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Jeanette Simon Transcript

FRANCES GODINE: We're beginning to record and today is Monday, October 27, 1997 and I'm Fran Godine interviewing Jeanette Simon in her home under the auspices of the Jewish Women's Archive Temple Israel Oral History Project in Boston, Massachusetts. And actually, Mrs. Simon, I'll ask you just to say hello so that we can check if the mike volume is working for you. Okay?

JEANETTE SIMON: Hello there.

FG: Good. And I'll start, and I'll also just let you know that I'm going to watch the tape because we have about 40 minutes on this side and then I'll stop it and—

JS: Oh, I don't know if I'll have—

FG: I know, but if we want to we can flip it over and see how it goes, but in case I need to interrupt you for anything technical that's what it's about, okay? [both laugh] I'm actually so happy that you're doing this and I wondered if there was any particular reason that you decided to go ahead with it.

JS: Well, I am coming to a ripe old age where when I speak to my friends, I call upon things that are so far back that unless they're old like I am, they don't know what I'm talking about. So I thought, 'Well, if you can't fight it you might as well relax and enjoy it and talk about yourself and the things that you've seen, and I've seen a great deal in my life. As a matter of fact, I'm afraid it's come full circle. I don't know if you know what's been going on in the stock market today, but it was closed down twice and I always feel that, since I was in high school during the great—the beginnings of the Great Depression, that that started quite a cycle in my life. And as time has gone by, I find that the world seems to be divided in half between people like me who lived during the Great

Depression and the other half of the world. And perhaps it's more than half the world who have never heard of it and don't really realize how it can grab you and how it can change families, sometimes bringing them together, sometimes doing terrible things to people's plans and intentions in life.

FG: Could you tell me a little more about that specifically for you?

JS: Well, yes. I can't say that the—the fall of the stock market in 1929 directly hit us, because my father had been in the—in a very speculative business, I feel, with our stocks. That was in the leather business. And there was a big slump even before that and we knew, my sister and I, that when we had—needed clothes, when we made plans for the future, that our parents were really struggling to do everything. Very fortunately, in those days, we were able to go to good colleges for a lot less than today. My sister was a good student. She went to Smith. When she got there, she was presented with a semester's worth of tuition as a prize for having the highest entrance examination—

FG: Wonderful.

JS: —marks. I didn't do that well. [chuckles] But, you know, at Wellesley, a thousand dollars took you very far. But we all had little jobs when we went there. For example, my roommate sold stockings. Oh, stockings were a big part of your wardrobe; they had runs. You had to plan on them. And she had a little store in our room in the dormitory at Wellesley. I typed theses.

FG: Very clever!

JS: Well, I had taught myself to type and it was rather an interesting thing because I had customers in various parts of the curriculum. So I did some chapters on a novel that one of my classmates was writing, and many of us, wondering what had happened to business and money and all, majored in economics. I was one of them and there were a few courses that I couldn't fit in, but after typing the papers for somebody else just fit

them in, I felt as if I had had—

FG: An education. [laughs]

JS: —an education in that so I didn't have to worry about it. We graduated in 1935, a miserable year for getting jobs. I can't tell you; the only good thing about it was that graduate school was very inexpensive. Even so, I did not go on to graduate school right away. I did a few things. I worked in my father—in the office of my father's factory and that was an appalling thing because business was going to pieces all around us. The sight of—I was payroll clerk and some of the paychecks I made up were pretty horrible.

FG: In terms of the amount of money you were able to give?

JS: Yes, there was so little—how families were going to try to live on that. I did go out for a few years—none of us had jobs. Nobody—after a few years, I did go to Simmons College School of Social Work. And I think it was—cost $250 a semester, two semesters a year. For $500 a year, I became a Master of Science in Social Work and I got a job and I got $28 a week and I was all set.

FG: How did you choose that career?

JS: Interestingly enough, at that time Wellesley had no—the Economic Department at Wellesley was combined with the Sociology Department. And I thought—so I majored in economic and sociology, and I was acquainted with sociology, with field work and besides, I knew that I could probably get a job and I was very anxious to get a job.

FG: So you had a practical side to your nature.

JS: Absolutely. Well, I wanted to—I wanted to do what I—I was old enough to be earning my own way and I thought it was about time. And I got—I got a very good job. I thought it was with Family Service of Boston, which was still one of the outstanding family

case center agency in Boston. And they had, oh, a lot of education on the job. I was also lucky my second year of field placement at Simmons. It was in the psychiatric clinic of the Mass General Hospital, so that was a very good place for me, because that was when—was during the war, Second World War. I'll talk about the First World War next. This is the Second World War.

FG: Okay.

JS: All Freud's disciples had arrived here and they were all on the staff at the Mass General and we knew them by their first names. And they had teaching seminars with the whole staff, and we were included in the whole staff so that I had quite a learning experience with them.

FG: Do you remember any of the specific people that might have come over then?

JS: Well, we had lectures from Anna Freud who was here, and Dr. Hitchcock and his wife who were mentioned in Freud's writings through footnotes, which they were very happy to show to you. Hans Sachs was at the Philadelphia School and he taught a seminar at our agency's center as well as to Smith. If I thought—if I think a little more—

FG: That's plenty. [laughs]

JS: —I'll come up with a few more. [laughs]

FG: And what type of work were you actually doing in the social work field? Were you working with families or—

JS: We were working with families.

FG: —counseling?

JS: Well, in the psychiatric clinic we were getting backgrounds for the psychiatrist, and we were also conducting—there was sometimes set out a plan for a disturbed young person. We would work directly with the person and the psychiatrist would work with the parents or visa versa. And that was four days a week, with classes a week—a day and a half. In those days, everybody worked a half-day on Saturday, which was just—

FG: Expected.

JS: —expected, that was it.

FG: That was the work week.

JS: I was astonished when I grew up and looked back on things. After my children grew up and went off to school, I started working part-time for Red Cross. They had a Case-working Department, working with families of the military. Now, when I went into that it was a peacetime organization. But I—

FG: This was 1940s or—

JS: No, it was the—when was Johnson president? It was the 1960s.

FG: That's right. So you—

JS: Because I can remember being in our office eating lunch with some of that other people when Johnson came on the radio, was all upset by the Tonkin Bay episode. And that's when the war suddenly broke out all around us, and we were working with families of men who were in the shooting war, men who were being drafted.

FG: Vietnam front lines?

JS: Yes, men—people who were being drafted, so it became quite a different job than I had thought it was going to be. Most of what before then had to do with separation by

people who didn't really know why they were enlisting but it would work out that that was their way of getting separated from the family, with the beginning of the—the breakdown of their family anyway.

FG: How fascinating. I never thought of it in that manner that the military might be used as a way out.

JS: Well that's the way individuals would—that was in the peacetime—

FG: Ya.

JS: —you see. Nobody wanted to go in the shooting war—nobody. Everybody tried to get us to certify them as having undue hardship to go and, being against the war, I was very cooperative.

FG: [laughs]

JS: What can I say? You can edit that out.

FG: That's all right. This is history. [laughs]

JS: Yes. [laughs] So I'll go back to the First World War now.

FG: Pleasure, yeah

JS: I got the day off from kindergarten on Armistice Day; I will never forget it. We went to school as usual. I was standing in the yard waiting to get in for the day, and the principal came to the window, screaming the war was over. And I thought that was very nice. I know my uncles had gone marching off and I used to enjoy going to grandstands and seeing the soldiers march down the roads. Didn't have a clue as to what they were going to be doing. But my mother went in town that day and bought me a drum. I wanted a drum all my life and she bought each one of us a drum. Now, where else am I?

FG: May I just ask what that was like so the grandstands would be on the side of the roads?

JS: Yes, they were, like, beside—along the side of the Boston Common.

FG: And people would parade?

