like growing up Jewish in Bogalusa?” I said, “It was wonderful.” He was crestfallen. He was so disappointed. He expected to hear all kind of horror stories. It was fine. We had family there, and we were -- we had everything that we wanted. We had all the dancing lessons and music lessons and elocution lessons -- not to any avail. But we had them, and we enjoyed them.

RH: Was there a temple?

SS: In the late 20s, my parents -- my family -- they raised money in the community to build a small synagogue. The land was donated by the Great Southern Lumber Company, which owned the mill, with the provision that -- it was very interesting that the foresight they had -- with the provision that if it was not used for 20 years, I think -- something like that -- the land would revert back to the Great Southern Lumber Company. Which it did.

RH: Which it did. Do you know when?

SS: No, I don't know exactly when. They gave -- there was so few people living in Bogalusa that my mother, a couple of cousins, maybe somebody else -- and they were told that they would -- 5,000 dollars would be given to any charity that they chose -- excuse me. And so, they gave the money to the Jewish Children's Regional Service at that time. And we started a fund there called the Bogalusa Fund. A scholarship fund. Youngsters from small towns. I got ahead -- way ahead of you there. But they opened this synagogue, and around 1928, I think, my grandparents were -- my mother's parents were the first people to walk into the synagogue. It was used on the High Holidays only.

My mother tried to get a Sunday school going, but it was never successful. So I grew up with absolutely no Jewish education at all, and it's been the regret of my life. I could have done something about it when I moved to New Orleans, eventually, but I didn't. I'm sorry. It was composed of a congregation that was -- did you get the form?

RH: Mm-hmm. I sure did.

SS: Did you notice I didn't put down what kind of synagogue I belong to? Because it was kind of hard to tell. They imported a Rabbi on the High Holidays. But the congregation was composed of everything. There were people who were Reform, Orthodox. They didn't do anything about Conservative.

RH: I think you put Conservative.

SS: I did for the one I belong to here. But the one in Bogalusa, they usually imported an Orthodox Rabbi.

But the congregation was composed of -- I guess the degree of observance there would be from about a minus five to about a seven on the scale of one to ten. But everybody went. You sat there as long as the services went on. But that was it. It was almost never used for anything else. And people came from other small towns around Bogalusa. Towns like Franklinton and Columbia, Mississippi, Hattiesburg, I think. Or maybe I'm wrong about that. But at least we had something on the High Holidays. It was much more difficult -- it was a much longer trip from Bogalusa in those days, into New Orleans. You couldn't go as easily or as fast as you do now. There was no causeway over Lake Pontchartrain. You had to go to Slidell and then go to -- you had to cross the Rigolets and the [Tchef?], and the only way you could do that was by a ferry boat. So if you missed the ferry boat, it was a long trip.

RH: Right. So there was not even a railroad across the Rigolets at that time. There was no Highway 90.

SS: No, no. It was all by ferry. And you got there five minutes after the ferry left, and you just sat and waited for them to come back. So it could take hours.

RH: Oh, that would be hours from across Lake Pontchartrain.

SS: And then before they built the causeway, they did build a bridge that brought you into Gentilly. And getting through that traffic was a much longer trip today with the causeway -- it's a whole different thing.

RH: Tell me a little bit about -- you said your family -- you got a lot out of the city, and your family gave a lot back to the city. So, what was it?

SS: Well, it was a small town. I remember when I was a young -- very young. There was a sign -- a big bulletin saying -- 16 years old and 16,000 population. And I don't know what the population is now, but I think when I was in my 50s or 60s, I would go back to Bogalusa, the population was still 16,000. It did grow for a while, but then it stopped. And then there's really nothing there but the sawmill. That was the only industry. And it was a union town, which kept other businesses -- a very strong union town, which kept other industries from coming in. And all the little towns around it, which we sort of looked down on like Covington and Mandeville and Poplarville and Picayune, all grew. All grew, and it attracted people from New Orleans. People have summer homes, or they moved over there. Bogalusa just stayed like it was. But it was a nice, pleasant town. We were treated very well, and we had a lot of friends.

RH: Were there -- did your family keep -- were they observant?

SS: No. They were not observant at all. We only with -- on the holidays, we knew we were Jewish because we had wonderful food.

My mother was a fantastic cook. Her matzo ball soup and her crawfish bisque were equally good. No, we were not observant. But my mother would observe Passover. It’s

very interesting what Jewish people do.

RH: So you remember Passover? What would you do?

SS: Oh, I remember Passover very well. I used to come down with my mother. My sister and I would come down with her, go to Dryades Street, and buy all the foods that were necessary. And she would clean her kitchen, change dishes, do all the things you had to do. And otherwise, I don't remember any observance other than that. But we had all the right foods on the right -- on the holidays.

RH: Do you remember any of the conversations around the dinner table? I mean, were you influenced by your parents?

SS: Oh, I was very much influenced by my parents in many ways. My parents were pretty remarkable people. My mother -- they were both very good-looking people. And they were young, and they were strong. They loved to dance; they loved to play bridge; they loved to travel. And my mother was only 16 years old when she was married. And by the time she was 18, she had two children. She helped my father in the store. She ran her house -- house was beautifully run, food was wonderful, the doors were open to anybody and everybody. There was always room at the table for anybody who came through Bogalusa, needed a place to eat. They would work on Saturday, for example, until 11 o'clock at night, and then go fishing somewhere around the [phone ringing; inaudible]. Come back early in the morning. And I mean -- yeah, early in the morning, and boil the crawfish. Not the crawfish. The crabs and do whatever they had to do with the fish.

RH: Boil the seafood.

SS: Yeah. It was just a --

RH: So it was an abundant table.

SS: It was a very abundant table. Always, always. They were good, charitable people. They participated in -- everything in the community. My mother was on the boards of the YWCA and the Red Cross. My father was on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and led every drive that came along. He worked hard for the community and for his business. We were provided with everything. We were very happy children.

RH: So there wasn't any antisemitism.

SS: Oh, I'm sure there was antisemitism in Bogalusa. It was the home of the Ku Klux Klan. I mean, I can't say it was the home of it, because I think that whole area -- Saint Tammany Parish and Washington Parish.

RH: Still is.

SS: Yeah, but we were never bothered by it. When I -- I spoke somewhere. I had mentioned Bogalusa and what a good childhood I had. And a man who had grown up in Bogalusa said to me, “How could you say there was no antisemitism in Bogalusa?” I said, “I didn't say that. I said I was happy.” We were the teachers' pets all through school. My sister, my brother, and I. We were treated well. And our friends -- my sister and I had a -- my brother was eight years younger than we were. But she and I had a lot of friends in Bogalusa. Went out with the crowd. And we really never felt it. I'm sure it was there.

RH: And did you have servants or maids?

SS: We always had a cook --

RH: A cook.

SS: -- who really did everything. And then, at least about once or twice a week, a laundress would come to do the fancy things, like the -- all the laces and the pleats on

our clothes. My sister got very well dressed in those days.

RH: Well, your father was getting the clothes from Saint Louis?

SS: They'd go to New York.

RH: They went to New York, OK.

SS: When you went to New York, you took a trunk. And American Express would pick it up, ship it to New York.

RH: Oh really?

SS: You'd get on a train here that took -- usually they -- there were three railroad stations in New Orleans then. There was Illinois Central, L&N, and Southern. And you usually went to New York on the L&N train, which took two nights and a day to get to New York. And they would go and stay for two weeks then. It isn't like -- you know, you'd fly up to New York one day and come back to the next. You didn't go for less than -- at least a week, two weeks, something like that.

And they would go to the shows, and they would go to the theater. And they loved -- as I said, they loved to dance. They would go to nightclubs. And I remember my sister and I would love to open their trunks when they came home. They got all the stuff that they acquired in New York.

RH: Oh, how nice.

SS: My father had a brother who was married to my mother's sister. And they were in business together. And the first house we lived in, in Bogalusa had -- there were two houses built exactly alike. My family's house and the aunt and uncle's house.

They had two children. And we were equally at home in either house. It didn't matter to us where we were. So when my parents left, we just moved next door. And we were fine. That was fine with us.

RH: So you really kind of grew up with a big family in a way.

SS: I did. We were surrounded by people. And then, some of my mother's relatives moved to Bogalusa for a while. And after the First World War, my father had a brother -- no a sister living -- still living in Poland. And after the First World War, there was a terrible flu epidemic. And she and her husband died and left four children, the oldest of whom were in their teens. And so my father and my uncle brought the four children over, and they lived with us until they were able to go out on their own. I was so young then. I remember them, and I remember their being there, but I don't -- I don't remember the details. But my mother, who was around 20, herself, with two children of her own, raised those children -- or took care of those children until as long as they needed to be taken care of. She was remarkable.

