



Janet Kaplan Transcript

RACHEL ALEXANDER: Today is November 5, 1997. I'm Rachel Alexander

interviewing Janet Kaplan in her home in Cambridge under the auspices of the Jewish Women's Archive Temple Israel Oral History Project.

JANET PRINTZ KAPLAN: Yes.

RA: I guess we can start off with – you suggested – maybe some memories of your early childhood.

JK: Well, I was born and grew up in Brookline, on Pleasant Street. Went to the Devotion School, which was not a parochial school. It's the Edward Devotion School in Brookline and high school and then Radcliffe, and that was –

RA: That's a pretty fast childhood. Maybe we could rewind back a bit. Could you tell me what family members were in America at the time and where they'd come from?

JK: Yes. My mother came from – was born in London. Her mother immigrated from Vilna. When she got married she went from Vilna to London as a bride. Married a distant cousin who she really didn't know very well. But he was already in business in London. All her four children were born there.

RA: In London.

JK: In London. And then my mother has practically no memories of that. But she came when she was about four years old, I think, to Boston, where other members, cousins, and members of the family already were living.



RA: Why did they leave London?

JK: Well, they probably wanted to be with other members of the family that were in America. My grandmother was a very interesting person because, as I said, she came as a bride to London. That's where she learned English. And she was a great reader. She wasn't like the stock grandmother, you might think. Her favorite authors were Dickens and Thackeray. She would come and visit us and borrow a pair of glasses and read Bleak House. That was her favorite Dickens novel. Well, she was fluent in Hebrew, too, and she could read new Hebrew. Well, she grew up in Vilna, which was Russia at the time, and she knew Hebrew, too. I think maybe it was Yiddish. It was the Jewish Daily Forward. Maybe that was in Yiddish. I'm not sure. And then my mother was a very bright person, very practical. She was the second wife of my father, who had married earlier. I had an older sister who was eleven years older than I, who actually got married when I was about nine years old, ten years old, or something like that. She went to Temple Israel, too, and went through confirmation class and so on, which I did. I started off in the first grade at Temple Israel and went right through.

RA: So your grandmother came to America?

JK: Yes.

RA: Also, with your grandfather?

JK: I guess so. But I never knew him.

RA: There were four children, and your mother was the youngest, you said?

JK: Maybe not quite the youngest. I think there was a brother who was younger. But actually, when he was – it must have been before he was twenty years old. He went to South Africa to work for some cousins who were there, who were living there, the Wyner family. They're the ones that have the – related to the ones that have the Wyner



Museum. Unfortunately, he caught some disease, and he died there. So that was sort of a tragedy. My mother also had a sister and a brother who lived in Brookline.

RA: Do you know how common it was for there to be Jews in London at that time?

JK: Oh, yes. There was a section that was a Jewish area. And probably was like the West End or something like that. It wasn't a very fancy area, I don't think.

RA: And were they a religious family?

JK: I think that my grandmother's father was religious. I don't know anything about her husband. Because I think they got separated. In those days, you didn't get divorced if you didn't get along, you just separated. I think that's what happened to them. I never knew him. So they weren't – although I'd say, in a way, my grandmother was religious because she would go to temple services every Saturday. She liked to go to Temple Ohabei Shalom and sit down front and listen to what the rabbi had to say. She was a very bright woman. In fact, when she went away in the summertime, she'd go – one summer, I remember she was in New Hampshire. There was a church in the town, and she went every Sunday to the church, listened to a sermon, and then had a big discussion with the minister afterward about it. She felt she was in a house of God even if it wasn't Jewish, so she wanted to do that. It was interesting.

RA: And you said your mother joined Temple Israel.

JK: My parents were married by Rabbi Levi. But my father, with his first wife, was married by – oh, I've forgotten the name of the rabbi. But was before that, before him. It'll come to me, I guess.

RA: And do you have any idea what happened with your father's first wife?



JK: Yes. She died in childbirth [with] a second child. My sister Eleanor was about five when she died. Eleanor lived with her grandparents. Then, when my father and mother got married, of course, she was eight years old. My mother brought her up. She was like her own child from the age of eight. She was a pretty blonde girl, always very attractive.

RA: Do you know how your parents met?

JK: Well, yes. I know they met through a cousin who lived in Salem. My father was working in Peabody because he was in the tanning business. And he was always involved – his family was always in the tanning business, even in Budapest, before they came to America. So he was in Peabody, I believe. How he actually met these cousins I don't know. But the family name Newmark in Salem – they had a store there. But Mrs. Newmark was a cousin of my mother's, a relative of my grandmother's. That's how they met through the Newmarks.

RA: And your father was born in Budapest?

JK: Yes. But his family immigrated to America. One story I heard was there was a flood of the Danube. There was a big flood of the Danube, and the factory was wiped out. Then they came to America. But they lived in Philadelphia.

The story was that when they got off the boat they saw a cart, a horse-drawn cart piled with hides. They followed the cart to the place where it was going and immediately got employment there. They were sent to Philadelphia to the branch factory there. He grew up in Philadelphia. And then he came to Peabody, which was also a leather tanning area around here for the time.

RA: Did he speak any English when he came?

JK: When he arrived, I'm sure he didn't speak any English. He spoke German because that was the time it was Austro-Hungary before World War. I think he came in about



1881. Austro-Hungary was one country, and they spoke German. They didn't speak Hungarian. But he probably knew some Hungarian as well. And when he was a little youngster in Philadelphia, he got a job in the A&P. They put a sign in the window, "German spoken here." He was the one – I don't know how old he was at the time.

RA: What was the age difference between you and your sister?

JK: Eleven years. So she got married when I was ten years [old]. She was like twenty-one. She married somebody who had been at Harvard Law School. He was from Chicago, so she moved back to Chicago. She moved to Chicago as a bride and lived there all the rest of her life except when she lived in Florida. She had two children: a daughter and a son. I'm very close with her daughter still. She comes every year for Passover, and we have a good time doing a Passover together for the family. The son lives in Colorado at a ski place. Decided to make that the rest of his life because he liked skiing and outdoor activities. Then I had a lot of cousins on my mother's side of the family who were – her sister married somebody named Friedman. Her youngest child was my age. Her oldest was actually my sister's age. She had six children. So that was quite a family. If you'd like, I could show you our family tree.