JS: People would go and watch the parade of the soldiers with their tin hats on and their backpacks and their peyes and their—I don't know, they had the hats with the brims on the little tassels. My uncles—my unmarried uncles used to march like that and it was a day kind of excitement celebrating. As I said, I didn't have a clue as to what they were going to be doing. If I ever knew, I don't know.

FG: So for Armistice Day, the principal came in and just said—

JS: "It's over. You can go home. You have the day off from school."

FG: So all the children left.

JS: Yes.

FG: Was there any other celebration that you—and then you got your drum. [laughs]

JS: I got my drum. Well, I was too young to really—I understand there were all kinds of excited celebrations but we didn't live near the center of things like that.

FG: Where were you living at that point?

JS: Roxbury. I was born in Roxbury. I was born on a small street there and—

FG: Do you remember the name?

JS: Yes, Nasing Street.

FG: Nasing?

JS: Ya. And the rest of my life, somehow or another, no matter where I am, there's somebody that I remember or who remembers me from Nasing Street. It was a fairly well to do street. There were any number of chauffeured limousines belonging to families. Well, they took the place of coachmen. Women did not drive and that was not all that unusual.

FG: Did your family have a house there or apartment?

JS: We had a house there. We had a nice house.

FG: And who was in your family?

JS: My sister and I and my mother and father. I had a much older sister. I don't remember her. We had a tragedy in the family on my first birthday. We were in a car. Private cars that belonged to families were unusual when I was small, and they were all open cars with wonderful-smelling leather seats. When I was one year old our car went off a bridge and threw us all into a river and my older sister drowned, which cast a pall on a good deal of my mother's life.

FG: I'm sorry.

JS: I never knew. I never knew her. I was one year old. I've run into people who used to be our neighbors on the street older than I am who would recall that. That was the important thing about it. My mother was the woman who wore black all the time.

FG: So since that time she wore black?

JS: Well, for a few years.

FG: Ya, ya.

JS: For a few years; then she pulled herself together.

FG: And how close in age is your sister to you?

JS: A year and a half. We were very close.

FG: And she's older or—

JS: Ya, she was older. She was the one who got the prize for the highest college boards –

FG: Going to Smith –

JS: She, uh, I'll show her—get a little picture.

FG: Oh, I'd love to see it.

JS: She was interviewed for the New York Times voted for [unclear] and she got a lot of publicity at the time.

FG: Oh, how beautiful! Oh!

JS: She was very pretty.

FG: Oh, yes. I see the family resemblance.

JS: Oh. [chuckles] We—my mother was very fussy, that she and my father were married quite awhile before they had children. She was very careful of us, very protective. Well, if somebody lived on our side of the small street we lived on—if we lived on the same side we could play with them. But we could not cross the street and we could not go to anybody else's house. That was it, so it's a good thing we got along.

FG: Ya. [laughs]

JS: We also couldn't go to libraries because she heard about the germ theories of illness. She was afraid there would be germs on the—

FG: Books.

JS: —pages of the books. So we went to Jordan Marsh once a month. We would each get a book and then after we finished reading it, we would change it.

FG: Do you remember any of those titles?

JS: Oh, there were all kinds. [laughs]

FG: Ya. Were there any books from your childhood that stick with you? That had a particular—

JS: Oh, there were a series of books we used to read. The Outdoor Girls, Bunny Brown and Sister Sue, all of the Alcott—I believe, the Alcott books. I was sick one year. I got pneumonia. I was seriously ill. That was when I was in the sixth grade and my nurses used to come each day with a new book from the library. So it was all right that they had library books. I just couldn't have any. And they would read a book a day to me. While I was there—

FG: Are you still a reader? Do you still like—

JS: Yes, my eyesight is not very good. I always planned on having a lot of hobbies when I grew older. I have discovered that that doesn't happen all the time. For example, if you like to read music at the piano and you wear bifocals, you can't do it. And I was going to garden but if your knees give out, arthritic, you can't kneel. And I used to love my sailboat, and you have to be very nimble or fast and athletic. There were so many things I planned on doing, so that I can read all right if the print isn't too small.

FG: And you go to concerts; I know that.

JS: Yes.

FG: So you still appreciate that.

JS: And I paint in watercolors and I play bridge. And I—before, we never played any better than I do but I have found kindred spirits who play as I do. I would say that my—I was coddled a good deal by my family since they had such trouble establishing a family. And my first independence came with overnight camp, which was a hard transition for me to make.

FG: How old were you?

JS: Eleven, which was fairly normal in those days. Really, you started later and you stayed with it longer, and the camp season was longer. For example, you were always at camp during the Fourth of July but we never came home until a week before school would start. It was a long camp.

FG: So maybe 12 weeks or—

JS: Something like that.

FG: I guess sometimes now it's about eight weeks if there's—

JS: If you're lucky.

FG: Ya.

JS: And—

FG: Do you remember what camp you went to?

JS: Yes, it's not in existence anymore. The name was Camp Gregmore and I keep running into friends from Camp Gregmore too. I'm very local. I was born in Boston,

educated here and I never went very far from here. I think I didn't have the Peterboruogh all the time.

FG: Was Camp Gregmore in Massachusetts?

JS: No, it was in—not far from [unclear] New Hampshire.

FG: Oh, how did you get up there?

JS: By train.

FG: Did your sister go also?

JS: Oh, of course. What do you think? [laughs] And I was very homesick at first and I think that maybe it wasn't for my parents. I think it was because I was in a different bunk than my sister, and that was our first separation.

FG: Ya.

JS: But—

FG: What were some of the activities?

JS: Some of the activities? I imagine the same—it seemed to me I spent most of my life playing basketball, which I hated. I was very tall for my age but slow. Since I was tall, I played guard, but I was slow. So if you're slow you can't do very good work at guard—guarding so—

FG: You can get in the way.

JS: You can get in the way; I did my best.

FG: [laughs]

JS: But I was—[laughs] I never did too well. We didn't play baseball too much. People would have braces on their teeth and the ball would hit them in the mouth and that was out. But we did interpretive dancing.

FG: Oh, how wonderful! Oh, that—Isadora Duncan kind of thing?

JS: Ya, exactly like it with the same kind of costumes that she had.

FG: Long scarves?

JS: And we used to—well, we would take dyed cheesecloth and we would make shifts for ourselves like we used to dance in and we would have a little belt around our middles and we would—

FG: Dance to the music.

JS: —dance.

FG: Interpret the music and—

JS: Ya. And we'd have a pageant every year. Then, swimming twice a week—twice a day, and canoeing and—

FG: Is that where you learned to sail?

JS: I didn't learn to sail until I grew up and got married and lived down on Commonwealth Avenue. And my husband used to work late sometimes. He was a lawyer and I didn't know exactly what I would do with my time, but they had started this sailing program on the Charles River. So I thought I'd give it a try, and I loved it. And then, when my children came along I thought, 'Well, here's one thing that at my age and at their age we can get together with.' And so we got a day sailor that we kept in Marblehead. And we used to sail.

FG: Wonderful. Did you drive out to Marblehead—

JS: Ya.

FG: —and take the boat out?

JS: Ya, we used to keep it moored there.

FG: Wonderful. Was your husband finally interested as well?

JS: No, he didn't like boats. [laughs]

FG: So this was something for you and the kids.

JS: Yes. In later years we got a motorboat. It slept two people but we never stayed overnight on it. That he was willing to participate in. And then, he used to work sometimes in New York for a few days at a time and so I studied navigation, which was fun. There's a lot to navigate, and are you familiar with it at all?

FG: I'm not. You're amazing!

JS: Well, I'm curious. I used it in later years and it was really fun. That's what I mean when I say I have a lot of interests but I'm too old to really use them. I wouldn't trust myself in a boat for anything anymore.

FG: So did you actually use your navigation to go places?

JS: Yes.