RH: That is remarkable. And they weren't that much --

SS: Well, no, they weren't much younger than she was. I remember once being in Bogalusa, and one of -- there were two boys and two girls. One of the girls called my mother on Mother's Day, and she said Aunt Eva, I've just realized you and I were almost the same age when we came over. So she took care of it -- I just don't know how my mother did all the things she did. She was really remarkable. And those were not her relatives.

RH: Right. They were her husband's. Did they stay in touch over the years?

SS: Oh yes, yes. Eventually, the two boys started a business in Bogalusa. My father and uncle helped them do that. The two girls married and moved to New Orleans. None of them are living now. There are children of those children, but none of the four. Yes,

we kept in touch with them. The boys adored my mother. When they lived in Bogalusa, they came to our house frequently. And yes, they kept in touch with them definitely.

RH: Do you remember anything about the politics in your household?

SS: My parents -- I remember that my parents always supported somebody because I remember my father handing me a check made out to somebody's campaign, asking me to write a letter. Sometimes in my spare time, I worked up in the office in the store. And I remember writing letters to candidates, sending them money. I don't remember. I don't think people voted -- I don't remember hearing talk about the party -- the parties then. I just remember individuals. So they were active.

RH: And was there any conversations about segregation and that type of thing?

SS: No, no. I don't remember any. I remember my father helping some Afro-American women with their children's college education. I remember he was doing that sort of thing. I had a very strong feeling about that when I was growing up.

RH: You did?

SS: Somebody asked me how I could feel the way I do coming from Bogalusa, and I said, “I saw it.” In those days, if you were walking down the street, especially on a narrow sidewalk, they would step off the sidewalk and let you pass. I was six, seven, eight years old, and it used to really hurt me. I had very strong feelings about that.

RH: So grown men would step off for a six or seven-year-old.

SS: Yeah. And it really bothered me a lot. Or I'd see, walking home from school, I'd see Black children with not enough clothes on in the wintertime. It would be getting dark or something. Things like that used to worry me terribly. I must have gotten that from somewhere.

RH: Right, right. Somehow in the atmosphere of your home, evidently. Do you think? Do you have any idea where you got it from?

SS: Yeah, I think a lot of that came from my parents. My parents were genuinely good. And we were -- it was interesting. My mother was so smart. She gave us a lot of liberty, but she knew exactly where to draw the reins in. And we knew. We had -- when I think about the liberties she gave us in those years, it was kind of remarkable. But we knew when -- how far to go and when to come home.

RH: What kind of liberty? Like you know, when you think about that.

SS: Well, when I passed the high school years, went to college when I was 16 years old. And you have to remember, things were different than they are now. First of all, you went on a train, and you didn't get on the plane and get to wherever you were going in three hours. And you spent -- I went to Duke in North Carolina.

RH: Oh, you did?

SS: And there was a 24 -- at least 26-hour trip on the train. And Duke University then, the women's college, you had to be in by 10:30 every night, except Monday night. On the weekends you could stay out until 11. And if you were going to a dance, you could get special permission to come in later. And if you were going away for a weekend to a house party, you had to get special permission from home. You had to go to the social secretary's office and sign out. My mother, who was very busy, said to me, “Can't I just send a blanket letter saying you can go wherever you want to go?” Well, I think that was pretty good. I think she had complete faith in her ability to control the situation.

RH: Well, even sending -- go ahead.

SS: She was also very -- we went with a nice crowd of kids, and my mother -- our house was always open. If there was a party, my mother would say, “Why don't you have it

here?" Or if we'd say, "Mother, can we have a party Saturday night?" "Sure." She never said no. She wanted us in that house, not riding around Bogalusa in somebody's car. My house was open.

RH: And so there were a lot of different kinds of kids coming through for parties and things.

SS: Yeah. They weren't Jewish kids for the most part. Almost none.

RH: How big was the Jewish community in Bogalusa?

SS: You know, I don't really know, but there were enough families to maintain that synagogue. People have used the figure 40 families, which may or may not be correct. I think that'd probably about it.

RH: So even the decision to send you -- to let you go to college.

SS: Oh, I was going to go to college. That was a known. But I had a scholarship. It was 1931, which was right in the middle of the Depression. And a depression is something that you never want to live through.

Depression is a depression. It is awful. And it affected everybody. And I had a scholarship to Newcomb -- a four-year scholarship to Newcomb, and I didn't want to go to Newcomb. I had gone to camp in North Carolina. And among the people at camp were six people from one family in Durham, North Carolina. The name of the family was [Nachimson?], and the oldest -- they had eight girls and one boy. The boy was the ninth child. The oldest daughter in that family married a man named Evans, whose one son is Robert Evans, who was with CBS at one time. And the other was Eli Evans, who was the --

RH: The historian.

SS: Right.

RH: A Jewish historian.

SS: Right. So six of those people were at camp. A couple of them -- one was a counselor, the rest of them were campers. And they decided that I should go to Duke. So when they decided, I decided. And I didn't want to go to Newcomb; I wanted to go to Duke. And they let me do it. And when I look back on it and realize that was a sacrifice for them then, but I went.

RH: So you didn't have a scholarship there?

SS: No.

RH: How did the Depression affect your family and you?

SS: Well, it affected them a great deal. Their income -- well, they lost a lot of money -- they lost what they had accumulated in the stock market. Business -- people had no money. Business was terrible. When I went to -- when I finished Duke, I went to the Tulane School of Social Work for one semester and decided that that was not for me. I don't know whether you want all this.

RH: Yes, I do, actually, keep going.

SS: My casework class -- my beat was the French Quarter. I was placed with the Department of Public Welfare, and I had clients in the French Quarter. And I had to visit them -- I forgot now -- regularly. And we had to make budgets for them. They taught us how to make a budget. And you'd sit down and make a budget, and then they'd give you a check for three dollars to deliver to a family. And I remember one time, we had to ask the families if they if they wanted -- they had to choose. They could either have a blanket, or they could have coal. And to this day, I wake up in the middle of the night

wondering which one I would have taken if I had to choose. I still hadn't decided that. But it was really -- the Depression is the right word. It was so hopeless. Men were so helpless. There were just no jobs. They had no money; they had no place to get money. It was a terrible thing to go through. I can't say that I suffered through it, but I certainly saw the difference in the way some of the things my family did or did not do. But the general feeling was just awful. I used to dread the -- it took me years to get over my feeling about the French Quarter.

RH: Really?

SS: Yeah. The French Quarter was, to me, just a terrible place to have to be with no money. These people, really they, just subsisted on nothing. And it took a long time, and it didn't really begin to pick up until to any extent until the Second World War.

RH: So the French Quarter. Were black and white living there, or was it -- was it just tenements?

SS: Oh no, they weren't tenements. There were -- you'd go into little patios, and there would be a house or two. And people living there who were just out -- the men were out of jobs. There were black people living down there, but none of my clients, as they were called -- they were all white. The hopelessness of it was a terrible thing to see. Just terrible.

RH: Where did you live when you came to New Orleans after Duke?

SS: I stayed in Bogalusa for a while. Well yeah, I came to New Orleans to go to Tulane. And my sister and I lived in an apartment on Saint Charles Avenue. And I'm trying to [take the timing?]. I went to Tulane -- oh, I meant I left Tulane after the first semester and did something against the advice of the Dean of the School of Social Work at Tulane. The Dean of Women at Duke University called me and told me that there was an organization in Richmond, Virginia, called the Southern Women's Educational

Alliance, and they were looking for somebody to do an apprenticeship with them. And the Dean of the School of Social Work said, “Don't ever take an apprenticeship.” But I took it. And went to Richmond, Virginia, where I stayed for about six months. And I spent out of the six months, probably spent three months in Breathitt County, Kentucky, where they had a program to give vocational guidance to high school students. And that was really an experience. My mother was so frightened because it had a reputation for -- well, it was one of those feud counties where there were feuds, and people got shot.

There was a doctor there who was supposed to have treated more gunshot wounds than anybody in the United States. And when Franklin Roosevelt and Mayor Cermak from Chicago, I think, were riding in a car, and Dr. Cermak got shot. I mean -- not Dr. Cermak, but the -- Mr. Cermak was shot and died, everybody in Breathitt County said if they had got one of the doctors from their county -- a Dr. Boch -- that he would have survived because he was the expert on treating gunshot wounds.

Anyway, I went and -- I went there a couple of times. Stayed in a little railroad hotel the first time. And then the second time I went, we had a program at a little college called, I think Lee (sp?) College where these teachers came -- high school teachers came to be trained so that they could train their teachers. And that was really an experience. There may have been one teacher who had finished one year of college, and the rest of them were high school graduates. And they were teaching in the high schools. And we had sent out a questionnaire for them to answer. And it was just amazing. The teachers, there was no -- some of them had absolutely no punctuation.