RA: Yeah. I would love to see that. [Recording paused.] Okay. Now that we have seen the family tree, did you have any brothers or sisters growing up?

JK: Well, yes, my older sister.

RA: Your older sister.

JK: But I was the only child of the second marriage. So it was like after she got married and I was nine, ten, it was like I was an only child. Except I had my cousins, first cousins, who were very close. So they were almost like – we played together all the time, and we were very close.



RA: And where did you grow up?

JK: Brookline.

RA: And your cousins were also in Brookline?

JK: Yes. They lived within walking distance. And then we moved to where we were nearer to them. And so we were close.

RA: Do you remember what street you lived on?

JK: Well, of course, I remember where I lived. In fact, I gave my granddaughter, Jackie, a tour of all the places where I lived when she moved to Brookline, where she's doing graduate work at BU [Boston University]. We had a little tour, and I showed her Pleasant Street, where I first lived. And then, later on, we lived on Fuller Street, and then I lived on James Street, which is near Coolidge Corner.

But my father passed away of cancer. He died of cancer when I was only thirteen years old. He was sick for about three years. And it was sad because it started in his mouth. He liked to smoke a pipe or cigars. It really is an example of how that's a dangerous thing because that's what he got. It started with a small sore in his mouth. And nowadays, it would be treated, and I'm sure he would've lived a long time. But in those days, in 1928 or something like that, there was no cure for it. There was no treatment for cancer, especially a localized thing like that. So I lost him when I was thirteen, just before graduating from grammar school. So my mother and I lived alone together because she was a widow, and that was the story.

RA: And how did she have money for the family?

JK: How did she have money?



RA: Yeah

JK: Well, actually, she went into business before he passed away because I think she must have had a premonition. She was in the insurance business. She sold insurance mainly to women. She loved going into town and talking to all these businesswomen that she had contacts with. And she did quite well with that.

RA: So she was working a few years before your father passed away.

JK: Yes. And then she kept it up for many years. She loved going into Boston and going around and seeing people and so on.

RA: So when you came home from school, was she home?

JK: Sometimes and sometimes not.

RA: You grew up and could take care of yourself at that point.

JK: Probably, yes. I don't remember that too well. By that time, I was in high school. He died just before I graduated from grammar school. So by the time – at that point, I was in high school, went to Brookline High School. Of course, it was a disadvantage not to have a father at that stage of my life. But that's the way it was.

RA: How was it a disadvantage?

JK: Well, I think you just have one parent. That's the disadvantage. I mean, I have memories of him from earlier times. But my mother had no desire to get married again. That was all right.

RA: Okay. What was Brookline High School like at that time?

JK: Well, I think it was a very good school. I think that the standards were high. And if you were in – we called it the college course. They tracked people to college courses or



commercial courses or different things. And the standards were very high. For example, I had a lot of French. I had two years of French at the Devotion School. The ones in the more advanced divisions had French for two years, which was the equivalent, really, of one year of French. Then I had it four years in high school, and later I had it one year at Radcliffe. So little did I know that I would have some use for this French because my son, one of my sons, married a French girl and lives in Paris.

RA: Well, that's convenient.

JK: Yes, right? But, of course, when I got to college I was studying Moliere. It wasn't much help in talking to people on the street in Paris.

RA: Right. So you're fluent in French now?

JK: Well, I can get along. I'm not perfect. But, of course, our children all studied languages when they went through school, and we helped them with that. I mean, when they'd have tests and so on.

RA: Do you speak other languages?

JK: No.

RA: You didn't pick up any of the languages of your parents?

JK: Well, they didn't speak anything but English at home. They never spoke a different language. You have to remember that my mother was born in England. She wasn't born in a shtetl somewhere. My father spoke English. He had a slight German accent. But that was the language of the household. Then, of course, my children have had marriages that had a different look to them. We have three children. The oldest, Josie, married a boy from St. Louis. Dick, who was next, married a girl from Buenos Aires whose mother spoke Spanish and lived with them. So there was a lot of Spanish going



around in their household. My husband and I decided that we'd learn Spanish so we'd know what the other grandmother was saying to the baby. We went to the Cambridge Adult Center for two years and went through a whole Spanish grammar.

RA: Wow. That's pretty impressive.

JK: So we learned a little bit. We found out what she was saying. [laughter]

RA: Did she realize you understood?

JK: Well, she was just telling the babies, "Walk, walk," or something like that. And I knew what it meant. Then Philip went to France to study, and he met his wife there.

After a few years, they got married. They wanted to live in Paris. She was an only child, and she wanted to live where her parents were. So they have settled in Paris. We go to see them once a year, and they come to see us once a year. I'll show you pictures of the family later on if you're interested.

RA: Yeah. That would be great. Okay. So at Brookline High School, you studied French.

JK: Yes.

RA: I'm just going to guess there were other Jewish students in the school?

JK: Well, there was a big contingent of Jewish students. There was also a big Irish group that came from other parts of Brookline. I got to know various people of various backgrounds, which I think you miss if you go to a private school where you only see people of exactly your own kind. I knew people from different sections of Brookline.

RA: Were there other Jews that had a similar background to yours?



JK Yes. I mean all the ones I went to grammar school with and went on to high school. Some of them went to, say, Radcliffe or Harvard. They were the same background as mine. Yeah.

RA: How was religion practiced when you were in high school and earlier?

JK: Well, we belonged to Temple Israel. And that was under the famous Rabbi Levy, who was very well known. In fact, people came from all over to hear his sermons. In those days, they didn't have Friday night services. I don't remember if they had Saturday services. But they had Sunday services.

RA: Right.

JK: And the ushers wore gray kid gloves. [laughter] It was really very formal. But we followed the Union Prayer Book, and that's the prayer book I know quite well because that was the one of that time.

RA: And you learned Hebrew at that time?

JK: Well, Hebrew was optional. I could've gone to Hebrew class, but you had to get there an hour early. I don't know many children who would opt for going to religious school an hour earlier to learn Hebrew. I don't think it was that popular. But it was available. People don't think it was. But it really was available in my time. My parents didn't think I had to learn Hebrew, so I didn't.

RA: What did you learn in religious school?