FG: Where did you go?

JS: Well, we would stay in Cape Cod. We'd go for the day over from [unclear] to Martha's Vineyard or to Nantucket.

FG: And you got there?

JS: Well, we got there.

FG: [laughs]

JS: Believe me, we got there. [laughs]

FG: Congratulations. [laughs]

JS: It wasn't that far but, you know—

FG: It's a big ocean. [laughs]

JS: You got out of sight of the land in back of you and the land in front of you and you really were dependent on your—

FG: What type of tools did you have at that time?

JS: Oh, we had compasses and tracks and—there's no such thing really as a speedometer that works. But I used to figure out the course readings to follow and which buoys to go from one to another. And my children were good at it too.

FG: Wonderful!

JS: My husband came from a nice family, four brothers and a sister and we were all very close. When my husband died, the other four went rather quickly. So I'm left now with the widows of the men and we're close friends. Now, his brothers were interested in boats too, so when we'd be down at the Cape they'd come and stay. And we'd take picnics and go out. Now, what else can I tell you? It seems to me that in all these years I've seen an awful lot, done a lot but it's hard for me to pinpoint anything.

FG: Well, you wrote in the questionnaire that there was a bank holiday in 1933. Do you want to tell me a little about that?

JS: Well, yes. Did you know about it?

FG: Tell me about it.

JS: Oh, well, that was after Roosevelt—Franklin Roosevelt was elected but had not been sworn in yet. When the banks were closing—there were runs on the banks. But there was a drying up of credit and I was studying banking and finance at Wellesley at the time. We got a brand new textbook and I was learning about the gold standard and how much gold you needed to back up your currency. And then we heard that Roosevelt was inducted and the next day closed the banks down on a holiday because there was such a run on the banks that he felt that he had to close them down, see which were the rotten apples, see if some of the healthier banks could back them up. And he cancelled the gold standard. So we went to class. Everyday we would—every other day—it was Monday, Wednesday and Friday that we had our economics class. We would find out what do the headlines mean and our professor, who was really a very confident person, would tell us. And he would say, “You can cross out Chapter Two and Chapter Five of your new text”—

FG: [laughs]

JS: —and continue all through the book until he finally threw the textbook away. [laughs] But that was a frightening time. All the banks closed down. You couldn’t go and get any money out. If you had a business you couldn’t meet your payrolls.

FG: What did you feel like personally? You were a young woman in college.

JS: Oh, I was so worried about my father’s business and I had my first checking account then. I was supposed to be learning how to manage money of my own and so forth. And

I knew that except for what was in my father's [unclear], I had no money to spend. And very fortunately, I was living in a dormitory and I didn't need it for food. But it was scary. How would you feel if the whole banking system and the whole economic system under which you make all your plans, as they do, as you—I am sure you do now, goes away? It's very upsetting and that's part of the reasons why everybody would refer to Roosevelt as a father figure when he died, because he came and made things—everybody thought he made things right for us. Now, actually, he didn't. The outbreak of the Second World War made things all right for us. Everybody got jobs. But until then, he did set up WPA, the PWA, the CCC, the NRA, all these things. I mean, he did everything to try to put people to work and take some kind of optimism. And he had—all the people who surrounded him and his wife were social workers and I think that had a lot to do with my choosing that as a profession.

FG: Interesting.

JS: Remember that a lot of the careers that are open to women now were not open to women in 1935. It would not have cost me much more in the way of time or money to have become a lawyer or a doctor. Many of my classmates did. A lot of them who were economic majors went to Washington and got jobs in Washington in the agencies that were set up during the war later on and during the Depression and through the New Deal. The New Deal was very exciting. It was—you felt, well, you reached the bottom and there was no place to go down further, and here came this man with a jaunty cigarette holder and the smile and—

FG: A sense of optimism and hope for the country.

JS: Yes.

FG: Do you feel your career was one that you would have chosen again?

JS: No. I have found other interests now, and at the time that I chose it, it was just at the end of the Friendly Visitor thing. I used to give relief among other things. Financial relief. And in my references, which I still kept because they're really rather interesting, I was considered a valuable worker because I was comfortable giving relief—financial relief. Evidently it's—that's another thing too. It varies with the social worker and some of them were getting an awful lot of satisfaction out of being controlling. And anyway—

FG: But personally, you felt—

JS: Personally, I felt if there is a need and if there is a fund, I thought the Red Cross was wonderful. They let me do so much with money when there was a real need and when they couldn't help with all the emotional things, but at least you got bread on the table.

FG: How did your family feel about this career choice?

JS: About what?

FG: About your choice of becoming a social worker.

JS: Oh, my mother thought it was great.

FG: Growing up, did you have a sense that they wanted you to be anything particular?

JS: No, because what was I going to be? A schoolteacher? I never seriously considered being a schoolteacher; never interested in that. I knew some of my—some of my classmates became lawyers but they were never able to set up practice or work for a private company. They would work for Internal Revenue, for state bureaus, things like that. They were second-class citizens in all of those things.

FG: Just because they were women?

JS: Because they were women, yes. They were—those were not considered appropriate for women. And—well, I still have some friends who don't particularly care for women lawyers, even though they're very smart, [chuckles] very confident ones. Well, doctors, now—these women doctors are a brand new species. There were some—there were, I think, three or four from our class—

FG: At Wellesley?

JS: At Wellesley. But that was the exception. People didn't want a woman doctor unless you were very fussy and wanted a gynecologist who was a woman, or a woman's problem sometimes. But you didn't do it really. It was not—you were allowed into most of the graduate schools for those careers, but that didn't mean that you would get a job, or being pushed forward to get a job.

FG: If you could do anything—if you could have done any profession, what would it have been? Just curious.

JS: Oh, I think that I would have—I think I would have liked to be an MBA.

FG: Hmm. It sounds as if you have a thread of an economic interest and knowledge all through.

JS: Yes, and it's an interest that I have kept up with a little bit. And I just wish that I had more real knowledge than I do, because I have theoretical knowledge of macroeconomics, not micro.

FG: Well, you've certainly got the vocabulary. [laughs] And I bet you have a lot—a great deal of—

JS: And actually, I call myself an economics major. We had general exams before we could graduate where we'd take an examination in every subject that you had for your

major field. And I had actually taken more French and French literature than any other subject, but I was afraid of writing for a whole day in the language. I knew that I couldn't depend on my grammar to be that good. So with my general and economic was a half-day it was a stickler. So that's what I called it but I was I was actually a French major and I liked the literature and I always enjoyed it.

FG: Have any of your children followed any of these interests?

JS: Not particularly. I taught them first-year Latin to both of them.

FG: The what?

JS: I don't know if you're familiar with Commonwealth School.

FG: Sure.

JS: How do you know it?

FG: Well, I know it by reputation. It's a wonderful school, it is very clear.

JS: Well, my daughter. In the first class of [unclear] there. Charlie Merrill had this hot idea that Latin was a dead language and he was willing to let it die. But if you had already had first-year Latin, he would let you continue with it.

FG: He was the head of Commonwealth School?

JS: He was the founder. That was all Merrill Lynch money. He was a nut.

FG: Really. [laughs] What was he like?

JS: Oh, he was—he hated parents. [unclear] at me and he was the most uncommunicative—but he had a good school. He was most unfair about many things and very controlling. Look, I wasn't that happy with the total experience but anyway, I felt

that it's very nice to have a Latin background. I had my six years from Girls Latin School and I always thought it saves you a lot of trips to a dictionary. Do you agree?

FG: Well, I don't have that type of background. I never was—wished I had because I make many trips to the dictionary. [laughs]

JS: Well, I do too, but there are an awful lot—well, you just take the derivation from the Latin.

FG: Ya.

JS: And they were good sports so I tutored them in first-year Latin because he had skipped them in Latin—

FG: Of course.