Grammatical errors. I'm probably talking very carelessly, so you're getting that from me too. But it was really -- we had these -- we worked on these answers that we had gotten back from them. Made a booklet out of it. The National Education Association picked it up and devoted an issue to it. My copy was destroyed in a fire. I would give anything to have that back. It was really interesting. I stayed out there for about two months.

RH: So you really found it a great apprenticeship.

SS: It was a great experience. It didn't lead to anything, but it was a great experience for me. And then I can't remember why, but I went home. And then my mother was determined to get my sister and me out of Bogalusa. I told you she was smart. And my sister and I lived down here, and we decided to go to a business school. And while we were at the business school, I had got engaged. And so I quit.

RH: So this was before World War II?

SS: Yes, it was 1937, something like that, I guess. And When I quit going to the business school, my sister quit too. She had enough. And I got married in 1938 and became a New Orleanian.

RH: OK. Well, how did you meet your husband?

SS: At a party.

RH: And so by this time, were you -- were the parties primarily Jewish parties?

SS: Here? Yes. Here? Oh yes. Yes.

RH: Were you connected anyway to a synagogue here when you were young?

SS: Not until we got married.

RH: Not until you got married.

SS: Oh, I did come down here -- I came down here when I was about 12 years old, I guess. And I was visiting an aunt of mine. I went with her at a confirmation at Gates of Prayer, which is a Reform temple, and I decided that that's what I -- I wanted to do that. The Rabbi from Gates of Prayer was a Rabbi Silber.

S-I-L-B-E-R. And he would come to Bogalusa occasionally for -- when they needed a Rabbi, he would come out there. So we knew him. And my mother asked him how I could be confirmed, and he said he would send me material to study. And then I could come down, rehearse for a couple weeks. So that's how I made my confirmation, but I did it.

RH: You kind of did it on your own, huh?

SS: Yeah, I did. And I didn't really learn a lot because that was the extent of my preparation for the confirmation, but at least I did it. And I've always been very glad that I did. So anyway, we were talking about -- or you were to ask about congregations? My husband, at that time, had left Beth Israel and had joined Gates of Prayer. And so that's where I was.

RH: OK. Where was Gates of Prayer then?

SS: It was on Napoleon Avenue. And contrary to what most people still think, it was a definitely a Reform temple. People would refer to it as a Conservative. And it was not. And it didn't bother me, but it bothered the Rabbi. He was -- he wanted to be known as a Reform temple. Now they've moved out to West Esplanade.

RH: Right, out in Metairie.

SS: Yeah. And it's definitely recognized as a -- I think --

RH: A Reform.

SS: I have -- I had three sons and then a daughter.

And one of my sons -- the second one -- began to go to a synagogue named Chevra Thilim, which was on Clayburn Avenue, not too far from where we lived. I lived uptown on Jefferson Avenue then. And he not only started going there, but he got himself a

Hebrew teacher and began to learn Hebrew. And my husband and I started going there with him. And he would come home and say, “Pop, they called me up for an honor today, so please send them the check.” And I think we were sending more money then than we were to our temple. So we decided to move over there. And we stayed there until they merged with Tikvat Shalom -- down on West Esplanade. And then they changed the name to Shir Chadash.

RH: Do you remember the controversy about seating?

That kind of split?

SS: I remember it. I wasn't involved in it. I didn't think it mattered to me. And I knew so little about my own religion that it didn't matter. I know it a lot more now because I've learned from my son. Anyway, I went to Tikvat Shalom -- (inaudible) a Rabbi. I knew his name. That's terrible. Scratch that.

RH: Heller?

SS: No, no, no. I'll think of it. He was absolutely wonderful. And I really liked being there. I like the people who belong. I could not read one letter of Hebrew, but I liked being around people who knew what they were doing. And I really liked it. And I stayed. And there's another Rabbi there now. A young Rabbi. And I still like it, and that's where I go.

RH: So you're at Shir Chadash.

SS: Yeah, I'm at Shir Chadash.

RH: [Kurtzman?].

SS: And I really like it. I grew up in a small town -- Bogalusa -- and all of my friends -- or most of my friends -- went to churches of all denominations. And while I had a -- I sort of

envied them having a place that was -- where they felt completely at home. But I feel more at home a Shir Chadash than I do in a Reform temple, even though I cannot follow the service. If they didn't have the English translation, I might as well not have a book in my hand. I found my place.

RH: Place there.

SS: My son is quite observant.

RH: What do you like the most about it?

SS: I like being in a situation where people seem to know what they're doing and enjoy what they're doing. And it just feels right. Now I may have gone to a Conservative synagogue somewhere else and then have a completely different experience, but this hit me. And I really like the people out there. I feel good when I go. I don’t go often, but I like it when I go.

RH: So did you raise your sons and your daughter to go to --

SS: They all went to a Reform temple. They came out with -- knowing more than I did, but definitely not enough. And that was very true of temples in those days. I hope it's better now. I think it is. I shouldn't be saying all this stuff.

RH: I don't think that's a problem; I think most people realize that there was that generation where --

SS: That really had no education.

RH: Right, right.

SS: And it -- what it brought about was a real split in this community between the Reform group and the Orthodox group.

There was a very strong line between -- it's not completely erased, but it's certainly a lot different now because they -- the education is better.

RH: The education is better in the --

SS: Jewish education is better now than it was. And a lot of people I know -- a lot of my friends who are younger than I am have taken advantage of the classes that -- that are given now for adults. People who were never exposed to that kind of teaching are now going to classes, and they're learning. And they -- it's this whole different kind of atmosphere now. I just wish I had done it.

RH: Well, why don't you tell me what you did do? Because you --

SS: I raised my family.

RH: You raised your family.

SS: I got involved in the National Council of Jewish Women -- the New Orleans section. And that was mid-century -- 1946, I was asked to go on the Board. And I think every president -- I became president of the organization in a few years, and I think everything president who comes in thinks that she has coming into the best part of the history of the organization. I'm convinced that I got the best. It was really a group of remarkable women, and I was exposed to not only the one -- the people who are a little bit older than I was, but I was also exposed to some of the founders of the section because they were still on the Board as honoraries. Mrs. [Joseph?] Friend, whose name I'm sure you must be familiar with, is still coming to Board meetings. Mrs. Rosen -- Mrs. Charles Rosen was still coming to Board meetings.

And I could go on with -- really, there were quite a few of them who were still there. Plus, the ones who were the contemporaries who were really quite a group.

And I got started there. But that was 1946. And the Second World War had just ended. Because I got to be known by some people on the Board, I was asked to come to a women's division meeting of the -- for the Jewish Welfare Fund. It was the first meeting held -- first campaign after the Second World War. And Edith Stern's sister -- Adele Levy (sp?), who lived in New York, had started a women's division, and it just spread all over the country. And this was the first meeting that I had ever gone to, and I think it may have been the first -- I know it was the first meeting after the war. And I heard -- what I heard at that meeting just absolutely blew my brains out. I was so affected by that. And it really changed the direction of my life. We went through that campaign --

RH: Tell me what you heard.

SS: Well, I heard what had -- I can't say I heard the full story of the Holocaust because nobody will ever hear the full story.

I read books now and pick up a newspaper and read things I've never heard before, and I have read a lot. You never -- there's something new all the time.

But we did get a pretty good dose of what had happened. It was amazing how little people like me -- when I say people like me -- people outside of government and high position news people, maybe. It seems so absolutely unbelievable that we didn't know more than we did today with television that shows you what's happening in a tiny little village somewhere in Africa, and here we were and didn't know really what was going on in Europe. So we heard a lot that day. And we were -- it was devastating. It was just unbelievable. And money was given that year in unprecedented amounts. What today you wouldn't get excited about. But I remember the Rosenwald family -- Edith Stern's family -- gave a million dollars. That was really something in 19--

RH: Yeah, that's a lot of money.

SS: And then she gave -- she and her husband gave something locally. And she also gave a luncheon. The minimum donor luncheon -- and the price was, guess what? A hundred dollars. It absolutely -- you can't believe what it did to this community. A hundred women are going to give a hundred dollars? But they flocked too. There were so many people that Edith Stern had to move it to a restaurant called the Patio Royal in the French Quarter. I don't think it exists anymore. If it does, I (inaudible). But anyway, it was a tremendous success, and it was sensational. The following year, 1940--

RH: Seven?

SS: This was for the '47 campaign. The following year, Israel was on its way to becoming a state. And so many people in New Orleans were members of the American Council for Judaism, which objected to the creation of a Jewish state. And they all just disappeared. The people who were -- with some exceptions, the people who were most able to afford to give large amounts, just about disappeared completely. And we -- most of them to this day don't give.