JK: The Bible, all about the Bible, all the stories of the Bible, and the period of the Syrian conquests, and so on. We learned the historical part. And we learned the Bible, all the stories from the Bible.

RA: And did you learn the Jewish holidays?



JK: Oh, yes. Well, we always had Passover holidays. We always celebrated Passover. And we still do have a big Passover Seder. I have the prayer books, the books that – one of them has my father's signature in it, which he loved to do. I like to use those old prayer books with those old woodcut pictures in them that used to scare me when I was little. Pictures of the Egyptians with their horses drowning when the sea closed in on them, and that sort of thing. But I still have – well, it's the same prayer book that is used generally.

RA: What was Passover Seder like when you were a child?

JK: Well, I don't know what you mean.

RA: Like, did you have family to your house?

JK: I think we just celebrated ourselves. I don't remember having others with us particularly.

RA: It was you and your mother.

JK: No, and my father.

RA: And your father.

JK: Yeah. I mean, we just read the prayer book.

RA: And then how's that changed over the years?

JK: Well, I've been the one that does the Passover usually. In fact, when we bought this house, the room that I'm in – that we're in now – was the kitchen of the house originally. It didn't have a dining room. It had a little table here with barstools where the people who'd lived in it before us – they grew up in this house. The wife grew up in it. But they didn't have a dining room. So we added on the dining room and a kitchen area here. I



mean, excuse me, a kitchen and a breakfast area so that we could have a nice dining room so that we could have our family all together here. We always celebrated Passover. When we lived in Newton before we came here, we always had a nice Passover Seder. Leonard's parents, my husband's parents, always had a big Passover with a lot of family.

RA: Any special foods that your family prepares?

JK: Only just the standard stuff.

RA: Standard brisket—

JK: Or whatever. My mother was always a very good cook. She loved to try out different recipes. She was always looking for the perfect matzo ball recipe. In fact, one of her cousins said, "I have no trouble with this. I just put a little baking powder in." So my mother said that it wasn't her way. I don't know. I don't think matzo balls are very hard to make. You just follow the easy directions on the box, and that's it. [laughter] But she was sort of a perfectionist on cooking. She was very good at cooking.

RA: Did you inherit that?

JK: Well, I wasn't as creative as she was. She liked to read recipes in the paper and try out new things. I just have my standard recipes that I use, and I'm happy with those. I don't branch out very much. So she was really more creative. I mean, she found good recipes that I still use by reading the column. But it used to be always they had lots of recipes in the newspaper on certain pages.

RA: Were there other holidays that your family celebrated over the year?

JK: Well, I think Passover's really the biggest one.

RA: Rosh Hashanah.



JK: Oh, we went to services at the temple at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My mother always stayed there. On Yom Kippur, she stayed the whole day. She never left the temple.

RA: Wow.

JK: In those days they didn't have an intermission the way they do at Temple Israel now. You could stay for the whole day. I mean, you can do it in Temple Israel. Most people don't. I remember fasting, also, for the whole day on Yom Kippur.

RA: Did you celebrate Chanukah?

JK: Oh yes. Yeah, we did.

RA: How did you celebrate?

JK: We lit the menorah. And I made many menorahs since. I use my own that I've made for Chanukah now because since I have gotten into painting and ceramics, I have a nice one I made.

RA: I'd love to see that.

JK: Yes. I could show you that.

RA: Did you make latkes?

JK: I'm not so strong on that. They're so greasy. We really don't like them very much. Although, my daughter-in-law likes to do that. But they're usually pretty tough to make good ones, I think.

RA: So after Brookline High School –

JK: Yes. Then I went to Radcliffe.



RA: And how did you decide to apply to college?

JK: Well, many girls I knew from Brookline were going to Radcliffe. And we kept up our friendship all these years. I'm still friendly with these classmates that I went to Radcliffe with. But let's see.

RA: So there were a lot of people from your high school that went to Radcliffe?

JK: Yes, there were quite a few.

RA: And a lot of people at Radcliffe that were from Massachusetts.

JK: A lot of people were. I commuted to college. I didn't live at the school. But most of my friends were girls who lived in the dormitories at Radcliffe. My social circle was people I knew who lived in the dormitories there. We had a nice circle of friends. We had parties and good times and so on.

RA: What was it like to live at home during college?

JK: Well, it probably wasn't as much fun as living at school. But being that my mother was a widow and there were just the two of us, it didn't seem practical for me to be off somewhere else at college. So that's what happened to me. But it didn't really matter that much because I had many other friends that were also commuting from other areas like Arlington, Belmont, as well as Brookline, other areas all around, and who became my friends. So I was socialized with it at Radcliffe.

RA: Had your older sister gone to college?

JK: Yes, she went to Boston University. She was also artistic. She went to the – it had an art school in those days. She went to that. Then, when she left Boston University, she worked at the Society of Arts and Crafts, which was at that time on Park Street in Boston. Now, it's on Newbury Street, a very well-known outlet for artists and



craftspeople to have their works shown. You have to pass a jury to get into it, and so on. But she worked there, and then she met her husband when he was at law school, and she was, I guess, working. But she was a very good-looking girl, very charming. She was unusually good-looking, so she had lots of boyfriends. My mother actually became very friendly with some of these; even though they weren't her close boyfriends, they always valued her and always enjoyed the hospitality. It was sort of like a tradition that she would entertain out-of-town men or young fellows who were at college. We sort of carried on the same tradition. We had lots of people that we knew that we entertained.

RA: How did your sister become interested in art?

JK: Oh, she had a talent for it. I guess it must run in the family on my father's side, not on my mother's side. But it must run in the family on my father's side.

RA: Why do you say on your father's side?

JK: Because she wasn't a blood relative of my mother's.

RA: But then you got it also, right?

JK: Yes. Right. But I always loved to draw since I was a little girl. I've done many things along those lines. In high school I made Christmas cards, which my mother managed to get in some stores and put them in for me to sell them, with dogs on them, because I liked to draw dogs even in those days. We didn't have a dog, but I liked to draw all kinds of dogs. I started going to dog shows and drawing the dogs at the dog shows. I still have the notebooks that I had when I was a youngster.

RA: Wow.