JS: —and I felt bad. My daughter followed that along right from college.

FG: What did she select for a career?

JS: Oh, history—guaranteed not to have a job for you—

FG: [laughs]

JS: —when you [unclear]. But she's the one who went to—got a degree in Library Science years later. My son—my son had dyslexia; he had a lot of problems. He did get a Master of Fine Arts in Filmmaking from Brandeis. In those days they had a—

FG: A wonderful—

JS: —a graduate program and was never able to really get a job in that. Then he got a Doctor of Education at Boston University and he used to arrange seminars for digital until they cut out that the head of the department. Now he's in the real estate business and

doing terrifically.

FG: Great! In this area?

JS: Cambridge. It's a family business, something my husband left. And he's very good at doing general contracting work. So whenever things need to be done, he can organize the whole thing and does a good job at it too.

FG: Are you involved with that business at all?

JS: Yes [unclear]. I keep an office and I keep my fingers on everything.

FG: You're an advisor and you—I bet—

JS: I have an advisor but I administer on the basis of my advisor. And I think that probably if I were in analysis I would discover that really I just don't want to give up, that—my children are both in their 50s.

FG: Why should you give up? You have a lot to contribute.

JS: Well, I feel I don't do anything to contribute. And, as I said before, the world is made up of people who have lived through a Depression and those who have not. And I figure that my children could benefit by knowing somebody who can warn them against some things.

FG: And you bring a perspective, even to today's events, on the stock market that other people don't actually have as, you know, in your—

JS: I've seen it before and I think it can be very scary if you had. Maybe nobody else is as scared as I am.

FG: No, I was listening to the radio coming here and people are talking.

JS: Ya.

FG: You can say that. Do you have any interpretations of it today that you want to share? [chuckles]

JS: Well, I—I don't know what to say. I'm not in a panic and I think everything is—I hope everything will be all right.

FG: I guess, just to say for the tape recorder, in case this day in history is not that well-known in the future, that what we're talking about is that the stock market fell 500 points—

JS: 550 points.

FG: 550 points today.

JS: And it's been closed twice.

FG: Today.

JS: Today.

FG: And they do that as a safety measure to—

JS: Well, I really don't know what they do it for.

FG: Ya.

JS: I think it's so that people can collect their thoughts and that, in a panic, everybody doesn't run to the telephones all at the same time. It's a free-fall beforehand, but as soon as they opened up again, it becomes another free-fall because they feed on their own anxieties.

FG: Would you have ever liked to be in the stock market directly yourself?

JS: Never. Of course I am in it; everybody is in it. If you have any cash at all, you're not going to sit on it in a checking account. But, as a matter of fact, I'm probably the most conservative investor that there is. And I don't even want to talk to my children. I don't know what they're doing. I know that they must consider that I am super-conservative and that they can do better than I do. And I just don't want to—I just don't want to confront the whole thing. So I'm glad to be sitting with you instead.

FG: Oh. [laughs]

JS: Well—

FG: My pleasure too. Shall we—

JS: I'm trying to think of who else I am.

FG: You mentioned also that there was an annual luncheon for the Council of Jewish Women.

JS: Oh, gee. How did I happen to mention that?

FG: Well, it was in the questionnaire. We asked you if there were three things that you might like to talk about when we came over.

JS: Oh, well, that—that was a rough job.

FG: Tell me about it.

JS: They used to have a lot of luncheons. How old are you? May I ask?

FG: Fifty. Of course you can ask.

JS: You're 50.

FG: Yes.

JS: So you don't really remember so much, the days when organizations would raise money by having great big annual luncheons.

FG: Well, I've heard about them and my mother was certainly involved with them in Manhattan, but—

JS: Well, then—

FG: Just the stories. [laughs]

JS: It was—I belonged on—I forget why I was singled out to be offered these chairmanships that nobody else wanted. But I was Chairman of Patrons for one annual luncheon, and then to get people to give extra money. And I was resented by enough of the people who said, "The Cabots speak only to God and you have no right to approach people directly if they don't know who you are, who your family is." I didn't always come from Boston and they didn't know what I was doing. So it was not an easy thing but I decided I would approach everybody who approached me for contributions. That worked out to be a goodly number of people and it was a good enough record that I made so that I was asked to be General Chairman. That—that was very difficult. In the first place, you had to have a good subchairman and I was lucky. I got some good ones. As a matter of fact [unclear] I got some good friends after working, but I had to take up a lot of my time in order to get around to telling the story and to work up enthusiasm. I got on the board of the PTA; I got on the board of the Jewish family and children's things. I got on the Wellesley Club [unclear]. I was every place talking and for once—and it just took all—my children remember the times that I took away from them by being out doing it. And it was a big accomplishment. It took a lot of brains on the part of everybody who was involved. We used to have rehearsals. We'd put on a little play.

FG: Oh.

JS: I gave a speech in verse that was—we did everything.

FG: Oh, great!

JS: We went to the Statler. We had to draw lots to see who would have tables out in the lobby, who would have the [unclear]. We made quite—

[END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE]

FG: I'm with Jeanette Simon and this is October 27, 1997. And we were just talking about a luncheon that Mrs. Simon chaired in 1950?

JS: Yes. I think though that that is something that probably that's not as common, that type of volunteer work, as it was in my day. We would all work for—do volunteer type of organization work. And I don't see how women today, who will have their careers, have time to do that kind of thing, because certainly a career doesn't take any more time than, in the end, we used to spend on those things. It isn't just that it didn't pay, but people sometimes value the—what you do by what get paid to do. [chuckles]

FG: Yeah—really—

JS: And—

FG: The contributions that were made to organizations—I mean, I just know from Temple Israel, for example, that the Sisterhood fundraising made and even today, are tremendous. I mean, they have a huge impact on the budget and what the—what the activities of organizations can do.

JS: Well, is it—you can still get young people to do it? I felt that I was—it was the easiest thing to combine with family life, but it really wasn't. And another thing, when I go

to Friday afternoon concerts at the symphony I notice that a lot of people don't come anymore, and I'm sure that they're in their offices conducting their career. I think a lot of our social emphases have changed a great deal, probably for the better but maybe not. Who knows? We'll see what happens with the "nanny" case. [tape turned off/on]

FG: Do you feel you have any childhood experiences? This is changing gears a little bit—any childhood experiences that affected your adult life, that may have shaped who you became as an adult?

JS: Probably, but I don't know how to identify them.

FG: Ya.

JS: I'm sure that we're all the product of the way we started out.

FG: Ya.

JS: But I can think of many reasons why—I might have had certain shynesses, I might have developed a few glitches in my personality but I can't really identify them. I think all—all of us of my generation who had to have—parents who were not born in this country, have a little something different to contend with. You have to define reality in different terms than perhaps people whose grandparents were born here. You don't know what is a real fear and what is something that your parent's uncertainties lent you to.

FG: That's fascinating. Can you think of anything specific that, maybe the "germ theory," for example.

JS: Oh that's right.

FG: Ya.

JS: Except that that was a new concept.

FG: That's true.

JS: So many parents, many other people had that too.

FG: Right.

JS: I was talking to a former librarian the other day who was about my age, and she said, "Do you realize that after every time a book goes out, we had to hang it up and let it air out to make sure that no germs stayed." Well, you see, the library—the public library people had the same fears that my mother had. I think that she was considered odd because she used to squeeze fresh oranges and give it to us when we were little children. That was something new. She didn't know about Vitamin C but somebody told her that it's very healthy; you should try it. If your child can digest something as strong as—

FG: Fresh orange juice.

JS: —juice right from an orange.

FG: Do you remember the taste of that?

JS: Oh, yes, I always took it for granted. I'll tell you, I remember when we got electricity in the upstairs of our house.

FG: What was that like?