Or have never given. Those who are still alive. Their children and their grandchildren are very important members of the Federation and the campaigns and so forth, but we struggled for a long time.

RH: So it was really controversial about making Israel a state?

SS: Very controversial. Very controversial.

RH: Can you remember and tell me what some of the controversy seemed to be?

SS: I don’t know what they objected to. I think some of them really thought it was going to affect them. I guess they did. And they did not want any of their money going -- we even had resignations from the Council of Jewish Women because we supported the establishment of the State of Israel. But the welfare fund really suffered for a long, long

time. This was not an overnight thing. This went on for a long time. In the 60s, things began to change. Leon Uris wrote *Exodus*.

We went to Israel in the 70s. We were able to go three years in a row, and we had the same guide who was really wonderful, and he could not stand that book. Just mention the word, and he would go into a big tirade about what a terrible book it was. And I said, “Don't knock it. That book is bringing more money into the Federation since the Welfare Fund campaigns than anything that's ever happened.” And then came the Six Day War, which also changed a lot of people. That was interesting. There was one man in this town who never thought of giving to the Federation, gave 100,000 dollars after the Six Day War. He liked that spirit. And then, from then, it began to pick up. And they began to -- they were having trips to Israel. The Federation -- trips to Israel -- sponsored them. And things picked up from there. And today, it's a whole different ballgame. There are still people living -- I'm sure -- who never support the campaigns, but there are a lot of people whose families did and who are very, very involved today. And it's a much more united community than it was.

RH: Do you remember in the founding of the State of Israel, were you involved in any fundraising for really revolutionaries, I guess you'd say? I know that that was going on in Chicago and some other cities.

SS: Oh, it was going on here. I was at my -- my husband was to a small degree. But I knew the people who did. And I don't want to mention names, but it's really surprising some of the people who did -- who managed to get those ambulances and airplanes and things like that that they needed. I remember being in on conversations about it. I didn't have the kind of money in those days to participate beyond the campaigns. But I remember -- I knew people well who did.

RH: And you were in support of --

SS: I worked -- I practically ran the women's division in the basement of my house for many, many, many years. There were a few of us who stayed involved and managed to keep the women's division going. It wasn't easy because we -- so many people who could really support us didn't.

But we did it. And to this day, there's a sort of a camaraderie among those of us who are left. We go to Lion of Judah meeting or something, and we look at each other as if to say, “Remember?” That never fails.

RH: A number of women talk to me -- and now I've done 80 interviews -- about you being a mentor and a role model to them.

SS: Well, I don't consider myself a role model, but I think what they -- I did work hard to keep the women's group going. And then when some years later after -- you know, more people had come in, and people were giving more money. Mary Wolfe (sp?) who was -- had been -- was chairman of the women's division that year, asked me and Joyce Belitzer (sp?) to head up the -- no, there was no Lion of Judah then. But they called it Lifesavers division. The minimum gift, I think, was a thousand dollars. Which was a big step forward then. And we did. And I stayed with that division for a long time, and really -- I worked with other -- with co-chairmen. But I worked with them for a long time. And then some of the young people took it over and ran with it. So I guess if I'm accused of anything, I'm loyal. When I go with something, I stay with it a long time.

I've been on the Board of the Council of Jewish Women since 1946, and I have stayed involved the federation in one or another since 1946, I guess. But it was a struggle. It was really a struggle. And it's something that's a very important part of my life. I mean, I've had other things that I'm devoted to, but I -- there are two things that stand out in my mind. One was the -- I'll never forget my first meeting of the Jewish Welfare Fund, Women's Division. And I'll never forget the years that we -- through which we struggled. But almost at the -- simultaneously, in 19 -- well, let me go back. When the war was

over, and there were so many people left in Europe with no place to go -- survivors. Not just Jewish survivors but non-Jewish survivors. All denominations. There wasn't a country in the world that would take them in any numbers.

[END OF FILE 1]

RH: ...Stone. And you were just getting into this very dramatic story about survivors.

SS: I said that at the end of the war, those who survived -- many of those who survived, had no place to go. They couldn't go home; they couldn't go anywhere else. No country would take them. The Dominican Republic, of all places, took some, and they started a dairy business in a place called Sosua, which I'm sure does not exist anymore. The dairy community must not exist. I never heard what happened to... Anyway, after the -- and they couldn't get into Israel because there was no state. It was still Palestine, and the British wouldn't let them into Palestine. And so they sat mostly in these displaced persons camps until 1948, I think, the United States passed a displaced persons act under which they would allow a certain number of people into the United States. There were three ports of entry: New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco. The ships started arriving in 1949 and continued to arrive about once a month for three years. The last ship came sometime in 1951. The ships ran somewhere -- a number of people on the ships, some ran somewhere around 1,200, 1,300 people. A little less sometimes. And they could be anywhere from 150 to maybe 300 Jewish people on the ships. The rest were -- it was every denomination. You had to be sponsored, either by an individual, family member, or some individual, or by an organization like HIAS -- the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, United Service to New Americans.

In New Orleans, the Jewish community was represented on the dock by the Jewish Family Service, which in those days was housed in the same office as the Federation. The national representatives from these national organizations that I just mentioned were on the dock. Sometime before these people arrived, they were -- their destination was

already decided by whatever agency was sponsoring them. And I guess this was true of all denominations. On the dock were representatives from the Lutherans, the Catholics, the Jews, et cetera, et cetera. The local organizations like the Council of Social Agencies, Social Welfare Planning Council, I should say. The Red Cross was there, policemen, ambulances, whatever was needed was on the dock. Most of the people who came off the ships were going on to other destinations.

Some stayed here. But they were going everywhere. Some of the ships that came here, the people were going to California. But they knew before they came where they were going. Or they knew when they got -- certainly when they got here where they were going. Occasionally, one of them -- one of the people who got off the ship would persuade the powers that be who were on the dock to change. And they were able to do that under, I don't know what conditions, but they did. Then there were volunteers on the dock. The Council of Jewish Women was the volunteer arm of the Federation. Not officially, but we were. And the woman who organized the people for the Council of Jewish Women.

A wonderful woman named Clara Schwartz.

One of the few names I will mention, but she was really quite remarkable -- was not only in charge of the council volunteers, but she was also in charge of the whole city. And this meant hundreds and hundreds of volunteers.

Tremendous organization. You had to have every agency on that dock like ambulances, policemen, social welfare people from everywhere. And this carpool that we were talking about. The carpool was a non-denominational carpool. When you came up on the dock, you picked up whoever was ready to go -- and picked that person up. You could be -- you get Catholic and pick up the Jewish people, and et cetera. Otherwise, each group had its own volunteers. Those who were going on to other destinations were taken to railroad stations, where they sat until their trains left. And I'm sure everybody must have

had their volunteers at the railroad station. Those who were going to stay here were sometimes taken, I guess, to whatever agency -- somewhere by the agency. I don't know what they did. But the Jewish people who came in were taken to the Jewish Community Center, where we had another group of volunteers who fed them. There was food; they had nurses there; they could take showers; they had beds for -- cribs for the babies. They had everything. And I'm -- this story now has been told so many times that I'm sure you've heard it.

Anne Levy, who was one --

RH: Please tell it.

SS: Well, it's one of my favorite stories. And I'll tell you the end of it too. They were taken to the Jewish Community Center, where we had all these things that I just mentioned. And Anne, 50 years later, I was a volunteer at the Anne Frank exhibit. And I had nothing to do for a little while, and so I walked into one of the classrooms in this building -- a room. And Anne Levy, whom I did not know at that time. Didn't know who she was -- was sitting in that room talking to a bunch of schoolchildren. And as I walked into the room, she said -- she was telling them what happened when she arrived on the dock in New Orleans. And she said, “After we finished all the processing on the dock, we were taken to the Jewish Community Center where the ladies” -- this is her quote – “ladies of the Council of Jewish Women greeted us.” She said they had food, and they had nurses, and they had showers. They had thought of everything, including white tablecloths. I can't tell you what that did to me. And I started to laugh, and I started to cry. And I started to run out of the room to call these women who had done all this and realized they were gone. And I had nobody to call. It was, I think, the most emotional moment of my whole -- I know of my volunteer career.

So she tells the story, and I tell the story. And it got lost in this -- (inaudible) in the film, which was too bad. Anyway, we took them there. Then at night, the husbands would

come to the Jewish Community Center and take those who were going on trains to wherever they were going. Take them to the railroad stations. Those who were staying here were taken to hotels temporarily until they found housing. And the Council of Jewish Women had another group of volunteers who helped them furnish -- get furniture for the -- furnish the houses, they took them to grocery stores, taught them how to shop, got their children involved in -- enrolled in schools. We had English classes, and we had naturalization classes, and whatever was needed. But being on that dock was an experience that I have never forgotten. It stands out whenever we talk about volunteer, this is the thing that stands out in my mind. So all of this business starting with the Federation campaigns and this three years of having these ships come in was a -- all came at the same time.