JK: I don't think I've thrown out anything I ever created, unfortunately. It's a lot of stuff. Yeah. Anyway, after a couple of years at Radcliffe, where I was a major in fine arts, I left



Radcliffe and I actually got a job as a medical technician and was studying art nights. I mean, creative art. Because I really wasn't that interested in art history, which is what Radcliffe was. They didn't encourage anything creative, really. Except there was one professor who gave a course in drawing at the Fogg. Most people didn't know about it. I took that course twice. But I was really interested in creative art for a long time, all my life really.

RA: And how did you get interested in dogs?

JK: We had a dog. It wasn't a purebred dog. But we had a dog. I used to like to try to draw him. It's funny, the year before my father died, he took me to my first dog show. I remember walking – it was at North Station at the – what's it called? – the convention center there. And that was my first dog show I ever went to.

And every year, I always went to that particular dog show. I liked to draw the dogs to learn the different breeds. We didn't have one, but then after my husband and I were married, we started owning dogs, and so on. And actually, when I started the Elkhounds, they were the first ones that were really winners at the dog shows. I started breeding them. Over the period of twenty years, I midwived ten litters of puppies.

RA: Wow.

JK: Of course, we sold most of them. But we kept certain ones. And we have three dogs. That's all you're allowed to have in Cambridge without a kennel license, which I don't think I'd get in this neighborhood.

RA: Wow. That's an interesting law.

JK: Well, that's the law. You can't own more than three dogs. And in the country where we are in the summer, I think you can own five dogs without a kennel license.

But—[telephone rings]. You want to turn that off? [Recording paused.]



RA: Okay, now that we've had our cookie break. So you left Radcliffe College before you had a degree?

JK: Right. And I never missed – I never missed not having a degree because I really was more interested in creative art. From the time I went there, I took as many fine arts courses as was possible, plus whatever else I was supposed to be taking. I took biology for two years, thinking I would learn more about animal anatomy. I mean, I took a course in mammals, thinking I would learn about animal anatomy, but actually I didn't. But I was supported by the fact that I made very nice lab sketches. I always got an A on my lab sketches. I think that carried me through that biology course.

RA: That was the one part of biology I couldn't do was the sketches. I have these leaves that look like circles and squares.

JK: Yeah, well, that's what I did. These were skulls with teeth, different kinds of teeth. Well, I had a great time drawing all that. But I didn't learn too much about animal muscular anatomy, which I thought – I wanted to learn from the point of view of drawing. So anyway, I just continued and was studying life drawing and mostly life drawing at night classes while I worked as a medical technician in the daytime. And summer, I took some other courses. It was a continuous thing. My education continued even though I wasn't at college in various ways until finally, I – of course, we were married in 1938, when I was just twenty-one. Then I took watercolor – studied watercolor for several years. I was pretty good at watercolor. I'll show you some of my paintings.

RA: That'd be great.

JK: Which I have right over here. Then I went into other – got involved with the Plymouth Pottery. I found working with my hands – I really enjoyed that.

I went to a place called the Pottery Workshop, which is part of the museum school, the



school at the Museum of Fine Arts. And that was a sort of a – you belong to this organization. The Pottery Workshop, you had to – the facilities were available to you if you could go there every day of the week, except one day when they had the freshmen working in the ceramics department and learn all about throwing on the wheel, how to fire in a kiln and making various things. After a few years there, I thought, “Now do I really–?” Oh, this is a dish that I made.

RA: Oh, that’s funny.

JK: I thought I’d show it to you. I put it out. It had a little design on it. Did I want to be a potter and make that sort of thing for the rest of my life? If so, I should develop my own pottery studio at home, probably. I wasn’t quite sure I wanted to do that. So I sort of backed off from that. I found that I could take sculpture lessons with an artist named George Aarons, who lived in Brookline. And he had classes for women in the daytime. I started studying sculpture with him. I learned a lot from him until finally I just continued on by myself doing my own things.

RA: Now, you said he had classes for women in the daytime.

JK: Yes.

RA: Why weren’t men taking the classes?

JK: There were a couple of men, I think, that were in the class, too. Mostly women, though.

RA: Why do you think that is?

JK: Because men don’t have the chance to do that sort of thing in the daytime, usually. They have jobs, don’t they? But I learned how to make a model for my sculpture and then work from the model, which in French, they call a maquette. I don’t know if that



sounds familiar to you. That's the way I still work on my sculpture, most of it. Well, now, some of the sculpture I have is right here. I don't know if you noticed.

RA: Yeah. I was just noticing. Oh wow. That's very nice.

JK: Well, this is the stuff I've been doing for the last ten years or so, which is abstract ceramic sculpture. Actually, I fire it over at the Jewish Community Center in Leventhal Center because when they opened up the new building there they said they would be willing to have working artists take advantage of the facilities there. I thought that was great. Before that, I'd worked carved in wood mostly. So, when you do that, you're limited by the size of the block of wood. If you're working this way, you can make any shape you want, and you're not limited by – I have some of my woodcarvings in the living room. So that's not mine.

RA: This house is full of art.

JK: There isn't room for another picture on the wall. I've got all kinds of things. This was a painting done by somebody who I studied at the Mass College of Art with. He began to do some very free stuff. This is an artist who works at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. I thought that was kind of a fascinating thing. I think the things that I buy are the things that I can't make myself.

RA: An Agam over here?

JK: Yes. We got that through the Jewish Welfare Board, I think. My husband's been very active in the Jewish community. We've been particularly – the center movement. He was on the National Jewish Welfare Board, which has to do with community centers all over the country. So we went to Israel with them quite a few times. I don't know. We had the opportunity of buying this through them, I think, something like that. So that was interesting. That's not something I'd make myself.



RA: What did your mother think of your becoming an artist?

JK: Well, she thought it was okay. I mean, actually, she lived with us for quite a while after we were married. And she used to say, "Well, I'm home when the children come home. And if you're out painting, then there's somebody in the house when they come home from school." So I'd take off with the car, perhaps put a dog in with me for protection, and I'd go off painting landscapes. That was before I got into being a sculptor. As you know, I've just had an eightieth birthday.

RA: Right.

JK: I'm eighty years old. My daughter wanted to have a collage of pictures of me from babyhood on. I said, "No, I don't want that. But if you want something that's me, I'll get together some of my old paintings that I did fifty years ago and have them around at the party that we're having," which is what we did.