JS: Well, it was wonderful because I used to—I used to get very dejected. We had—we had electric lights downstairs. I think we must have because I don't remember ever seeing a gas mantle downstairs. But upstairs—have you ever seen a gas mantle?

FG: Mmm-hmm. Can you describe it a bit?

JS: It comes like in a fan and it flickers. Sometimes—

FG: Usually in an opening from the wall?

JS: Yes, it comes out in a brass pipe. Very ugly. There were shadows around all the time. You couldn't read by it and you had to wait for a grownup to come along to light a match to it.

FG: Because they were up high.

JS: They were up high, which is just as well of course. But I can still remember when we got electric lights in the upstairs of our house. It was the most thrilling thing. You would pull a chain and the chain would go halfway down and that meant you would get half the amount of electric current in the bulb. So you could leave your lights on a little dim or you could pull it up all the way. I remember—

FG: About how old were you, do you think, when you got them?

JS: Well, I was small—I would say about five to six years old. I can remember great big copper tubs that we kept down in the basement on a gas stove for boiling laundry. And it was a long time—I was already much more grown up before we got a washing machine—I would say about ten years old.

FG: Do you have any Jewish experiences that you remember from your childhood or—Can you just talk about that a little bit over the course of your life?

JS: Well, I loved my grandmother dearly. She died when I was seven and I can't believe that that—she died that early because I remember so many things about her. We used to sit in her lap and she would scrape an apple and the two of them would have a—us would have a great time. We would go to the movies together. The movies! Of course they were not the talkies. They were the—they had—

FG: Signs—

JS: They had the signs and there was somebody playing the piano all the time. And I think now, my grandmother did not speak English. I had not yet learned how to read. What were we doing together at the movies? [both laugh] But those were happy days. I loved going there with her. That's really funny.

FG: That's great!

JS: Now that you asked me. We belonged to an Orthodox synagogue on Bluehill Avenue where the men and the women sat separately. The whole thing was very mysterious to me. And I didn't like it. I just didn't like it. I was born to be a Reform Jew. [laughs] I didn't like the way the men were comfortable wearing the tallises and we had to climb upstairs and sit up separately. There was nothing that I liked about it. Also, the old men with long white beards who would come to the house asking for money for Jews. [several words unclear], I didn't like them.

FG: Were they scary or how did you respond? This is when you were a child.

JS: They were Jewish.

FG: Ya, but did you feel afraid of them or did you—

JS: No, I just thought, 'What are they begging us for anyway? Why is there all this stress on differences?' I was a child; I wanted to be the same as other children. And my grandmother—I can still remember. We used to have peddlers come around with horses and wagons in those days. And there would be the bread man and the milkman and the fruit and vegetable man. And I can remember my grandmother saying, "Go darling and find some [unclear] for me." So I went down and I asked for some [unclear]. I knew what they were but the Italian fruit man didn't know that I wanted carrots. But I was mixed up because I didn't know what was English and what was Yiddish.

FG: Yiddish.

JS: It didn't make any difference. Whatever she said, I loved. I had a lot of trouble starting out in school. For some reason I had to repeat kindergarten. That's the big joke amongst all my friends. I had—I flunked sand box. [chuckles] I got into the first grade and everybody always told me I was a smart little girl. Why not? I wasn't an idiot. I was a smart little girl—probably had a big mouth. [chuckles] So if you were smart you sat in the first row and as you went along toward the window your IQ presumably went down, and there were three separate groups. Did you ever have anything like that?

FG: We used to do size places and having grown up short, I too was always in the first row, but it had nothing to do with my IQ.

JS: Oh, you were toward the front.

FG: Yes.

JS: Well, I figured if I was smart I would just go to where I was destined to be. Well, the teacher took out a chart and a pointer and started to teach us to read [several words unclear] vowels and diphthongs. I still—my hair still stands on end when I think about it. I didn't have the faintest notion so she told me I better go and sit by the window and see what she could do with me. So I went home and I said very sadly to my mother, "I've been changed to the row over by the window." She didn't know what I was talking about but she said, "You know," she said, "you can catch cold that way." [laughs] "I insist that she change you and I will write a note." She wrote a note saying she wants me toward the middle of the room because I had—I was delicate. I was delicate after that time that the car fell into the river—

FG: Oh.

JS: —I was terribly sick and I had been a sick child. And I was sitting there feeling very sad. I really felt very ashamed of myself and put upon—vowels, diphthongs GOd. [?] And I noticed that she was giving the bright kids words to read. And she said, “I am going to give you something really difficult. I’m going to give you a whole sentence on the board so you will be able to read it.” So I put up my hand and she said, “I’ll get to you another time.” I said, “But I don’t know vowels and diphthongs but I know how to read. I’ve always known how to read.”

FG: [laughs]

JS: So I had a very up and down education.

FG: Did you have any Jewish education as a child?

JS: Yes. My mother got one of the old men with the long beards to come and teach us how to read. [chuckles] And then—

FG: Even though you were girls.

JS: Oh, yes.

FG: Because that was a little unusual in those days. Sometimes the boys had Jewish education and the girls didn’t.

JS: No, my mother had a Jewish education herself and she knew how to read, and I think most of my aunts did too. Then, you know Temple Mission to Roxbury on Siever Street?

FG: Mmm-hmm.

JS: They were just building that. We had a great big fair and we went out and sold tickets for it and arranged raffles for it. And so my mother sent us to the Hebrew School

there. And I stayed there for a little while. The famous rabbi, Joe Shulow was a Harvard student and a teacher—he was my teacher. And I can't say that I liked it. I was never attracted to Jewish things though when I was young. And then when I went into Latin School, it was the seventh grade and it was such a question whether I would have time to do all the enormous amounts of homework that we had, or whether I would go to Hebrew School. So you can imagine what I picked. Now, the funny thing is I did go Sundays and I did learn a lot better—if I had stayed with it, I probably would have been confirmed. But they didn't do confirmations in those days. At Wellesley, one of the few required courses was Bible History—a year and a half in my day. And I always liked the idea of Judaism and I always disliked orthodoxy of any kind. I thought that it got in my way and I can't say that I've changed too much. The thing that I enjoy about services at Temple Israel now is the music. I love the music. I feel that I am at one with the rest of the congregation. I—and I realize the need for Israel. If there had been no Hitler and there had been no real need for Zionism, I doubt very much if I ever would have been Zionistic. But to be practical, there is a need for it and you can't help but be proud of it, of what has been done there. When I've been there I've been proud of what goes on there. But I've never lived there; I never want to work there and especially with the Orthodox people there. I think that I was meant for a very reformed congregation to feel really happy, and Temple Israel is not reformed enough for me, but I don't have a choice.

FG: How did you actually get to Temple Israel? You mentioned it when I first came in.

JS: Yes, I do.

FG: It's a wonderful story, but I don't think we got that on the tape recorder so—

JS: What was that?

FG: How you actually got to Temple Israel as a congregation. You said after—

JS: Oh, my [unclear]—

FG: —while you were dating your husband.

JS: [several words unclear] Well, my husband joined it the next day.

FG: Well, just for the tape recorder, let's tell about how you decided to go to the lecture.

JS: Oh, I wanted to hear Rabbi Liebman. I had heard that he was giving a series of excellent speeches. Then there was another thing. I have—was nice that my husband belonged—my future husband belonged to Temple Israel and Rabbi Liebman was delighted to marry us. My husband was a lawyer and I was a social worker. "Ah, the union of justice and mercy," he said.

FG: That's lovely.

