Meta R. Kaplan Buttnick Transcript

PAMELA BROWN LAVITT: This is the oral history interview of Meta Buttnick. My name is Pamela Brown Lavitt. I am the oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words Project in Seattle. We are in the home of Meta Kaplan Buttnick. Is that how you'd like your name to –?

META KAPLAN BUTTNICK: Meta Buttnick Kaplan.

PL: Meta Buttnick Kaplan. The address is 5835 Seward Park Avenue South in Seattle. Today's date is Thursday, May 31st. The year is 2001. I just want to make sure – in Seattle, it's important that I have your consent and that you understand that this interview is being recorded.

MB: Yes.

PL: Wonderful. I just would like to say, for the record, to begin the interview, that this is not the first time that Meta Buttnick Kaplan is being interviewed. In fact, at the University of Washington's Jewish Archives Project, there is an extensive accession, as well as a wonderful interview of seventy-five pages of transcript, as well as the interview and some papers of her mother, Jessie Bloom. So, let's begin. I was very curious about your name. I know that we did this at the narrator's brunch. The name Meta is a very unusual name. How did you get it?

MB: Well, the Hebrew name – I was named after two great-grandmothers, and the Hebrew name was Meta Malkah. Of course, you can change a Hebrew name. All of my children have Hebrew names and English names. And when it came to Meta Malkah, Daddy said, "Nothing doing." He thought so much of this particular grandmother that he said, "We're leaving it right the way it is." So it's Meeta [phonetic] or Mayta [phonetic] or

Metta [phonetic], but it stayed. My second name, Malkah, of course, means "queen." They translated that Regina, that's the Latin word for queen. As I say, I was named after two great-grandmothers.

PL: What were those grandmothers' names?

MB: Well, Meta and Malkah.

PL: Okay.

MB: Yeah.

PL: How have you lived your life through that name?

MB: [laughter] My uncle in Dublin ¬– in Dublin, they have meters to get gas; you put in two, shillings and you get a certain amount. So, he used to call me "Gas-o-meter" because I never shut up. I've been called by another uncle, "This is Meta Bloom. Meet another Bloom." But it's really interesting when my name pops out all of a sudden. The president of Mount Holyoke College was Dr. Meta Glass. Sometimes, you see it. It's the name of a certain kind of slug bait/snare-all, I think, so it used to be in big signs on the billboards. But it is a very unusual name. People pronounce it just the way they want to. I like Mayta [phonetic], actually. Some people call me Metta [phonetic], and they won't call me anything else.

PL: I've always thought it was interesting that it could be pronounced Meta [phonetic] because of the work that you've done in Seattle from a kind of meta-perspective, so to speak. We'll get to that in a little bit. So, I think we'll just begin a little chronologically, and then I'd be happy for you to backtrack to your parents as you see fit. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

MB: I was born in Fairbanks, Alaska. Both my parents and their parents moved in the mass migration that started in the 1880s, when Jews had to live such restricted lives in Russia, they came, both the Blooms and the Spiros, to Cork, Ireland. Cork was the first free port, and also, perhaps they didn't have money to go elsewhere. But more cogently, there were already relatives who had left Lithuania, Shavil or Zagar, little towns, and come and stayed at Cork. So, Jews traditionally go where there's a toe hold. They came with nothing. If they had a relative, they could stay in his house for a while. He could introduce them [to] business opportunities. So, they lived in Cork. My mother's family name was Spiro.

PL: Can you spell that?

MB: S-P-I-R-O. They lived in Cork for about six years. One of my uncles was born in Shavil. Both families had lived there for generations. They moved to Dublin after about six years, both families, my mother's and my father's. A brother, a sister, and my mother were born after they got to Dublin. My dad had been in Shavil. His parents couldn't leave yet. But there was a woman, Mrs. Lippman, and Daddy came with her. Can you imagine? A six-year-old child. Anyway, Daddy did not like Ireland. So, he had an uncle who had left Shavil and come to America, beckoned by the offer of free land after the Homestead Bill was passed. I've heard people traveled in these Russian towns and villages, tempting residents with offers of free land because, I guess, the railroads wanted ground opened along their routes.

PL: What was your uncle's name?

MB: Uncle was Samuel Shapiro.

PL: And your father's name?

MB: Robert Bloom. Mama was Jessie Spiro Bloom.

PL: Okay.

MB: So Uncle came out to Minneapolis, I think. And from there he – where he went, to Devil's Lake, North Dakota. That was a Baron Hirsch Project. But in my research, I've found out that – Uncle came out probably in the '80s, '85, or '86. The Israel Colonization Society – or the Jewish Colonization Society, the Baron Hirsch Project did not start until about 1890 or so, and Uncle was already in Seattle by 1889.

PL: Can you describe briefly what you mean by the Baron Hirsch Project?

MB: Well, you know who Baron Hirsch was? He was a Russian millionaire or multi-millionaire, and he helped these people who had gotten free land. He brought farm instruments and did other things for them. It seems wonderful, but I've talked to quite a few of them. Their security was on the land. If they couldn't make it, as some didn't, they had to give up their land. We have one interview that told us that. I think that Julie Eulenberg deals with it in her article in Nizor. Anyway, Uncle came out to Devil's Lake. There was another family named Friedman who were there. Mrs. Friedman had a young, unmarried sister who had known Uncle in Shavil. She came out to visit her sister, and they were married. They didn't make it. Jews were not cut out to be farmers. They tell that one time, they took in a terrific harvest, had a lot of barley, and celebrated it. And that night, there was a hailstorm that destroyed everything, a very hard life. So this same relative, Friedman, came out to Seattle, and Uncle followed him. Uncle got here in 1889. He got here the night of the Seattle Fire, and he slept in one merchant's burned store to guard the merchandise. So, Uncle was living in Seattle. And Daddy, as I say, he was chafing at the bit. He didn't want to stay in Ireland. So, Daddy was born in 1879. He came to America the year of the Spanish-American War, which was 1897. So, he was very young. So he came to Seattle in 1897. 1897 was the year that the steamer Portland came down from Dawson City with a ton of gold, men getting off with pockets filled with nuggets and pokes of dust. That precipitated the famous Yukon Gold Rush.

The Klondike Fever by Berton is the definitive history of the Gold Rush. People came from all over the world by different routes. Jews traditionally follow mass movements of people to sell the goods that meets their needs. I have heard that Jews followed Napoleon's army, outfitting the soldiers. So, in 1899, Daddy went into Alaska with a stock of goods. There has never been a better marriage of man and country. That's just where he wanted to be. Actually, he wasn't in Alaska. He was in the Klondike, in Canadian territory. But the climate and the general situation was the same. So, he came in with a stock of goods. I've talked to people who were actually with him in Dawson, and they marvel at how hard he worked. He would carry a fifty-pound pack on his back all week; then he'd come back in and load up again. He had a cabin where he kept his merchandise, and people would come and stay for a few days. One of his cabin mates, for quite a while, was a Dartmouth professor. So that shows how everybody came on the gold rush. Daddy was in Dawson until 1903. Then, there was already a trading post in Fairbanks. There was a man named Barnette that wanted to establish a trading post, not necessarily in Fairbanks or where Fairbanks was, but in that general direction, and they got stuck on a sand bar. I knew the Captain Adams that had been on that boat. So the Barnettes got off there and put up a building. The idea was that they would furnish things to the people around on the various creeks. Then an Indian runner or somebody, cam came in to tell at Barnette's Trading Post that gold had struck on Pedro Creek. So, that precipitated the gold rush again, down from Dawson to Fairbanks, and Daddy rushed with them. He opened up, as I say, a little hole-in-the-wall and sold hardware, guns, and ammunition. I have never known if he did much mining. He probably did on the side. He did tell me one time he would have liked to have prospected – he said the thrill of finding gold. But he said he just couldn't do that to his parents. They were living in Dublin, Orthodox Jews. When he prospected, he'd be away for months and months at a time in the woods; nobody would know where he was. So, for filial duty, he went into business in Fairbanks. Then, in 1911, Grandmother Bloom, Daddy's mother, had been living in Dublin with Daddy's brother, Uncle Zelig, who was about twenty-six, and a much younger

brother, Uncle Myer, who was still in high school. Daddy had another brother, Uncle Sol. And Uncle Sol had left for South Africa about 1907, 1908. "Leaving," there was a lot of that. See, it was still part of the British Empire, and the language was the same. Quite a few Jews came to Dublin and then went out to South Africa. Uncle Sol was in Johannesburg. Uncle Zelig had died. He got a boil on his neck and got blood poisoning. I've often said one shot of penicillin would have cured him now.

PL: So he died of a Staphylococcus?

MB: Must have been that.

PL: A Staph infection?

MB: Yes. It was all covered by blood poisoning then. So, grandmother was alone with this much younger brother. So Daddy came back from Fairbanks, Alaska, and Uncle Sol came back from Johannesburg, South Africa, to see how they were going to take care of their mother. They decided that Uncle Sol would take her out to Johannesburg, and Daddy would take care of Uncle Myer, just like taking care of another child. Daddy and Mama were actually second cousins, so they knew each other. He became reacquainted with Mama, and they got engaged. Then, he went back to Fairbanks and came back again in 1912. In 1912, they were married.

PL: What was your mother doing all this time in Ireland?

MB: Well, she had been ill as a child. She had St. Vitus' Dance, which is a stage to rheumatic fever, but fortunately, she didn't get rheumatic fever. So she left school kind of early. Her brother, Uncle Abraham, was in London. Now, where she got her education in shorthand and typing, I don't know. But she had it, and she did very well. She had a couple of jobs there. Then she came back to Dublin while Daddy was there. Mama was very active in the Suffragist movement. She stood on the streets selling – a pamphlet called Votes for Women.

PL: And that was during her stint in London, correct?

MB: Yeah, during the time that she was in London. So they got married. She went right up to Fairbanks, Alaska from London and Dublin; while we were in Dublin, going to school, she wrote the story of her life completely accurately, but she called Daddy "Rube," [phonetic] not Robert or Bob. She called the account JIRA, Jewish, Irish, Russian, American. I read the parts of it that happened before I was born. I knew the other things that had happened after I was born. She tells that – she came in pregnant with me. They came into Fairbanks, and Daddy left her for a little while with some friends. He came back and said, I bought a place for us, just like that. This place had no foundation; he was going to put one in, and he started it. And then the Shusand stampede to another gold strike started, and he was busy outfitting the men. There she was up on stilts for three, four, I don't know, months. So, she did take hold. She started to make some pretty good friends there, but she told how one day she was out for a walk. She missed her mother so terribly. Now, on the wall here, you see that picture of that water man, as we used to call him. In those years, many people had to buy their water. Daddy hadn't dug a well yet. There was no reservoir, of course. So, this fellow used to go around with his horse, pulling the big tank. In the summer, it had wheels on it, and in the winter, it had runners, like a sled, I think, whatever it had, and there was a little fire to keep the water from freezing. He would come into the houses with a yoke around their neck and two buckets. Of course, they had to pay for it. So she said to herself, "I'll just go home and have a good cry and wash my face before Bob comes, so he won't know I've been crying. Then she realized, "We have to buy that water. I haven't the right to waste it on a good cry." So, she didn't. Mama, vis-à-vis, Alaska, is interesting. She did a lot while she lived there. She got the kindergarten put on to the Seattle Public School System.

PL: You mean the Fairbanks School System?

MB: Yeah. All of Fairbanks. Did a tremendous job on establishing the kindergarten. She did a marvelous job with the Girl Scouts. In fact, one of their buildings is named after her. During World War II, she did a wonderful amount of work with the American Women's Voluntary Service.

PL: Well, let's hear about your emergence into this milieu. Your mother, the picture of her on stilts in a house, I mean, you were born eleven months after. So, was there a foundation yet for your house?

MB: Oh, well, finally, it got done. But as I say, it was deferred for weeks because of the Shusana strike – we grew up in that house. There was a bathroom, and there was running water, but the sewer was frozen for six or seven or eight months every year. Then I don't think we could exactly use the facilities in the bathroom – in fact, I know we couldn't. The place was warm. We never bought water, except just that one time. He dug a well. I was born ten months after they were married.

PL: So you were born in 1913?

MB: 1913, yeah. I mean, that was the life. The place was always warm. We had a heater in the living room, and against the wall was piled a whole cord of firewood. Then, you didn't have to go out to bring in the wood; it was right there. We had a kitchen stove, there were four children, and we all slept in one room. It was pioneering.

PL: Can you describe your first memories of the scenery of Fairbanks? What was it like outside your house? Were their neighbors?

MB: Oh, we were on a street, Third Avenue. By the time I was cognizant of things, Fairbanks is an example of a gold camp that grew into a city much more picturesque than Anchorage. What I was saying was Anchorage was planned by the builders of the Alaska Railroad, streets one way [and] avenues another. But Fairbanks just grew. The streets had been moose tracks. But there were twelve avenues and maybe ten or twelve

streets named after prominent citizens. And my first recollection of Fairbanks is really – well, I'm jumping ahead. We were in Fairbanks until 1914, and Mama got pregnant again. Her mother had been very ill with cancer; she wanted to go back to Dublin. War broke out when she got to Dawson. She kept going. She stayed for about two years, 1914-1916, during which time the Lusitania had been sunk by bombs, German bombs. She stayed, and then she came back. She tells how on the boat coming back, she went down once and found the watertight doors closed. She asked the steward, and he said, "We're in the floating mines area." Debbie, my second sister, was a baby, and I was three. She sat up all night long watching us, just watching over us. Anyway, she got back to Fairbanks. I should have also said that when they came in 1912, just a few months later, the Railroad Bill was passed. Of course, there was jubilation. It must have been toward the end of 1912 because everybody got drunk, and it was a tremendous parade. And she couldn't join it; she had to stay home and nurse me. But my first memories of Fairbanks must be when we came in on that riverboat from Dawson to Fairbanks. The boat anchored in Fairbanks, and Daddy came on the boat to meet us.

PL: This is when you returned from Dublin, Ireland.

MB: When we returned.

MB: Yes. That's my first memory of Fairbanks. Then, of course, I go back to the way we lived, the extremely cold weather. But with it all – it was a good life. Mama made wonderful friends up there. Mary Lee Davis came in there in 1917 and wrote articles for Scribners, and then later, four or five books, to which I will allude later. She was our friend in that little old humble cabin. There was a woman doctor there who delivered me. All distinctly superior people. We would go to school in the winter with scarves around our faces. We lived on Cushman – we lived on Third Avenue near, and the school was about four blocks on Seventh and Cushman. So, on the tremendously cold days, Daddy would walk us up because, Heaven forbid, a child could fall down or something. So that

was our life. We loved it. We loved our friends [and] loved going to birthday parties.

PL: I'm going to backtrack a moment, Meta, if that's okay. You had said in your previous interview, which is at the Jewish Archives Project, that you were one of the first hundred white children born in Fairbanks.

MB: No, born in Fairbanks.

PL: Born in Fairbanks. I want to just explore that a little bit because it seems very interesting to me. What can you tell me about that? How did you learn about that? Why is it significant to you?

MB: Well, I just got through saying about this same doctor, this woman. And my dad has always liked bright women, and there were other doctors in the town. When Dr. Baskerville came up with her husband, they came up because he had terrible asthma.

PL: Could you spell her name for the record?

MB: Baskerville, B-A-S-K-E-R-V-I-L-L – and probably an "E" on the end of it. They came in about 1906, and they bought some things from Daddy's store, and he delivered them. Right away, he started to admire that woman. So she brought me into the world. Now, what was the purport of your question?

PL: I guess my question was that you were one of the first one hundred white children in Fairbanks.

MB: Yes. I had to get my passport when I went to study at the Sorbonne; I wouldn't have had it, except they had the affidavit from the records in her office. So, there weren't that many children in Fairbanks. People of childbearing age, and so forth, they hadn't come up there in great numbers. But as contrasted to – not Blacks, but Native Americans – there was no official registration of birth there then. That was how it was,

see? The accouterments of city living hadn't reached it yet. I don't know enough about the machinations of registrations and things; I've talked to a lot of people that – that couldn't get birth certificates and so forth, didn't know exactly – my cousins in Seattle didn't know what age they really were because there were no birth certificates. So, that was not too unusual a thing.

PL: By saying that you were one of the first white children, can you tell me a little bit more about what then the non-white children were in the community?

MB: Well, in several instances, white men married to Indian women. And some of the kids were very brilliant and very beautiful. There was a social distinction. I mean, if you married – if a white boy married an Indian woman, there was a distinct social error there. But some of those women that married white men were so marvelous. They used to stay up until two, three o'clock in the morning making beaded moccasins, things like that to support their families. The Motschmans and the Harpers and the Mayos – fine, good Indian women. But there was, as I say, social distinctions. White girls didn't want to dance with a native American.

PL: So, what was your firsthand experience being of the minority in a public school where you were surrounded by students that were either part white, non-white, or at least had parents of mixed heritage? What was that like for you?

MB: I didn't ever realize it. It meant nothing to me. When I got back and started to teach is when I found out about it. As I say, the nice girls in my classes wouldn't dance with these very nice Indian boys. I knew that if a man married a woman with Indian blood in her, so forth, it was a social comedown.

PL: Was there anything that your parents discussed with you that you remember, where they talked about those social interactions or distinctions, as you call it?

MB: Yeah. They never talked about that at all. Some of the children from these – the Motschmans, they're the finest children, finest people. Now, this has changed. Girls dance with and marry native Americans. It is no comedown.

PL: I guess what I'm also wondering [is] whether or not having this moniker of being one of the first hundred white children has throughout your life had any sense of impact upon you. Is it a sense of pride? Is it a historical fact?

MB: Yes to both questions.

PL: How do you conceive of that when you tell that story?

MB: Well, you know something, my sister, as I say, that trip that Mama made back, it deprived her of her being born an American. She was at the status of a naturalized citizen. In that picture of President Harding, the kids lined up around him were members of the Native Daughters –

PL: Can you describe it? There is a picture on the –

MB: – wall is a picture of President Harding in Fairbanks at the time that the Golden Spike of the railroad was hammered in and the railroad was officially finished. He drove the spike in Nenana. The work had been done from there for the railroad, which worked for Sewal D. Fairbanks.

PL: In July 1923.

MB: We had an organization called The Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden North. They were the kids that are standing in front of the President. My sister couldn't come, see, because she was born in Dublin and was not a native daughter. So, there was a certain distinction in having been born in Fairbanks. But I can't get into the subject of anti-Semitism at all because we never felt any.

PL: Well, I think that takes us to a really interesting part of this interview, which is about what it meant to be the first Jewish family. Is that right, in Fairbanks?

MB: No, not the first Jewish family – as a matter of fact, I was the second Jewish child born there. At the time of the gold rush, the stampede down to Fairbanks, once again, a lot of Jewish families came in there with kids. There was one family, the Kahn family, that came in. And they had a son who was born maybe a few months before I was. So, I wasn't the first Jewish child. However, we loved our friends, and our friends loved us. But we never had any ham or pork in our house. We never had any shellfish. And it embarrassed us that we had to stay out of school on two days, Rosh Hashanah and one day, Yom Kippur. We didn't like that either. But never a scintilla of anti-Semitism at all. I don't want to jump ahead then and tell you – I'd be making too big of a leap ahead as to say we were very comfortable and loved Fairbanks, but my dad had other plans for us.

PL: We can get to that in a few moments.

MB: Yes.

PL: Did you want to continue with some other thought there?

MB: I think not. I want to show you how we loved life there and loved our friends – still do.

PL: You talk about your father's kind of ineluctable sense of Jewish loyalty, and that affected you very much throughout your life.

MB: Yes.

PL: I'd also be interested to know because, obviously, your mom had to, in many ways, keep a Jewish home. What was it like being Jewish in Fairbanks? You mentioned a couple of these things that you couldn't necessarily keep kosher, but you didn't eat

certain foods.

MB: Yes.

PL: What do you remember about the foods in your home that you did eat? Were they Jewish foods?

MB: No. Well, for one thing, we had wild meat. You know, we had moose, moose steaks, caribou. Mountain sheep was a delicacy – mountain sheep chops. But those were irrefragable rules. No pork, no ham, no bacon. The main criteria in a Jewish home is the meat, you know. So the other things were what everybody ate: fruit and vegetables. Fruit was very expensive. It had to be brought in from outside. "Outside" was the US proper. Alaska was still a territory then. Apples, oranges – very expensive.

PL: So, in that way, would you feel that your Jewish sensibility was instilled in you?

MB: Because Daddy stood four-square on Judaism. Had I been a boy, he would have brought an Orthodox mohel [ritual circumciser] into Fairbanks. His position was unshakable. It cost him quite a lot to close the store two days, three days a year, but he did it. In fact, I don't know whether this is true or not, but one time, a train was supposed to leave for the creeks on Yom Kippur. Several men in the town had to get their outfits going into mining or something. They would not buy them anywhere else but from Bob Bloom. And they delayed the train. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not. It's a well-established story. In those years, a teacher could talk about the crucifixion of Christ and so forth. There was one teacher whom I liked awfully well, and she liked me personally. Around Christmas, she went into the torture and the vinegar sponge and all that kind of thing. Mama was a little offended at it. She said, "I'll tell her exactly that that is not historically true."

PL: Do you remember if your mother ever went to go talk to her?

MB: No, no. I know she didn't. I know she didn't. There was never any incident in the years we lived there that we had any reason to feel that we were being abused because we were Jewish.

PL: Well, whether by action or omission or ignorance or just plain intention, it sounds like, though, there were certain things. For instance, you mentioned in a previous interview that everyone had a Christmas tree.

MB: Yes.

PL: And that on holidays, the kids kind of were going to tattle on you because you were not, in fact, quote, unquote, "sick."