You know, in the same short period of time. And of all the many things I've done, these are the things that really stand out.

I've been very involved in -- through the Council of Jewish Women, and was for many years -- chair of the Education Scholarship Committee. And we had no professional staff. And so I had to do -- I did all the interviewing. And then, the decisions were made by a committee. But I was the only person who knew the applicants. And at some point, many years later, Nancy Timm and Anne Thomson took over, and they are still the chairs of the scholarship committee, and I'm still on the committee. Then I went over to the -- Viola Weiss and Sandy -- Viola and Sandy Weiss were directors of the Jewish Children's Regional Service. I'm sure you must have some information on that their organization, right?

RH: I've just kind of been on the edges of that organization.

SS: Do you want any more on it?

RH: Yes, please. Tell me exactly.

SS: In the 1850s, there was a terrible yellow fever epidemic, and many people died. There were lots of orphans left -- widows, orphans. So the Hebrew Benevolent Aid Society, which was the forerunner of the Federation, built an orphan's home -- widows and orphan's home, on the corner of Jackson and Chippewa Streets. You know that part.

RH: I do.

SS: And eventually outgrew that and built the home on Saint Charles and Jefferson where the Jewish Community Center is. At some point, they decided that the orphans and the widows did not belong in the same institution, and so they moved the widows over to Touro Infirmary, where they paid Touro $12.50 a month to keep the home -- you know that Newman Schools built for the children in the home. Eventually, in the 1940s, they came to the conclusion that the home was no longer needed. There were not that many orphans anymore. The theories about the best place to take care of children like that -- the opinions had changed on that. So they closed the home, but they continued it as an agency to serve the same seven-state area that it served before, providing certain services to them.

The man who came down from the institution in Cleveland that had been -- had had close association with the home, came down to close the home, decided that they really needed -- even though they didn't need the home, they needed services for these children. And so he stayed on as the -- and became the director. They changed the name to -- it's changed several times. But it eventually became the Jewish Children's Regional Service.

At some point, he began to lose his eyesight. His wife, Viola, had come down with him. She was a fabulous caseworker. And she worked for the Jewish -- not the Jewish -- she worked for the Family Services Society of New Orleans. When he began to lose his sight, she moved over to the Jewish Children's Regional Service.

And she was the caseworker there, but they really worked together. And when he died, she became the Director. I always consider it only one Director through all those years until Ned Goldberg arrived to become the Director. I had, as I told you, did the interviewing for the scholarship committee. And when I was asked to come on the Board of the Jewish Children's Regional Service, I grabbed at it because I thought it would be a wonderful training for me. To have Viola train me to do what I had been doing. She was just fabulous.

RH: What was her -- can I have her last name?

SS: Weiss. W-E-I-S-S.

RH: Oh, that's right, you said that.

SS: So that I worked with on the Educational Scholarship Committee for them. Well, I still am on that committee. I don't really know what year I came on, but it was a long time ago. And I -- it's really been the big interest -- my really big interest for many, many, many years. Not only just the scholarship part but meeting needs of needy Jewish children, of which there are many. It's amazing how many Jewish people don't know how much need there is among Jewish people. Not just children, but people. And I've stayed in the area of trying to help needy children, but I'm going -- becoming increasingly interested in the degree of poverty among Jewish people in this country and in Israel. And this bothers me a lot. I don't hear much about it, but I read about it. New York, for example, has a tremendous number of Jewish people living at poverty level. Philadelphia has. We do not have the degree of poverty, I think, in our region. This is my own opinion. But we do have poverty, and we do have a great deal of need which the Jewish Children's Regional Service meets. And in the city, the Jewish Family Service. We take care of scholarship needs and certain other needs for children in New Orleans.

We do not overstep. We don't -- once the word I'm looking for? We don't duplicate.

RH: Right, other services.

SS: Yeah. But you know, you have rural communities, you have smaller communities that don't have social welfare services specifically for Jewish kids. There are a lot of Jewish kids living in small towns who have no exposure to any Jewish education, for example, or exposure to other Jewish people. So that when you send a Jewish child to a Jewish camp, you're really making big changes in that child's life. And then you have people who have special needs, either physical disabilities, mental disabilities, emotional problems. And an increasing number of grandparents who are taking care of grandchildren.

RH: Really?

SS: Oh yes. Not only among non-Jewish people but among Jewish people.

RH: Yeah, well, that kind of, I guess, surprises me.

Because I do know that's the case in non-Jewish.

SS: I don’t have figures on it, but there are enough, so -- Ned Goldberg has really done a good job there. He has formed a club for these people. And last year -- I think it was last year -- at the annual meeting, he had three sets of grandparents there to talk about their experience. They all said that they had never had to turn to any agency assistance until they had to take their grandchildren. And these are for three couples who had never spoken in public, and they were absolutely wonderful. They talked about their experiences and how much it had helped them to have a place to turn. I don't know if anybody taped it, but I hope it's on tape because it'd be a great thing to have. Really good.

Anyway, that's basically my history with the main things I've done. The main things to me.

RH: Who are your role models? Who are the most important people in training you?

SS: Well, I'm glad you asked that question because I had the best group that anybody could ever have had. And it really hurts me to think that so many of these names mean nothing to people now. The person who [wrote?] invited me onto the board of the Council of Jewish Women was Irma Isaacson. You know --

RH: Well, I know the Isaacson --

SS: You know that's Nancy's grandmother. Nancy Timm's grandmother -- Margery Bissinger's (sp?) mother. Irma asked me to go on the board. I had met her at the Tulane School of Social Work.

She was married, had children, and she invited me to her house for dinner a couple of times. And then, I didn't see her until 1946, when she invited me to join the Board of the Council of Jewish Women. She was great. Wonderful.

She was a mentor not only to me but to so many people who came after me. And when she died -- she died very suddenly, I think in 1973 -- and the people who had succeeded me as presidents or officers of the Council of Jewish Women loved Irma. They were so shaken when she died, and they wanted a memorial. And I agreed with that. I thought Irma -- that we should memorialize Irma, but I wanted something that would last. I didn't want a little piece of something stuck on a shelf somewhere; I didn't want -- I wanted something that would be forgotten in a couple of years. And I proposed after we had a lot of discussion that we name the council scholarship program after her. So it became the Irma M. Isaacson Memorial Scholarship Fund.

And her daughter, Margery, has been extremely generous to the fund. And her granddaughter, Nancy, is a co-chair of the fund. So it survived -- it has survived. I think last year we helped out 12 or 13 local kids go to college.

And so I'm so glad that it's something that did survive, and it looks as if it's going to survive for a while.

But there were others. I think I had more mentors than anybody else could have had. There was a woman named Babbette (sp?) Marx who -- the structure was such in those days that you had a vice-president in charge of whatever you were doing. And Babbette called me almost every morning and was just wonderful to me. Clara Schwartz, whom I've already mentioned. And incidentally, when Clara died, her husband established a book fund -- part of the scholarship fund. The book fund provides extra money for books for anybody who gets a scholarship. And that has survived. Clara was the person I told you who was in charge of this whole city when the ships came in.

RH: So, as a mentor, it was just being around these women, or did they teach you?

SS: They didn't sit down and say, “Now Sara, I'm going to teach you something.” But just what they did and their behavior and their actions. I mean, when Babbette Marx would call me and say, “We're having the Board meeting at such an such a day at such and such a time, and I want you to do -- report on this. And I suggest you include this, that, or the other. And be sure and call your committee people and talk to them about it.

Call me back”. You know, that sort of thing. This went on with me without anybody saying, “I'm going to sit down and teach you,” so that my orientation was wonderful, and my training just continued.

But I had not only -- I had Irma and Clara and Babbette, and a woman named Henrietta Boch, Helene Gaucho (sp?), Mildred Heller. I could go on, and on, and on.

RH: And so all of these women --

SS: They were very -- they were mature people, they were people who had done a lot of things in the community. In those days -- and I guess it's still true today, but most of

these women whom I've mentioned were also on boards of non-Jewish organizations. They were on the boards of the Community Chest in those days, and then the United Fund, Social Welfare Planning Council, which also changed its name a few times.

Very active in the drives -- the Community Chest drive. They served on the Family Service Society Boards. They were familiar with the community and familiar with Jewish organizations too. They had a know-how, and they had a maturity that was wonderful to be able to absorb.

RH: Is there something unique about this Jewish community in all your years that --

SS: Well, you know, I've never lived anywhere else except Bogalusa.

But I can only -- it is unique. I would guess that -- I would say that it was unique. Yeah, I really am not going to talk about this because I don't really know it well enough. I'm sure that there are other cities in the South who have the same kind of social makeup.