JS: And I've never turned back from the—it was really the congregation that I wanted. Now, we had heard that years before—most of my friends who had grown up all their lives in Boston were influenced by Rabbi Harry Levi. And in his day, it was truly almost non-Jewish. There was so little ritual as we know it. And that turned my mother off. She said, "Men and women—it's all right if they sit beside each other that is fine but the men don't wear hats and they don't wear—and they had Sunday services and passed around a collection box. And that turned her off. They had already really past that stage when my husband and I joined. We were very happy there. Since those days, there is—it has turned much more to the traditional. Now, as I say, they didn't have—in those days they did not have bar mitzvahs for the boys, let alone bas mitzvahs for the women. My daughter, who was 52 last year, was bas mitzvahed in her temple. She joined one in the [unclear].

FG: As an adult?

JS: As an adult.

FG: How did you feel about that?

JS: Me?

FG: Ya.

JS: Oh, I was happy that she had found something that she cared about that much that she wanted to do it.

FG: Did you have any Jewish rituals in your home?

JS: Oh, yes, we always had a say in it. We fast on Yom Kippur. I had to break the fast. We would sample things along the way. She was always—when she married and moved to Belmont, she felt that she didn't want Temple Israel even though she was confirmed there. She wanted to make friends in a small, new place, and she became very active in the temple. And she is much more closely associated with formalized religion than I am. But, you know, I'm happy for her. She married a non-Jew. She divorced him. She found a lot of friends, a lot of satisfaction from her life there. I have three grandchildren. They're all adopted. My son has a little boy and she has a boy and a girl. Their daughter is getting ready to go off to college next year.

FG: Oh, how exciting.

JS: And her son is 13.

FG: Did he have his bar mitzvah or is that happening?

JS: He doesn't want it because he's—

FG: Isn't life ironic? [laughs]

JS: Well, he's had a few problems in his school. My son had dyslexia. He might have had a bar mitzvah but I was just too nervous about the whole thing. I think that's why I

discovered—but, you know, he was having a lot of trouble learning how to read and went from right to left—from left to right. It didn't want to expose him right to left. And—

FG: It was very advanced that you even recognized the learning style.

JS: The school alerted me about it. They were just starting to recognize it. And my oldest grandchild, the girl who is getting ready to go off to college, was also the sole half of—left-handed like my daughter, who is her mother and dyslectic like her uncle, who is my son. [chuckles] Well, she went to Carol's school and she's ready for college, I think.

FG: That's wonderful. Is there anything that you would like to tell me about that we haven't—

JS: I think I've told you an awful lot.

FG: You certainly have; it's just been fascinating.

JS: I hope it has been fascinating.

FG: Oh. "The union of justice and mercy."

JS: [laughs] That—

FG: Wonderful praise!

JS: Well, that was Rabbi Levi; he was wonderful.

FG: Ya, but it was, just, you and your husband that created that.

JS: My husband was a nice person.

FG: Tell me a little bit. How did you meet?

JS: Oh, we had friends in common and they introduced us to each other and he was a very exciting man—very confident, very—very bright, very entertaining, a little crazy, a little peculiar. [chuckles] It was never dull when he was around. For better or for worse, it was never dull. He died 19 years ago and he died of brain cancer. I was reading in the Globe today, or was it in the Times? I think it was the Globe that they are finding that perhaps there is some way of getting at these brain cancers but in those days they didn't. He was a lawyer; he was a very good lawyer. He also every now and then had deals that involved real estate where he'd go in and get himself personally involved in that. And that's why I kept the office. We closed down the law part and kept the real estate and I didn't want to—

FG: I do hear your doorbell so I'm going to pause this. [tape turned off/on] I was interested in asking you just about your painting career.

JS: Oh!

FG: I think I know you spent some time doing that and I would love to see some of your work in a minute if that's all right before I leave. But tell me about how you got interested in painting. I know you're doing—

JS: I'll tell you.

FG: All right. [laughs]

JS: My husband's brother was a surgeon, a very good surgeon in New York, and that was his hobby, painting. I used to travel with him quite a bit. If my husband came along, fine; if he couldn't get away I would travel with them too. One day I was—after he died—after my husband died I was down in Scarsdale visiting with them and we were reading through the New York Times. There was an ad there for a group sponsored by the New York Horticultural Society of a trip to Normandy and Brittany, one supervised by their teacher of watercolor painting. And it was for painters and photographers. So we

thought, “That sounds good. Sounds interesting,” because he always took his watercolors along on many trips that we took. So I decided I would take a camera and he was going to take—

FG: His paints?

JS: —his paints, and his wife was going to—I forget what his wife was going to do. She is one of my dear friends always. Came time to go and he got sick. It was a year before he died and they said they couldn’t go. I didn’t know what to do. I hated to go alone but I had made arrangements to go, and I think I was going to lose all my money if I didn’t. So I decided that I would go. So I read over the literature and it said, “We will do thus and so if it’s convenient for the painter. All other activity will have to make way for the painters.” So I decided, I think I will learn how to do watercolor painting because I used to do pencil sketching and I used to enjoy it. I took lessons from Karen Moss, who is very—

FG: Oh!

JS: You know Karen Moss?

FG: Sure. Ya, I know her work. Ya, she’s wonderful.

JS: Well, she was giving me private lessons up in the attic of her house for awhile, so—

FG: And she’s a member of Temple Israel also.

JS: I think so, yes.

JS: She’s very nice.

FG: Oh, and her work is beautiful.

JS: Ya. She charged me a fortune for it but she gave—she taught me certain elements of it and so I joined the group, which is very fortunate because we weren’t gone very long

before my camera broke. So I would have been—I would have been a real trouble—well, so I painted. Now, she didn't teach us very much, this [unclear] was the person. She knew I was very nervous about going without my pals. So she took good care of seeing that I got along with the rest of the group and it was a very friendly group. I remained friends with many of them. And we—we had a good time; we went again the next year. I had—one of my other friends became widowed. She came along too, and that got me started.

FG: Terrific. And now do you take classes or how do you work now?

JS: I—this past year I haven't taken classes because the ones that I like the best started being held the same day that I take bridge lessons and I wanted—I have two other friends from Wellesley who are in my class for bridge.

FG: Oh, how wonderful.

JS: Amazing.

FG: Have you stayed friends over the years or did you just—

JS: Ya, that's how we happened to get together.

FG: Oh.

JS: We haven't been close all through the years. Our lives have gone in other directions or some time—a lot of times separately. But we've never really lost touch.

FG: Are they your longest friends?

JS: What?

FG: Are they your longest friendship?

JS: No, but the longest ones that have survived; the others have died. I've had a lot of losses. The—I've taken different places. I took drawing lessons and pastel lessons and printmaking at the museum—the Museum of Fine Art. I took a whole series of painting lessons at Wellesley College Greenhouse. They—after a while though I got a little tired. The automatic sprinklers would come on.

FG: [laughs]

JS: I'd get wet and the—my material would get wet. [laughs] Those were pleasant classes, I've got—

FG: Such great stories. [laughs]

JS: [laughs] Well, I got tired of—and besides which, you had to park down a hill and as I got older and we would go early in the morning to the classes and it would be icy. And I felt if I fell down I could break a hip as easy as pie. So I changed over to Brookline Art School where I had [unclear] Phillips who was really great. But she changed her day to Thursday and I didn't want to give up my bridge thing. So now I'm starting with Katherine Zimmerman who taught for awhile at Wellesley, and I'm starting tomorrow morning.

FG: Oh, wonderful! And then do you do some work on your own as well?

JS: Very seldom. Sometimes I do but very seldom. I find that I'm not awfully good at arranging still lives and I'm very clumsy working out-of-doors. I can go into my garden and do some work and I have done that. But let's say I have to pack up all my stuff and go and sit on a campstool. I am sure to spill my water and what can you do without water with watercolors? I love doing prints and one year I made up a number of prints that I gave to some of my friends. And they're very nice, my friends; they framed them and used them.

FG: What subjects do you like the most? You mentioned your garden and some still lives.

JS: That's only because the models stay still.

FG: Mmm. But what would be your favorite subject to work with?