MB: There was one incident. Mama took us out for a walk on Rosh Hashanah. She should not have passed by the schoolhouse. The kids were all on the playground. So, the next day, one of the boys said, "Why aren't you in school?" Debbie, my second sister, yelled out – "It's a Jewish holiday." I stopped her. I said, "Don't say that." So the next day, this boy said, "I feel like telling the teacher on you. You weren't sick or anything, and you stayed out of school." So, I went home to tell Mama about it. She said, "You see, Debbie wanted to tell them what the reason was." We didn't have the Christmas tree, but we didn't ever feel deprived because we didn't have it.

PL: Well, you also mentioned that – I love the Yiddish word that you use for it. Is it goyishe [non-Jewish], or how would you pronounce that, for the goyishe surroundings that you said that you grew up in?

MB: We wanted them. We were used to them.

PL: Why didn't you want your sister to say, "It's a Jewish holiday"?

MB: Well, as far as I was concerned, I didn't want to appear to be different. But that was just I as a child. This boy was a very nice boy. I imagine if you'd told him, he wouldn't have said that. But we were never considered queer. As a matter of fact, when my folks came to Alaska, they came in with the Reverend and Mrs. Condit. He was going to be the incumbent of the pulpit of the Presbyterian church. They got very, very friendly. And for years and years, I was on the Cradle Roll of the Presbyterian church. I used to get a birthday card always on my birthday from the church. The Catholic priest there, Father Monroe, my father and he were very, very fond of each other. I never felt at all like an outcast or strange or queer. Of our friends that remained there – there was this large family, the Herrings. Mr. Herring died early. When his daughter Agnes got married, she said of all the people that she wants to walk up the aisle with her is Mr. Bloom. See, that was the way people felt about us.

But I was going to go ahead and say that my dad was not satisfied. He wanted the intangibles and the imponderables. He wanted Jewish awareness – not wanted, he insisted, Jewish awareness. Well, frankly, among others, he wanted Jewish sons-in-law. But what he wanted was that we should know what it is to be a Jew because we really didn't. We hadn't had pride of heritage instilled in us. Shall I get into what he did?

PL: Hold on. Because I know you're going to get there. I want to mine a little bit further into how you celebrated – if you did – holidays in your home as a child. Did your mother –? Did you do things over Passover and the High Holidays and things? So when you say there was really no sense of that heritage, how then did you interact? What were the things that you did with other kids in the neighborhood? I'm just curious about what kids, you know, through their high school years, did for fun.

MB: Well, we skied, and we skated. We didn't keep the Sabbath either. And we had birthday parties. In the spring, we went out picking crocuses on Birch Hill. We went to each other's houses to do homework. We played with the kids on our block. We went to

one theater – one picture show house in the town. We went there, not as much as we would have liked, but as much as Mama would permit us to. She was quite strict. We were too young to go to dances or anything yet. But we had a normal existence, just like my children have had. We went bike riding. My kids have had a normal existence, but mostly with Jewish kids. Our life was with these non-Jewish kids, a happy life, a full life.

PL: Did you celebrate Christmas or ever consider it?

MB: No, no. We used to give what was called New Year's gifts. If we wanted to give something to our friends, we gave them New Year's gifts. We did. We gave a lot of them.

PL: So feel free to go ahead and jump ahead because I guess I'm also wondering – I know from the history that I've heard, your previous oral history, that your father, of course, had a tremendous influence on your going back to Ireland.

MB: Oh, absolutely.

PL: Your mother, who was active in the Suffragist movement early on, where was her sense of presence about these decisions? Was she a strong personality in your growing up as much as your father had influence over those decisions?

MB: No. I think he was stronger. But frankly, I have never understood that trip to Ireland from this point of view. After all, my mother and father were married to each other. And you know what married people mean to each other. And he knew when we left that it would take years, you know what I mean. We'd have to be busy there. It was more or less understood we had to get our higher education there. That kept them apart all that time. I've never understood that.

PL: Were you part of the decision-making process?

MB: No.

PL: Do you remember the decisions as they were being made?

MB: No, no, no.

PL: So can you, chronologically, at what point was the decision made, and did you leave to sail back to Dublin?

MB: Well, the decision had been made when my father was blessed with his first child because – I'll digress for a minute. In the oral histories that we have made here for WSJHS, you hear over and over again that a Jewish father was doing very well in a business in a small town. He had left the business and come and started all over again in Seattle because he wanted those same things: Jewish contacts and Jewish awareness. So, that was what Daddy wanted, and that's what he did. He shipped us away.

PL: Prior to that, were there any books in your home, any Jewish learning –?

MB: Oh, yeah.

PL: How would you describe –?

MB: Well, no, not enough to do anything. I remember sitting down at a [Passover] seder and Daddy telling us that Judaism is the logical way. Mama did read to us. She had a book called Pathways Through the Bible. And she read to us every night the stories from the Bible. She did that. That was about it.

PL: Do you remember your feelings at that moment? You're two years from graduating from high school –

MB: Yeah.

PL: – in a place that you were born and grew up in –

MB: Yeah.

PL: How did you feel about being wrenched out of that situation?

MB: I didn't like it. Some of the kids thought, my gosh, isn't that wonderful, you're going to – blah, blah, blah. I loved Fairbanks High School. As a matter of fact, when my class graduated, it was the Class of '30, then my friends wrote. They said, "We all thought of you, Meta." I had been with them since first grade, you know. No, it was all my dad's thinking. I've often wondered if he had moved us into Seattle or someplace like that, couldn't just as much have been accomplished? There was one cogent reason for the move to Dublin, and, of course, that was because Mama had a brother and a father and a home established there. That might have had something to do with it. That's the only thing that I can think of. And we could have come out and stayed in Seattle and gone to the University of Washington, and Daddy could have come out in the winters and so forth. No, that was the way he wanted to do it. You know, it's a strange thing. Whenever anybody hears the story of our lives, how we were pulled away from our roots and plunked down in another culture, so to speak, the thing that impresses people is, "the girls did what they were supposed to do." I graduated from Trinity College with a B.A. in modern literature, my two middle sisters, medical school. Baby sister, architecture. That's the thing that impresses people. And I sometimes wondered if we could have had some rebellion in us, what would have happened. What Daddy wanted to do, it had to be done that way.

PL: Would it have been different –? You were three girls.

MB: Four.

PL: Four. Oh, four girls and your mother. So, five women in the family and him. He already had a strong sense of independence from having frontiered in Alaska –

pioneered. Would it have been different if you were a boy? And would you have gone into business with him? What would have happened differently?

MB: Well, you know, it's a very good question. Sometimes, I think the Lord above meant it to be that way for one reason. If any of us had been a boy, Daddy never could have sent us away; that way, he would have had to come. Boys have to have a father. The fact that they were girls showed that the Lord approved. No, life would have been altogether different if he had had a son. And frankly, if he'd had a son, he would not have wanted him to grow up and come into the business in Fairbanks for the same reasons he didn't want us to be there: for the assimilation effect. No, that's a very good question. But as I say, I don't quite see it. After all, they were man and wife. If we were going to accomplish anything, it would take a span of years. I've never understood what the thinking there was.

PL: So you left in 19 –?

MB: 1928.

PL: And what did you do after that?

MB: Well, in '28, of course, I had two more years of high school. Then, in 1935, I graduated, actually in '34, with an elaborately useless degree, modern literature, no certification, no secretarial training, nothing.

PL: Where were you at school?

MB: Pardon?

PL: Where did you attend school?

MB: Oh, at Dublin University Trinity College. Then, I went to the Sorbonne for three seasons. But when I graduated, I was a mess. Also, apart from having an elaborately

useless degree, I had no aims or goals. The only thing I wanted to do was go back up to Fairbanks, which I did.

PL: I was going to just ask that you arrive in Dublin, and you're a high school student in a foreign country that you've never experienced before but maybe heard stories about. You've never met your relatives there. What did you remember from arriving and the community? You were suddenly supposed to have a Jewish community. Was it there? Was that Jewish education there for you the way your father had hoped? I'm just curious a little bit about your experiences arriving in Dublin and staying there.

MB: We did it. You know what I mean? We did it, and gradually, we made friends. I always idealized America. And always my goal was to get back as fast as I could, which shows that I was inexperienced and callow because when I graduated from Trinity, I could have stayed on and done some more work, gone back, taken a certain degree that they gave at the Sorbonne. I wanted to get back! So I went back up to Fairbanks. And I had a year like I'll never forget. No aims, no goals. I should have gone right back out again to Columbia University and taken that journalism course. Nothing. Just stayed up there.

PL: You went back by yourself?

MB: I went back by myself.

PL: And you're living with your father?

MB: Yes.

PL: What was that like? You're the only woman of the house at that point?

MB: Oh, yeah. He was so vastly displeased with what I was doing – nothing University of Alaska was there. I could have gone out and taken a secretarial course. I had no

desire [and] didn't know what I wanted to do. Then you see, again, the finger of fate. In those years, married women couldn't teach. The Depression years – I have heard – in the teacher placement I did for our SHA.

PL: Seattle Hebrew Academy?

MB: Yeah. Mr. Selby was, I think, the assistant administrator. I got very friendly with him working on teacher placement. He said, "Since married women have been allowed to teach again," he said, "we have gotten very many able teachers." But married women couldn't teach in Fairbanks. So there was one couple that had been going together for a long time. He made a very poor living. He had a sort of small bookstore. But she was making a good salary. They had been to the school board a couple of times to see if she could keep her job and they could get married, but they were told no. Then, he was a veteran of World War I, and he drew a big bonus check. With that money, he bought a house. They felt then that they could give up her salary. And that's the job I got. The people in town backed me up to the hilt. My superintendent felt that I should – the school board had already hired somebody else, someone with whom our principal had worked with in Oregon. And you can imagine what a teacher she was because everybody wants to come to Alaska. Every teacher wants to see the country. She wanted to come, but she got another job offer in Oregon that was so good she couldn't turn it down. So, my superintendent was coming into the school system the same year that I was. He also felt that having – a hometown girl, first of all, is at a disadvantage, and secondly, having been educated in another system. The woman in teacher placement at the University of Washington said, "If your superintendent hadn't wanted you, you wouldn't have gotten that job." But as I say, the townspeople came out very strong for me, so I got that job. Then that put some meaning into my life, you know.

PL: So that was how many years later?

MB: Three years.

PL: Three years after you returned to Fairbanks?

MB: No, no. Oh, no. That was just one year. I actually graduated in October of ‘34. I went back out to summer school in the summer of ‘36 to get my eighteen educational credits.

PL: When you came down to the University of Washington?

MB: Yeah.

PL: I just want to back up a little bit about your education for a moment. When you were studying, was this at Trinity, or was this at Wellesley?

MB: No, Trinity.

PL: Okay. And you wound up going to Sorbonne for the three summers?

MB: For the summers.

PL: To study intensive French, is that right?

MB: Yes.

PL: Did you go alone?

MB: Yeah.

PL: What was it like, and how old were you? Here you are a young women living in Paris. What did you experience being there?

MB: Yeah, well, it was really something – I knew I had to go to France. I had two years of high school French. I couldn’t carry honors French in college. And an awful lot of students went to France, too. So Mama wrote to the Council of Jewish Women in

London, and she found out places that had registered for people to live in. And so I went.

I went in the summer of ‘31. I was, I think, just eighteen, yeah. I remember getting there and sitting down and crying and crying and crying. I don’t know for what reason. But I pitched in, and I made giant strides. There were nice kids in that boardinghouse where I stayed. They were nice to me. I came back much improved, much more able to cope with honors French and an honors degree. So, I went two more times. It became kind of second nature after a while.

PL: What was Paris like in the –

MB: It was beautiful.

PL: – height of your teens? What did you do?

MB: Beautiful, just beautiful.

PL: Did you date?

MB: Not really. The kids in the boardinghouse went out and did things together. I had one or two contacts from people that lived in Dublin or people that lived in London. But we did a lot of sightseeing and learned a lot. The fact that I lived in a French home made a difference because those girls that came over from America to attend the Sorbonne associated a lot with themselves and spoke a lot of English and so forth. That wasn’t what I was there for.

PL: I’m trying to get some perspective on what it’s like to go from Fairbanks, Alaska, being one of the few Jewish families, even a few white families, and then going to the glories of Europe. Obviously, it’s the Depression. But I’m just wondering, what did you experience? Were you too focused on going back to Fairbanks at that point? What did

you experience that you'd say might have impacted your life while you spent those years there?

MB: Well, you're speaking of going to Europe?

PL: Yes.

MB: I can't say that I dis-enjoyed it. I hated to leave Fairbanks. We were a wonderful group of kids, been together since the first grade, as I was saying. Well, one thing that made the difference was we always knew we could come back when we finished school. You know what I mean? Daddy knew by that time we would have this Jewish awareness implanted. As I say, I idealized America. When you know there's an end to it somewhere, I was not deeply unhappy in Dublin. One reason being, of course, that I was very busy. No, I wasn't unhappy, but I would have been if I had known that I had to stay there all the time.

PL: You left your sisters as well as your mother. So, what was your relationship with your sisters?

MB: Well, now, that was when I had graduated. By that time, they were in medical school. As a matter of fact, my third sister, Olga, who is a doctor now and a psychiatrist, was going to take a BA in history. When she saw the mess that I was – as they said, you can go home and talk to the Thursday Afternoon Literary Club – that inspired her to go and get a professional degree. And another thing too, the fact that I was going back to my dad, you know, I naturally, you hate to pull away from your mother and your sisters, but going back to him made it more normal – made it easier. I can't ever say that I was terribly unhappy in Dublin, but I always thought of it as just a temporary thing until I got the education and then came back. Now, I realize I shouldn't have rushed back like that. My second sister graduated from Trinity. Then, she stayed another year to take a year of training at the Harcourt Street Children's Hospital. See, that's what I should have

done.

PL: Now, your father wanted to inculcate you with a sense of Jewish –

MB: Yeah.

PL: – history and heritage. And I'm wondering whether or not going back to Dublin did. I know you've mentioned that, unlike your sisters, you didn't get a formal Jewish education while you were there. Can you talk a little bit about that decision and what you did learn about being Jewish while you were away before you returned to Fairbanks?

MB: Well, I don't think that it was so much learning. That was the lifestyle there, and we adapted to the lifestyle. We more or less knew the procedures. We knew about the traditional home because Mama had kept one when we lived in Seattle for those two years. And we got used to going to shul [synagogue] on the Yom Tovim. Yeah, he was right. It did. They saw that we were different. We did. We were different. Our attitude toward our faith was different after just being – living in a Jewish community. I went out with some awfully nice boys when I was teaching, but I never would have considered marrying out of the faith.

PL: This is when you returned to Fairbanks?

MB: Yeah, never.

PL: Tell me more about that.

MB: Well, marrying out of faith – it was not to be done, that's all. Not only that, I was thinking about breaking my mother and father's heart; I just wouldn't. That's one thing that – well, that's the whole thing, that's the main thing, that came from that – stay in the Jewish community.

PL: Can you be more elaborate? You're saying that you felt strongly that you would not marry a non-Jew.

MB: I never, never would. Frankly, had we not had that experience, I might have. But there we saw what it meant to be a Jew, and all the influential people who were Jews, and the Jewish lifestyle. And whether it was done – I was changed sort of subtly without my knowing it or not, but I know that I came back with an altogether different attitude.

PL: Now, you also had said in your previous interview that you would often be the matron of the home, that your father had dinner parties in the house, and you would help out. Did you return to that home, keeping the Sabbath, or with your new sense of Jewish – the Jewish lifestyle?

MB: Well, now, are you talking about after I was married?

PL: No. I'm talking about when you returned to Fairbanks.

MB: No, no. That year, we – no, whenever we had company – no. The house wasn't kosher. Meat wasn't kosher. No, we didn't observe Shabbos [Jewish Sabbath] or the holidays. No, I didn't. But it had changed me.

PL: How did it impact you that your parents were separated?

MB: I didn't like it. It bothered the hell out of me. Didn't like it at all. In 1950, Daddy bought a house out here in Seattle. She was just idyllically pleased to be there. She loves the salt water and all that.

PL: How do you feel –? This is jumping ahead, and we can return. How do you feel that what you just described affected the way that you conceived of your own marriage relationship? That sense of independence, being separate, and being together? Did it?

MB: Are you speaking of me and my –?

PL: Yes.

MB: Of course, now, my first husband was never very strong. He had a very big responsibility. So, on several occasions, I said, “Harry, go on down to California.” And for all those years, from 1939, when we were married, until 1958, we never really had a vacation trip together. Then he put his foot down. Because see, I sent him off to Panama. I sent him off to the Caribbean. I sent him to California various times, Arizona, Hawaii. I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to leave my kids. During our years together, everywhere he went, I went. He was very active at the synagogue. I’d drive in with him and sit around the office. I always wanted to be with him.

PL: When you first started teaching in Fairbanks, can you describe your job?

MB: This gal whose job I took was a very fine teacher. I filled some very big shoes. I had a class of French and three classes of English. Then, as I say, I was faculty advisor for the school newspaper. And that I loved. And I taught. I taught for three years, and I had been seeing my husband in Seattle when I came out here to study. Believe me, I was very ready to get married to him whenever he’d make up his mind. But I think back then, from 1935 until 1939, and I doubt if my dad would have let me come back another year.

PL: You’re talking about going down to Seattle?

MB: Yeah. Whatever I did, I don’t think he wanted me up in Fairbanks anymore. Well, that was just the way it was. Again, it wasn’t really the life that he wanted me to live. But it’s ironic; in ‘41, the bombs had barely stopped falling on Pearl Harbor when Daddy was made Chairman of the Jewish Welfare Board. There were the elements in him. He had a very fine Jewish education. His father had been a teacher. And he’d had sixty years of experience in the country. And he was retired. So, our house was always filled with nice Jewish boys and plenty of Jewish connections. But that was just when I left. But

anyway, I had been just absolutely crazy about my husband for several years.

PL: How did you meet? Describe the situation that led up to your meeting.

MB: Well, that's really interesting because when Daddy came out here in 1897, he went to work for the Buttnicks. That's when it started. And then, when he was in business in Fairbanks, they were always his agents. He always kept some money on deposit for them to pay his bills and stuff like that. So that's how I met – Harry was the youngest. Harry had been born when the family came to America. The Buttnicks were grown children already. And Mother Buttnick didn't feel good and found out she was pregnant. He was a change-of-life baby, quite a lot older than I was. But we had a very good marriage. But he was never strong.

PL: When was the first time you saw him?

MB: That was interesting too. Daddy told me if I needed anything to get in touch with the Buttnicks. So I was taking the month to cross the States, which I guess you can still do, traveling by train. You buy your ticket, and then you go wherever you want, but at the end of the month, you've got to be where you're supposed to be.

PL: So this is when you were taking courses – you needed to get from Fairbanks to Seattle to take your French courses?

MB: Well, no, this was when I just came back from Europe.

PL: Okay.

MB: And I had this trunk. I thought, if I'm taking this time, there's no point in paying storage on a trunk all that time. So, I wrote to Harry; he was the person I was supposed to write to. And I asked him if he would take care of that. And I told him where I would be in San Francisco. So he wrote me back. And he said, you know, I'm going to be

there at the same time. So that's when I met him. But that was '35. We weren't married until '39. And he wasn't ready yet, you know. Now, those years in Fairbanks I cherish and treasure. I got experience as a teacher, and I started to have an awful good time in Fairbanks.

PL: Hold on to your thought. I need to switch tapes. And we'll continue with that thought.

MB: Sure.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PL: This is the second minidisk of the oral history interview of Meta Buttnick Kaplan. Let's continue. You were explaining to me when you first met Harry. You said that he was a little bit older than you. So, what was your age difference?

MB: Harry was probably, oh, maybe nineteen years older. But my second husband was twenty-seven years older than I was.

PL: Is that right? So, how old were you when you met him in San Francisco that first time?

MB: Well, I was born in 1913. I was twenty-three. He was one of these boys that was perennially young. You never really had any impression of age. He was, as I say, not strong.

PL: Can you describe what you mean by that?

MB: He was just not robust. He'd had a terrible case of Scarlet Fever as a child, temperature for a long time, and it had affected his heart. No, he was not strong. But thank heaven, he lived to see his children. It was very tough when he died.

PL: What do you remember about your courtship period? You said it was four years before you got married, and he wasn't ready. What was going on in that time?

MB: Well, I was having a heck of a good time [laughter] in Fairbanks. And he was living a social life out here, of course, very busy in business. And he was traveling back and forth to California. And we wrote. Then, I came out the summer of '36, and I came out in '37. '38, I did not come out. And I saw him – and he told me after we were married, he says, "When I heard you weren't coming out in '38, I felt terrible." I said, "Why the heck didn't you tell me to come?" But as I say, he's told me after it – he regretted those years. But I didn't. I was the queen of the world there, you know, with my friends and everything. But as I say, we had a good marriage. He was always very active, always on the rabbinical and cantorial committees of the shul. And I worked with him, you know. And then, as I say, we founded the Seattle Hebrew Academy in 1947. We worked together on that.

PL: Where did you get married?

MB: Where? I was married at Bikur Cholim. For sixty years, it was on the corner of 17th and Yesler. Now it's the Langston Hughes, whatever it is.

PL: Langston Hughes Cultural Center, I think that is.

MB: Yeah, like a community center.

PL: Yes.

MB: When we got engaged, my folks had thought that they would be coming down. Harry said, "You know something? I want to do this very quickly and very quietly." That's how the Buttnicks did things. He said, "If your father comes to Seattle, there'll be a whole big to-do." He said, "Your father has so many friends here and relatives." So he said, "You know, would you just tell them we're going to be married – we're going to be

married in traveling clothes in the main sanctuary of the shul, and come downstairs and just have a dinner afterward." As I say, I don't know if it was fair or not, but that's what he wanted. He told me afterward he regretted it a little bit. There should have been a family reunion. But I didn't care.

PL: You didn't.

MB: I didn't, no.

PL: You didn't have an image of a marriage in your head from youth or anything like that?