RA: That's fabulous.

JK: They're in that package over there.

RA: That I definitely would like to look at.

JK: Yes

RA: Wow.

JK: So do you want to take an intermission and I can show you some more things?

RA: Sure. Let's do that. [Recording paused.]

RA: Okay. We're back from our little tour of some of the art in the living room. You started to tell me about empty nest syndrome. But maybe we could rewind for a minute and go back to how you met your husband?



JK: Well, it was very high class. We met at the symphony. I thought that was very nice. Better than meeting at a baseball game or something like that.

So actually, we were both— I went to the symphony. I had tickets. I went with another girl, a friend of mine. We used to go to a certain number of concerts. This friend of mine went to Vassar, and she was a year older than I was. She was entertaining one of her classmates, one of her roommates, for the Thanksgiving weekend. So I said, “Well, let’s have a party after the symphony at my house,” where we lived. I invited a lot of friends, some of my friends from Radcliffe. Louise was the one that the party was supposed to be for. One of the friends that I invited actually had a date to go to the symphony with somebody, who just turned out to be my husband. So, we actually met at the symphony. Then we came to my house where there was a party. Maybe I was a little different, so he was attracted to me. I don’t know why. Anyway, he dropped the other girl pretty fast. To be fair, he hadn’t taken her out more – it was one of the first dates he had with her.

So that was it. So that’s how we met. Then he began dating me. Well, that was Thanksgiving, and by April, we were engaged.

RA: Wow.

JK: So that was quick for these days. People have very long relationships before they get married. But I think it was a little different in those days.

RA: And how long was your engagement?

JK: Oh, about three months, maybe, maybe. April, we got engaged, and in June, we were married.

RA: And where was the wedding?



JK: But then we decided that it did seem like a short time to tell any relatives that we hadn't known each other that long. Well, we discovered that we had gone to brother and sister camps in New Hampshire. Of course, he was five years older than I, so he wouldn't have looked at me when I was at camp when I was eleven or twelve, and he was, well, seventeen or something like that. So, but we said, "Oh, we first saw each other ..." [Recording paused.] Well, that's how we met. And it was a quick engagement. But we've had a very happy life together. And that was – we were just right for each other.

RA: And where was the wedding?

JK: Oh. The wedding was at the Hotel Copley Plaza. Rabbi Levy married us. Although he'd retired, he said he was willing to marry us because he'd known me since growing up through the years. That was very nice.

RA: And where was your husband from?

JK: He lived in Jamaica Plain. He was from Boston. Our mothers really knew each other somewhat. And so they were – it was a marriage where the families sort of knew each other somewhat. But that was okay. That was nice.

RA: And his parents were both born in America.

JK: Yes, they were. His father, my father-in-law, was a very famous lawyer, also. Judge Jacob J. Kaplan was very well-known, a wonderful person. I felt I'd had a father again when we got married. So it wasn't so awfully many years because my – [End of Tape 1, Side A] In 1924, they had – at that time, they had three boys. It was a beautiful Cape Cod colonial house, which they fixed up lovely and had developed beautiful gardens around it. It's just a gem of a house. So my husband always grew up going to Scituate in the summertime. When we got married, which was in 1938, we lived – for the first summer, we were living in a house with his parents. But my father-in-law said in his



wisdom that families should have separate houses. So, he said, “You know, pick a place somewhere.” He had acquired some land because a neighbor wanted to sell some property to him. It was sort of up in the back where his house was. He said, “You pick a place where you want to have a house built, and I’ll build a house for you.”

RA: Very nice.

JK: Which I did, and we’ve gone there ever since.

RA: That’s where you were this summer.

JK: Oh, yes. Yes. We’re there for almost half the year from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, more or less. It’s a nice house all on one floor, very easy to take care of. So that’s what we’ve done. That’s the reason why we decided to move to Cambridge after our children grew up. We had been living in Newton, and our children all went to Newton schools. But when the last one went off to college, we decided to live somewhere else because the house we had in Newton was quite large, and it had a lot of land around it. There was nobody to help my husband rake leaves in the fall or take care of it, so we moved. We found this house, but not right away. We rented for about four years before we found a house that was right around the corner from where we rented, which was just the perfect house for us. So we’ve lived here ever since.

RA: Wow.

JK: But we always go to Scituate in the summertime. And at that time – of course, when we were first married, my in-laws were living in the main house, we called it. Then Leonard’s sister got married. They built a house on another part of the property. So there are three houses. Leonard’s brothers would come for a couple of weeks’ vacation but stay with the parents. So they didn’t have a house of their own. But when they passed away nobody seemed to want to take over the main house, nice as it was. And I felt I’d rather be in the house that I’d designed and built. I helped to design it.



RA: Wow.

JK: We built it. We didn't want that house, so that was sold. But it's still a nice house.

RA: What was your husband doing at the time that you met him?

JK: He was practicing law. He had graduated from Harvard Law School. Went to Harvard and Harvard Law School. He was practicing law in the same firm with his father, but not under his father. He was sort of separate from him. Sort of developing his own career. And so that's what he was doing.

RA: And does he continue to practice law?

JK: Well, he's supposed to be retired. That's a big thing. He's retired. But he's sort of un-retired. He retired from the law firm a few years ago. Then he went to work at the attorney general's office, which was a fascinating experience because he was working with non-profit organizations, which was one of his specialties as a lawyer. He did a lot of work for non-profits. He worked for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, doing some legal work for them, in addition to being on their board of directors and so on. He enjoyed working in this department very much and did it for quite a few years. Then he went back to Nutter McClennen and Fish, his law firm, as a counsel. He goes into the office several days a week.

Of course, his particular hobby is music. He plays the cello, and he's always played in string quartets and some orchestras, also.

RA: That makes sense that you met at the symphony.

JK: Right. [laughter] I've heard a lot of music through the years. I know a lot of quartets by memory. I'm not sure whether I could identify all of them by opus number, but I know them. I know the literature. So we've enjoyed our two interests, art and music, together.



We each understand each other's interests.

RA: And it sounded like you did a lot of volunteer work.