When I first started out, there was a lot of -- there was a lot of mixing among Jew and non-Jew. We were not part of the Carnival -- that Mardi Gras thing.

But we were certainly part of the social welfare scene. My information has been, and I think I'm correct, that three Jewish men started the Community Chest. Do you have that information too?

RH: No, I don't.

SS: Well, my information has always been -- I really need to check this out to be sure. I'm sure -- I used to be sure. David Fishman, who was the head of the Federation, Julius Goldman -- I don't know what his position was, but he was a -- he had been trained as a social worker, and he became head of the Community Chest. And Rabbi Leipziger from Touro Infirmary -- Touro, excuse me, Touro Synagogue -- started the Community Chest.

And we were housed in the same building, 211 Camp Street. Housed the Federation, the Community Chest, I think the Social Welfare Planning Council, but other agencies. We rode the same elevators; we were on first-name basis with the heads -- the directors of the other organizations. Everybody -- it was like a family kind of situation. And did I say this already? At one time, they took turns as head of the Community Chest. One year there would be a Catholic head; one year, there would be a Jewish one; one year, there'd be a Protestant.

RH: Really?

SS: Mm-hmm. I don't think that's true anymore. I know it isn't true anymore. The whole organization world has changed. But in those days when I started out, we were sort of -- 211 Camp Street, we were really a big happy family then.

You just, automatically, you just knew everybody.

RH: Can you talk about the family values or the Jewish values that have propelled you into this kind of activism that you've just --

SS: You know it's funny. I have told you before, I had no Jewish education. I still am not educated in any way. Except the only thing I have really ever learned is the degrees of observance among Orthodox Jews because I have one son who is Orthodox.

So I have observed -- I mean, I saw many of the things he's told me about -- I never knew that there was -- you were either Orthodox or Reform. I had no idea that Orthodoxy was as complex as it is. So that part I haven't learned. But I always had a very strong Jewish feeling. Very strong.

RH: And when you say a Jewish feeling, like a --

SS: I just, you know, I had a feeling for Judaism, I guess. I don't know how to say it otherwise. Even though I had no training, I had -- I was trained to eat the right foods on the right holidays. I knew I was Jewish, and I knew I was in a Jewish home, even though we weren't at all observant. Except for Passover, as I told you. And we went to the synagogue on the High Holidays. But there was just something about it I... We used to get three new dresses for the High Holiday. And even though the holiday might come on the fifth of September when it was 95 degrees, they were winter clothes that you wore.

Believe it or not, we used to walk to the synagogue, which was at least a mile away from my house. Maybe more. In our new fall dresses. And I remember my sister and I were walking, and my father passed us in the car and waved to us. OK, you want to know how I was brought up? He thought that was funny, and I think it is too. I just had the feeling. I don't know where it came from. My parents let me know I was Jewish. I mean, I was very aware of that. And I think in spite of what I said earlier, when you live in a small town where you're a real minority, you know that you're not like everybody else.

So whatever it was, I just -- that's the way I felt.

RH: Were you involved with the Council when -- it seems like the Council was very involved in the civil rights movement.

SS: Oh, they were. Oh yes, I was involved in that. That was during my time. As a matter of fact, in the 40s, when most of the things happened that I've told you about, the civil rights movement was going on at the same time. The interesting thing is, to me, we had no problem within our own group about the civil rights movement. We supported it without any objection from membership.

The State of Israel was a problem.

RH: Isn't that interesting?

SS: It is interesting.

RH: And so you --

SS: We had resignations, we had objections, but never for anything we did in the civil rights movement and the people who were involved in those days. My very good friend, Dorothy Betty Levy, who is deceased, was president in -- let me get this straight now. She was right in the middle of it. It was in the 50s -- early 50s. She had crank calls, telephone calls, obscene letters, obscene phone calls. My husband's law partner, a man named John Minor Wisdom. You know --

RH: Yes. (laughing)

SS: Was on the bench through those years. He got phone calls all night long. And you know he got up and answered them. He answered every phone call. They found -- snakes were thrown into their yard. And Dorothy Betty went through all that. But she went through it -- Dorothy Betty was one of those people who didn't get excited, but I don't know what it did to her family.

RH: Do you recall what the National Council of Jewish Women -- some of their stands over --

SS: Oh yeah, they were definitely among pro. I mean, they were just civil rights movement.

They were definitely on the right side.

And the local section was -- but I just think it's so funny. Here we are in New Orleans in the Deep South, not a complaint that I ever heard of from our membership, but we sure caught it on the Israel thing.

RH: And you're saying in '48 and '49, the civil rights movement was really starting then?

SS: Oh yeah, sure.

RH: That's a story most people don't know because it blossoms in the 60s.

SS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). It didn't just -- yeah, but the Supreme Court decision came down in '54, right? '54.

So it just didn't start overnight.

I remember John telling us that -- there was an organization called the White Citizen's Council. And I can't remember the name of the man. I do remember the name of the Rabbi. His name was Spector (sp?). The one I couldn't remember. He was wonderful. The White Citizen's Council put out a rumor that John Wisdom had been -- I think it may have been right before John was approved for the bench -- a rumor that John Wisdom was seen going into the Jewish Community Center. And John said, “I did go into the Jewish Community Center that night with my flat tire. I had to go in and use the telephone to get somebody to come and fix my tire.”

RH: So that rumor was true.

SS: That was true. John was the most liberal person I have ever known or ever expect to have known.

RH: Really?

SS: Absolutely. No prejudice. Well, he would never become a partner -- started a law firm with Saul Stone if there'd been any prejudice there.

1929. Year of the Depression. Year of the stock -- when the stock market crashed. And he and John finished Tulane. They had -- John had gone to W&L where his father had received his diploma from Washington -- from Robert E. Lee.

RH: Oh, wow. W&L was --

SS: Oh, W&L -- Washington and Lee.

RH: Oh, Washington and Lee. W and L, OK.

SS: Very careless.

RH: Father from Robert E. Lee. Got his diploma from him?

SS: Yeah, I'm almost sure that's right. Anyway, he finished W&L, went to Harvard Graduate School, and decided to go to go to Tulane Law School. He and Saul came from completely different backgrounds. Saul was the son of immigrants -- Jewish immigrants. John was among the elite social group. And Saul came in first on an exam, and John second.

And John decided that’s the one I want to study with. So they began to study together. And when they finished law school, they decided they would open an office together.

So you don't do that if you -- he had no prejudices at all. I don't think I've ever known anybody like -- I know I never known anybody like him.

Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

RH: Well, Sara, you talk about a White Citizen's Council.

Did you experience more antisemitism once you came to New Orleans?

Was there --

SS: No, well, I don't know about that. I don't want anybody to think that I'm saying there was no antisemitism in Bogalusa. But I must say my sister and I came through it without. I don't remember any event, anything that ever happened to me there.

You know, and I did feel it when I went to Duke University. I had no idea -- well, I knew I wanted to -- was going to Duke; I was going to be in Durham, North Carolina. I knew it was a very good school. It never occurred to me that they wouldn't take me. I sent one application in. You know, this was 1931. And I arrived at Duke, and there were five or six Jewish girls on the campus. That was it. And we really stuck together. We had friends among the non-Jewish girls. But we had our little group. And as I told you, when we wanted to go away for a weekend, we had to have special permission. We went over one day with a little group to sign out for a house party in Chapel Hill, which was really fun. Those were fun. I had a wonderful time at Duke in spite of all this. One of the girls who was invited was not Jewish. And we went over together to sign out. We went to this little office. And the social director said to this girl, “I'd like to see you outside.” So they walked outside, came back. This girl signed her card, and we left. And I said, “Well, what was that?” I knew.

She said, “She wanted me -- wanted to know if I knew that I was going to a Jewish house party. And I said I told her I knew where I was going.” Then, I had come out of Bogalusa High School. I was the valedictorian of my class and about as uneducated as anybody could be.

I was not prepared for Duke University. And so, for a couple of years, I didn't do too well. In my junior year, I hit my stride. I had caught up. And I had to go see the Dean of Women for something. And she said, “I just wrote your parents a letter.” And I said, “You did?” She said, “Yes.” She said, “I was so pleased with your report” -- I had made straight As. And she said, “I wrote them a note.” And she said, “I think it was you. I know it was one of you girls.” I hear that -- I've heard that all my life since, and I have never forgotten that. And that was the first time I had ever run into anything like that. I found out -- I found out. I went, that's where I found out I was Jewish. And through all this stuff that's going on at Duke -- you know when they had that Palestinian conference there a couple years ago, and then the [soccer bit?]. I sat there.