MB: No. You know how some girls go out and look at ring settings and all that? I didn't. I just took the ring he gave me and done with it. I was glad to get it. Let me say this: right or wrong, I don't regret it at all. It was exactly the way I wanted it. His father was there. His father was ninety-two in – let's see. We were married in '39, and Dad Buttnick must have died about March of '40. So he was there. Again, it doesn't seem nice, and it doesn't seem right, but I have never regretted it.

PL: Was there dancing? Was there music?

MB: No, oh, no. We were married in front of the Ark of the Covenant. We came downstairs, and we had a chicken dinner, as I remember. And his father and his three brothers were there. My sister happened to be there too, Debbie. She had just graduated and come back. She was there. Let's see, my great uncle and auntie. After we ate, we just got into the car and drove off.

PL: Where did you go?

MB: We went to San Francisco. That's where we had actually met.

PL: What did you do in San Francisco?

MB: Well, we were there about two weeks;– he had friends there. It was the year of the World's Fair, '39. And we went to the World's Fair. And then we came back. We had taken an apartment before we left on 16th Avenue. 1631 16th, the Garden Court. So we came back to our apartment. He was very close to his family, obsessively dedicated to them, which was understandable. They were older people, and he was sort of their window on the world.

PL: How did you feel about that, being a new bride, distanced from your own family? What was that like?

MB: Didn't bother me a bit, not a bit as long as he was there. It didn't bother me at all. I just sometimes wonder how strong the ties were. When we left in '35, we didn't see Daddy for four and a half years. He came over again – no, we left in '28. He came over just at the end of '32. And then he went back.

PL: You're saying he came to Dublin to visit.

MB: Yeah, to visit. Now, he also went to South Africa.

PL: What would you say was your most romantic or best and clearest memory about your courtship with Harry, your wedding, or a letter that he wrote? Is there something that you particularly cherish about that period of your life together that you recall?

MB: Well, I know I was always awfully thrilled to be with him at all times. We saw plays together. They had a couple of little theaters on the campus, then the Studio and the Penthouse. I liked being with him all the time. The most romantic moment must have been when he actually proposed.

PL: How did he do that?

MB: Just said, “I think maybe you better not see anybody else,” something like that. But you know how girls have showers and blah, blah, blah? I was down here; I hadn’t any friends yet or anything. I always said, “All I got was the man I wanted.” My daughter, my gosh, was she feted and wined and dined. Well, that’s fine. She had the veil and the train and everything, and I’m glad of it. But in absolute truth, I have no regrets about my wedding at all. There might have been a few raised eyebrows.

PL: Did people actually ever say anything?

MB: Some of the relatives in Harry’s family did. He had an aunt, his mother’s younger sister, and I understand she registered some disapproval that she wasn’t invited. Harry did have a big family, and none of them were there. But the Buttnicks were never that close to their family either. But that’s just how it was.

PL: Where did you settle?

MB: In Seattle? Well, we had that apartment until I got pregnant. And they wouldn’t allow children there. It’s on a court. It’s not far from where you live now.

PL: It was on Capitol Hill?

MB: Yeah, on Capitol Hill, 16th Avenue, very close to Madison. You know where that big apartment is, 1605 Madison. Just very close to that on 16th.

PL: It’s near Council House.

MB: Well, Council House is 17th.

PL: 17th.

MB: Yeah, it is. Now, the apartment house has “gone condo.” But they would not allow children in there. And glad and all, as we were happy to have our darling son coming,

Harry didn't like leaving that place. He said, "It's become home to me." But we were so thrilled to know that we were going to have the child. And that was just at the beginning when things were getting tight, too. But we moved across the street into an apartment that would take children. We were in that small apartment for three and a half years. Actually, Harry's folks had a beautiful home up on the corner of 17th and Prospect. I would not move in there, although they wanted us. We used the house an awful lot and the garden. We got a whole complete set, a baby bed, and everything, and we would drop the child off when we had to go out. But I maintained my own domicile. It was tough. I used to have to get up in the morning and get right out of that apartment. So I said to Harry, "I'd like to find a beach place." And as I say, housing was tight like you wouldn't imagine in Seattle then, with the war, right in the middle of the war. But I called up, and I found out that there was one place available on Alki Avenue just before you got to the lighthouse and you turn onto Beach Drive. We came out. We rented it. And we stayed there for the summer. That was kind of a novelty to Harry. It was right on the water.

PL: How did you get from Seattle to West Seattle at that point? Was the bridge built? Was it by ferry?

MB: No, oh, no. Ferry was much earlier. Also, the Elevated Streetcar was much earlier. We drove. There was a pretty good bus service then, too. No, I did – when I made my tape for West Seattle, I went right back to the years of the trestle and so forth. The ferry was before that. And there was an old, old family in Alki named the Teigs. They used to come over by boat very early on. But then Harry got to like living that way. I don't think his family liked it too well that we were so far away. We were back in the apartment for the winter. Then, one day, all of a sudden, I was putting away some clothes in the apartment – laundry – and he said, "Meta, there's a house – there's a place for sale on the Beach Drive side, on the waterside." I said, "Let's go." So we went back to – out to this real estate man. And he called us into the office. There weren't too many people

when we came in. But he called us into the office. And while we sat there cogitating, five calls came in about that property. So, on the fifth call, Harry said to the agent, “It’s all right. Hang up. Tell them it’s sold.” And when we came – he told us afterward, the real estate man, that he walked out, and there were about eight or nine couples sitting there. When they heard it was sold, they all walked out. It was a bargain like you couldn’t imagine. We had seventy-five feet of city waterfront for $7,500 and two livable houses on it. One was a guest house, and one was a garage that had been remodeled so that you could live in it. With my Alaska background, people living in one-room log cabins didn’t mean a thing. So, we lived out there, but his folks missed us very much, particularly the kids. We had two more babies after we moved out there. And then, right away, Jewish education for our child. Jack went to kindergarten in Alki. My little son went to kindergarten. Harry didn’t like it because he wasn’t getting any Jewish Education. He used to say, Jack, say Moshe kabole Torah m’Sinai [Moses brought forth the Torah from Mt. Sinai]. So, for first grade, I would send him to Seattle to the Talmud Torah, the after-school classes. The school was on 250 and Columbia. I said to some of my non-Jewish neighbors, “We’ll take Jack in every day, and your kids can play on the swings.” I said, “Then we’ll take Jack home.” That’s what I was going to do. It would have been Jack’s first grade. I’d been supervising the Sunday school in Bikur Cholim. And Rabbi Wohlgelernter, rest in peace, who’d been away on this vaad hatzalah thing, this rescue mission, had just come back, and he stopped me at the door. And he said, “What are you going to do about Jack’s [Jewish] education?” I said, “I’m bringing him every day to Talmud Torah, the after-school class.” He says, “What about the Day School?” I said, “What are you talking about?” He says, “This offers an integrated program of standard grammar school curriculum and Judaic studies in a regular public schoolhouse.” So I thought a little bit about it driving out to Alki. I came in, and I said, “Rabbi Wohlgelernter is starting this Day School thing. He wants me to send Jack, but I’m not going to do it.” Harry says, “Oh, yes, you are.” It was pretty tough on me, having been educated in public school and taught in public school. But when the master of the house says it,

that's it. So, we started Jack. Now, that made it easier to think about living out there because, see, there was no problem with having to pick him up and take him in in the middle of the day. His whole day of schooling was all done there. Then, I could see it was the way to educate a Jewish child.

PL: What was your Jewish life at that point outside of your children's?

MB: We had a strictly kosher house. We observed the holidays. We would come into town and stay with Harry's people for all the holidays.

PL: I'd like to hear a little bit about that because that seems like – you mentioned, I think, at one point in your previous oral history that there was – that that became very difficult at points, not only when Harry got ill, but, it was a big job to pack up the house.

MB: Yeah, it was.

PL: So tell me, how did that come about when you moved?

MB: Well, as I say, when we saw that we could have this routine with the kids, we began to think about putting a house on our property, building a nice home. Having grown up in a small town, I never realized how important transportation is in a big city. We lived a beautiful, rich Jewish life. As I say, Harry was active in the synagogue. Then, I was active in the Amit Women Zionist group and the Sisterhood of the shul.

PL: Which was called Mizrachi at the time?

MB: Yes, Mizrachi [Women's Organization of America], it was called, yes. We had such a beautiful site for that house. So, after Gwen was born, we built this beautiful home there. It was a mistake. I told that on the other tape, too. It's silly to build a house where you can't be for Shabbos or yontif [holidays]. And another thing, too – I pointed that out – your kids' lives lack spontaneity. I actually had all three of mine going to school out of the

district because, as I say, I got very friendly with the people in the school administration office. I told Mr. Selby in the office – then, after they finished the school, after they finished the eighth grade, they went to after-school classes for higher Jewish learning. Now, there's a high school; there wasn't then. So, I said it would be much easier if I could bring the kids in the morning and go to Garfield or to Franklin [High Schools], and then they can just go to synagogue for their after-school. He says, "Well, because you want to do it to give them more education," he said, "you can do it." They didn't allow that much in those years. So, that was all right. The school was all right. But Gwen felt out of it. Her friends would go off to study together after school. Well, I'd have to get her home. Once in a while, if they'd go into some evening thing, there'd be spontaneous getting together for a party afterward. See, she couldn't do it. I wouldn't ever do that again. My kids lived too far out to get together with their friends spontaneously after school and do homework or play or whatever.

PL: When you were getting ready for Shabbos to go to the Buttnick's house, what did you do to get ready?

MB: Well, first of all, we had to take all the clothes for the regular and for the synagogue. And I frequently took food in. I used to make Gefilte fish balls. I sometimes started taking in a roast. It was easier to cook at home and bring it in there. And Harry used to pack a suitcase. It was a big move.

PL: What was it like for a girl who never grew up in a Jewish community or with a formal Jewish education to then be in the home of another woman on Shabbos? What did you do?

MB: Well, first of all, Harry's folks sat and waited for us, you know what I mean? I could not have come in on my own mother the way I did with them. They had a big home, and Harry and I had our bedroom, and they had two rooms for the kids. There was no crowding at all. We were their window on the world, so to speak. They were old, older

people; you bring these three darling kids in. We entertained. We lived there as we would live anywhere. But again, I say it was a mistake. It was a pity to give up that property, though. We built a beautiful home on it. We enjoyed that home very much. We had an outdoor barbecue pit. We had beautiful big parties. Some of my friends used to call them "conventions." And being strictly kosher, we were able to entertain the rabbis and other observant people. I never minded being in somebody else's house because I was never made to mind. You know what I mean?

PL: I know that you learned a tremendous amount about how to be Jewish and how to keep a Jewish home from your own family. But who else did you learn from? Clearly, when you moved to Seattle and married Harry, who grew up Orthodox, there were things that you had to learn. What were those things, and how did you learn them?

MB: First of all, I knew the basics. I knew when I was buying the stuff for home – two sets of China [and] two sets of silverware. I knew the basics. I just asked.

PL: Who did you ask?

MB: Well, I asked the rabbi. I was very flattered one day when – well, it was after Dad Buttnick died, I guess. And they used to come over for morning prayers every morning. I brought some cookies over there that I had made. He said, "Which are yours, Meta?" Oh. Takes one off – it was a great compliment. I learned. When you know the basic things, you can learn. In those years, there was almost nothing you could buy in cans. Everything had to be done at home. A few Heinze's products, some Cross and Blackwell stuff. But you see, the point is, if you want to, your motivation comes from the fact that you want to do it. And now, the most Orthodox Jews can eat in my home. My children have sat down at the table with the president of the UO and with Mrs. Gotsfeld, who was the founder pat of Amit Institutions in Israel.

PL: Is it Bessie Gotsfeld?

MB: Yes, I consider that keeping a kosher home is a very enriching experience.

PL: Explain more how you've experienced it as an enriching.

MB: Well, first of all, I said that the most Orthodox Jew will eat in my home. I enjoyed working for an Orthodox synagogue and for the Hebrew school. I enjoyed the work. It's hard, very hard work. Believe me, payroll in the Hebrew Day School comes around inexorably. The school is on a much better financial basis now because they have the Samis Foundation money. For the first year of the Hebrew school, we started with nine children. We had a little money at the start that Wohlgelernter collected for the whole year. There were two teachers, a Hebrew teacher and a wonderful secular teacher named Della Morrison. Harry Buttnick and Ben Genauer – let him live longer – matched checks every single month to pay those two teachers. It stood on its own then. But I haven't felt it irksome or a bore, never. This bunch of girls that I go around with now are on the lake; none of them are Jewish. They go to the Boston Pops on Saturday. I'd like to go there, but also they're always having anniversaries of this, that, the other. When they have them on Saturday night, I'm not able to go. It's a sacrifice. But again, weighing the loss against the gain, I'm very satisfied with it.

PL: Early on, when you were still acclimating to keeping a Jewish home as a young married woman, do you remember making mistakes?

MB: Oh, yeah.

PL: What do you remember?

MB: Well, I remember mixing things up, like grabbing a fleyschike [meat] spoon when it should have been dairy – I always asked the authorities. That's what people say about me, I always asked.

PL: How much did Harry know, and was he able to advise you?

MB: Oh, he knew everything, but I just didn't involve him. You know, the Catholics say, o, saveur non pas â ses sainte – savior not to his saints. I call the rabbi. It's the toughest thing in the world, asking sheyles [questions about Jewish law]. I loathe it. Rabbi [Shalom] Rivkin was here. We got awfully friendly with the rebbetzin [rabbi's wife], Paula. She said, "If you didn't have a kosher house, you wouldn't have any sheyles to ask." No, I never took anything for granted.

PL: So, how would you say that you finessed being a Jewish homemaker? Were there things that you decided to bring in that were from your own history, from Dublin, from Alaska, that influenced your home and your children's sense of being Jewish?

MB: Yeah. Because, as I say, my dad reached his goal, and then I wanted just the things he wanted. I wanted Jewish associates. I always say the three things that you can do against the scourge of intermarriage is education, association, and festivalization; that is, making a big to-do out of the holidays and about a Friday night and so forth. No, I had the same objectives as my Dad. I wanted my children to have Jewish awareness. My daughter now is married to a very Orthodox boy. Of course, she has this very fine Jewish education. She went to the Hebrew Day School for nine years and then afterward to after-school classes and graduated from Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She couldn't have married that fine gentleman if she hadn't had that education and those values.

PL: I think we're going to end here for today and pick up at another session. Is that all right?

MB: Sure, whatever you say.

PL: Okay.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PL: We are continuing the oral history interview of Meta Buttnick Kaplan. This is Pamela Brown Lavitt of the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Woman's Words Project in Seattle. Today's date is Wednesday, the 20th of June 2001. This is the continuing mini-disk tape two. So, last time we met we were talking quite a bit about your family and living in West Seattle. I just wanted to ask you to talk a little bit about your children. So tell me, when were your children born, and how many did you have? Tell me about them.

MB: Well, I had, G-d bless them, three. The way we happened to go – because, as you know, a logical place for a Jew to be is – well, as Orthodox Jews, we have to be walking distance from the synagogue and walking distance from the Talmud Torah, or not too far, from now, as we called it, the Day School. Now, it is the Seattle Hebrew Academy. In the good old days, you also had to consider the Jewish butcher. That was said about the position of a Jewish home; [it] could not be far from the Jewish butcher. Now, you don't have to be closer ¬– we have freezers. You don't have to get your whole year's supply of meat in your freezer. But the other two things still remain, as far as being close, walking distance from the synagogue. Synagogue is terribly important. It sort of actualizes the theory that your kids – Rabbi Appel said that once – "They learn all week, but when they go to the synagogue, they put these things into practice. They put the knowledge into practice." So, when we got married, my in-laws had a beautiful home on the corner of 17th and Prospect, which was [within] walking distance from 17th and Yesler, where the shul was. In fact, my father-in-law, rest in peace, walked it in his nineties. It was a level walk all the way, but a long walk. So we moved – we had a furnished apartment when we were first married, walking distance from the shul – everything, convenient as it should be. Then, when we were blessed with our first child, we had to move out of there because they didn't allow children. We moved across the street into an apartment that did allow children. But you certainly couldn't keep an infant, a little child, in that apartment. I used my in-laws' home. It was about maybe six, seven blocks. We were on Olive, and they were on Prospect. I would get him up in the

morning and feed him, and then I'd take the walk over to my sisters-in-law, and we'd spend the day there. It got to be pretty strenuous. Fortunately, they had a beautiful yard, like a park. They were close to Volunteer Park. In the summer, we would take him there. Meanwhile, we were always looking for a house. We had the idea that having that home on 17th and Prospect, we could live anywhere in the city because we could always come there for Shabbos. And the psychological ambiance there was they sat and waited for us. They were all older, and our children were a stellar attraction. So I had a summer of that, of taking him every day, either to Volunteer Park or my sister-in-law's home. The next summer, I said, "Harry, we're going to look for a place, a shack in Alki, by the beach. And I'll keep him there for the summer." So we looked, and we got one. We called the Alki real estate woman, and we got one. That was the summer of '43 – very fortunate to get it. It was a shack, but it was right on the water. And this way, I could live more or less of a normal life. But of course, at our son's age, there were no demands yet for Jewish education or anything like that. There was one Orthodox family in Alki, and they'd lived there for several generations. So, they used to bring my meat out when they'd get theirs unless I got it myself. So in the fall, we – that shack was not adequate for fall; it couldn't be winterized. But I hated to give it up. And I kept it – we kept it for a couple of months, and then we sublet it. And then one Sunday, in the winter, we lived in town, the same deal, moving between the two homes. And Harry said to me one Sunday morning – I was putting away some clothes that had been ironed – he said, "There's a piece of property advertised on the water in West Seattle." I said, "Let's go and look at it." See, he wanted it too. He'd gotten so he liked living right on the water. We went out to this real estate man on California Avenue. There were quite a few people waiting, but they took them in turn. We went in to start talking to him about it. That phone must have rung six times. He was describing it to others who were interested. Finally, maybe on the seventh ring, Harry said to him, "It's all right. Tell him it's sold." So for $7,500, we got seventy-five feet of city waterfront and two livable houses on it. One house was a beautiful little guest house down by the water. The other house was a remodeled

garage. But with my background in Fairbanks of log cabins and so forth, it was perfectly all right. We were able to live there. So we bought it.

PL: You had one child at this point?

MB: I had one child. That child was born in 1941. And those were the war years, too. You couldn't get an ounce of help. So then, we moved out there. We were blessed with my second child in '45.

PL: What is that child's name?

MB: Morris. Jack, my oldest, was five years old. He absolutely had to get his Jewish learning. And even though Harry could have taught him, I felt he should have the ambiance of a class and classmates. And I was absolutely right, too, as was shown later in the Day School, Seattle Jewish Academy. So we did have this beautiful piece of waterfront property. We wanted so much to build a house on it. But I was at war with my conscience. I didn't see how we could keep Jack so isolated. So, in 1947, Rabbi Wohlgelernter stopped me as I was just dashing out. I had worked with the Sunday school in the shul, Bikur Cholim, in Achzika. An Orthodox congregation never encouraged Sunday school. They want maximal education. So they gave all their strength and their support to the Talmud Torah, which had after-school classes. But as it happened, Herzl had this three-day-a-week school then. There were people who did not want a day school program for their children, and they only wanted Sunday school. We might have been losing some members on account of it. Many years before, they'd had a Sunday school, and [the] board would reinstigate it. Harry, my husband, rest in peace, was one of the people who said they should reinstigate it. It wasn't opposed so much. So I worked for the shul Sunday School; I always worked on anything that Harry wanted.

PL: Can I ask you about that statement?

MB: Yeah.

PL: When you said you worked on anything that Harry wanted, I guess on a more personal level, Meta, I'm just wondering what your hopes and desires for your child, as far as raising them was concerned at this time. Because you had some interest in their education as well. So what were you wanting?

MB: Well, again, with my background, I knew what Jewish loyalty meant and how one must work for it. I was going to get a Jewish Education for our son. My non-Jewish neighbors and I had it planned out. We'd ride into town, which is ten miles. There's a park across the street from the Talmud Torah. Their kids would play on the swings and stuff while Jack was in the Talmud Torah. Then, after I had supervised that Sunday school for two years, I was giving it up. There was a fellow that was stationed out here in WWI. His name was Rosenblum; he married Nate Etkin's sister. He was a teacher. I didn't take any money for doing that work, but they were going to pay him something. So I bowed out of it. I was glad enough to hand it over. It was pretty exacting work. I was just leaving the shul one Sunday morning, and Rabbi Wohlgelernter had just come from Europe and Israel. The Vaad Hatzalah was a rescue mission for Holocaust survivors. Rabbi Wohlgelernter was in Europe and Israel for quite a while after WWII. He stopped me and said, "Meta, are you going to send Jack to Hebrew school?" Well, I said, "Of course. I'm going to bring him in every day after public school." He said, "No, I wasn't talking about that." He had just started a Day School with an integrated program.

PL: Can you describe what you mean by an integrated program?

MB: Well, a school with the integration of Jewish scholarship and secular learning in regular public school hours. It was in the planning stage. But Rabbi Wohlgelernter accepted no obstacle, never. The fact that I lived ten miles away from the Talmud Torah meant nothing to him. He said, "I mean what we would call the Day School, Jewish learning and secular learning." So I listened to him, and I said, "Oh, no, I don't want that." So he talked to me a little bit more. I said, "Well, all right." He said, "That's fine." After

the ten-mile drive back to my house, I said to Harry, “Rabbi Wohlgelernter wants to start a day school, a whole Jewish school secular learning with secular learning in public school hours. He wants me to send Jack, but I’m not going to do it. He said, “Oh, yes, you are.” I was hysterical. Public school had been so much a part of my life. I’d always gone to them, taught in them. So we had some hysterical days.

PL: Well, you had mentioned – either it was in a previous conversation or a previous interview, I can’t remember, that, I guess it was when there were times at the Seattle Hebrew Academy where you had recognized that women and men had different feelings around whether to send their children to that kind of school. You remember a particular woman who, I think, perhaps had more of a choice, or she was much more forward about not wanting this. And you had said, “I certainly had no choice.” What did you mean by that?

