# Freyda Sanders Transcript

JUDITH ROSENBAUM: It takes a second for the tape to wind around. I am sitting in the Hadassah office with Freyda Sanders. Today is July 12, 2000, and the interview is being conducted by Judith Rosenbaum. Great. I think the best place to begin is if you tell me a little bit about your childhood.

FREYDA SANDERS: [laughter] Well, I was in nine public schools in thirteen years of public education.

JR: Wow.

FS: Always had to find the bathroom. My parents moved a bit for a variety of reasons. I was born in Boston. My father lost his job the day I was born. We went to New York, where he had family, and that didn't work out well. We went to Detroit because that's where my mother had family. We lived there for about four years, came back East, and, like a lot of Russians, he went back to the earth because he figured he could always eat off the gardens. He took a farm that was one of his first cousins' in Bridgewater. I lived there for four years [and] went to a one-room schoolhouse, four grades. My mother hated it. She was a city girl. So, we went to Brockton, which I hated, and we lived there for three years. Then we went back to Boston until I was married. I lived in Boston until I was twenty-three.

JR: Were both of your parents immigrants?

FS: Yes. My mother came here as a young girl at about seven, I think. But my father came here – he was in the Russian army and came here – he was about twenty-three, twenty-four.

JR:  Did you have any siblings?

FS:  Yes, I'm the oldest.  I had a sister who was five years younger than myself – she's deceased – and a brother who was thirteen years younger than myself.

JR:  How would you describe your family's class status?

FS:  Lower-middle class.

JR:  How did your family identify Jewishly?

FS:  They both spoke Yiddish until the kids understood it, and then they would speak Russian, but my mother wasn't very good at it, so they'd say something in Russian, and then they would say "movies," so we knew what they were talking about, kind of the customary thing.  But we were a Jewish family.  My family was not particularly religious.  In fact, they were anti-religious; they were leftist socialists.  But we were Jewish.  An incident happened when I was about seven.  I came to school on a Monday morning.  Now, you have to understand that the school was right behind my house.  My father took out a couple planks from the fence, and I just went through, but almost everybody else came by bus.  I come to school on Monday, and the kids started throwing rocks at me, saying I'd killed Christ.  Well, I didn't know who Christ was at that point, so I went home and I spoke with my mother about it.  Of course, I knew the Bible stories, David and Goliath and Adam and Eve, and all the others, but I didn't know the New Testament.  My mother kind of explained it, and she said, "Well, they just think you're different, so you have to let them know you're not different.  You have two eyes and two hands.  You're just like them."  The next time I went early, and I caught each one of them and kind of beat them up, and that solved that problem.  But as far as being Jewish, I always stayed out – regardless of my parent's feelings about religion, I always stayed out on the Jewish holidays.  There was never any question about being Jewish in our house.

JR:  Did your family celebrate holidays or Shabbat in any way at home?

FS:  Not really, except we knew they were holidays, and we usually ate well, but Shabbat was never practiced in our house.

JR:  Did you go to a synagogue of any type?

FS:  No.

JR:  Did your brother have a bar mitzvah?

FS:  No.  He had a thirteenth birthday party, but that was about it.

JR:  Did your family talk about Israel or visit it or anything?

FS:  Oh, yeah.  My mother probably was the youngest Zionist secretary in Massachusetts.  Her father was an ardent Zionist, and if you'd like, I'll tell you a story about him.  They were in Russia and – now Poland.  Well, it was hard to tell at the period of time whether it was Russia or Poland at some point.  They apparently were close or were involved with about six other couples.  One day, they went into the forest and supposedly had a picnic.  The men got together, the kids were playing, and the women were preparing the food.  The idea was – just like – who was it? – (Akiva?), they had cards, but they were holding a meeting.  The kids, the older ones, were told to watch to see if anybody would come along.  My grandfather had membership number seventy in the [inaudible].  So my mother was brought up with that.  She was an activist, a secretary.  They lived in Lynn at the time, and she was really – it wasn't until she married my father that she became so far left because the [inaudible] is a socialist group anyway.  So, she had the background, but with my father, it was much more.  My father's story that he tells is that he had a half-brother who was a very active Communist.  Apparently, something happened, and he came home, but the children did not know there were extended siblings.  Of course, the police came – my father said, [inaudible].  Anyway, they came, and they inquired, and they threatened the kids, but the kids didn't know anything.  It wasn't until they left that they realized he was hidden in a barrel in the back

of the house. My father came up with that, though he never went back. He ran away from home, joined the Russian army, and never went home. His father, he felt, was too religious. I guess he was very influenced by this half-brother. That's pretty much what it was like. I did go to the Workmen's Circle school, but it didn't take. [laughter] Anyway, that was that. But there was no question about it; my mother would always go out – I can remember – to get money for Youth Aliyah. She had a cadre of friends, and once a year, she – and we knew. We knew my mother was very active. When we weren't home from school, mother was out busy somewhere. She was always home when we got home, but she was always doing something.

JR: What kinds of things was she doing?

FS: Political kind of stuff. She was a staunch Democrat. In fact, even in her eighties, they were coming to her to invite her to cocktail parties or a meal. Of course, she didn't go, but she was always very active in that and whatever else was going on for the state.

JR: Was your father also politically involved?