JS: Interiors, I think. My sister was very good at painting. She was the one who pointed out to me that no matter how you fixed your still life, you have to work very fast because your light's going to change on you wherever you are.

FG: Interesting.

JS: And it's true. I do have a studio fixed up upstairs. The lighting is not great and that's one of the reasons I don't do a lot at home. But it's a nice studio. The light—I have to fight for light here, for my plants, for everything.

FG: That's wonderful. Would we be able to see some of—

JS: Well, I don't have an awful lot of it here.

FG: Anything is fine.

JS: I hate to tell you this, but I'll take you to my downstairs bathroom. That has the best—

FG: Sure. [laughs]

JS: When I say the best, I mean it's the most accessible. The rest of mine are just thrown around.

FG: If you don't mind, that would be wonderful.

JS: Come on.

FG: Okay.

[END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE]

FG: —to check the volume of both of us.

JS: Have you plugged it in?

FG: We are plugged in. And put the microphone on there. I will say that today is February 7th—

JS: 7th.

FG: —1998. And this is Fran Godine. I'm at the home of Jeanette Simon and I am doing a second brief interview to follow up some questions of interest as part of the Oral History Project of Temple Israel in conjunction with the Jewish Women's Archive. Mrs. Simon, will you just say hello and I can check the volume of your voice.

JS: Hello there. [tape turned off/on]

FG: The way this came about was I had heard a bit about your investment group and that was such a remarkable thing for a woman of your generation to be involved with that we really wanted to hear a little bit more about it. So any memories that you have in terms of how you joined the group and what was going on at that time, how—

JS: I was not one of the original members. This was an on-going group that had started perhaps 30 years ago. It went on for quite awhile but there were people who moved away or who lost interest, and they stopped meeting for perhaps ten years. Then they started again with a smaller group, most of whom have their pictures there, with the exception of Frances Mordechai, Esther Snyder—there was some others too. But I was

introduced to the group by Marion Schein, who was one of the original members, who complained to me one day that they had—they were having very poor results from their investments in the club. And I said, “That seems odd; I’ve been doing very well personally.” [chuckles] She said, “Why don’t you join?” I did join. Fortunately, I had some old friends who happened to be members who passed on my application for admittance, which was purely oral. And one of the last ones, with the exception of Ruth Rose, who was the last new admittance, we took no more members after that.

FG: About how many women were involved when you joined?

JS: We were the 15 associates, and when we—we stopped when we got down to seven because not all of the seven were able-bodied. We didn’t have a deficit but we were barely with our head above water. The great bull market came along perhaps or perhaps we got more skilled and adept with what we were doing, but we’ve never had a down year. We usually made it a practice to vote on any action unanimously and that wasn’t always so simple. We—it was a result of a lot of discussion. We met without fail and without any change on the third Thursday of every month at 12:00 except for January, February and March when some people would go to Florida. Every couple of years we would each go home with a thousand dollars. Oh, the dues were $20 a month and when I joined I suggested raising it, but we never got much above $25 a month. Nevertheless, we did well. I think you can turn that off while I gather my—[tape turned off/on]. It was almost a laboratory for us because different things came up that we decided to try out. For example, instead of just plain buying stocks, we tried treasury bills, treasury notes, various other new instruments. And we wound up just doing stocks because we felt that we were not in it to make money. We were in it to test our expertise and to develop a philosophy. We each took a turn being hostess and I must say that some of the hostesses were wonderful hostesses. [laughs]

FG: Yes.

JS: Wonderful cooks. There were almost a party at every time that we went. We became good friends. During the past year, two—three of our members died. Before that, two had died. Some of our members are in nursing homes or unable to get to meetings, so we decided to break up. We have, however—even though we all went home with nice, big, big checks, we hated to say goodbye because we became very good friends. We didn't always see each other except for at the meetings but we looked forward to seeing each other. And so, we—are now, starting in April to have monthly meetings again where we do not discuss money. We just will have—we'll be a luncheon club where we will trade notes on what are the good movies, what are the good books and we'll just have some fun.

FG: Oh, how lovely. Wonderful. How did you have information about what decisions to make?

JS: Oh, from all over, in every way, shape and manner. Everybody seemed to come up every few months with another suggestion. We did have a broker from Tucker Anthony who would give us suggestions. Then some of us had friends in high places who would whisper in our ear. And then we all would read the financial papers and televisions shows and so forth. So it came from a mixture of places.

FG: And how were decisions made?

JS: Decisions were made—for every suggestion that was made we would pass it by our broker who would give us the figures of what the prospects would be and who was behind it. We would—in the end it was always our own decision except that we didn't always do our own research.

FG: Was a decision made at each monthly meeting?

JS: Yes. There was a discussion of it at each meeting. We would count our money, ya. [laughs] Our treasurer would give a report. And then, any new suggestions—there were

usually a couple. And then we would get to work on whether we knew about it. Let's call up the broker. Let's—oh and monthly reports were usually read to us by the treasurer in case anything of unusual value. There was one person whose teeth needed a lot of work whose dentist was a mine of information. And for awhile we made some money on his suggestions. But with the last two things and the failure of his last suggestion, we crossed him out as a source. [chuckles]

FG: [laughs] Was there ever any time pressure to make a decision?

JS: Yes.

FG: Since you met once a month. Was there—

JS: Yes, during the winter sometimes we had to get on long-distance telephone and consult each other. Now, if you turn your thing off I will tell you a secret. [tape turned off/on]

FG: Okay.

JS: Sometimes we made some mistakes. We owned IBM stock on three different occasions and have the distinction of having lost money on each occasion. A record. We—very often, in the interest of having a unanimous vote, I would go along with a sell suggestion that I didn't really like and I would buy what the others were selling. And that way, I managed to own—wind up owning a lot of Boeing right after they sold it; the same with Bank of Boston—a few other things too.

FG: You mean personal.

JS: Personal.

FG: The group would sell and you personally—

JS: And I would buy.

FG: You would buy, because you felt your judgment was different.

JS: That's right, and we sold a lot of very good stock; but we did well, so what difference does it make? And they forget what we shouldn't have sold. I get a twinge every now and then when I see what happens to American Homes Products and a few others of that ilk.

FG: What happened within the group when a disagreement came up?

JS: Well, we just plain talked it over and if there seemed to be some sense to the disagreement we'd go that way. Everything was done on a very friendly basis. We were really wonderful now that I think of it. We were very proud of our record because there is a group of women, I think in New Jersey, who have gotten a lot of publicity—elderly women, who have come up with good returns and whatnot. We did much better than they did.

FG: Did each member contribute an equivalent amount to start out with?

JS: You mean with money?

FG: Yes.

JS: Yes, because when you joined you had to pay an initiation fee; I mean later on. You had to pay an initiation fee equal to what the others had put in. And when I joined I had to pay $1,313.13, I think.

FG: You remember that.

JS: Wait a second, yes. It so happens that I have the letter of acceptance. Isn't it funny? "Fifteen Associates welcomes you as a member. We hope you will enjoy the

group as much as we have during these past ten years." Oh, you know, when I joined they were ten years old and they took money from the treasury, and we took our husbands and we all went to Chatham [unclear] Inn for a long weekend.

FG: Very nice.

JS: "Enclosed is a list of the members"—which I don't have evidently—"and their winter and summer addresses." Oh, wait a minute. "The net worth of each year as reported at the meeting today was $2,277.68 plus two percent, $45.55, which the bylaws requires to be added for a new member. Your lucky number, 2,323.23."

FG: And what year—what date was this?

JS: January 13, 1977. "Dues will be $20 a month to be paid to the Treasurer, Mrs. Miles Lewis," and so forth. Oh, and here's a list of our portfolio at the time. "American Home Products." Why couldn't we have kept that? It's gone through the roof. "Dennises—100 shares, Dentsupply." (That came from that dentist, I'll bet.) "100 shares. First National Bank of Boston—100 shares. First Penn Corporation—100. Gray Drug—100 shares. IBM—10 shares." Even on that we had to lose money. "Pfizer—100 shares. Williams Company," which has come back to life now but we sold it, don't worry, it died—"100 shares."