I composed so many letters to the president of the university. I stopped paying my -- whatever I used to send for my annual gift to Duke, which wasn't very much. And decided to give it to the -- what's the name of the organization? The Jewish something or other for the Righteous Gentiles.

You know that organization that sends money -- helps out people who help Jewish people during the Holocaust? It's the Jewish something.

RH: Oh right, right, right. The right --

SS: The Righteous Gentiles. So that's where my Duke money goes now. I'm not sorry I went there. I had a good education. I'm proud of the way I finally pulled myself out of the Bogalusa High School and got to be a junior. I liked being there; I loved going to Chapel Hill for house parties. But I have never forgotten those two incidents.

RH: Tell me about -- did the women's movement have any impact on you at all?

SS: No, you know, it's really funny. I'm all for the women's movement. But I always felt. I remember as a youngster, I just felt we had certain rights. I never thought of it as a woman. I thought of it as individuals have rights. And they belong to you, and that was it in my book.

My daughter points out things that I did that it never occurred to me that anybody would notice, like going to Duke University, in spite of the fact that my parents didn't want to go. In retrospect, I feel a little ashamed of myself that I wasn't more aware of what this meant financially in those days -- during the Depression days -- '31 to '35.

1931 to 35. But I just felt that I had an independence that I just must have been born with. I never thought of it as a woman; I just thought of it as an individual.

RH: Well, were you supportive of -- like NCJW has a stance on choice, for instance.

SS: I know they do. And that's fine. They should.

I don't really want to comment on.

I just think they're -- I'm for it.

I support it. And I think definitely as a women's organization, we should support it. I don't think it should be the one and only thing in our existence. I think that there are a lot of -- (inaudible) I'm not going to talk about this.

RH: OK. We don't have to. I mean, certainly, your life has been well-rounded. You're dealing with poverty; you're dealing with refugees; you're dealing with --

SS: I've had wonderful experiences. I really have. And I've done things that I really wanted to do. You know, nobody forced me to do this. I don't do it for anything else except for the fact that I've seen the needs to something that interested me. I did it. I don't analyze it. I don't analyze things like my rights. I just feel that I have certain rights, and that's it.

RH: So, have you ever had any roadblocks because you were a woman?

SS: No, but the kind of life -- I've led such a sheltered life. You know I got married -- I've never worked. A little bitty. Nothing jobs.

But I haven't had to work. I've always been taken care of. I have led as about a sheltered a life as you can live.

I've never had to worry about who was going to take care of me. Somebody's always been around to do that. Well taken care of by my parents and by my husband, my family, my children now.

So I've had an easy life that's had one terrible blow, which my son -- when he died. But outside of that, I doubt anybody who has had an easier and luckier life than I've had. That's why it was so hard to take that blow because I wasn't prepared for it.

RH: Your son died right before Katrina.

SS: He had pancreatic cancer, which we found out maybe two and a half months before he died. Found out, was diagnosed. And that was it. And so when some of these questions about Katrina that I really didn't go into, it's so mixed up in my mind that I'd have to really sit down and sort it all out.

I'm not sure that I haven't got through with it because it's just such an unreal kind of situation. You know to be in this house during the storm and hear the windows going bang, bang, bang, bang all night long, and then every once in a while, you'd hear a crack. And I was sure one of the windows had broken. Can you imagine coming through here? But it was the wood blowing off some of the trim on that terrace out there.

RH: Were you by yourself?

SS: No, my daughter was here with me. She lives in a -- lived in an area that floods when there's a hard rain. And so she came down here to stay here and was with me all night long. My birthday -- David died on the 16th of August.

My birthday -- 90th birthday was on the 23rd of August. Somebody had sent me a tin of caviar. And the night of the hurricane, she and I went into the kitchen. All the lights were off. We had only candlelight. And the refrigerator was off. And I said, “Carol, you can't lose that caviar.” So we sat there and ate caviar by candlelight. And I had some filets in the refrigerator that we took.

And I have a gas stove, so we ate caviar and the filets and listened. We had a radio that we could use. Listen to the news. And at some point, everything got quiet. It was over.

And we were so excited because it was -- the storm had passed, there'd been no major damage to us, and we hadn't heard about any real bad flooding. And then, the next morning, Carol came in my room, and she said, “Mother, we have to leave.” And I said, “Why?” She said, “The levees have broken. And everybody has to get out.” And people in the building were telling us that we had to leave. So we went over to Baton Rouge, where I have a niece. And we stayed there a couple of days, and then I couldn't stay there forever. We couldn't get back to the city at all. So we went to New York and stayed there. We went with maybe one or two changes of clothes. We thought we'd go over there for a couple of days, and we'd be like -- anything else, we'd come back. It didn't work that way. You weren't allowed back in the city. So we went to New York, and at some point, I came back down and got some clothes and went back up there and stayed up the power was on in the building. Had to replace some of my appliances. My freezer, my refrigerator -- then kind of stayed in a hotel when I came down. And then went back to New York and stayed -- I stayed there for three and a half months.

RH: Did you connect with the Jewish community here while you were away?

SS: No. I didn't know where most -- a lot of my friends were. I kept up with my family. I may have been in touch with a few friends, but that was it. First of all, everybody was so scattered. They were all over the country. And the Jewish Federation did a fabulous job of finding so many of the people, getting addresses and phone numbers, cell phone numbers, et cetera. But they did a fabulous job of tracking people down. They moved to Houston, set up headquarters there. The Jewish Children's Regional Service set up offices in Houston.

The Federation there gave them office space. And they all had to just put the pieces together as well as they could. Both organizations did remarkably well -- heroically well.

RH: Did it make you proud to be Jewish when you saw how the Jewish community was responding?

SS: I think this community has always been a good community. I think we went through some hard times, and that's the other thing I've told you about.

But by and large, when they put it back together, they've always done a good job. This has been a good Jewish community. We've been well represented in the community; we've done a good job considering our numbers. But I am proud of the way that the Federation and the other organizations kept going.

I am proud of that. They did a fabulous job, and I was up in New York, not doing anything except keeping up with my family and trying to pick hotel -- I mean restaurant reservations. I have eight grandchildren. I have two children living in New York -- eight grandchildren in New York.

My third child, my daughter, was there a lot when I was there. Everybody wanted to go out to dinner, and I was the one to pick the restaurants and make the reservation. I got so tired of hearing, “I'm sorry we can't take you at 7:30, but we can take you at 5 o'clock or 10 o'clock.”

RH: Welcome to New York.

SS: So I spent a lot of time doing that. And keeping -- my housekeeper had -- she lived on -- at a rented house on Louisiana Avenue Parkway. And her area flooded, and she waited with her husband at the corner of Napoleon and Saint Charles, where she was picked up by a bus and taken to the --

RH: Superdome.

SS: No, to the convention center, where she refused to get off the bus. And so they put her on another bus and took her to Arkansas. She told me that that was the first mountain she'd ever seen. And I didn't know where she was, and I was frantic. And I sent word -- I don't use a computer -- I sent word to all my grandchildren, “Get on your

computers and find Frankie.” And they did. Somebody found her. And located her. By that time, she had persuaded the people in Arkansas to give her bus money to get to a little suburb of Jackson, Mississippi, where she had family. And so we found her there. And my only real contribution, I think, except with the buying tickets for concerts and donations of one particular night, I kept her going for two years until she was able to come back. I gave her full salary. And she's home -- she's here. She doesn't have a place to live yet.

RH: Where's she living?

SS: She's living with her son. She's just found a house, so we're going to move her from Jackson -- I mean her things back from Jackson into this house that she's going to rent.

I think that was my -- I really am not just saying this to pat myself on the back. I just want to feel that I did make a contribution.

RH: Well, kind of gratitude. It sounds like more like you found her.

SS: Oh my gosh. I was frantic. You know that's a terrible feeling. Imagine what it must be like to have a member of -- somebody -- I'm close to her, but it's not my family. It's not my son, one of my children, or they're looking for me, or whatever. Can you image what it must have been like to have to not know where people were? Because I know how I felt about her. And they found her. And we stayed in touch. And she’s back now.

[END OF FILE 2]

RH: I'm going to start the tape. And this is tape 3 for Katrina's Jewish Voices. And I'm speaking with Miss Sara Stone. So you were talking about that you came back into the city three months later, and you couldn't believe --

SS: I was totally shocked at what I saw. My daughter lived on Octavia Street between Clayburn and Fontainebleau, which is the bowl. If it's going to flood anywhere, that's where it'll flood.

She had come down and gutted -- had our house gutted. She found somebody to do it. And she sold her house, which was really lucky. But they lost everything on the first floor of the house. The piano was turned over, the refrigerator was floating.

You know all that kind of thing.