JK: Well, I did for quite a while. Let's see, different things. In Newton, I was active in the League of Women Voters. I also did some printing for them, like signs: Vote in Newton, November 3rd. It was such a good sign. It looked practically professional. I thought I'd reached the acme of the sign painter's art, and that I should quit at that point. [laughter] And then in Cambridge, I joined – I became active in the League here because I wanted to learn more about what Cambridge was all about. It was a good chance to do that. I was on the board of directors of that organization for quite a few years until I decided to quit and just do my art. Let's see. I volunteered at Hecht House in the days when Hecht House was called a settlement house. It wasn't called a community center. Ladies from Brookline and Newton run a board of directors to help set policy, some policy for the organization. It wasn't like the community center today which is run by the people who take part in it. It's a little bit different.

RA: So, what was your position there?

JK: Well, I was on the women's board of directors. Actually, I volunteered in the art department there and also in the nursery school. They had a very good nursery school then. Eventually, Hecht House became a Black community center. Combined Jewish Philanthropies sold it to another, a Black organization, for a dollar. My husband had the privilege of being the one who did the transfer. They always appreciated that. They called it something different. We called it Hecht House. So, let me see what other organizations – what did I say I was in? Well, the sculpture organizations, art organizations and –

RA: And you're fairly active in those, it seems like.



JK: Well, yes. I belong to the Cambridge Art Association, where I exhibit occasionally. I'm going to have a show of all this white sculpture in May.

There's going to be a show with four artists; three painters and a sculptor, me. And it's all going to be abstract art. It's going to be at a place called University Place, which is opposite the Harvard Square post office. We have a gallery there. And so I'm looking forward to that.

RA: Oh, that's great.

JK: And I'm producing quite a bit – trying to produce a lot of stuff for that.

RA: How long does it take you to work on a piece?

JK: Well, it may be a couple of months or something like that before I get it done. And then you have to let it dry and so on. That's my Holocaust piece. It's supposed to be a flame. Then I made a base that was a Mogen David with the names of different concentration camps.

RA: Yeah. I can see that.

JK: Oh, and I wanted to tell you about our AFS student because that's a very big part of our lives. When Philip was the only one left at home and he was a junior in high school, Newton South High School, they had a program of American Field Service exchange students. The high school could accept two students. It wasn't a person-to-person exchange; it was like a school-to-school exchange. The school took part in it. We volunteered to be a host family for a student, which would be a boy because our son was the only one left at home. Our daughter was married. Our other, the second one, was at



the University of Maine. I only had one child left at home. It was an empty nest. I just had the feeling I had to fill it up. So we got the papers for the student, whose name was Tom Gabelin, just at the weekend that our daughter was getting married in Scituate. She was being married at her grandmother's house in Scituate. It just was strange that it came that way.

I opened up the paper, and I read: "I'm from Krefeld, Germany." I said, "Oh, are they testing me to have a German student live with me for a year?" He said, "I was born in Theresienstadt concentration camp." And he was. He was one of very few who are alive today who was born in that concentration camp.

AR: Unbelievable.

JK: Now, Theresienstadt or Terezin, it was called also, was not a death camp. It was sort of a transit camp. A lot of Danes were there and other people, famous people, like Rabbi Leo Baeck, were incarcerated there. But they didn't send him to Auschwitz. Some people were sent to Auschwitz from there, but I guess his family was lucky. So his mother was pregnant when she went there, and he was born a few months after they were there. All the Jewish doctors were happy to bring a life into the world, even though it was there. So he had attention, medical attention. But I think his eyesight suffered from it because he didn't get the right kind of drops or something they put in the baby's eyes when they're born.

RA: He was Jewish.

JK: He was half and half, or rather two quarters. His two grandmothers were Jewish, and his two grandfathers were not. But they weren't religious people. They were socialists. In the Rhineland, where he came from, I used to say you were either Catholic or socialist. If you were non-religious, you were socialist. So his two parents were mixed-marriage people, from mixed marriages. That is, his two grandmothers were



Jewish, and his two grandfathers were not. But they weren't practicing any religion.

Hitler brought them together, actually, because legally, they couldn't under Hitler marry a full Aryan. So that's one of the things that happened. But he didn't have a particularly religious background. But his mother was thrilled that he was living with a Jewish family because then he'd learn something about what it was like to be Jewish. His mother felt particularly Jewish. His father was really not – was somewhat indifferent to that. His mother eventually left her husband and settled in Berlin and became a member of a Jewish community, quote, in Germany – if you sort of become a member of the community and join it. That's a sign of your religion. So, he's gone back to Theresienstadt several times. When they had the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation, he and his mother went back.

RA: Wow.

JK: To visit it. And he wanted to take us there too, actually, but we never have gotten around to it.

RA: How long did he live with you?

JK: He lived from August, about a month before school started, until June, until after graduation. And that was the standard way they did it. And then took his group, the whole group, took a bus trip partly around the country. Went to Washington and saw President Kennedy, and so on. But what happened was subsequently, when Philip married Evelyn and lived in Paris, we've been going every year to see them. So we also go to see Tom and Claudia. So we've kept up a very close relationship all these years with them, too. They visited us several times. At least three times, they came with their two girls and stayed in Scituate. So, we're very, very close. When we got to France we also go to see them in Germany. And he's become a psychologist. When he came to Newton South, he kept saying he was going to be a teacher when he grew up. But he took one course in psychology, a two-period course in psychology at Newton South, and



it changed his mind. He decided to become a psychologist. So we had an influence on his future career. He works for the city of Krefeld and works with children a lot. So, that's his career. His wife is also in psychology. She studied psychology. They met when he went to the University of Bonn. She was not Jewish. She is a hundred percent Protestant. So she said to me – well, the first time I met her, she said, "I hope you don't mind, mom, if I bring the children up to be Protestant because Tom has no religion. And I feel they should have religion." So I couldn't say, "Oh, no. I refuse to accept that." I said, "That's okay, Claudia. You do it the way you want."

RA: So you have three children?

JK: I have three children, right?

RA: The oldest was born –

JK: Well, the oldest is Josie. She married Lou Schneider, and they have three girls. The oldest is – well, the first two are now married. And Jackie is the youngest. She, as you know, isn't married. The oldest one now has two children. So we're great grandparents.

RA: Wow.

JK: Nancy, the second one, just got married last May. She went to Stanford Business School, and she met her husband there. They're living in California. And they were married in California because they wanted all their friends to go to the wedding. So they got married out there. So that's their family, the three girls. And Dick has two boys.