MB: Well, this is what I meant by it: Harry said Jack was going, and that was it. Then I got interested in the work – and believe me, I did a complete bouleversement. Jack learned to read in English long before any of the other kids on Beach Drive. He was very happy to be surrounded by Jewish children. And already, his social life was mainly Jewish. He was being invited to birthday parties and had many Jewish friends and so forth. So, as I say, I worked as hard as any human being could to keep that school going and thank God it did go because I was blessed with two more children, I told you. And they all went, and I was delighted with their progress. But we’d have meetings on enrollment. We’d get lists of people. And then we’d bring in the reports. And one of the girls on the committee would say, well, the father wants it, but the mother doesn’t. I wondered what kind of a Caspar Milquestoast is that father? In our case, too, the father wanted it, but the mother didn’t, but the father prevailed. Well, there was a lot of opposition. One Orthodox Jew told Rabbi Wohlgelernter, “You’re not going to make a guinea pig out of my kid.” And they didn’t, but as I say, the man that said this did send his three younger children to the school. There were loud cries against this school –

“Ghettoizing the Jewish child, segregating the Jewish child.”

PL: How did you feel about that, and what were the models in education you were aware of at that point?

MB: I knew the class would be small. They’d get individual attention. I know the morning that we drove up, I drove Jack in. I’d packed his lunch and drove him in. And there was a woman standing on the steps of the Hebrew school. That building now is on 25th and Columbia. I think it’s a Muslim school now. Anyway, this woman was standing there. And she epitomized the public schoolteacher – beautifully quaffed grey hair; in her hand, she was holding some colored pencils and paper. So I went up to her and said, “Are you going to be the teacher?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “What a relief. I finally saw some normalcy in the thing.” Her name was Della Morrison.

PL: Who were you afraid would be his teachers?

MB: I had no concept. I knew who the Hebrew teacher would be, and he was very excellent. The thing was so foreign to me. As I tell you, I was very strongly opposed to it. I was reassured when I met Miss Morrison.

PL: In terms of the roles that you and your husband played, your husband made a very strong decision, yet you had to carry it out in many ways.

MB: Yeah.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about that? Did he engage as much as you did in those early days of the Seattle Hebrew Day School?

MB: Yes, he did. First of all, he and Ben Genauer – we had enough money to start – what happened was he started that school. He’d been away from Bikur Cholim for several years. There was no longer the empathy for him that there used to be. So, he

was offered a job in Chicago at the Ansche Shalom shul. He was here for about six weeks, and we found out he was leaving. He could collect money. He could get blood from a stone. But he left. So the money to pay the two teachers lasted maybe one month or so. Then, for that year, Harry Buttnick and Ben Genauer – Ben should live longer – matched checks to meet the expenses for a whole year. So, I think that answers it. Of course, Harry didn't like the way I was working so hard.

PL: Tell me about your involvement and give me a sense of your involvement over the years.

MB: Well, first of all, the first year, there was no reason to hire teachers because that had been done already. We had public relations. I remember we organized a tea and invited all the mothers and all the prospective mothers so they could see what we were doing. In that year, that was my first consideration. See, for the first year, we were separate. The second year, we went in under the aegis of the Talmud Torah. And then, of course, there were big fundraisers, the bazaars, and so forth. The first year, first of all, I had to drive Jack back and forth ten miles every day. That I did and did willingly. The first year was just a question of my general conversion to the idea of it and then trying to sell the idea to other people because there was no fundraising or anything.

PL: Did they give you a title of any kind? Were you a board member?

MB: I was on the Board of Education always, all the time from 1947 to 1967. I was the secretary. The board would get together and constantly watch for classroom situations and everything. And the fact that I could get up there in the middle of the morning and be there for the meeting was interesting. But as I say, I did everything that I could. I organized these teas and conceptualized them. But then, the second year was an altogether different ball game. The Seattle Talmud Torah is first documented as the Bikur Cholim Hebrew Free School in 1894. It offered classes in Judaic Studies after public school hours. It was terminated in 1948. The Seattle Hebrew Day School and the

Seattle Talmud Torah consolidated. Then, the financial obligation was much greater. We had to get out and raise funds. The big fundraiser of the year was a bazaar. And we went into every second-hand store on First Avenue, getting merchandise for it. Then, by that time, there was a need to get into the teacher placement. And the public school opened up their books containing applications to us completely. That's when I probably mentioned Mr. Selby. He was awfully nice. The way teachers in the Seattle Public School system are rated this way: The number ones are the best. The higher the number, the less efficient the teacher. The Seattle Public School Administration gave the Seattle Hebrew Day School full access to its information on teachers. So we would read these – resumes – that went on for all the time that I had kids in school. Choosing the teachers, we would get the best available candidates, and they would come in for an interview before the board. Then, there was nothing that I didn't do.

PL: What kind of qualifications did teachers have to teach in a day school?

MB: To teach in the day school, the teachers had to be qualified to teach in public school. This gets complicated. We hired teachers who had taught in public schools in other states, and they were efficient teachers. To teach in Washington public schools, they had to take an exam which involved Washington State School Law and something called Washington State Manual. We hired excellent teachers who had come here and not taken this exam. This is how I remember the matter. I was secretary of the Board of Education from 1947 until 1967 or 68. If the school was open now [it's closed for winter break], I would call and find out the policy now. I'll be glad to do so later if you so desire. Ms. Morrison, Della, told me that – she said she'd lie awake moaning, asking about whether she should take it on or not. She had retired from Minnesota after teaching for many, many years there. And she'd come out to the West Coast because she had a sister in Walla Walla and a relative in Portland. She didn't want to live in the same city with either of them, but she wanted to be closer. She was just a little past public school age. She was about sixty-five. But anyway, she told me – she said she moaned in her

sleep about whether she should do this. Somebody told her that Jews are the people of the book. Any time they want to do something, it will be of the very highest standards. So we would explain the structure of the school. These teachers would come in. Let me say that when we met our parents in the fall, they had the very best teachers available because we didn't stop at the public school. We went to graduate schools and universities where the students could work part-time. We looked everywhere. We got the best that were available. But as I say, your ones and twos and threes and fours would be taken up in public school. We had no power of taxation or anything. And then the ones we'd get would be eight or nines. But we got some crackerjacks. We got some retired – the hardest slot to fill was beginning reading. Nobody wants to do that, K through six. Even your teachers that had K through six wanted second grade. They didn't want beginning reading. So we got a few retired teachers that were absolutely marvelous.

PL: I saw in your file when I was doing some background research that you even received letters from people in different countries.

MB: About teaching?

PL: Yes. I remember seeing a letter that was written either in Hebrew or Russian. Do you remember?

MB: Oh, well, they possibly could have been Hebrew teaching applicants. Well, frankly, I don't like to say it, but we got the people that couldn't qualify for public school. Though, we got Ms. Armstrong. She was a crackerjack. She had wanted to get out of public school into an easier slot, so to speak. But we had applicants from all over the country and certainly all over the state.

PL: How did you respond when non-Jewish teachers applied for the position? In secular subjects, we wanted non-Jewish teachers. We did have some Jewish teachers in the

secular department, and it was incongruous because the school is based on traditional philosophy; but, at the time, reform and conservative Jewish teachers were the best choices, so we hired them.

MB: Our teachers in the secular faculty all were non-Jewish. We wanted them to be. There were a couple of errors. First year, Ms. Morris, and second year, Mrs. Reitan had a little Halloween party, which they shouldn't have had, see. It wasn't their fault, and we hadn't informed them. They apologized.

PL: What was wrong with having a Halloween party?

MB: Well, Halloween party – Halloween means "All Saints Evening," see. It's definitely a Christian holiday. But no, there was no anti-Semitism among the secular teachers.

PL: I don't think my question is so much about anti-Semitism. It's more about induction and how it is that you introduce them to the way of a Hebrew Day School. So what did you have to do to acclimate them, if anything?

MB: Well, nothing. Nothing. They knew the situation. They knew that school would have to be closed on the High Holy Days and all the other differences. This was their job, and they were going to do it. I think, frankly, Jewish parents were much kinder to teachers than others. I mean, they accepted them much more socially. They were always being invited to dinner at this person's house or something like that. They were asked to our birthday parties and Bar Mitzvahs. Jews were Jews, and that was it. Their lifestyle was different.

PL: Was there any reaction, positive or otherwise, within the larger Seattle community to the creation of an accredited Jewish public/Hebrew school?

MB: Yes.

PL: Do you remember there being recognition?

MB: Yes, but it almost entirely subsided as the years passed. That's what I said. At the beginning, we had one fellow that was Jewish but was married to a non-Jewish woman who had had some kind of a conversation ¬– he had a drugstore. We always went everywhere for merchandise. So I asked him for something. He and the school seemed as far apart as the poles. Do you know that his grandchildren were in that school? There came to be a complete acceptance. There were Jews that would say when they were asked for money, "The kids that can't afford to go there should go to public school," which was all wrong. So that opposition there was. The school was not acceptable immediately. But by the sheer force – I know the principal of Franklin High School said, "You graduate about three or four kids a year, and we graduate forty or fifty." He said, "Your students all have valedictorians, salutatorians, over and over again." The educators had great respect for us.

PL: Did you have to gain any kind of accreditation from the Seattle Public Schools or the Regents exams? How did you go about –? You said you added a year every year –

MB: Our teachers were all qualified public school teachers. Some of them had already qualified scholastically in another state and did not have that exam that qualifies them to teach in Washington. But possibly we had teachers that were not qualified to teach in public school for that reason. But if we ever took them, it was because they were wonderful teachers, you know what I mean?

PL: Your children – I'm sorry, continue, Meta.

MB: No, go ahead.

PL: Your children didn't actually graduate from that school? Why not?

MB: Oh, yeah. They were in the school as long as it was there. Jack graduated from the eighth grade. Morrie graduated from the ninth grade. Gwen graduated from the tenth grade.

PL: And then where did they go after –?

MB: Well, they all went to public high schools. Now, that probably wouldn't be the case. Now, they'd go to the Yeshiva, Northwest Yeshiva High School. That's an integrated program with standard high school curriculum. But my kids all had that much public school, and I'm glad they did, in a way.

PL: So, looking back at your essentially founding the Hebrew Day School here in Seattle, what are the satisfactions and rewards that you feel, looking back at that experience?

MB: Well, first of all, their Jewish scholarship is above reproach. And thank Heaven they have the Jewish loyalty, which comes from their scholarship. Even though we lived kind of far away and they didn't live in the Jewish neighborhood, almost all their friends were Jewish. And besides Jewish learning, there's ethics and morals from the wisdom of our Jewish sages. Thank heaven they've been ethical and moral, which could probably come from that. With my kids, it was particularly fortunate because they lost their Daddy – Gwen, the baby, wasn't even eleven yet when he died. When the man of the house goes, a lot of discipline goes. But they lived according to Jewish Law, to Jewish Order, and that was another element of discipline.

PL: Was there something about the fact that you founded this in Seattle that makes this particularly important? Seattle, is it unique compared to other cities?

MB: Yes.

PL: How so?

MB: Well, no, Seattle isn't unique. It's its location – you take your very Orthodox Jews before we had this school; those kids were all sent away. Some of them got sent away at the first year of high school. And it was very hard – your top-flight Jewish Hebrew teachers and rabbis did not want to come on the West Coast before there was a day school. Even after there was, they sent their children away for contacts. We weren't satisfied with the Reform and Conservative contacts here. A Jew was a Jew. Their kids had to be plunged six feet into Orthodoxy, so to speak. We were satisfied, but some of them weren't. There's more satisfaction now with the Jewish High School for the Orthodox families. And now, some of the mothers say that it was a mistake to send sophomores in high school away. One mother said, "Fifteen-year-old kids have problems, and they shouldn't have to discuss them with other fifteen-year-olds," that type of thing. The high school is Heaven-sent to them. And yet, maybe they still feel that there aren't enough Orthodox Jewish contacts. Coming out to the West Coast is really an expedition for some of these Jews.

PL: Can I ask you a little bit about what you were like as a mother?

MB: Well, I don't think I have anything to reproach myself with. It might have been that we did eventually build a beautiful home on that property and it was a lovely place to live, but it was far out. The kids had all these Jewish friends, but the minute the school day was over, they did have to come out away from them. We would bring kids out to play, or they were invited to play, parties, evening school events. Never let them miss a single thing, but they didn't have that coming home, going over to each other's houses, and so forth. They didn't have that. Let's see, there was something else that came – oh, yes. The fact is that there we built this lovely home, and we couldn't be there for Yom Tov or for Shabbos because if we did, we couldn't go to shul. So we would pack our suitcases and come in and stay at my sisters-in-law again. We came in frequently on Shabbos if the children were invited anywhere or if the school had a special Shabbos program.
PL: Right, you mentioned that.

MB: And it's silly to build a Jewish home, a strictly kosher home, a traditional home, where you can't leave it and go to shul and come back to it. If I had that part of it to do over again, I don't think I would.

PL: How do you think your own children would describe you as a mother, though? Would they say that –? You were talking about your husband's discipline, but would they say that you were a permissive mother, a flexible mother, a strict mother, a protective mother? What would they say and why?

MB: I never would countenance anything dishonest being done. I think, basically, they were satisfied with me as a mother. I did everything in the world. Their wish was my command. And after Harry died, I moved heaven and earth for them. Nothing was too much for me to do for them.

PL: So what kind of things would you do that –?

MB: Well, if Gwen had an after-school program, I would sit in my car and read a book for an hour or two. I never wanted them to miss a thing, never wanted them to miss a birthday party, didn't want them to miss anything. I saw to it that they didn't. Gwen was in kindergarten. That was just a half a day. I'd go in, pick her up, bring her home, go back in again to get the other kids at 3:30. I think, looking at it from my own point of view, is this – there are certain things in your life that you're satisfied the way you've done and certain ones where you haven't done your best. Now, as far as my four years at Trinity, if I had them to do over again, I would do them better. I didn't know the value of a minute in those years. I didn't fit into the laissez-faire of college, you know. There – you know, you've been to college. Your work depends on yourself. It isn't like having to go home every day and do your homework and have the teacher see it. I should have worked harder. I was taking an honors degree, and we had an honors exam three times a year; one of them was all that was needed to get credit. For a while, I only did one. I should have done them all because all that material is what you have to write on for your final,

for your moderatorship. I came out all right. There were three moderatorships – first, second, third. I missed first by 1.8 of a mark. But it was an honor's degree. When you went into Trinity, you decided to join a pass degree or an honor's degree, and you took different courses. But I'm not happy with my work in college. But I think as far as being a mother and a wife, I am satisfied.

PL: Were there particular things that you did with your children that you really enjoyed doing or your whole family that you really enjoyed doing together?

MB: Yes. Well, when Harry was alive, we had beautiful barbecues on our dock. And we did have some little trips. I did what they liked to do. As I say, I never let them miss a birthday party, never let them miss a thing. I didn't care what personal sacrifice on my part. Now, I sometimes contemplate what Harry would think, that they have excellent Jewish scholarship. My daughter married a wonderful Jewish boy.

PL: Do you feel that your style of childrearing was different than your own mother's?

MB: Yes [laughter].

PL: That's fine.

MB: No. My mother was an outstanding woman. She was a born K through six teacher, but she never trained formally. But she had an instinctive way with little children. She had a nursery school in her front parlor for years. She felt that it was very wrong that kindergarten was not part of public school education. And in those years, people thought that kindergarten was a lot of play – as late as when I started to teach in 1936, my superintendent through then said – but now, you know how important it is. The whole Head Start movement started with pre-kindergarten children – those kids would learn more in kindergarten. But Mama got a few other mothers to sympathize with her. First of all, to get it put onto the ballot, we had to get people to sign petitions. Mama would push

the sled, the two younger sisters in the sled around, and get the signatures on the petitions. And they got it onto the ballot, and they made it. That's really remarkable. There was another schoolhouse across the river from Fairbanks; they pulled that schoolhouse in and set it up. So, it's due to her that kindergarten became part of the public school there. But as I say, she had a very fine mind, and she was very fair-minded and very sympathetic to us when we needed sympathy. My dad never balked [at] anything we wanted for education or travel for education. There was never a question. I told you I was reading honors French in Trinity, and I only had a couple of years of it. I didn't have the knowledge of the language. I told it to Mama. I said, "The only way you can get it is to go and spend a summer in Paris." Nothing to it. There was the money to go with anything. My sister, Deb, wanted to go into college earlier. She was going to medical school. And she could do it if she had what we called grinds, special tuition, that cost a king's ransom. Nothing to it. He said, "I have all kinds of money for education."

PL: So let me ask you then about a very important and difficult time when Harry got ill. Can you help us understand –? I mean, he died an untimely death. What happened in terms of your family life when he got ill?

MB: Oh, it changed. It changed. There was no Daddy at the head of the table to say Kiddush [prayer over the wine], though my kids kept up those traditions. Oh, no, my life changed.

PL: When did you learn that he was ill, Meta?

MB: I always knew he wasn't robust. He had a rheumatic heart. When he passed away, the doctor told me he had lived thirty years longer than anyone could have expected with that heart. So, I let him rest as much as possible. I made him take vacations – the Caribbean, Honolulu, Panama, Arizona, California. I stayed home with the kids so he would know that they were properly taken care of. I think I can say I did my best for Harry. We were married twenty-one years. And oh, yes, my life changed. You ask any

widow. I had an enormous responsibility and did my best to meet it.

PL: Can you describe what that experience was like, your experience of widowhood? What did you do?

MB: Oh, you fill your life as best you can. And I wrote – I kept on. I had written the history of Bikur Cholim for the 50th in ‘41. And in ‘51, of course, I wrote it for the 60th. Harry was still here. In ‘61, I wrote it again. See, that was when he had died. As I say, taking care of the kids alone was in itself a job.

PL: Well, I’m curious how it is then that your experiences, getting involved with history and oral history, were an outcome of that time of your life. So maybe we could talk about that a little bit. When did you first get involved with oral history? What was your first foray –?

MB: Well, let’s see, didn’t I put that on the tape? Well, when I was a little girl in Fairbanks, the high school and the grade school were all in one building. And there’s a picture of it right here, the little red schoolhouse. Every Monday morning, there would be an assembly in the one big room upstairs, which was used as a classroom for the high school. But there was a woman superintendent, Henrietta A. Myrick. She was a graduate of Wellesley.

PL: Could you spell her last name, if you remember? How did she spell her name?

MB: M-Y-R-I-C-K. Henrietta A. Myrick. And she used to – she had all the school get-togethers on Monday mornings, first grade all through eighth grade and high school. I remember the kids in high school would double up in their seats so there would be seats for us. Every once in a while, each grade would be asked to put on a program, and we sang one song. I remember, “We are the knights of the health brigade …”. That type of thing. But she had an instinctive feel for oral history. In those years, most of the men walking around the streets of Fairbanks were living libraries. They had come up to

Alaska in the gold rush. They had walked up the Chilkoot Pass, shot on the way to the Klondike Gold Rush in the rapids in Lake Bennett. So, she had some of those men come and talk to us, and tell us their life experience, which is exactly what oral history is. I particularly remember one man named Mr. Buteau. He told us how they had built some kind of a cabin and had no light in it. So, they cut one part of the logs open, and then some way, somehow, made some ice freeze and put it in the opening so that the light came in through the ice, see? And I really think that's what started it, talking to people who had lived the situation.

PL: Did you do this as part of an assembly, or was this is class project, or did you do it as a teacher and ask your students to do it?

MB: When I started to teach high school, Ms. Myrick had inspired me. There were still men walking around Fairbanks who were living libraries. So, I was the faculty adviser for the school newspaper, and I initiated the Trailblazer column.

PL: What was the –?

MB: My pupils went out and talked to people, and they wrote them up. I remember one funeral we went to, and one of my kids' write-ups was what was used for the obituary. We did capture some of the atmosphere of those early days. We had no tape recorders, just made notes. These interviews were published in the Paystreak, the school paper, published in the Fairbanks News Miner. When I got married to Harry in 1939, Bikur Cholim members were already talking about their 50th Anniversary in '41.

PL: Of Bikur Cholim?

MB: Of Bikur Cholim. That, by the way, is the oldest congregation in the state. We just were about one jump one year ahead of Spokane. So, they were talking about what they were going to do, a banquet and so forth, and I said to Harry, "Who's going to write the history?" So Harry says, "History, what history?" I said, "The history of Bikur Cholim." I

had already heard that there were – see, the Bikur Cholim started as the chevra. That means – the Hebrew word for "society." It started as a chevra in 1889. There were a few Orthodox boys here, and there were Reform Jews, but they had never organized. These Orthodox boys just got to know each other. When one of them had yortzeit and had to say the memorial prayer, the others would come. They met in the back of a food store, Jacob Alpern's food store. Jacob Alpern is the third man buried in our Bikur Cholim Cemetery in 1893. Anyway, they met there. Then, they decided that they would rent a hall and have services on the High Holy Days. And they did. Then, in 1889, they were having services, and they decided that they would form a chevra, and they did. And then, in 1891, the chevra was incorporated [and] became the Congregation Chevra Bikur Cholim. So, in 1941, there were four surviving members of the chevra. But there were two men, Morris Pearl and Frank Antel were surviving members of the chevra, who consented to be interviewed in 1891. When it was incorporated in '91, there were quite a few surviving people that were there when the cherva was incorporated.

PL: What is the name of the book that you produced, and what did you produce it for?

MB: Well, it's just the History. The History of Bikur Cholim. We collected pictures which are reproduced in it. Anyway, when Harry came home, he said there was going to be a book, and they were going to sell space in it. I said, "Who's going to write the history?" He said, "History, who needs history?" I said, "I'm going to write it. We have primary source material from the members of the chevra, just like from these fellows that had crossed at Chilkoot Pass." These men that had been right there from the beginning and knew everything and everybody. I said, "I'm going to talk to them." So that's how I started. I got interviews with them. And then we had minutes. The Bikur Cholim Tribune. For more documentation.