Records and tapes and books and that kind of stuff -- photographs. She had come down; she told me what it was like. When I came down, and I rode on Octavia Street, Nashville -- I could not believe my eyes. I was so stunned. And then, when I saw where Gerald and Joan had lived, I was totally unprepared for that.

RH: That was in Old Metairie.

SS: It's still like a ghost town. Nobody's building out there. Gerald and Joan are among the few who've done it. That area is really a disaster. And I had friends who lived in Lakewood South who've left town, never coming back. I lost a lot of friends.

RH: Did you?

SS: Yeah. A lot of my friends have moved out of town. And a lot of people I know. They weren't close friends of mine, but people I hated to see leave. I was heartbroken at what I saw when I came down here. I mean, I was upset about it, but I really didn't get it until I came down and saw it myself. And then when I rode down into the 9th Ward and saw the destruction down there -- I've taken out-of-town people down there a few times. I've hired a guide with a van and gone down there. And I still don't believe it. It's just so awful. But if you weren't here to see it, you could not imagine it. And I still think they never really gave the right -- hit the whole total picture. Not the right picture, but the total

picture of what happened in this city.

RH: You mean the media?

SS: Yeah. They were wonderful about giving us publicity, but they did not put across the degree, the extent of the damage to the city. It wasn't just one area; it was 80% of the city. I ride up Clayburn Avenue -- I go out to Oxford Clinic a lot. That's my home away from home now. I still can't believe Clayburn Avenue. It's horrible. Never been beautiful, but it's terrible. Businesses and homes, never been rebuilt.

RH: Did you think the rebuild would be further along by this point?

SS: I hoped. No, I didn't really -- yeah, I guess I did. I guess I did. I did.

I'm disappointed like everybody else.

On the other hand, when you consider what this city was like, we've come a long way. I think with the right leadership, that would have been different on all levels.

RH: You mean political leadership?

SS: Yeah. What do you think, how much of this has been done by private interests -- individuals -- how much they've done with no organization? Look what they've done in the 9th Ward.

RH: Right. It's all been --

SS: So much of it's individuals.

RH: Yeah. And you know, just small charities and small community people.

SS: Yeah. Charities.

All those kids who came down and worked on it. I had a -- one of my grandchildren came down with a group. And she called me, and I said, “Don't you want to go to dinner?” “Oh yeah, they'd love to go to dinner,” she said, “but there are three of us,” or four of us, or whatever it was, “and we don't have any real clothes.” I said, “Just wear whatever you got.” I took them to Galatoire's. And my granddaughter kept saying, “I can't believe this. I can't believe that I was where I was today, and I'm sitting in Galatoire's.” Everybody's having a great time, and they're busy, and it's noisy and festive. And so she said -- she's been to Galatoire's before -- she's like, “I can't believe this.” The contrast between what she had seen and what she was doing that night.

But word got around what they were doing, and all the waiters came by and said nice things to them. And they have a very young waiter there. Nice -- very nice, young kid. And he came by the table several times, and then before we left, he came by the table, and he said, “I just want to tell you, you're doing God's work.

Thank you.” You couldn't have bought those kids for a million dollars.

You know, so many people have come down, and what they've done here. It seemed to me that governmental offices, with the resources that they have, could have done more than they have.

RH: What are your hopes for the city and for the Jewish community?

SS: I hope for the city that it gets to be back to what it was. Not just before the storm. It needs to go back further than that when it was a more thriving port. When big businesses like the oil business had big buildings here and they were occupied -- to be what it used to be. The Jewish community needs people. We are so small. We've always been such a small part of the population here. And the people we lost -- the few thousands that we lost -- were very valuable. And we need them, and we need other people. I think what the Federation has done by bringing in -- bringing young people

down here is a wonderful thing. I hope they like it, I hope they find jobs and settle in, get their kids in school.

We really need those people, and I think that was a very bright thing to do. It's worked so far. I understand -- how many people have I heard -- like five or six hundred? I think something like 300 entities, which is really kind of remarkable.

RH: And how's Shir Chadash, because it lost --

SS: Oh, everybody lost members. First of all, they had a lot of damage, which they're repairing. And they've lost -- everybody lost members. The Council of Jewish Women membership is down. I'm sure Hadassah's is, the Federation. You know, that's a lot a people when you have so few to start with -- to lose that many, that's a load. And to keep functioning the way they have. They all manage to keep going. We've had wonderful help from other parts of the country.

RH: What do you think the Jewish community's relationship is with the larger community in New Orleans?

SS: I'm not in as good a position now as I used to be on that. I'm not sure that I'd be completely accurate. I think, by and large, we have a good relationship here. There's the Mardi Gras, which I think most Jewish people don't really care one way or the other. I don't know whether you read the article that Mr. Talladonna (sp?) wrote for Commentary Magazine -- what Mardi Gras has done to the Jewish community, and that's kept them out of this, that. I remember years ago, there were quite a few Jewish people who always left town during Mardi Gras because they didn't want to be here, not be invited -- included. I think people leave town here because they just find it such a darn pain in the neck to get around now. A lot of people leave. I would leave too, but just -- like this year, I just didn't have the energy to do it.

But just to get away from the crowds and be able to go out to dinner if you want to. But I don't think people leave town for social reasons the way they used to because I think, for the most part, I don't think most people care.

You know, I don't think it bothers them.

They have their social group.

There's mixing. There's a lot of mixing here. And I think as most communities go, we do -- my impression is that we do pretty well. A lot of people have non-Jewish friends. I don't think they think of it as that. They're just friends. And then there are people who don't. They perhaps stay within their own circles. I can't really generalize with that because I'm not as close to the social scene. I don't mean that I was on the social scene, but I was closer to it through people than I am now.

RH: Do you think the Jewish community's relationship with African-Americans in the city, how has that --

SS: In the city?

RH: Mm-hmm.

SS: As far as I know, I've ever heard that it isn't.

I really don't know that either.

I mean, offhand, I'd say I think it's fine. I don't think there's that difference between that and the other white population. I don't even remember incidents, do you? I mean, I hope this goes on -- I'm not aware of that. And I'm not the person to answer that.

RH: OK. If you were going to talk to you grandchildren and tell them about your impact on the city or the impact in the Jewish community, what would you want to tell them

about? What would you --

SS: Well, I have talked to them about many of the things I've talked to you about. When I first -- after I was President of the Council of Jewish Women, I was involved in a lot of non-Jewish organizations. I was on the Board of the Community Chest and then the United Fund.

I was on the Board of the Social Welfare Planning Council; I was on the Board of the Community Volunteer Service. I was on the Board of the Volunteer Committee at Charity Hospital. I was on the Board of a Ballet Group. Ballet, I never mentioned, is one of my great (inaudible) things in my life. I love ballet. I'm on the Board of a lot of things. Eventually, I began to lead -- after the war, and after I began to find out what really happened, I went more and more toward the things I've talked about.

And my grandchildren, I don't go out of my way to sit down and tell them about it. They ask me questions and then seem interested, much to my surprise.

And one of them interviewed for a while.

We stopped. We never resumed again. But they like to hear it. And one of them is now trying to get me to record some of it. She lives in New York. And I haven't seen it yet, but I am told that she is on some sort of thing that you get on a computer -- and I don't use the terminology because I always do it wrong.

She does a two-minute thing about celebrities, and everybody tells me she's really funny. So now I'm going to buy a computer so I can see my granddaughter.

She wants to bring somebody down to interview me. And I'm really reluctant to do it, just as I was reluctant to do this. I am so careless with my speech; I think that -- that's why I moved from Bogalusa influence -- or my Southern, Southern influence. My granddaughter, who did interview me, she recorded it, and then she wrote it up. And I

was horrified at the way I expressed myself. So I'm not anxious to do this -- whatever she wants to do with it.

But to answer your question, my grandchildren are interested, and they question me because they seem interested in what I tell them.

RH: And what would you like to see for your grandchildren?

SS: I'd like to see a peaceful world. A world of peace. When I think about how this world has changed since I came into it and think what might happen -- let them have that. Let them live in a world of peace and a world without prejudice, and they'll make it. Just give them that.

RH: You've dedicated your life pretty much to dealing with both of those issues.

SS: I'm a little fish in a little pond. But I'm satisfied with what I did. I did what I wanted to do. I never did anything for any other reason except that this is something I want to do, and got involved before I realized it sometimes. But if my grandchildren can have that, what else is there?

RH: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

SS: I think I've taken up a lot of your time and space.

RH: Well, I certainly appreciate this interview.

Thank you so much.

SS: I hope I've talked about the things you wanted to hear. I think I went overboard on some things or maybe said a few things I shouldn't have said.

RH: Well, you'll get to look at the transcript. If there's something you don't like, you can take it out. We can't take it out of the film, but we can take it out of the transcript, which is

probably what most people will look at.

SS: OK. All right.

RH: OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]