RA: And where does he live now?

JK: Dick lives in Newton Center. He belongs to Temple Israel. His boys have gone to religious school there. Let's see, the older one is at – what's it called? – the college in Wellesley, one of the state colleges. The younger one graduated from Boston University



is now at BU Law School. So that's Dick's family.

And then Philip has one daughter, Agnes, who I showed you her picture. She's studying law at the Sorbonne now. So we seem to have several people involved in law, two in the next generation.

RA: And some art in the gene pool and some law in the gene pool.

JK: Right. That's right. That's what it comes to. Well, we never would have – well, Philip, who is our youngest, if we had said to him, "Why don't you go to law school?" he probably would have said he wasn't interested. Because he didn't particularly want to just do what his father had done. But his career had – he had the most interesting career of any of them. He graduated from college in 1967. That was the time of the Vietnam War. He had spent the summer previous in France because he majored in French, French history. He was very much against the Vietnam War. So he really didn't want to go, and a lot of his friends didn't.

Meanwhile, he won a fellowship for a year studying French history from Harvard. It's called the Tower Fellowship for a year's study. He went to Paris for a year. Well, at that point, the Sorbonne broke out in this huge student strike that was very famous. The whole school closed. The Metro was closed. The students were tearing up the paving blocks in the streets to make barricades against the police. It was a – but he felt that he really had to produce something to show that he didn't waste his year in Paris. So he bought this little portable radio. He listened to see where the action was and walked to the archives where he was studying, away from where all this action was.

RA: What were they rioting against?

JK: Oh, I'm not sure. It was something to do with the way the schools were administered or something like that. It was a very famous time. You've never heard of it?



RA: No.

JK: Yeah. That was about 1967, '68. So he did spend his year there. And he managed to get somebody to give him an oral exam so he had some record that he actually worked there. And he did. He worked on a project which was to be for his doctoral thesis. Then he went to the University of Chicago, where he had – at Woodrow Wilson. And he was there for about half a year. He decided to enter the Peace Corps. He went in the Peace Corps. He was in Brazil for three years.

RA: Wow.

JK: Working in a small community in a coffee-growing area.

RA: And that's how he got out of fighting the war?

JK: Well, it was like an alternate service, yeah. So while he was – he had met Evelyn just before he came back from his year in France. They corresponded. Their friendship got much better through correspondence. [Recording paused.] He spent two years in this small village where he did community service work in the coffee highlands in Brazil. Well, he hadn't really decided what he was going to do once he got out of the Peace Corps. I mean to go to graduate school or what he wanted to do. So he signed on for another year. Well, he was in Sao Paulo, a big city, a huge city, with five million people in it. I think the population of Sao Paulo was equal to the population of Massachusetts at the time. It's a very big city. Where he became a program planner to plan programs for other Peace Corps people who were coming in. We went down to visit him, and he told us that he and Evelyn had decided to get married. They had been corresponding all this time. And I thought, "Well, she had opportunities to meet other young men, but he didn't. So maybe if she's interested in him, there must be something really good in this relationship."

RA: So he asked her to marry him over letters?



JK: I guess so. And then in April – they got married in April, and we all went to the wedding in Paris. Then she went back to Brazil with him for the last four months of his period there, which I thought was very nice because that way she knew what his experience was like, what it was like to be in another country. She thought it was very folklorique. She liked it a lot. So when they finished – by that time, he decided he wanted to go to the Harvard School of Education, Graduate School of Education, and do something to do with adult vocational education, which was sort of a little bit in line with what he'd done in the Peace Corps. So that was a three-year course. They came to Cambridge, and they stayed in the married student housing. She was working in a store at Harvard Square. And he was studying. Eventually, he got his degree. It was like a Ph.D. But I think it was called something else – Doctor of Education or something like that. Then they went back to France. They used to go every summer because she was an only child. And she liked to be with her parents.

RA: She was French and had always been in France?

JK: She had always lived in Paris. As I said, she was an only child. Her father was an only child also. And they only had one child of their own. So it's a family that was a small family. Her mother had some other relatives. But they weren't close. But Philip was one of twelve grandchildren. At first, she couldn't understand why it was so important for the cousins to get to see each other. She had no feeling about having cousins that you felt close to, whereas, as I said, Philip was one of twelve grandchildren. So we were always in contact through coming to Scituate for the summer, in the summertime. But now I think she understands all that kind of family she married into much better. They just have one girl. Then Philip was working for OECD in France, then getting occasional grants to do studies in education and different things. It wasn't steady work. So we suggested he speak to somebody we knew there who was a French lawyer and see if maybe he had some leads of what organizations or companies that he could do vocational work with the workers. Instead, this man Jacques offered Philip a job in his



law firm as the business manager of the law firm. So it sounded interesting to him because it was something. And he said, “If you have any grants of things you have to do, we give you a leave of absence.” So he called his father up and said, “Dad, what does a business manager at Nutter McClennen Fish do?” He did that for quite a few years.

Then I think, possibly through the law firm, they said, “Why don’t you become a lawyer?” So he did. He continued working with them. He also went to the Sorbonne and studied law for four years, and became an avocat who goes to the courts, the French courts. He now has a law practice in Paris.

RA: And do you miss him?

JK: Well, as he pointed out, I had two other children at home. And Evelyn’s family had only Evelyn. So he felt it was only fair that he stay with them. But we see them in the summertime. And then some other time of the year we always go to France to be with them. We stay at a small hotel near where they live and are with them for a week or two some other time during the year. We probably will go in the spring in April this year.

We’re very familiar with the neighborhood that he lives in because we’ve seen it for so many years. His in-laws live in the same apartment building but like in the next entry. They always helped to take care of the little girl when she was small and going to school. Her father, Evelyn’s father, had to take an early retirement. That was the rule. So they would take the little girl to school. He would pick her up at noontime. They’d take her home, give her dinner, and then take her back to school again. Then call for her at the end. So it was a very close-knit thing. I mean the other – the in-laws were very close and helped to raise Agnes, which was more what they do there than around here.

RA: It says in this little ode to Janet Kaplan –

JK: Yes.

RA: It says, “While taking tennis lessons at eighty ...”.