PL: I want to know about how you collated all this material, because there was no Jewish archives project back then.

MB: No.

PL: How much of a Seattle resident were you at that point, how many years?

MB: I had lived in Seattle from 1923-1925, but a permanent resident since 1939. Well, there's some opposition to my doing it.

PL: Well, you were the new girl on the block.

MB: Exactly. Let's see, the thing was in '41. And I was married in '39, so barely two years. But I conceptualized the deal, and then people wanted to climb on the bandwagon. I understand they did a lot of campaigning, "She hasn't – how could she put the feeling into it." So, there was opposition. But my sources of information were minutes, which are now, thank heaven, in the archives, and interviews – and we did have a Bikur Cholim Tribune then too, and some information from there.

PL: How did you negotiate maneuvering through those very entrenched folks? How did you do it?

MB: Well, I found out afterward; I didn't even know this – the chairman of the affair was Sam Prottas. He was the most wonderful volunteer we've ever had in Seattle.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PL: – continuing the oral history interview with Meta Buttnick Kaplan. And this is mini-disk three. So, you were saying about Sam Prottas –

MB: Yeah. Sam Prottas was the chairman of the Jubilee. I went on my merry way, meeting with people. Of course, he was working on pictures and other articles that we conceptualized the whole book. As it started, it was just for people that would buy space in the book. Then they changed because some of the people said, "Some of those men that would work for the shul and do so many things, they didn't have the money to buy a

fifty-dollar page in the book." So, it was decided the book would be given free to everyone. So, I was working on it. There were a couple of other people on the committee. But I was asked to have one committee meeting with them. And that's, I understand when the objections started. They started to call Sam – I found this out later. They called Sam, and they had their friends call Sam. One of them said, "Could she put the proper feeling into it?" So I know there was some pretty big opposition to my doing it. But my material is correct. Even the biggest one who really militated against me came up to me afterward and said, "Congratulations," and she said her husband praised the book. But there was opposition. I was the new girl on the block.

PL: Now, you said you learned about this opposition later. So you didn't experience any kind of resistance at the time?

MB: Second-hand.

PL: Second-hand.

MB: It was reported to me.

PL: How did you feel about this?

MB: Well, I didn't care. I didn't care. I felt that it was absolutely something that should be done. I know all archival work is done with an obligation of regret that so much documentation has disappeared. Even in Fairbanks, when we were working on the Trailblazers, we would hear, "Oh, if we could have spoken to him, but he just died," something like that. So, I thought that it should be recorded. As I say, I heard about the opposition, but I didn't care.

PL: So, what was the next history project you worked on after that?

MB: Well, then, five years later, we made a timeline of what had gone before, and I wrote a history that was just published in the Tribune. And some way, somehow, I think I have a complete line of Tribunes, and I have lost that one. Can't find it. That would have been 1946. But then, in 1951, they had another dinner, and they had another book. I brought the history up to date. As I say, we started in then with timeline – what has gone before – and then wrote the history of the five years. And now, I'm glad we did because I have just been called by the publisher of our Tribune to publish a timeline of the 110 years, the 110th – and the material is all there. It's all done. I'll have to read through the next – through the last ten years' issues of Tribunes, but otherwise, the big bulk of the work is done.

PL: Did you use any models as a historian for Bikur Cholim to sort of – it sounds like you're sort of an autodidact in many ways about – and you've done it through process and experience.

MB: Yeah.

PL: Did you at any point at this time decide that you needed models through which to learn how to write history or history writing?

MB: Actually, when I read the first fifty years, kind of – to me, it's kind of sickening [laughter], you know, cutsie-pie. You know what I mean? Of course, the committee was in seventh heaven when we had the 100th anniversary because our history had been so well preserved. I don't know whether I said this before, but there was a congregation in Atlanta, I think, that was celebrating there at the same time. And they had nothing past the '60s – or nothing before the '60s. The kids that were working on the 100th Jubilee, on the history, they were grateful – Howard read it all. He said he liked best my "cutsie-pie" writing for my first one. After that, I personally felt that I got better, better use of words, sentence structure, and so forth. But no, they never quarreled with anything. They've tried to, and I've always been able to come up with the facts. One woman came

up in 1941, and she says, “Couldn’t you just say that – you know, her father, Mr. So-and-So was a hard worker for the shul?” I said, “Well, I mean, I’d have to have some documentation on that.” They were vying for places of honor, and I wouldn’t give it unless it was earned like Frank Antel. He’d earned it. He would run up in the middle of the night to do something for the shul. And he had been a charter member. I mean, there was irrevocable proof that he was. But if people just told me stuff and couldn’t document it, I wouldn’t use it.

PL: Well, I guess history, like democracy, on the face of it, seems something we can simply celebrate, but we both know it’s a very messy thing. I’m wondering how it was that when you learned of things that weren’t necessarily things that you wanted revealed in public history, how did you deal with those things?

MB: There was nothing. I started to be known as a person who would do something. When our shul had its 75th anniversary in 1966, I wrote the history. The Jewish Family Child Service started out as the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society one year later [in] 1892. So they wanted to have a 75th Anniversary history. So I had a very nice committee of women, and we did the history of the 75th. Then, in 1968, Elsa Levinson was the chairman of the Women’s Division of the Federation. One thing she said should be done – we should start to try to preserve the history of the Jewish experience in the Northwest. So, then I was called. We had a committee of laypeople and personnel from the Manuscripts Department of the University [of Washington]. We met downtown in the Federation Offices and formed a group that would be known as the Jewish Archives Project. We were to be given the expertise of the Manuscript Department and a place for storage, which is terribly important. Incidentally, now Paul Allen has given us thirteen million dollars. His father was head librarian at the UW. So, in the new Allen Library, we have state-of-the-art storage space and handling by the professional staff.

PL: When you say he's given you, do you mean the Historical Society or the University of Washington?

MB: No, gave to the University of Washington. After Mrs. Levinson's suggestion was adopted I started out doing oral history interviews and bringing in things for the archives, and I've been doing it ever since.

PL: What years were these when you started?

MB: That committee was formed in '68. Then, in 1980, we became The Washington Jewish Historical Society. The Archives is a committee of the Society. It's the most active committee there is. We're always doing oral histories and bringing in documentation. Right now, I'm working on the history of ninety-five years of Herzl Ner Tamid. There is material there, and there will be more when we have completed the history.

PL: I want to ask you a little bit about – there's a period right before you formed the Jewish Archives Project with the Federation and Elsa Levinson that you were deciding to get active in this kind of work and becoming more active volunteer-wise after Harry's death. How did you see that relationship? What's going on for you in terms of your choices to get active outside the home?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

MB: The fact is that I've always been active. When I was in Trinity, there was the Dublin Jewish Students Union, and I was in that. And then, when I went back to Fairbanks and started to teach, there was one woman there, Dorothy Robe, [who] was married to a college professor at U of AF. She had had help from – the Ameri Association of University Women when she was a student there. She had gotten a scholarship from them. So when she came up to Fairbanks, she wanted to start a scholarship – she wanted to start a branch of the organization, the AAUW. Its main purpose would be – it

did other things, but its main purpose was to establish a scholarship at the University of Alaska and to award one every year to a deserving high school girl. The first gathering was held in our home, our little old shacky home in Fairbanks. There were about eight or nine girls there. Dorothy had a list of people that were qualified if they'd gone to certain schools. My school was on the list. As I remember that night, many girls were relieved when their moms were on the list. Anyway, that was an interesting thing, too, because in those years, there was – if you taught grade school, you didn't have to have a degree – you could have a normal school education. But if you taught high school, you had to have a BA. And now you have to have a BA for any teaching position. There are no more Normal Schools. These schools have become colleges of education. It was a little disconcerting to some of these people. They'd say, "If I wanted to know about how to teach the third grade, I would go to a Normal School graduate who specialized in primary work or something." But anyway, the Fairbanks branch of the AAUW was established, and I was the first secretary for those two years. Somebody else was just going to take over after that. I was quite active in that group. We had a beautiful scholarship tea every year. I can remember making sandwiches for it and so forth. It has, through the years helped a lot of girls. When I was teaching high school, there was one gal. She says, "You know, Ms. Bloom, I'm so anxious to have that scholarship that I stopped going out with a certain bunch of kids because I wanted to prove that I was an amoral and ethical person." Because it was based on morals and ethics, everything like that. So then, when I got married to Harry, there had been a woman who lived in Seattle for about six years. Her name was Bessie Gotsfeld. She had become very friendly with the Buttnicks. She and her husband, who was a jeweler, had gone to live in New York. She started to work for Mizrachi. In those years, Mizrachi women's groups were just auxiliaries to men's organizations. There were no separate women's organizations. And the men's Mizrachi were well organized. So Mrs. Gotsfeld started to militate to have separate women's groups [and] separate organizations – Men's Mizrachi, Women's Mizrachi. Also, she went to Israel, and she saw some pitiful sights there. Those Yemenite girls

were given no opportunity for education, nothing. I've been to conventions where I heard even worse. I don't want it to go on tape. Anyway, she decided to start a school where they could live a decent lifestyle, they could learn a trade, and get decent standards of living. So, she started the first Amit school. The first one is in, I think, Tel Aviv. They went on, and now they have million-dollar institutions that are doing wonderful work. They are accepted by the Israel Educational Organization as being models for other schools and so forth. Anyway, she came back to Seattle in '39 on a fundraising tour. She also wanted to start a group of young women. There was an older group here. The older women had had an organization.

PL: There was an older women's chapter of Mizrachi?

MB: Yeah. They called it the Senior Mizrachi after we came to Seattle. But Mrs. Gotsfeld and Celia Genauer had a beautiful tea. There were a lot of people there that day. Mrs. Gotsfeld came over and asked me if I would take the presidency. The Buttnicks were one of the leader – pillar Orthodox families in Seattle. So I said I would. I remember the jubilation in the Buttnick's house when I got home. Now, you know that nobody wants those jobs. Nobody wants to be president. But in those years, it was kind of an honor, and I considered it such. So, I got right into that weeks after I was married. I kept the job as president for almost three years.

PL: During the war years?

MB: During the war years. We had interesting meetings. And by gosh, the National President came out here, Mrs. Shapiro, Irena Shapiro. She is Erich Segal's– the author of Love Story– She's his grandmother. And she was a person that also admitted no obstacle they already had kosher catering in the Waldorf-Astoria and so forth, portable ovens. She said, "Know how things are done." She said the downtown hotels in New York had the Kosher catering. So, again, Rabbi Wohlgelernter had a conference with the head of the hotel. It was the New Washington; it was the best hotel in the city. Now,

that's a sort of a Catholic home or something like that, on Second and Stewart. He went in, and I came in. And Marion Katsman came. The Rabbi had a conference with the maitre d', and the maitre d' said, "All right, we can do it." So Mrs. Poplack was the moshgiach [kitchen overseer]. The first kosher dinner in a downtown hotel was the dinner sponsored by our Avivan Mizrachi. So that was the beginning of the – now all the hotels have it. I was going to say, most organizations have it in their bylaws, their affairs have to be kosher.

PL: Can you tell me or identify what values you had that influenced your participation in Mizrachi, as well as to become president?

MB: I think, first of all, the reason I accepted is that I always seemed to like organization work. You see, I told you I was in the Jewish Student's Union in Dublin, and I always liked it. It was the thing that I liked to do. When I was approached by a woman of Mrs. Gotsfield's statue when I was a newcomer to Seattle and to the Orthodox community, I said yes because it was the thing I liked to do. It was my lifestyle.

PL: Are there any Jewish values that you associate with your decisions to participate?

MB: No, no. It was something I gravitated toward.

PL: Was it recognized – you said that the Buttnicks clearly celebrated. They were so excited. Why do you think they got so pleased about it?

MB: My procedure in the Tribune is when there is a current event that is connected to Bikur Cholim – Machzikay Hadth, I do just that.

PL: Can you explain what you mean by that?

MB: Amit is based on Orthodox philosophy. We have schools and we have community centers. Everything, all dietary laws are followed, all religious laws, I mean, as far as

doing things on Saturday. In our youth organizations, Jewish values are inculcated just as much as any other values. And we give some wonderful, sophisticated education – computers and everything like that. But these kids get their Jewish learning too. It's strictly Orthodox, strictly traditional.

PL: Did you see the presidency as an opportunity for personal growth?

MB: No. [laughter] I never even – I was so crazy about my husband. No, I didn't then but it was.

PL: So who was your mentor? How did you learn how to take on a leadership role?

MB: I think I just did it. As I told you, I was inspired to do this history by my experience in grade school. I think you don't because you like it. I was qualified for the AUW in Fairbanks. My school was on the list. I think I just liked it. Dorothy Robe, who was president, I liked her. I liked her husband very well. Some people wouldn't even touch community work with a forty-foot pole. But you know, I can't do anything else. I can't play bridge. I can't play Mahjong. I can't play golf. I can't play tennis. I'm glad to see my kids can do all these things. My granddaughter is quite a tennis star now. But I couldn't. And what I'm doing now even, this history of Herzl, that's the kind of thing I like to do. It's an aptitude and also liking it, finding it congenial.

PL: How have you, from the days when in 1941 you first put together the Bikur Cholim 50th Anniversary –

MB: 50th, yes.

PL: – how have people recognized you differently having done all this work?

MB: It seems like my name is synonymous with history. I'm always getting calls. In fact, the night before the Federation had its 75th Anniversary, Karen Treiger called me up.

She said, “Do you know how many Jews there are in Seattle?” I said, “No, Karen.” I said, “We’ve tried this, but there’s no – you could add up the membership of all the organizations but look at the unaffiliated Jews.” I said, “How can you tell how many those are?” Those are the questions I’m always getting. Or dates or something like that, I seem to be considered sort of a citywide historian. And that’s why Sid Weiner, when he’s so desperate to get Herzl’s history written, that’s why he called me. I don’t know him. I didn’t know him at all. But he evidently had heard that I had done it and would be willing to do it.

PL: So when you got involved first with the Jewish Archive Project and the Historical Society, can you tell us a little bit about the culture of those organizations? You’ve been working with the Historical Society all these years? What have they done?

MB: Oh, the Jewish Historical Society has accumulated a very credible number of oral history interviews. Actually, who was it that told us at one of our archives meetings that the representative of the Jewish Women’s Archives was impressed?

PL: It was probably me because I came to one of your meetings but –

MB: Maybe.

PL: Maybe.

MB: Yeah. They were very impressed, and they found some very valuable interviews. We have Adina Russak, who’s on that committee, has done an excellent one with a Sephardic woman who was here from the start of the Sephardic immigration to Seattle. Our archival material has been used a great deal. People come there now when – Sephardic Bikur Holim had an anniversary. They came there to research. Bikur Cholim came there to research. Yeah, I think we’ve done very well. And I’m interested in doing it and even doing better Well, in Bikur Cholim I write for the Tribune. And I call one of my columns “Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen” [raisins and almonds]. For instance, this week there’s

a new article in Hadassah National Magazine about one of our local gals that's done awfully well. I've written her up for it. We had to learn to point out the landmarks and explain their significance. Now, Landmarks – those were the tours that we started, also under the aegis of the Historical Society.

PL: When did those start, and how did they start?

MB: The Jewish Landmarks Tours, oh, maybe eight or nine or ten years ago, we had the first one of them. And we made the continuity and had a bus and went around. We showed any place of Jewish interest. Then finally, I would get called about having people who wanted to do it. I was doing it on a volunteer basis. And I said, I'm always happy to do it, but how do I know I can be free to do it because my family has always come first. So then we conceptualized, I and Jane Avner, who was our coordinator then, our Jewish Guidebook. Have you seen it? Yeah. We worked on it and worked on it hard. People have told us that they used it and had gotten very satisfactory tours out of it.

PL: Were you the first person to, in a formal context, identify the [Jewish] landmarks of Seattle and write about them?

MB: I don't know. I wrote the continuity for the tours.

PL: What do you mean by that?

MB: Well, you know, as the bus goes along, and we point out Jewish landmarks I did write some articles in the Nizkor [Washington State Jewish Historical Society newsletter] about Jewish landmarks; for instance, the homes of some of those people, the German Jews that were well established, had beautiful homes. I wrote one about two or three of those. I think from that came the Landmarks Tour. The Ecksteins had a lovely home, and a lot of authenticity in it, you know. Yeah, I would say that my work on Landmarks did certainly influence the Landmarks Tour.

PL: Whose idea was it to create a tour, and why was there a need for a tour of Seattle landmarks – Jewish landmarks?

MB: Well, the need was that people just wanted to do it. And I think that I had part in conceptualizing that also. One thing we've been fortunate in, the – I think it was in 1937 during the Depression, the WPA gave photographers cameras to take pictures of every single building in Seattle. These pictures were affixed in the tax rolls. We have been able to get pictures of things that no longer serve that purpose. For instance, there was a small congregation called Ahaveth Achim on Fir Street, 17th and Fir. I call Fir a history-rich street, because there were originally five congregations built there. And the Ahaveth Achim is, of course, no longer a synagogue, but it's a church, but at least we know where it is and we can point it out as having been a Sephardic congregation. Then even in some instances, the picture of the house that had the first mikveh [ritual bath], we found that on the tax rolls. The house may no longer be there, but we found the pictures. As I say, as we drive up – history full street, Fir Street – the Sephardic Bikur Holim were on 15th. The Herzl was on 16th. This little Ahaveth Achim was between 17th and 18th. Rabbi Shapiro, the Machzikay Hadath shul was on 26th. So, you just tell the history as you go along. It makes it more interesting when you can point out places.

PL: When did you realize that as a historian doing this work that you had to learn quite a bit about Sephardic culture?

MB: The Jews who founded Sephardic Bikur Cholim came to Seattle from Constantinople, Tekir Diag and the little islands in the Marmara. The Jews who founded Ezra Bessaroth came from the Isle of Rhodes and are called Rhodeslies. You had to learn to point out the landmarks. We've done interviews with them, oral histories, with Sam Maimon, who was, again, a living library. You don't have to get sympathetic with it, you just have to learn it. We have some very good interviews with Sephardim. It's a pity they all say that they have to have two Sephardic congregations. In doing these

interviews, you get the feel of it. You learn a lot. Now, for instance, Sam would not be taped, but he let me take notes and write them up. He said that when the first few of the Sephardic Jews came, which of course was very early on, 1903, 1904, then you've got your large numbers coming, just pre–World War I, during World War I, the Young Turks arose. They didn't want another foreign group in their midst. And the Sephardic Jews were going to have to bear arms, which they had not done before. So that's when you had the big influx. Anyway, he said that when the first ones came, in 1909, 1910, they all worshiped together, and it was fine. But the phrase he uses is: "These were impetuous young men." And they were different from the Rhodosles, which is Ezra Besseroth, and the Jews in Sephardic Bikur Holim that came from places like Tekirdag, Constantinople, the little islands in the Sea of Marmara. They had different rituals and maybe spoke their Ladino differently. Anyway, they just didn't get along, and they broke up into those groups. So, I've learned a lot by just listening to these people. I could empathize a lot, too. It was very – the discrimination between Sephardim and Ashkenazim was very bad. In fact, I think I'm right in saying that some of the Sephardic students at the university started their own fraternity because they were not allowed to join. They were very much discriminated against. They did things a little differently. They were called Mazolas, you know, Mazola oil, because they cooked everything in oil, and they cooked in the basement. They had different lifestyles. Just as the German Jews who were settled here early on in the 1860s did not take kindly to the influx of Orthodox Jews – influx of Eastern European Jews that started in the early 1880s, they did hold out a helping hand to them. But they were kind of embarrassed by them. And these Sephardim, I think, embarrassed some of the Ashkenazic Jews. Well, I mean, frankly, one gal said, "If I'd gone out with a Sephardic boy, my mother would have killed me." But that doesn't prevail at all anymore.

PL: Given that your role as a historian meant that you traveled in a lot of different Jewish circles interviewing people, what could you say you got out of that?

MB: Well, just what I named. First of all, a lot of history. With the Reform Jews, we learned that there was a Golden Rule Bazaar here about 1860 and a big department store, Toklas and Singerman. And you learn, you learn a lot.

PL: You said, I think it was – I guess Carol Starin when she had done the pre-interview with you. You wanted to talk about the sharpening of your sense of history. What did you mean by that?

MB: Well, first of all, you have to have a sense of history to do what I'm doing. I know what I meant by that: Why wasn't my sense of history sharper? Now, in 1941, we had these two men, founders of the chevra. We got a certain amount of information. But one day, Morris Pearl came over to tell me the first minyan in Seattle. I got busy with my baby or something, and I didn't take it down. I could have kicked myself ever since. I could have talked to them a lot more ever since. The BC-MH Ladies Auxiliary started in 1909, became the Sisterhood about 1939. Mrs. Lasky was the wife of the second president of the Bikur Cholim, Harry Lasky. One day, she made an allusion to the Ladies Auxiliary [inaudible]. Shouldn't I have asked her a heck of a lot more about it? I didn't ask her nearly enough. My sense of history was not that sharp yet.

PL: So what's changed for you? What do you do different now?

MB: Well, I think that based on regret, and I realize that the more details, the more information you get, the better – I do now – I'm satisfied with the interviews that I've done in the last twenty years or so. I just had the nascent sense of history. I did have the sense to record the history in Alaska, and I did have the sense to record the history in Seattle, but I didn't have the sharpness of sense and history that I have now.

PL: I want to talk a little bit about your doing oral history. How many oral histories would you say you have done in your course of working with the Historical Society?

MB: Oh, golly, so many of them. I tell you, I could get that information for you if you want to fill in.

PL: Oh, just roughly, would you say it's two hundred?

MB: Oh, no, no, no. Might be twenty or twenty-five.

PL: Meta, you're being very – I think it's shy of how many you've actually done, but –

MB: For my own satisfaction, I'll ask. I just have to see the record of them – who the interviewers are. But I have done a lot of them. And I don't even know if, in the beginning, I did those well enough.