FG: [laughs]

JS: "Your Broker," and so forth. "At the January 13th meeting we authorized the broker to sell Pfizer and to buy Bally," which was a good idea: Bally was just starting out, only 50 shares. And Warner Communications—"50 shares"— also at about 626 ½. "Best wishes for a good vacation." I remember that my entry fee is less. Now, Ruth Rose was the last one to come in after I did and she actually had to pay $5,000 entry fee. It took her—it was a down couple of years then. When I say down, nothing much happened. We never lost money in those years but it took her a long time to make up that $5000, but she has

more than made it up.

FG: You said you knew of some other groups at the time—something in Belmont or—

JS: There was one—Gladys Cohen was the Treasurer; Anna Ulian was the President or Vice President; Sylvia Seda was a member. It was a large group of women at Belmont Country Club.

FG: Mm-hmm. And how was it, do you think, that the women came together to do this? It wasn't something they had done with their husbands or that they had—

JS: Well, I don't know because I was not part of that group. You have to be invited. Now my niece, Sylvia, has a group of young women, and she says they are doing very well. Their dues are much higher, but of course the value of the dollar is much higher now. Sylvia is 53 years old, so she's with a different crowd, but her mother, my sister, the one with the long curls—she is really the first person I know who belonged to one, and that was perhaps 20 years before I joined this group. She lived in Haverhill and it was a learning experience. They went to—they—she was in charge, I think, of the drug group, and there was somebody else had the cinema group and somebody else had the steel group. And they had to go and do their own—

FG: Research.

JS: —research. After awhile they all turned to their brokers. You know, brokers like to have that business because you don't do a lot of trading. I mean, they would have preferred a lot of trading but they like the business—easy to handle the customers. She learned—she learned a great deal and I joined it mostly because I thought I was going to learn.

FG: And you said that the group was sort of devising a philosophy through the years. Is there a sense that you had one?

JS: No, I don't remember saying that.

FG: Well, I think it was in the context a couple minutes ago when you were saying the idea of the group was mostly to kind of try out your expertise.

JS: Oh, well, that's—that was partly my doing because I had been newly widowed. My husband died a year after I joined the group, and I was learning about various ways of investing money, and I was busy pushing it then. We should have bonds; we should have treasury things; we should—

FG: Diversify.

JS: I got them—we were doing options for awhile.

FG: You were taking some risks at that time.

JS: Yes, we were. But then we calmed down but they were all learning experiences.

FG: And when you had a treasurer those were—did you have elected officers that changed from time to time or—

JS: Yes, we have—we had a Nominating Committee and everything. [both laugh] Well, we had bylaws; we had a couple of lawyers. Esther Snyder was a practicing lawyer for awhile and she made up the bylaws and—

FG: I was just going to ask you what professions people might have had that you knew of. You were a social worker.

JS: Ruth Rose was on the faculty at Wellesley College. She was a graduate and I think that she was the head of the department that worked with foreign students. She and Jen Cowal were both national presidents of Brandeis. They were—we were all big volunteer worker people. I was twice Vice President of Council of Jewish Women. Marion Schein

was not working at the time but she had retired. When she got married she was the dietitian at the Beth Israel Hospital. Grace Masters was always in business with her husband but I was never too sure exactly what business they were in. I think that's all. I'm not at ease with mostly people much older than I. Let me see that picture again of the [unclear]. I don't think anybody else did anything. Frances Mordechai was an artist and a teacher of painting. She died by the time that picture was taken but she was a member when I was.

FG: Mmm-hmm. I'm just going to identify for the tapes that this is the photograph of the investment group taken at Mrs. Simon's 75th birthday party—

JS: Ya.

FG: —in her garden and there are about nine women here that we will identify on the photograph and in notes.

JS: And as I say, Esther Sneider had been a lawyer and all of them had important jobs with Hadassah at some point. Hadassah really trained women to be effective volunteers.

FG: So, many of them might have had some finance experience in fund-raising, in volunteer capacities.

JS: Oh, we all did. All of us did.

FG: Not just a professional career in that area—

JS: Right.

FG: —in business, but—

JS: But things that required good intelligence and hard work.

FG: And you got good results.

JS: Ya. I think so; hard to tell. Those days are gone, you know. I can tell that when I go to symphony on Friday afternoons. The young women are off in their careers; they're not sitting at symphony on a Friday afternoon. It's only old ladies who go there now—

FG: Really?

JS: —and some old men.

FG: And years ago, there had been more of a younger generation that attended.

JS: Yes.

FG: Men and women? Or was it always more of a women's afternoon?

JS: It was always more women but there used to be a goodly number of men.

FG: And there's more of an age range in those days for Friday afternoon?

JS: I would say so, ya. Now, there were many buses that come from retirement homes at [unclear] and from North Hill, from [unclear] Cove. There were just lines and lines of buses.

FG: Hmm. Is it an outing you still enjoy?

JS: What?

FG: For yourself?

JS: To go to the symphony? Yes, I go every week.

FG: Do you have a group of women that you do this with or are you just on your own?

JS: No. I always have a couple. When I say, I don't do it with them. We don't all—none of us get tickets together but we've all recognized each other, a row here, a row there.

We're doing something else together, oh yes. I'm one of the few that goes every Friday though. Most of them do not; they go—they have all kinds of groups now—every other week, just fall ones, spring ones, winter ones.

FG: Different subscriptions for the—

JS: Ya. A lot of different subscriptions.

FG: And on to a different topic. We hadn't really talked about your business now, that you are maintaining an office. Do you have a little more energy to just tell me a little bit about that?

JS: No, because it's not really very interesting.

FG: Well, I—

JS: It really isn't.

FG: But you do have a—is this in real estate or what are you [unclear]?

JS: Well, it has been in real estate. It's mostly investment now.

FG: And it's an office out of your house that you go—

JS: No, no, it's a professional office with—we still have some property that we take care of. We have a group of secretarial, computer people who work at it. My son runs the—some businesses that we have in Cambridge but it's not a big, ongoing thing of taking care of stuff. It's getting rid of some things at times and when they get rid of it I take the liquid assets and look for investments for it.

FG: So they're still benefiting from your wisdom?

JS: Well, I hope so. A lot of decisions when my husband died had to be made and I was going to have to live with them. So I decided to—

FG: Educate yourself?

JS: —educate myself and get ready to make those decisions.

FG: Was there anything that you read or any courses you took that were particularly helpful?

JS: I was an economics major at Wellesley.

FG: And that—

JS: So I had a [unclear] acquaintance with many of them. And then people taught; some of those office associates taught me and lawyers and accountants and, you know, you get to learn.

FG: Some people do; some people can hear it a million times, [laughs] like me, and don't absorb it.

JS: Well, if you had to, you would.

FG: I would hope but it's still wonderful that you were able to really make a second career, in a way, for yourself.

JS: Well, nobody would hire me back at my first career at that age. My husband died when I was 65. That's the retirement year; that's not the year that they hire you back.

FG: Mm-hmm. Well, you're a modest woman, but you've had many achievements.

JS: I've done a lot. I think the nicest compliment I ever got was from one of my friends, formerly from way back at Latin School, who said, "One thing about you, Jeanette, you

have an insatiable curiosity. [chuckles] And I thought back; really, most of the things I do was because I'm curious about what makes them tick, what makes them go.

FG: That's wonderful, and it's a wonderful note to end today's interview on, unless there's something else you'd like to say.

JS: I can't think of anything.

FG: Okay. Thank you very much again.

[END OF INTERVIEW]