JK: I think there's a slight exaggeration. I think I was only seventy-nine.

RA: When you started taking tennis lessons?

JK: Well, not starting. But about twenty years before the Mt. Auburn Tennis Center opened up on Coolidge Avenue near here, I became a born-again tennis player. Of course my husband's very good at all sports. He always played tennis. He was the tennis counselor at a summer camp. And I played tennis, but I was – that wasn't my favorite sport. I loved skiing. Skiing was really my favorite sport. So, we'd ski in the winter with our family.

RA: Downhill?

JK: Yes. And in the summer, we have a tennis court, which Leonard's father built for his sons when they bought their house in Scituate. So we've always had this tennis court. Well, I played at it, but I wasn't really very good at tennis until Mt. Auburn Tennis Center opened up, and I began taking lessons there. Then I really was a born-again tennis player. But that was about twenty years ago. Maybe Lou was saying that I took – I was taking some extra lessons. One summer, I was taking some lessons down in Scituate, maybe a couple of years ago, to improve a little bit. But it was a slight exaggeration.

RA: Any other hobbies?

JK: Well, I like to garden. We have a nice – we have a flower garden and a vegetable garden in Scituate. We've always had a little vegetable garden, which I take care of myself. And bird watching – I like to go bird watching. I've done that for about thirty years, maybe. And there's an Audubon Society near us in Marshville, which has bird walks that I go on very often in the summer. And that's about – I think that fills up my life.

RA: Yeah. I think it probably does.



JK: Plus my other activities. Would you like to see my studio?

RA: Yeah. I think that'd be great.

JK: You want to take your –? Go down with your recorder?

RA: Sure. [Recording paused.] Okay. Now we're back in the studio.

JK: Well, when we bought this house, this basement was absolutely empty, nothing in it. Over the years, I've managed to fill it up with my studio and various things. A lot of dog sculptures. I've done some of those. This is a wax that can be made into a bronze. It's made in a mold. And [inaudible]. This is puppies – the way they pile up together. I don't know if that would be something [inaudible], two puppies. Oh, this is a bronze that's similar to the waxes over there. See, it's heavy. [inaudible] I did some of those. But I do also do quite a bit of dog art because [inaudible] we have these Norwegian elkhounds. I found that nobody had made an Elkhound statue [inaudible] British [inaudible]. So this is sort of a potboiler thing, a commercial thing I've done, from a mold and sold these ceramic dogs all over the country.

RA: I love the tail.

JK: Yeah. That's right. And at dog shows, we have these Norwegian Elkhounds at dog shows. So I've sold – I've never counted how many I've made and how many I've sold over the years. But it gives you an idea of what the coat's like and everything.

RA: A couple dozen?

JK: What?

RA: Do you think you've sold a couple dozen?



JK: [inaudible] count up my [inaudible]. I try to keep a record of how many I've made. These are the models of the different sculptures that I've made. I fire these in my kiln in my studio, and then when I make the larger one it's fired over at the

JCC. So this is –?

RA: I really like those.

JK: They're sort of fun. This is a model for a plain one that I was showing you. Oh, that's the model for the one that's in the dining room. But it's a little different. It came out bigger and heavier or something. But that was the first one [unclear] that was done at the JCC. Oh, and you probably didn't notice. I have a big wooden sculpture like that in the front hall.

RA: No, I didn't see that.

JK: Yes. Well, then I made it in clay, and then this is the wax. I made a mold. This is the wax that can be turned into a bronze. And the bronze – there's a bronze one upstairs, too. So I've done some work on that. And let's see. Over here's where I use this as sort of a turntable. This is one of the ones that [inaudible]. Old TV table. This is more or less the [inaudible]. This is a model for a piece I have outdoors in the garden, which I did in stone. And some dishes that I made that I showed you [inaudible]. I have a mold for that. These are the molds where you pour liquid clay in it, and it hardens and [inaudible]. See you pour it in here [inaudible], in this solid mold. I learned how to make molds at the museum school when I was at the pottery workshop. Some of them are simple one-piece molds like that. That's the [inaudible] sort of a spoon drip thing, which I've also sold numerous ones decorated with dogs. Yes.

RA: That's cute.



JK: That's a dog. [inaudible] back view of an Elkhound. [inaudible] and then it dried, and you pour out the extra water, extra clay. So that's the simplest kind of mold. Of course, it shrinks in the firing. That's why it's so much smaller than the mold here.

RA: I see some birds over there.

JK: Yes, Yes I have numerous [inaudible]. This is an abstract [inaudible]. And then I [inaudible]. I have another I gave away to Nancy when she got engaged [inaudible]. Then I have a mold for these birds and have made numerous ones of those. And various dogs [inaudible] and this is [inaudible]. I don't think –

RA: No. I think we're okay.

JK: That's an [inaudible] that you see in Florida. I've sold a lot of ceramic dogs and things like that.

RA: I'm going to take a picture of you in front of your favorite place. Now let me know where you'd like that taken.

JK: Oh, why don't I sit in this chair?

RA: It's not going to be a professional photograph.

JK: Why don't I sit on a chair?

RA: Now, that's a good place.

JK: [inaudible] Now, these are pedestals that I'm making for this show that I'm having.

RA: Are you doing the carpentry or the painting?



JK: No. I have the plywood cut at the lumber yard, and then you nail it together. Actually, my brother-in-law was nailing something together for me. He did a nice job, and then I paint. So this is one of my recent pieces of sculpture.

RA: I'm just waiting for the flash.

JK: Well, [inaudible].

RA: Are you okay? [inaudible]

JK: [inaudible] [Recording paused.] I can show you pictures of some of the things, sculptures that I've done in the past that I've sold if you're interested [inaudible]. Anyway, this is where I work; this is the kiln where I do small pieces. [inaudible]

RA: It's not really attached.

JK: [inaudible] Something's wrong. [inaudible] Yeah. Okay. So that's about where I work. It's not very glamorous, kind of messy, actually. [inaudible] working in one little cart, and everything is all around it. [inaudible] working into a corner [inaudible].

RA: Is it an expensive hobby?

JK: Well, I don't think of it in terms of being expensive. It's not a hobby. It's a profession.

RA: I'm going to stop the tape.

[END OF INTERVIEW]