PL: Why?

MB: Because, as I say, I didn't ask enough questions. I didn't realize the person's unique position in the history of that era. You should have training in that. And I never had any training; I just went into it.

PL: So, how did you prepare, and how did you think you should conduct an oral history?

MB: Well, that's it. I didn't realize the importance of preparation. Karyl Winn has showed me that. I didn't see the importance of getting enough to know about a person's background, so I would ask them the most illustrative questions. I just went into it like a bull in a China shop. Sometimes, I can't even stand to listen to the interviews that I gave early on. I talk too much. The other people didn't talk enough. I see where they make a statement – I should delve into it more, e and I don't. I always say I need a whole bottle of Tylenol before I can listen to one of my tapes. But you do get a few facts out of them. Right now, we did one with Cantor Frankel. Right now, he's a little Alzheimer-ish. But that one I'm more or less satisfied with. That was what I did later on.

PL: What did you feel was different about that interview?

MB: Because I had the sense to do some preparation, first of all. And then, when they made a statement, I'd delve into it. I'd say, "Well, what was this?" He did admit that he was at Bergen-Belsen, I think. And I questioned him about that. Then he was in an ORT school – or an ORT camp in England. I did have the sense to ask him about that. That you learn to do by doing, so to speak. But you asked me at the beginning of the interview if I were satisfied with any part of my life or all of it. I'm not satisfied with the early work I did in the Historical Society. And there were a couple of really good interviews. There was a woman named Alice Siegal. Her background is a little bit the same as mine. When the free land was offered in some of these small shtetlach in Russia, you can imagine a Jew in Russia being offered free land. And then Baron Hirsch started this project, the Israel Colonization Society, if you came and homesteaded, he would help you with farm implements and other things. So, there were quite a few Jews that came out to these various settlements – some in Canada, some in the United States. One of the settlements was near Devil's Lake, North Dakota. And that's where my uncle came. That's where a gentleman named Mr. Kahn came. I know Auntie, my Auntie Shapiro that was also in Devil's Lake. She, parenthetically, lived in Auntie's house in the '30s when her mind was like – it was clear as a bell. She'd go around saying, "In Devil's Lake, we did this or that." Like a fool, I didn't ask more. See, that's what I'm saying. My sense of history wasn't sharp enough. But anyway, this Mrs. Kahn, and again, parenthetically, Auntie was just about to deliver her first child. And Auntie says, "I and God were in that cabin alone." And Mrs. Kahn came in and delivered that baby. But Mrs. Kahn had a daughter named Mrs. Siegal in Seattle. She remembered living in Devil's Lake. She was about our first interview. But I didn't do it well. I didn't do it good.

PL: How do you feel, if in any way, growing up in a non-Jewish culture has given you the ability to interact comfortably with so many different kinds of people? Does that have anything to do with, on the positive side, your credible ability to make contact with – because I personally think many of those interviews are wonderful, and the work you've done is incredible.

MB: I'm glad to hear that.

PL: Actually, scratch that question, because I'd l because I'd like to pick up on what you've been saying being very hard on yourself. [laughter] I'm just wondering, then, in more recent past, when did you decide to stop doing oral history, and was it for the reasons that you're talking about?

MB: Well, I'll tell you frankly, I just do not hear as well as I used to. And you can't ask a person to tell a whole story and then make them repeat it again. Otherwise, I probably still would be doing it. But I would do it much better. I would get a lot of preparation and background and so forth. And I would let the person talk rather than talking myself. But that's the only reason. I'm still fascinated by it. My hearing is all right, but it's just not as sharp as it used to be.

PL: So what have you done instead, in terms of continuing your work?

MB: Well, first of all, the WSJHS – I've been a historian since the day it started. And in my duties as historian, I do a lot of research and synthesis myself, as you see. I wrote the whole history of Herzl for the first fifty years also. That was just done spontaneously because I felt that the history of the organization should be preserved. I did the same with the Northwest Yeshiva High School, because that history had never been recorded that started with a small Yeshiva in Rabbi Wohlgelernter's office. In my duties as historian for one thing, I say I go to the jugular, you know. As soon as a person would say, "Well, I have a picture of this and that," I'll say, "Let us copy it." Never let an opportunity like that go by. And as soon as I saw the stuff Sid Weiner had, I say, "Can we get it?" So I do bring in all the material possible and go anywhere and do anything to get it for the WSJHS archives and I return it, do a lot of that. And then I do this writing. The only thing I've dropped are the oral histories. I do have to listen to a lot of those for some of the work. Right now, I understand there are about ten or twelve that I should read in transcription for this Herzl. I will go out and do it. Another thing too, I don't drive.

I stopped driving a few years ago. I've been driving since I was fifteen years old. And the last couple of times I drove, I felt I shouldn't do it anymore. So we gave the car away. That makes a big difference. It cuts into your day – when you can get into your car and drive out to the archives for a few hours, that was fine. Now, you've got to call a cab – my kids won't let me take buses – and call a cab home, and sometimes the cab can't find you on the campus, and stuff like that. So those are the two reasons, I think – the fact that I don't drive and the fact that my hearing is not as keen as it used to be.

PL: Do you still participate in making decisions about who should be interviewed and what things should be collected? Do you participate in those committees still?

MB: Oh, yeah. I do bring documentation out. I say, "Do you want this, or do you want that?" For very few reasons, I have been told no. Sometimes Karyl [Winn] will say, "I don't think we can keep that." I am just as interested in the work now as I ever was insofar as I can fulfill my duties as a historian.

PL: Can you talk a little bit and describe the decision-making process and how it is that the Oral History Committee, let's say, decides who should be interviewed? How have you dealt with people who are extraordinary and people who are, quote, unquote, "ordinary," men, women? How have you made decisions around what are your priorities?

MB: I beg your pardon. That's really the question that you asked and I got branched out. First of all, having lived in Seattle for sixty years, I know a lot about people. I have spontaneously suggested some interviews. Well, let me think of one. All right, starting right in, this Alice Seigal, who had lived in Devil's Lake, or Julius Rickles, whose brother was a founding member of Bikur Cholim, or just like I chose these two men who were members of the Chevra, founding members of the Chevra, it's the background material that people have – their experiences – what they have to give. A lot of it I know about. Some I don't know. But other people have kind of gotten so they do, from some of the

suggestions I've made. Now, I understand your committee interviewed Ruth Peizer. I'm trying to help her a little bit, if I can, take care of her husband or with suggestions for help. Well, that girl is remarkable. She's a Yiddishist like you wouldn't believe, I think one of the most outstanding in the United States. It's wonderful to have her story, what inspired her in the first place, and the heights to which she's risen in it. See, I would know that. And I may have even suggested her for an interview. I don't know. But most people say, oh, what can I tell you? What have I got to tell you? But they have a heck of a lot to tell you.

PL: Have there been instances when there have been suggestions and they haven't – you have made decisions not to interview certain people? You don't have to use names, but I'm just curious about who – you have limited resources and limited number of people and time to do all this and money to transcribe. So, who doesn't get interviewed?

MB: Well, first of all, we have – we shouldn't know from it, I think it has been said that we have enough tapes of the Holocaust, of the big camps. I think that has been said. When you talk about if there are certain people that will not be interviewed, that reminds me of when we were doing the Trailblazers in Fairbanks, and my dad would never be interviewed. He had a tremendously interesting past. He wouldn't, but he would guide me as to whom to ask for interviews. Fortunately, he did let himself be interviewed by the University of Alaska before he died, and he gave them some wonderful things. But anyway, Daddy would tell me whom to interview because he took the stumps out of the streets of Fairbanks. He was there from 1903 or early 1904. So, he gave me some excellent leads. So, there are people that will not be interviewed because of something in their past that they don't want recorded.

PL: What about youth involvement, I mean, in a historical society? How has the Historical Society, let's say, you started, or is it just not – you don't have the resources to do it at the time? Have you interviewed younger people in the community, people who

were not necessarily born here? How have you discussed those issues?

MB: Well, we have younger people, like, Irene Steinberg, you know, who fled from Nazi Germany with her parents. Remarkably, it would seem like a young person wouldn't have much oral history, but they do. Some women that have been very active in organizations. Yeah, we have. It would depend on what you know about a person's background. Now, Eric Offenbacher interviewed Klaus Stern, and he said they were both crying at the end. They both had experienced Nazi brutality. One thing about the Holocaust survivors: some won't talk. They can't. Yehuda Baver met with us. We had a workshop session. He said, "Get every word about the Holocaust, but don't ever force a person to speak, or don't ever urge them to speak if they don't want to." Some people are adamant. There's a Mrs. Jacobi here who had the experience of leaving Frankfurt and going to Shanghai because – what was the free port? Shanghai was a free port, I think. We have some interviews of that period, but we don't have hers. She has steadfastly refused to be interviewed. She just won't, and that's all. That's her own business, you know. So, as I say, it's a matter of sitting around and discussing people and what they have to offer. Each person on the committee makes a contribution and said, "Well, she was this, and she was that, and she was this." And to answer to – that's the only reason we don't, is that the person doesn't want it, and as I say, some material that we've covered. One woman whom we interviewed, Rose Arensberg, had done an awful lot of work in Hadassah, but she had also lived through the San Francisco earthquake. Frankly, the girl that I went with to the interview said, "You know, Meta, we have an awful lot of material on the earthquake." There's no reason to waste this time going through that. It's much better to have her tell about her rummage sales for Hadassah and so forth. So those are the elements that go into the successful oral history collection.

PL: Over the years, how have you gained training in doing this kind of work? Have you taken workshops? Have there been workshops? And how have you seen the process of

doing oral history change, if you have?

MB: Well, we've had workshops. My tapes, my recent tapes – the most recent ones were good because, as I say, I learned to do by doing. And I learned by listening to some of my others. But I imagine that that's a sophisticated discipline, and I've never had that.

PL: Did you ever get together with other historians from other historical societies and Jewish historical societies? Was there a network within the United States, or did Seattle kind of stay in its own Jewish vinkele, it's little Jewish corner? What's been the interaction?

MB: This would be a good illustration – what you're doing. And there is that – we've done that, not getting together, exactly. We've had a little contact with the Portland Jewish Society, not on any major matters this is the first major project that has been undertaken. It's funny that you use the word vinkele. Karyl Winn was the gal that was the head of the Manuscripts when we started out, and she used to talk about Meta's vinkele. She became just like one of us. She became a personal friend. And I used to be criticized – I just went ahead and did what I wanted to do. If I wanted to interview somebody, I grabbed the tape recorder and I went. I wrote the articles for the Nizkor, if I felt they should be written, I did it. So somebody disapproved – so I said, "Listen, I work in my own vinkele."

PL: What did they accuse you of, Meta?

MB: They didn't disapprove. They always said that Meta seems to work on her own. But the fact is, the committee wasn't as strong then either, and couldn't guide the way they do now. Now I wouldn't think of it. But anyway, he said, Meta sits in her vinkele. And that's a word Karyl picked up. And the other one was lamed vovnik. Yeah. She said, "He's a real lamed vovnik."

PL: I know what that means. But could you describe how that was used?

MB: Well, there was – God is supposed to – when he took up the angels, there are thirty-six, I think he left on earth, thirty-six righteous men that keep the world on an even keel. When you mention a person that's more or less like a saint, you say, "He's a real lamed vovnik." Karyl has used that several times when she was talking.

PL: And she would refer to you as a lamed vovnik?

MB: No.

PL: No. [laughter].

MB: No. But it is true, the committee wasn't as strong or as cooperative as it is now and as eager as it is. Of course, recognition like you're giving us is marvelous. So, I did a lot of things on my own. We didn't sit down and discuss certain people around the table, whether they should be interviewed or not. I just did it. I felt that I should do it, and I did it.

PL: Well, that leads to my last question about this subject area, which we can continue to talk about, but as a woman who came in in 1939 when I was married, into a congregation, and has continued to do this work as she sees it should be done, with a strong head and a strong mind, could you reflect on what it has meant to be a woman and to be in this position of authority as a historian in the community?

MB: I don't think being a woman has anything to do with it at all. I think that when you talk about oriented, I think I have come to be an authority purely for the work I've done, not for any brilliance or genius, but just that I've done so much of it and retained so much of it or know how to tell people to get so much of it. I've just been steeped in it. That is why being a woman or being a man doesn't matter. Women do more. Some of the best interviews I've got out were with men.

PL: When Harry died, and you started getting so involved with this work, at what point – he couldn't be involved in this work? But you got married again. Did your second husband get involved with your new passions?

MB: He was involved, even not wanting to be. First of all, he was a printer. He had a treasure trove of memorabilia, programs, everything you could think of: tickets to affairs, stuff that you can get – ephemera, that you can get information from. He gave me all of that. Also, his name is one on the charter of Herzl. He was one of the five men that founded it in 1906. I don't know the exact date now. But anyway, the first office – the first meeting place was on 10th Avenue, and that was his office. And if this is 2001, so 2006 would be their 100th, that's right, 1906. This is the 95th anniversary. He himself was a walking library. He had grown up in Bialystok, and they had to flee for their lives. For that reason, from the first day his foot touched American soil, he became a strong Zionist, one of the first. He used to tell about a little Zionist paper he went out to sell. He was a treasure of history himself, a treasure trove of history, first of all for the things he gave us, and secondly, just making his tape. He had belonged to the Sons of Zion, and there was the Daughters of Zion, I think, the first Zionist organization in Seattle. And Herzl, as I said, was strictly Orthodox then. And I think he was one of the people that opposed it going Conservative. Of course, he kept up dual membership in Bikur Cholim, and he was an old man when he died. He was eighty-seven years old when he died, and his mind was good practically until the end. So you could get – just by listening to him, you could learn an awful lot.

PL: How did you meet him?

MB: Well, again, the Jubilee. When they planned that dinner, planned that affair, Jake was the chairman of the dinner. Of course, was working on the history on a volunteer basis. So, I came to meetings with him. And then he called me up one day, he wrote me a note and said, "You'll have to make a little talk." And that was in 1941. I knew him.

We never mixed socially with him at all. Of course, they were older. But we didn't, for some reason. We knew them, they knew us, but that was it. Then Harry died. In those years, I was a widow for seven years, you get calls, you know, "Come out and see a show." I didn't ever want to go. I thanked people and said, "Come out and see us sometime." I didn't want to. But Jake's wife died. We were married in '67. Jake's wife must have died in '66. I saw in the paper where she died, and I wrote him a note. He was on the Board of the Hebrew School and its president for years and active in B'nai B'rith. He was given a full column on the front page of the paper when he died. Anyway, she passed away. My oldest son was in Vietnam. And I used to spend my whole day Sunday baking for him and sending – the butcher used to wrap the stuff, and we would take it to the post office and send it out. So, it was Sunday morning. I was in shul at some kind of a little meeting. Jake was saying Kaddish [mourner's prayer] for his wife. He only said it in the morning; he didn't go in the evening. He got to the coat rack, and I got to the coat rack at the same time. One thing about Jake, as little as I saw him, we always kidded the ears off each other. He had a good sense of humor. Just a chance meeting. This day he got to the coat rack the same as I did. I said, "Jake, where are you going? Where are you going?" That's all I said. The next morning, my phone rang. He says, "This is Jake." I said I was delighted to hear from him. He said, "I want to answer your question you asked me." I says, "What question?" He said, "You asked me where I'm going." He says, "You know what the answer is? Come with me and find out." So, he said to me, "Will you have lunch with me today?" I said, "Yes, I'd love to." The first invitation I'd ever accepted since Harry died, just because he was such a balabatish person and such an altruistic person, and a person very much respected by the Buttnicks – by the whole community. So he gave me my choice of days. I said, "You know something? Today would be the best day," because I was so tied up with the kids. So, I went down, and we had lunch, and then he let me have it. He says, "You know what? I've been watching you ever since the day you came to Seattle," he said. He went ahead, and he told me about his feelings. Oh, you could have knocked me down with a

feather, I was so surprised.

PL: What was your experience hearing this?

MB: I was astounding, absolutely astounded. In fact, when we were married, I'd say, "Jake, do you want a cup of coffee?" He said, "Yes." I would say, "You'll have to wait for the kettle to boil." He'd say, "Who's rushing you?" I'd say, "Who's rushing me?" I said, "A guy asks you downtown to lunch, and he lays all his cards on the table at once." There was never any question of how I wouldn't have gotten along – we always got along together. As I say, in the few times we met, we kidded the years off each other.

PL: Where did you get married the second time?

MB: Right up in the pulpit of Bikur Cholim where we had gotten married the first time. He always belonged to Bikur Cholim. And when he said, "I've been watching you," he said, "What I meant to say is, I've been watching the way you've been working and doing things for the community." He had a lovely wife. They were married in 1909, and she died in 1968. They were married fifty-six, fifty-seven years. So I said, "You know, I do carry a colossal responsibility." Jack was in Vietnam, and Morris was at the University of Washington, and Gwen was graduating from high school. She graduated in '67. There were other things, too. So, I talked to the rabbi. I was crazy about Rabbi Rivkin. He was with me through Harry's illness and death and single parenting. I always said Rabbi Rivkin doesn't watch you go through Scylla and Charybdis. I said, he gets on the boat, and he sails with you. So I went and talked to him. So, he said to me – the first thing is how you feel about the other person. The reason why Jake might have talked to the Rabbi before he called me was because he was a Cohen; the Talmud says a Cohen cannot marry a widow; however, although he cannot marry a divorcee, he can marry a widow according to our sages. So, I had an idea that Jake had talked to him first, whether he would even call me for lunch or not. So, of course, his kids were delighted, you know. Even his daughter was delighted. Sometimes, daughters don't welcome a

second wife. He said, “Put your clothes in a couple of paper sacks and come,” he said. “I’m not interested in anything that you have at all.” Well, I knew that we would get along.

PL: Who was everybody in that light? Was it women friends?

MB: No, that I didn’t do. No, no. I talked to professionals, yeah. Women friends, believe me, they didn’t like it very well. He was twenty-seven years older than I.

PL: So, you sought advice about what particular aspects of that?

MB: Well, the management of my affairs and also about the effect it would have on my children. I only talked to a professional because that’s a trained mind meeting with you. It was time my sons were on their own anyway. I was professionally advised of that. My daughter was going east to school. He offered Gwen a home here. She could dig a swimming pool in the backyard, anything she wanted. No, she didn’t want it. Had she not been going away to school, I might not have done it. I could not have lived in the same city with my daughter and not served her hand and foot as I always had. But she was going to New York. Then, I saw no reason for not getting married a second time. When I moved into his house, there was not one thing about it – and I loved it as much as I loved my own home and we have a beautiful home, beautiful view, custom built. This was exactly the same. My view here seemed – we had a beautiful marine view in west Seattle, this is a little bit more miniature, you know, the lake. But everything is the same. The house was built about at the same time, too, and with the same high standards Harry and Jake both had. So, he said he had never been in Israel. He had always wanted to go. And even when his wife got ill, the family said, “We’ll take care of Celia, you go.” But he didn’t. But he said, “If we get married, we’ll have that trip.” And we did. I had never been either. He kept every one of his promises. He was an ethical person, a moral person. And thank G-d, he was only ill about the last year of his life. Even then, we had our home because if I had to entertain, like some of my relatives or

something, I'd call his family and tell them to come. I didn't want anybody else there because he was getting a little divorced from reality. So he was really only ill for a year.

PL: How long were you married?

MB: We were married in '67, and he died in '74. About six and a half years because he died in March, and we were married in September. So that was a good marriage. That's why I will not take my name back. After he died – I'm so involved with my kids that I use Buttnick a lot. But I have never given up Kaplan. When a woman does that, when she takes back her other name, it shows it wasn't a good marriage. I won't do it. It's led to lots of complications, believe me. Everything official has to be in my official name. When I got my passport, I forgot and said Buttnick instead of Kaplan. But that's all right. I'll cope with it. That's what I want to do.

PL: So in '74 –

MB: Jake died.

PL: And this is the second time that you had to deal with widowhood. And so what did you do then?

MK: Just about the same as I had done before. My sphere of acquaintances was bigger because his family have been just marvelous to me. They never leave me out of a thing. His grandson, Marty, was quite a catch, and he didn't marry for a long time. And one day he called – he's won prizes in his architecture and everything. He called me up one day and said, "I'm going to get married, Meta." I said, "Well, that's lovely." So, he told me about the girl. She's the head of some high-tech business and has a wonderful education. So, he keeps me listening. And then he said, "She's a nice Jewish girl." I said, "Marty, why didn't you tell me that in the first place?" We have a very good relationship with his family.

PL: As a single woman, once again, did your social life change?

MB: Yeah, it did.

PL: How so?

MB: I was older now, too, and didn't do as much. But you hear of large groups, large parties you're not asked to, that you probably would have been if you had your husband. No, it's a different life. The thing that is personal – you don't have anybody that wants to sit down and talk to you. When my kids come in here, it's only to do things quickly for me. They do everything for me. They do my heavy marketing, change light bulbs, this, that, everything. But they aren't going to sit and talk to me, and I don't want them to. You know what I mean?

PL: No. [laughter]

MB: No. You miss that. Marriage is just sort of a lot of kibbitzing, just the mere fact of being together, and that I miss terribly. I really do. You've got a human being who's interested in you and you only. You don't have children yet, do you? No. Well, you'll see what you mean. And not only that, you want your kids to be out and be pushed into the scheme of things. I'm delighted. Thank God they're all socially acceptable and sought after. But when they do come in for a while, I wish, oh, golly, I miss Harry. They say, "Anything else you want?" "No, well, I've got to go, then." That's wonderful. But that's what you miss. And, as I say, you do have a more straightened social life.

PL: I imagine that you needed to create other social networks for yourself. So what are some of the things that you did, or did you pick up more again?

MB: Well, there again, if you play golf, or if you play tennis, or if you play poker, or if you played bridge, you'd have your ready-made associates? You see what I mean? But I don't do any of those things. I don't do any things for which somebody else has to

participate. So, I go ahead with this particular work and other communal endeavors.

PL: How else would you say you've spent your leisure time? What are the other things you like to do?

MB: I read an awful lot.

PL: Are there favorite authors that you have?

MB: I read an awful lot.

PL: What kind of books do you read?

MB: Well, some by some distinguished, established writers. I just finished a book by Willa Cather. Sometimes I read the book reviews. That's how I came to read Cold Mountain, which turned out to be a bestseller/prize winner. I'm, shall I say, very Catholic in my reading. I read everything. It's got to be interesting. Right now, I'm reading a book by Rabbi Lapin, whom we hear on the television, a distinguished rabbi. I'm enjoying it. As far as reading is concerned, I take all knowledge for my province. I will always say this, and I say it over and over again: life is much sweeter when you have a good book – much more interesting when you have a good book to come home to. Even when we travel, I've got to have something to read. I would say books are my companions, and this work that I do is my companion. Whenever my kids want my company, like when Morrie has seats for these musical comedies, musicals at Paramount, for instance, there's a maybe six or seven of them in a season – he got them. I didn't ask him to get them; he got them. That I enjoy. But unless he did that, I wouldn't do it. I never go out by myself to see anything. Harry and I went everywhere and did everything.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

PL: This is a continuing oral history interview of Meta Buttnick Kaplan. This is Pamela Brown Lavitt, oral historian for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words Project in Seattle. Today's date is [July] the 17, 2001. Once again, I'm very pleased to be in the home – the Seward Park home – of Meta Buttnick. This is mini-disk tape number four. So, to continue, the last time we met, and some of the things that we've spoken about earlier today, we talked about some of the things that you did after Jake Kaplan passed. One of the things that you mentioned to me earlier this afternoon was your walkers' group. I was wondering if you can tell me a little bit about your involvement. What are they called?

MB: Well, first of all, we call ourselves the Seward Park Walkers. But our walk is unique. I don't think there is a better place to walk in the whole United States. First of all, there are no hills involved, and you know what that means for Seattle. And second, we walk around the loop. The peninsula is a tongue of land jutting out into Lake Washington. When you walk, you don't have to come back and traverse your same ground again; you walk all around. Secondly, it's not cultivated. It's pristine. Sometimes, you can feel you're deep in a forest because there are no houses, there's nothing, all the way around. Being by the water is always interesting. It's always different. Some days. it's just blue and expanse, and some days, it's like an ocean. Always interesting. Always different. The big sight of the walk, if we catch it, is a blue heron. If it stands properly so that you could see its beak and its long legs, you just can't take your eyes off of it. So we do see them, and we see them fly. The Times one time asked a question: Which is the only park in Seattle that has an eagle's nest in it? Well, it's Seward Park. We do get beautiful sights of the eagle perching – I have some pictures of it there – perching way at the top of a tree or flying. I think the little eagles are the ones that have the white heads. But in any case, it's a majestic sight when it soars. We did once see a horned owl. A friend of mine walked around toward dusk one night and he saw a coyote, but we've never seen that. We do see beavers swimming. In fact, the beaver was such a nuisance. We've seen trees that they gnawed I think they were lured out of there. We see muskrat

swimming. And then, as I say, if everybody's assembled, there are about thirty-five people. You fall into patterns. I very much enjoy the girl with whom I usually walk, Helen Hackett.

PL: Can you spell her last name?

MB: Yeah. H-A-C-K-E-T-T. She's read a lot. And frequently, we have both read the same book, and we discuss it. Of course, she can do something I can't, and that's portable art. She makes beautiful quilts. And I'm always interested to hear how she did them. As I say, it's just a basic congeniality. Others of the group form to walk the same way. And then there is a certain amount of esprit de corps, but not too much. Of course, some of those girls have known each other for fifty years, and they've done things socially. But for a newcomer like me, it's "the third place," so to speak. It's a place where you meet people other than at your home place or your workplace. And people have different interests. When we come back to where we met, we all go off in different directions. First of all, there's esprit de corps. People are so marvelous. G-d forbid, in times of anything trying, they'd back you upright to the hilt. And the girls have – I have in the past. too, had theater tickets together. We do go to lunch once a month, the birthday lunch. The girls that have had their birthdays in April take care of the next – of the May group, so to speak. We do that once every month on Wednesday afternoon unless holidays intervene. Then, once a month, the girls go out to Renton to a restaurant there and have breakfast. I don't go. I say girls; there are several men now that walk with us. Men that have retired from Boeing, and then that are retired altogether, and husbands of some of the wives. But everybody goes out to breakfast on the last Monday of the month. They are a delightful bunch of girls. One of our walkers is Charlotte Hutchinson. Her husband, William Hutchinson, founded the Northwest Research Institute, NWRI. They have made some big breakthroughs in that. She's also the sister-in-law of the famous ballplayer Fred Hutchinson. It was Fred Hutchinson's cancer that motivated the founding of the Hutchinson Cancer Clinic. She's very hospitable. She has a beautiful

estate right down on the water. I came over one day to give her something, and she had just come up from a swim. She just goes into her front yard and goes into the lake, prize winning Rhododendrons, big vegetable garden. She's always making strawberry jam or tomato soup or something like that. She's a trained nurse. Two of her sons are doctors. So it's a very enjoyable time.

PL: Can you tell me a little bit about when you started and what the routine has been?

MB: Well, the routine is that you've got to get out of bed at half past six in the morning, which is tough. I have an alarm that goes off relentlessly. I have to shower otherwise I just don't wake up. You shower, and you dress, and you make your little breakfast, whatever it is. It takes every minute of the time. Maybe about twenty to eight, I'll call Helen. I'll say, "Thou walkest?" She said, "Yes, I walk." And that's it. Then she picks me up at eight o'clock – she or another one of the girls. She and Bee Dammbacher have known each other for fifty years.

PL: Can you spell Bee's last name?

MB: Dammbacher, D-A-M-M-B-A-C-H-E-R.

PL: Thank you.

MB: They've known each other for many years. So, it's a very enjoyable and beneficial experience. When it rains, we walk. We can't stay home on the count of rain. We wear waterproof pants and a waterproof coat. And sometimes, in the summer, it's always better to wear a broad-brimmed hat. Another interesting thing to see is some of these young mothers. You see them with one of these hippie strollers. The baby in the stroller; they're sort of like low-slung canvas deals, the mother running along holding the dog. She's getting her jogging. The baby is getting the fresh air, and she's airing the dog at the same time. That's one of the most enjoyable sights to me.

PL: What do you think about when you see them?

MB: I think that they're very smart young ladies, that they're doing four things at once, and also that they're not letting their babies exile them, so to speak, from society. They come in pairs. We see darling, darling babies. I don't like to say it in the same breath, but we see some very impressive dogs. Doberman Pinchers and others– very impressive. I guess I've shown how interesting the whole deal is, how beautiful and beneficial it is.

PL: This is in a particular part of Seattle that I want you to describe. It's on Lake –?

MB: Lake Washington. As I say, where my house is located, you see the bridge, and you see everything. Then you have the peninsula jutting out.

PL: That's the I-90 bridge, right? I-90?

MB: Sometimes called the floating bridge. But when you go to the other – when you go south on Seward Park Avenue, as Jake used to say, you don't see the real lake. You see the part that's cut off by the peninsula. People who live here don't see the bridge; they don't get the expanse. They do get Mount Rainier, which we don't get. My neighbor next door says she has seen Mt. Rainier. She has seen it from her backyard. But I don't think you can do that. So we are actually [within] walking distance from the Gold Cup Course. Jake said that they used to – one of the boundaries of the race used to be you could see it from my home, but they moved it closer in. The kids park the car here, and they walk along until they can get to the point where they can see the race.

PL: So you've been walking five days a week at 8:00 in the morning. How many miles is it?

MB: Two and eight-tenths.

PL: And how long does it take you?

MB: Well, Helen and I are the slowest walkers there are. We're the cow's tail. It takes us about an hour and twenty minutes. Some of our walkers are awfully fast walkers. They do it maybe in a little over half an hour. But we don't. We make it, but we are not fast.

PL: When did you start doing this?

MB: My husband died in 1974. And that left me alone so the underside of being alone is that you do have some free time, and you don't have obligations. So I wanted to walk. Jake and I used to walk a little bit here in the area. But I wanted to walk. Actually, I was to meet a friend of mine one day. I did meet her, and we walked. But there are two parking lots down there. There's one by the tennis courts. There's a tennis court down there. There's one by the tennis courts, and then there's another one further on. So the next day, when I came down, she drove right past and parked in the other lot. I started to walk with these girls. And then we had – poor thing, she's passed away, Ellen Beaudry, who some way, somehow had a position of leadership. She used to say, "Why me?" but she inspired most of the diversions.

PL: Can you spell her last name for the record?

MB: Beaudry, B-E-A-U-D-R-Y.

PL: Thank you.

MB: And Ellen asked me, "Are we going to walk with them all the time?" I said, "I'd sure like to." So I came down. I brought her a bottle of wine, she wrote me a thank you note, and I have been with them ever since. Ellen also used to think up interesting things to do. One time, the girls – I wasn't there then, they walked at Green Lake. And they walked at that park out there.

PL: Magnuson? Discovery?

MB: It'll come to me in a minute. It's Coulon Park. Down by our lake, there's a pottery shed. And there's a clubhouse and tennis courts. We get to know the park personnel very well. You're really like in another world there. And we wave at them in their trucks as we go by. So there was one girl named Margo, she was there a long-time doing park work. And they put up a sign that she was resigning, and there was a farewell party. So we all traipsed up the second building that must have been at one time a natatorium. People dressed to swim. Those are the main characteristics of the group.

PL: Can you tell me a little bit about what this has meant to you?

MB: Everything, everything. Physical exercise. Coulon is C-O-U-L-O-N. Now, at Coulon Park, you walk along. You see houses on the other side. You do see all the flora labeled, tagged, what is this flower, what's that flower, what's that flower. But it doesn't have the charm, the natural charm, that the Seward Parkway does. But the walk means everything to me, especially congenial company. When you're alone, when your husband is gone, when you walk into the door, you're alone all the rest of the day. If you don't play cards, which I don't, or any other kind of games, you do things that keep you indoors. I'm doing all this research and this writing. So, it's very psychologically uplifting to be out in the morning where you get congenial conversation with people that you like and the very best physical exercise, which is what walking is.

PL: How do you feel that –? This group has been together for a long time; you said close to forty years. How is it that as women –? It's a vast majority that are women, right, Meta? How it is that you have supported each other and watched each other through difficult times, physical and otherwise?

MB: Well, I think it's because they're all nice girls. We've taken up many collections, and everybody is very quick about giving and very generous. Charlotte Hutchinson has had

us in for coffee so many times after a walk. Whenever – it should be for good things – whenever we want to do something for someone, I say, for heaven's sake, don't send flowers. I said, "It's a waste of money." They don't all agree with me. But I said, "When you send Charlotte Hutchinson something that perpetuates the work of her husband, that's very precious to her." So, we took up a collection for the Pacific Northwest Research Institute. When we want to send a tribute to anyone, we give money to the Pacific Northwest Research Foundation or some other good cause instead of sending flowers. So we sent it, and then she got the note. You send the money in, and then you ask them to send the note, and she sends it. I say, there are no mean people there. Everybody comes up with a contribution, sometimes ten dollars, even before you ask for it. In fact, one girl says, if – always when you tell people you walk, you know, they say, "Now, I should do that, I should do that." Well, some of them have, but they drop out. They don't fit in. There isn't that generosity, that respect and liking for each other. Nobody in that group doesn't like anybody else. It doesn't matter with whom you walk, it's all right. You know what I mean?

PL: Do you talk about things pertaining to aging and health?

MB: Well, the girls that are just becoming eighty are very proud of it. No. There's one gal that's had a lot of surgery for cancer, and she goes here, there, everywhere, never a complaining word out of her. Everybody is upbeat. One of the walking girls is ninety-three, let her live to be well. Everybody is congenial, and everybody is generous. When we go to the QFC, there's a big – there are small tables, we push them together. After the walk, we go for coffee usually at the QFC. We pick up groceries. It's very convenient. I always say that that mailbox outside the store has made a good Christian out of me because sometimes you can be so tired at night, and you think, well, I'll let this letter or that – and I'm crazy because there you are coming up to a mailbox in the morning, especially when you don't drive. So we have a mailbox outside the QFC, and then, of course, they have a very fine kosher department there now, which makes it much

better for me. I pick up my meat and everything right there. When I was a little girl, going to the butcher shop was an expedition already. People bought homes where they were close to the kosher butcher because there was no freezers or anything, no place to keep meat. So, we sit at these little tables, and there's a sign up there that said, "These tables are for your convenience for merchandise that you have purchased at the QFC." Well, as I say, we get away with murder. Somebody always brings in a cake or a bunch of cookies or something like that – I brought Mandelbrot, and I brought hamantaschen. And the QFC clerks look the other way. After all, we bring in hundreds of dollars worth of business. None of us leave without anything, very seldom. We get it because we're there. So, the fellow that is in charge there is a very tall, must be way over six feet, Black man. He comes over, and we have homemade cake that someone had brought, and we give him some. I think it's very good salesmanship. So you're supposed to buy your pastry in the pastry department and eat it there, but as I say, we don't do it. We have these little tables. We sit around these tables. That's where we make up most of our collections to send for tributes.

PL: Let me ask you a little bit. You said that there were some men that now walk with the group. Originally, was that not a welcome idea?

MB: Well, it wasn't welcome or not at all. It sort of evolved. Ellen was married to Roy, and Ellen died, and Roy kept walking. He had retired as a pharmacist, and he kept walking. And then, up until then, I don't think there'd been many men. He used to associate with a man named Leroy [phonetic] –they had a friend, Margaret, a former schoolteacher. They used to go to her house for little parties. So Roy told Leroy about it, and Leroy started to walk. And Leroy had a friend named Bob, a bachelor [who] never married. He started to walk. Then, as women's husbands retired from Boeing and elsewhere, they started to walk. Axel Druggy, Glady's husband, is a retired fireman. He walks. Those are the motivations that bring the men there. There's nobody that doesn't have an attachment, some kind of an attachment.

PL: Would you call it, though, a woman's space, or would you not?

MB: Not since the men have come, no. [laughter] They come everywhere, you know. For years, never did the men come to this women's luncheon, and now they come.

PL: And how has their participation influenced or added to or detracted from what normally would have been a girls' clutch, you know?

MB: Doesn't make a bit of difference. The men always get themselves a separate table when we have coffee. They always come forth with money when we collect.

PL: Just extrapolating or broadening this line of questioning a little further, I'm wondering how it is that women's friendships, what they have meant to you, generally speaking? Because in some respects, the things that you've told me is that, you know, you've had a fairly traditional life in the sense that you've had a nuclear family that you've cared for, and that's been a priority to you. And since the death of your husbands, you've really engaged more socially in many ways.

PL: So I'm just wondering, also, a lot of the women – there are some women who serve on the Jewish Archives Project. How can you describe how your life and your interactions have been shaped by women's friendship in particular? Are there any that stand out?

MB: It isn't like it used to be when I came here as a bride. I had a few friendships that I really enjoyed, calling up sixteen times a day and a real basic congeniality. I don't have that anymore. For one thing, my very best friends have passed away, and for the others, I guess we don't have the physical strength to get together. Women's lives have changed. I remember when somebody went to Israel in the '50s; before they left, I'd have a luncheon for about forty girls, a farewell luncheon. Nobody has luncheons anymore. So it's all a whole different ball game. I would say that as far as friends go, they're just casual ones.

PL: Is it for some reason you feel that women are not relying on women often enough or as much for advice and support and fun? Has there been a shift that you've witnessed?

MB: Well, there is in my life, but maybe not for younger women, women who have more energy and strength. Women, perhaps, that belong to the golf club or play tennis. Another thing, as I say, I don't do anything that requires anybody else's participation, nothing. I can't even play a game of casino. So that makes a difference, too. Nobody entertains more than bridge players. And those things would bring you much more into contact with your contemporaries. I've none of that. I very rarely go anywhere in the afternoons now. Just a good walk and the airing.

PL: So, who do you rely on the most?

MB: My son, Morrie, my middle son.

PL: And what do you rely on him for?

MB: Everything, everything. Since I've stopped driving, I will not let him sublimate – or I will not let him circumscribe his life for mine. He picks up and goes – he was invited to a wedding in Paris a few weeks ago. He picked up, and he went. I cut my demands down right to the core. He lived in town for a while, on 17th Avenue, walking distance from the shul and Council House. Then he bought a house on impulse on Mercer Island. I need to be with my kids for Shabbos, and so we go over there. He does everything now. But I mean, there's no more of the hard work for Shabbos that used to start on Thursday. One reason for that, of course, is the kosher delis. But when I get over to Mercer Island, all I have to do is sit and read. But as I say, I'm very careful with his time. If he does come in, I cut down the demands as much as possible. I do everything that I can possibly do for myself.

PL: Well, it sounds like from the things that you've said, that you have, because of convenience and also because of your – that he prepares much more for Shabbos now,

that you are no longer attending Bikur Cholim for Shabbos services, you're going somewhere else?

MB: Well, I'll tell you why that is, frankly. There's a real tough hill, two tough hills to climb now before you can get there. There's a long steep grade until you get to Morgan Street, and then I say, you have the Morgan Street hill for dessert, so it's a very tough walk. To the shul on Mercer Island is really nice. A smaller group, very congenial, very considerate. I like the rabbi very, very much. We get invitations out to lunch on Mercer Island and so forth. I still very much miss going to Bikur Cholim. I keep up my membership. I keep my seat in the synagogue and everything. The walk to shul in Mercer Island is maybe two blocks.

PL: When did you recognize that you physically were challenged by that walk, and how did you deal with that?

MB: You mean the walk to Bikur Cholim?

PL: Yes.

MB: Well, it almost became physically impossible, I think. On this walk that we take around the lake, there's one place just before you get to the end where you have to climb up a hill, not a very steep hill either, just to get to the little patio under which we all meet. I dis-enjoy that as much as I enjoy the whole rest of the walk. I'm just not good on hills. So that's the only thing. And another thing, I hate to stay in anybody else's house. There are probably some friends at the top of the hill that would tolerate having me, but I don't like it. I like to be in my own house. Everybody does.

PL: So the synagogue that you're going to on Mercer Island is Herzl?

MB: No. It's called Achaveth Achim, I think. It's strictly Orthodox.

PL: My apologies.

MB: Our rabbi there is from Chabad, but as somebody says, he's erudite and learned, Rabbi Kornfeld, but he could just as easily be a stand-up comedian.

PL: So, tell me then what it's like because – so it's generally a Lubavitch or a Chabad synagogue, or that's –

MB: No, it isn't. It's that he is.

PL: He is.

MB: Yeah. The rest is just Orthodox service – of course, I understand there are people leaving Herzl because they're not getting what they want there. It's strictly Ashkenazic. When we sing the Adan Olam, he claps his hands. And that's a little Chasidish already. But that's all.

PL: Well, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about how it is in Seattle, and maybe more generally, how you've witnessed as an Orthodox woman – and we talked about this off-tape – as an Orthodox woman, how it is that you have watched as there have been mutually agreeable and sometimes dissenting views on how ultra-Orthodoxy has infiltrated and presented itself and distracted from the Orthodox lifestyle. So it's very interesting to me that you mentioned that Rabbi Kornfeld, who is Chabad, is bringing in certain aspects of Hasidism, ecstatic-ness, whatever it is, into the synagogue. What have you seen in terms of women, in terms of men, in terms of tradition, how the ultra-Orthodoxy – I'm wondering if you could speak frankly about that?

MB: Well, ultra-Orthodox, I suppose some people would consider me ultra-Orthodox because I keep a strictly traditional home and observe the Sabbath and give my children maximal Jewish education. I live a very normal life. I think we discussed off-tape – I can't think of a single girl from a hasidishe family that has gone to college. They go

through high school and marry very, very young. Maybe they would be teachers, but I've never heard of them being anything else. It's sort of a little conclave unto itself, whereas Bikur Cholim isn't at all. We live very normal lives. We go on – college, graduate school, work.

PL: What about in respect to the relationship to Israel?

MB: Oh, we're very Zionistic. There were a few people – we say that prayer for Israel – we don't say it over here now, but we said it in Bikur Cholim. There are a few people that didn't want to do it. They were the ones that think that God should just give us back Israel. A little event there, but not so that it influences the whole shul. The girls are always showing me every consideration. If Charlotte Hutchinson has us in for coffee, she always buys some kosher pastry for me, showing me every consideration there is. But I can't even think of ways where our lives aren't completely normal. Of course, I would like to go to that Saturday Pops concert with the girls, but it's Saturday, see.

PL: Has technology in your lifetime made keeping kosher or keeping the Sabbath easier?

MB: I could say it about a thousand ways. I remember when you couldn't even have hot coffee on Shabbos, except if a neighbor brought it into you, or when they had the wood and coal stoves, the woman would have some hot coals, and she'd put little ashes over it so she could keep a kettle going. Well, now we have our urns, which give us hot water all day long. In the old days, too, they had to have what was called a "Shabbos goy," a goy is a gentile – not too nice a word for it, a little pejorative. You'd have your Shabbos goy, and she'd come in, and she'd turn on your lights. She'd come in in the morning, and she'd turn off your lights. If they heated by furnace, I guess she'd put the furnace where it needed to be. Well, now, there's none of that anymore. You have automatic lighting. We have a machine downstairs. We pull up one lever, and it's for the house; we pull down one lever, and it's for lights. The lights go on and off automatically.

PL: So you have a timer?

MB: Yeah. It has to be set to a certain time. In your oven, you can actually now – this stove that I have here – we just used to leave it on 200 all night. But now we have a way that you press it, and it comes up SAB, S-A-B, Sabbath, and that's the heat it's going to stay on all the time. So you see, you have your hot water, and you have your oven, and you have your lights, and you have your heat. So technologically, we have made giant strides.

PL: Did you hire a Shabbos goy or a –

MB: No.

PL: – or is that something from your mother's period?

MB: Yes, that would have been my mother's generation. An awful lot of Jews lived on 19th Avenue between Cherry and Jefferson in that area. Non-Jews used to come over and turn on lights and turn them off. As say, you have your kosher bakers. For Passover now, it's a breeze. You can get almost everything, get all the butter you need and cottage cheese. We used to have to go out to a farm and milk the cows ourselves into our own Passover containers. I remember doing that up until – in 1943 we were still doing it.

PL: Where was this farm?

MB: Near Bothell, I think. There may have been other places that did it, too. We'd go out with our Passover containers and get the milk from the cow. It wasn't a very edifying experience. When you saw it, maybe you didn't want to have any milk. Now we get the milk in bottles, no problem at all.

PL: Besides the convenience, is there anything about the old way [laughter] that was more romantic or simplistic?

MB: I've heard people say that they miss it, they miss doing all that heavy work. Of course, your house has still got to be cleaned, and thoroughly cleaned. But I've heard people say you used to have to crack a lot of nuts and things like that. Now you can get them readily cracked. We have wonderful Passover recipes now. They developed potato flour, and you can make it – your sponge cakes can get as high as your chimeizdik sponge cakes. Passover is still plenty of work, but nothing compared to what it used to be. Keeping a kosher home and observing Sabbath is nothing [compared] to what it used to be. Of course, now, if you can pay for it, practically every state in the union has these hotels, kosher for Pesach. They have several in Los Angeles, in San Diego, Florida, Acapulco. We went to Phoenix one year.

PL: Can you describe these hotels?

MB: Well, at the ones to which we've been, the first thing you think of is the food. You've never seen so much food in your life. But you see, everything – for one thing, the locks on hotel door locks involve electricity, and they have to make a change with that. When observant Jews come in, they can't do anything electronically. There's always got to be a substitute for that. And they stop the escalator,

PL: So the Shabbos escalator stops on every floor?

MB: Of course, a lot of that comes from the people themselves. Elevators can be made to stop automatically so people do not have to push the buttons, so some Jews will ride on the elevators.

PL: Where's the need that was created for Passover hotels? I mean, is it that you get out of actually cleaning Khometz [unleavened dough or bread] out of your own home?

MB: Yes. You don't have to change your dishes. And boy, is that a job, to change every single teaspoon. Some people have them from time to time. Some things have to be koshered. Oh, no, it's an awfully big job – and all the cooking. The hotels have buffets like you've never seen before.

PL: Has there been conversation and discussion around the issue of suffrage, which is, you know, the sort of tenant of Passover, that we should somehow taste the suffrage, that it sounds like it's somewhat of a holiday, in respect. So, do you talk about that? Or has there been conversation around these hotels that people feel conflicted about it, or is it generally seen as a mechaya [pleasure]?

MB: Well, anybody who comes to a hotel, there's no need no conflict. You know what I mean? You're there. You're there to avoid the work. The conflicts would come from people that didn't think that the hotel could do a job. And there's nobody like that anymore. Those people – it wouldn't even be Judaism, it would be just suspicion. In the bathrooms, there are boxes of Kleenex because you're not supposed to tear toilet paper, you know. All those things have to be done. But the last one we were at – first of all, they have very interesting programs, very interesting speakers, activities of that kind. They have things for kids. The food would just knock you out, the amount. Two big buffets, all identical. And in the morning, a chef making omelets. No, there couldn't be anything that you criticize when you're there. But not everybody conforms as much as we do. But some people would do everything in their house, and yet they would ride on the Yomim Tovim. But all right, that's a good place for them. It's interesting the crowd you get there, it really is.

PL: What do you think about the Seder table, as being something where you hand pick the people that you share such an important moment with, and yet, this is sometimes a very vast number of people that are sometimes strangers, which is also within the tradition?

MB: Not always. That's something I forgot to mention. You have your choice. You can either have a community Seder, which there is, and somebody else will conduct it, or you can have your own Seder table and do it yourself. I think every time we've had our own Seder table together – except for – Gwen has some very dear friends from Los Angeles. One year, we were all at the same resort. One year, we got together with them. Other than that, we have our own Seder table. You're given your choice, you see?

PL: Do you and your family have very specific things that you do during the High Holidays, traditions, family joys that you share on either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, or Passover, things that you do traditionally?

MB: I wouldn't say so. We just obey the precepts. I don't think so. There's always a little reminiscing about other seders you've been at. Or, on the holidays, my uncle, whom I adored in Dublin, died Erev Yom Kippur. And whenever Yom Kippur comes, I always think of that. But it should be for happy things. But no, the seder itself, the order, is all occupying.

PL: I'm wondering if I can shift this slightly to how it is that someone who has witnessed some vast changes in women's roles in synagogue if you can reflect and describe how you have felt about the changing roles of women in public worship, either in your own synagogue, if things have tweaked a little bit, even though Orthodoxy still pretty much remains true to –

MB: No, they have tweaked. And I don't want any part of it. For one thing, it might be halachic [Jewish law] that they can have separate prayers on Tisha Be-Av, a separate woman's group, and I think they do. And I wouldn't go near it with a forty-foot pole. First of all, I think your synagogue time is the time that you spend with your family. I want to be where my husband is. There is supposed to be a woman's minyan. There was one bat mitzvah or bar mitzvah that was there. I want no part of it. The ones that I'm speaking of now are within the parameters of Orthodoxy. They haven't broken any rules.

But they're doing things like that, davening [praying] separately.

PL: Are women laying tefillin [phylacteries]?

MB: No, no.

PL: Okay. Because when you say they have a minyan –

MB: No.

PL: – in the morning.

MB: I'm not even sure what they're doing, but I know that – I'm speaking strictly Orthodox now, that they do have some sort of separate davening for Tisha Be'Av where they stay alone, just women. What else they do, I don't know, but there is something else. But I know it's still strictly within the parameters of Orthodoxy because their husbands are Orthodox. As far as the participation of women in the services, I want it to be just like it was six thousand years ago.

PL: Why do you think that is, Meta?

MB: You mean, why do I feel that way?

PL: Yeah.

MB: I guess I'm a traditionalist. It's proper. I see nothing to break away from.

PL: Do your children and grandchildren feel the same way?

MB: Yeah. My kids are all strictly observant and want to keep kosher homes. I happen to know a little bit about it now with the research I'm doing, putting on tefillin.

PL: I was going to ask you about other settings where this might exist. Yes, go ahead.

MB: I don't want words that are too strong. To me, it's an anathema, a woman can be counted in a minyan, a woman puts on a tallit [prayer shawl], puts on tefillin, and goes up and touches the Holy Torah Scroll. It's an anathema. In fact, let me ask you, how do you like that?

PL: I'll tell you after we're done. But I am curious because I mean, in the Conservative movement, I mean, it's much more recent, and in the Reconstructionism and Reform movement, women are rabbis. I'm sure in the work that you have done, and now you're writing the history of Herzl, they've had a female rabbi for quite a while. I'm just wondering, not so much about your reaction to it, but how have you seen or witnessed that change, and how people in the community in Seattle have responded to it?

MB: Well, they've responded in great numbers. Herzl's enrollment has gone up very high, and you've got your young women doing this with tallit and tefillin. When it comes to female rabbis, I couldn't even consider it because the rabbi has to read from the Torah. To me, a woman doesn't belong in the rabbinate at all. That's my personal feeling. I feel all wrong when it is near about me, but I never have to worry about it, because it never would be done in an Orthodox shul.

PL: In a more secular setting, I'm curious, then, how it is that you have responded to feminism.

MB: Well, if feminism is women entering into all the fields where men are –?

PL: I think also taking charge of their role in public and private life.

MB: Well, as much as they can do, I think they should do.

PL: How have you been touched by it in any way or your children?

MB: Well, I wouldn't ever stop a woman doing a thing. She can break the glass ceiling a hundred times and rise right to the top. I do think a little doubt and controversy might come when it comes to childcare because every minute of my time was taken up with childcare. I always say I found interesting work to do when I followed my husband in his activities and I followed my children in theirs. Harry was on the Rabbinical Cantorial Committee for years, and it was a question of helping him, entertaining him, bringing in the candidates, letting them have dinner in our home, and participating right to the 'nth degree. And the same with my kids. As I say, we worked hard and made their school experience [as] good as possible and founded the Day School. I never would let anything interfere with them. If they needed to be taken to a birthday party, they were going to be taken. There's a whole life that comes on after school hours, you know. You're taking them – the soccer moms and so forth. Well, when a woman works full-time, she can't do these things. It's her own business if she wants to, I don't criticize her. But that's the only thing: I think women should rise right to the heights. Well, they do; they're astronauts now. I'm sure you get Orthodox women that do that, too.

PL: Do you feel that your children have different choices, specifically your women – your daughters have – wait a minute – am I getting this right? – have had different choices than you've had in terms of how they've lived their Orthodoxy as a woman or just their life as a woman?

MB: Well, now, do you mean that they took me as a role model?

PL: No. Well, I'm trying to ask you to contrast their choices and abilities versus yours; for instance, in terms of education, in terms of work life, the things that you're talking about as well?

MB: Well, they're absolutely – my daughter has just the same opinion, she says she's very happy to be a stay-at-home mom, exactly. She has found a lot of interest added to her life by her husband's profession, the activities of her kids and her kids' friends, and

entertaining for her kids. No matter how you look at it, there's nobody that can take the place of a mama. One day, on the TV, this woman was right at the top of Coca-Cola and stopped. Katie Couric, who has two little children at home, interviewed her. She wants to be – one said she wants to be at her boys' soccer games, among other things. Katie Couric, who is right at the top, you know, in TV, says, "We are all torn." So that's the only thing I would object to. I think one answer to it is going to be the laptop, being able to work at home and be there. That's a big help. And to be there for this big after-school life.

PL: Do you think, or are you aware of specific images that characterize Jewish women in your lifetime?

MB: No.

PL: You know, such as the exotic or the certain ways that they have been seen in the culture at large?

MB: No. A lot of them are professionals, you know, and wonderful homemakers. There might be a little bit of display of wealth, but you get that from the non-Jewish women, too.

PL: I want to shift to your last line of questioning, which is to kind of use and breach your historical knowledge of Seattle with that of the larger world and historical events that have happened in your lifetime. And as somebody who has witnessed a good part of the 20th Century, I'm wondering if there are particular events that impacted you that you specifically remember, say you know, the Depression or Japanese internment, or anything that world – one of the world wars, or even current events, civil rights, that you felt were very – had a strong impact on you?

MB: Well, interestingly enough, we never felt a trace of the Depression. My dad always had all kinds of money for education. We weren't indulged. But when we went abroad after a year of high school in Alaska, and I had had two years of high school in and went

into college and wanted to take honors French, I told my mother, I said, “I can’t take it. I haven’t got the background, the foundation.” I said, “I want to go to Paris for a couple of months.” And the money was right there, and we went, the depth of the Depression, 1933 – I went in ‘31 – ‘31, ‘32. Never felt a shiver of the Depression. I told you I had some rather sad experiences with the Japanese internment, but I can’t criticize those who thought it up exactly.

PL: You mentioned that off-tape, so would you mind explaining what you mean by that?

MB: What did you say?

PL: You described it to me off-the-record or off-tape.

MB: Oh, oh yes. I felt sorry for the Japanese friends in Seattle that had to be interned. I didn’t see that they shouldn’t be. Maybe now I might see it because, after all, they were deprived of civil rights. And you know, if they start depriving Japanese, they can deprive Jews or anybody else.

PL: But at the time, you didn’t necessarily see –?

MB: No, I felt that they should be. After all, they sneak attacked. But I felt very sorry for the individuals that I saw were affected by it and did everything I could to help them. I told you one of my personal friends was expecting a baby. I gave her my sterilizer. I felt sorry for people that had to give up businesses and so forth. I would say that had an impact on everybody. As a matter of fact, we had a little piece of real estate that had been owned by Japanese. We made a tape with them after it was over. This woman said that after they came back, they were scared to death. They were scared to go out at night and so forth. They still consider themselves enemies. That is, they didn’t consider themselves enemies but thought we did. And no, that impactment it had. The Nazi revolution had a terrific impact on my life. We were doing a lot to help – did everything we could to help the refugees and help them get jobs, help them get homes. One

woman still talks about the fact that they got out. And she wanted to go into the wiping rag business. And they came out and talked it over with Harry before they did. They went in, and they made millions, but they listened to him. That impacted every Jew. Sinclair Lewis wrote a book, It Can't Happen Here. Well, it could happen here.

PL: Do you feel that people living in Seattle have a different relationship to things going on, information on the state of Israel, or the Holocaust because of – versus other cities in the United States? Was there any difference? Because the influx of refugees in other cities was much greater.

MB: Well, no. I think that we participated – first of all, the National Refugee Committee, whatever it was, each town said that they would take so many. We got them out here in Seattle. No, we helped them get jobs and did everything we could to help them get over from Germany. There was one case where Harry had a man working for him, and his wife and son were trying to follow him from Germany. They did get to Ellis Island. It turned out that the boy had something called Banti's disease.

PL: How do you spell that?

MB: You know, I don't even know. B-A-N-T-Y? In any case, the way it presented itself physically was the heavy body of the child. So, we didn't know that until they got to Ellis Island. Then they thought they were going to be stopped there. So Harry went out, and he got eight or ten signatures. These people signed a public service bond that in anything that assured that if the family had any reason to need support, these agencies would do it. Oh, he worked – he got so tired. But he got as many people as he needed to sign – needed to sign it, sign it, and the kid got in here. They had a wonderful career in Seattle. This boy got his education and has a very fine position somewhere. When it was over, Harry took the bond, cut off all the signatures, and sent them back to the people. My husband was not a strong man, either. There was one man that gave him terrific opposition. He got his hand on the door, and the fellow called him back and said,

“I’ll sign.” It was tough. So that was the general spirit there, to do everything. I remember Rabbi Wohlgelernter spoke at our Sisterhood, and he said, “These people want to work.” He said, “Don’t be afraid to say, Mrs. Rubinstein, scrub my floor. She wants to do it.” These women must have led very aristocratic lives in the old country. She wants to babysit, she wants to scrub, she wants to do your washing. One day, this one fellow was starting to make a living selling corned beef. And Rabbi Wohlgelernter came in, and he said, “I eat it,” he said, “at a Sisterhood meeting.” The fellow afterward got into the paper business and did walk –

PL: So are you saying that by – just to unpack that little nugget that you just mentioned – so by Rabbi Wohlgelernter coming into the Sisterhood meeting and vouching for the corned beef, was that essentially a hechsher?

MB: Oh, yeah, oh, yes.

PL: He was giving you the kosher approval?

MB: Oh, absolutely.

PL: So, did you go out and buy it?

MB: He came from door to door, this fellow. He didn’t stay in that very long. He started to sell paper. I understand that the Kaplan Paper Company gave him samples and helped him do that. Kaplan paper was my second husband, Jacob Kaplan’s business. Nobody who needed help was turned down – you mentioned Monsey. There’s a Rabbi Elias in Monsey, north of New York City. I understand he’s quite a scholar, and he’s done a lot of writing. Well, his father got out of a concentration camp by – we have it written up, it’s very interesting – Diplomatic Pouch, or something like that. And he came to see – he had gone to cheder religious school] in Europe with one of our native citizens here, Alter Poplack. And they brought him over. Through Poplack’s efforts, he got out of Germany. And they were so poor themselves, and yet they took him into the house. So

Rabbi Wohliglernter came to me, and he said, “Would you start a lecture course?” So I collected about twenty dollars from many people, after the first lecture, it was pitiful. I used to sit there and pray for people to come in and call the people to come. His son had been interned because he was German. And when his son got out of internment – the one that’s in Monsey now – then he stood on his feet, Rabbi Elias did, and he got to New York. I think he taught at bes yakov. He got married again. He had been divorced. But the man was so down when he got here. So that was typical. We never turned away from doing anything.

PL: Were there any particular political causes or movements, or causes in general, that you and your family were occupied with?

MB: No, I don’t think so. We wanted to back certain people to have them elected. My daughter’s neighbors across the street were Jim McDermot’s, and we’ve always done everything we can to assure his election. There are certain people who we backed for election in the synagogue.

PL: How do you feel about Scoop Jackson?

MB: He is venerated. He’s the one that got these Refuseniks out, you know. And his – the Jackson-Vannik Bill, people were not being allowed to leave Russia, and he got the legislation so they could leave. One night, he came onto the stage at some meeting we were at, and one fellow that had been liberated was there, and he stood up and threw his arms around him. Oh, heavens knows, Jackson’s an idol. He’s a hero. It’s too bad that he came through as a very lackluster presidential candidate. No matter how much we backed him, he was not catching the public’s fancy. But heavens to Betsy, we’d go everywhere, do everything for him.

PL: On a national or international level, do you have any female role models?

MB: Female role models? Well, you see, I admire these women that have risen to the top. My own sister is a Fellow of the National Academy of Pediatrics. I can't say that I admire it because – if they have children. If they don't have children, it's nothing. If they have children, this one friend says, there's no cookie jar in that house, you know what I mean? I can't see it if they have kids.

PL: I'm going to play dumb and say I don't know what you mean. [laughter]

MB: Well, all right. Supposing you were interviewing me and you had two children at home, and they'd be with hired help. And you'd be doing a very efficient job here, a very interesting job. I think, gosh, her kids are sitting at home. Will the person that's with them take them to the playground? Will they do this? How will they get to birthday parties? I can't countenance it. And yet, I think – as I say, women should get right to the top. Maybe I'll compromise to the point where I'll say, well, if a woman does her work when the kids are in school. As I say, the laptop she can work on when they're in school and she can be free. I have been so completely preoccupied with my children, or occupied with them, that I can't see packing up in the morning, going off to a job, and with a job, you've got to be there, even if you have to leave a sick child. With volunteer work, you don't. So that's the way I feel. A friend used to say, "I feel liberated because I can do what I want. I can be a full-time mama."

PL: What is it like, then, to be a grandmother?

MB: Same thing. There's nothing in the world that I haven't done for those kids. Before they moved to West Orange, this house was filled with their friends on Saturday afternoon. They had carte blanche on the house and always had pop and cookies and candy. No, I feel that you bring children into the world for your own gratification and sense of fulfillment, and I feel there's nothing in the world that's too much to do for them or your grandchildren.

PL: How many grandchildren do you have?

MB: I have three.

PL: And where do they live, and how old are they?

MB: Well, they've always lived in Seattle until their daddy was called to Johnson & Johnson. He's an endocrinologist, essentially a research man. And then they moved to West Orange.

PL: In New Jersey.

MB: Yeah, in New Jersey. They are one boy and then two little girls. And my grandson now has a job with KUBE, he's a producer. He loves his work. So he stayed here, and they went. He's about in his twenties, twenty-five, twenty-six. Now, this year, for the first time in years, we stayed home for Passover on account of him. His coworkers and his boss has every respect for him because he's traditional. This way, he would have had to stay away from the job for eight days. But we lined the tables with foil and went the whole bit in Morrie's house on account of him, and we certainly should have done it.

PL: Can you describe what your role has been as a grandmother? I mean, you're saying you live now, far from some of your grandchildren. But what have you been like as a grandmother?

MB: Anything they ask me to do at any time.

PL: Is it different than how you reared your own children?

MB: No, same way. Nothing in the world they could ask me that I didn't do for them. I've been out at the university just set to work for an afternoon for WSJHS on listening to a tape or something like that, and I'd get a call from my daughter; she had to go somewhere, and her babysitter hadn't turned up. I dropped and went home. No, I

wouldn't think of doing otherwise.

PL: Is it different for you in terms of the way you feel and treat your grandchildren than you treated your own children?

MB: No, absolutely the same.

PL: What advice would you have for women, let's say my age, who are bringing children into the world?

MB: Just as I have said, exactly what I've said: If you could be home with them if you could do your work from home, or if you left home to do your work if you could do it within their public school hours, fine. Otherwise, I'd say try to be a full-time mama. One day, when I took one of my granddaughters to swimming, there was a woman there, and she had her kids there. She told me that when her husband gets home at night, she goes off, and she does word processing until about twelve o'clock at night. But she's home with the kids during the day. I admire her. No, I think when a kid comes home from school, he needs his mommy.

PL: Let me ask you, finally, to kind of wrap up what's been a long and wonderful interview about how it is that you have watched yourself age.

MB: Well, I wish I could do what I did twenty years ago. My hearing is not as sharp as – we haven't had a bit of trouble, you and I. If I go anywhere to hear a lecture, I've got to sit right front and center, or I don't get it. I cope with it, but I wish it weren't that way. I can't say I don't have the energy because I do as much as I want to do. I guess I'm very fortunate. The fact is that my hearing isn't as sharp; that's very little. Naturally, I realize I've cut out on certain things. We have the walk, and as I say, I come in, and I stay home all the rest of the day. And I don't like going out at night, because I do have to be up at half past 6:30 in the morning. Other than that, I'm grateful to the dear Lord that I can do as much as I do.

PL: So what's the secret?

MB: Maybe interests. I'm terribly interested in this work that I do as a historian. And thank G-d, there is satisfaction when you see the way your kids are growing up and achieving and accomplishing. Those are the things that I wish for – if my husband were here, these would be the best years. I must say, now, like in the mornings when we go for a walk, and the men all sit together at one table. And I know Harry would love being there. He loved to talk to people that did different work than he did and so forth. But he's not. I mean, and it has been very lonely, very lonely.

PL: If you have any final words, either a motto or something that you feel might end this interview, please take a moment to add anything else.

MB: Well, I'll take a moment to say you are a superb interviewer. Superb.

PL: [laughter] You're not supposed to say this on tape.

MB: And believe me, the project on which you're working, the organizers of it are very, very fortunate.

PL: Well, thank you. Thank you so much for your time and for this wonderful interview. It's been really a pleasure and a joy to get to know you.

MB: And for me to get to know you.

PL: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]