FS: Not really. He was busy trying to make a living. But the stuff was all in the house. At our supper table, we discussed not only the Russian pogroms but the Scottsboro Boys. It was an active house but Jewish. There was never any question about that.

JR: Did anybody in your family visit Israel?

FS: No.

JR: Just involved with –?

FS: Just myself.

JR: When did you go?

FS: Well, I've been there a number of times. First time I was there was [in] '68. I have a daughter who lives there now. We lived there for a year. We lived there for the Yom Kippur War. Had three children. The oldest one was in -- Aviva was at Hebrew University, so we decided we'd all go. My husband was a college professor. He had a sabbatical, and I got a leave of absence as a psychologist and merrily marched off there at the end of the year. And then went back there almost every year around Pesach to see my granddaughters.

JR: Are your other children involved in Israeli politics and Jewish –?

FS: Oh, yeah. The children were brought up in the Conservative Movement. I have one who goes to temple, Reform, and the other two are Orthodox. I don't know what I did wrong. [laughter] My son has three little boys and is very active in the synagogue, very observant. The children all go to Hebrew school, and my daughter in Israel has three little girls. I don't know why they couldn't mix them up a little bit. But at any rate, she's Orthodox, but not Haredi, very modern.

JR: How would you say that your relationship to Judaism has changed over time?

FS: That's very difficult because about thirty years ago, we moved to Akron. My husband was teaching at the University of Akron, and he had a Yahrzeit. He spoke with one of the other Jewish professors, and then two days later, I get a phone call from a professor's wife, and she greeted me [inaudible], and she said, "But I've got a personal question to ask." [laughter] She says, "Do you happen to be Jewish?" That was that. I went to a Hadassah meeting, and now I've been president of four different groups of Hadassah.

JR: So that was a turning point?

FS: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, because I'd just had a baby. Used to put her in the middle of the floor.

JR:  So, how has that kind of involvement affected you?

FS:  It's been very, very important to me.  Not only the Jewish element and, you know, that Zionist element, but I've always found my friends in Hadassah.  That's always meant a good deal to me.

JR:  Well, we'll get back to that part in a little bit, but I'd like to know also how you first got involved in teaching the juvenile offenders.

FS: [laughter] I've changed careers four times.  I started out in chemical engineering, got married, and my husband was a professor of education or going to be a professor of education, so that stopped right there.  After being married for a year, he decided [that] since we would be moving [to] an intellectual environment, I should go and get a degree.  He said I could take whatever I wanted, so I chose economics.  Why I don't [know], but I chose it.  I have a B.S. in economics from Columbia University, where I had a scholarship.  We were living in New York at that time.  My husband was getting his Ed.D. at Columbia Teachers College.  When we moved to Akron – the only things in Akron are the rubber companies and Quaker Oats.  The rubber companies would not hire -- not only not a woman economist, but they sure as heck weren't going to hire a Jewish woman economist.  We had to decide what to do.  Meanwhile, we had this little girl, and she went to nursery school, and I went to nursery school.  I was one of the teachers.  Then my husband decided that if I'm going to teach, I have to get a degree.  So, I have a master's in ed. from Harvard.  My mother lived at one end of the subway, and Harvard was at the other end at that time, and she took care of the baby.

JR:  Was your husband still in Akron at the time?

FS:  Yeah, yeah.  I got my degree, and I taught – in between that, before I got the degree, I was teaching kindergarten.  Right after the war, if you had two feet and two hands, you were a teacher.  That was the reason he sent me back to school.  I got to first

grade, and I'm pregnant.  Then, when she was about four years old, [I] taught the nursery school, and then when she went to kindergarten, I got a job as a social worker.  Not really social worker – case worker.  There's a distinction.  Then, we moved back East to New Jersey – Teaneck – and Gabe said if I'm going to be a social worker, I have to get a degree in social work.  Well, since my credits were still good at Columbia, I merrily marched over to Columbia's School of Social Work.  After one course, I decided this was not for me.  Then I come to teaching in the juvenile – we had a friend who happened to be a psychologist who was on the board of the Bergen County Children's Shelter.  We were talking, and he wanted to know what I was doing, and I said, “Oh, taking care of my children.”  He said, “Well, what's your background?”  I told him.  He says, "I got a job for you."  He says, "You can do it part-time."  I said, “Okay, I'll try it.”  For two years.  I taught at the shelter.  Now, you have to understand they called it a shelter, but it was really a jail.  The kids are locked into individual cells.  They are there awaiting court.  The court then decides whether they can be released and go back home, whether they're put on probation, whether they have to be placed in a residential setting, or you can go straight to the reformatory.

JR:  What kinds of things were they there for?

FS:  Car stealing, prostitution, incorrigibility, truancy, physical assault and battery, shoplifting – I mean, just about anything that you could think of.  I was amazed.  I had a fourteen-year-old at home.  What these kids could get into was just impossible to believe.

JR:  What was their range of ages [at the time]?

FS:  They were about thirteen to sixteen.  At sixteen, they were pretty much adults, though we had them younger.  We had a case where a mother dropped off a seven-year-old and said he was incorrigible, and we had no way of denying taking him in, but she was just going off with her boyfriend for the weekend and didn't want the kid around.

JR:  Was it mixed, girls and boys?

FS:  Yeah, but I did not teach the boys.  I taught the little one because they felt that would be better than [to put him] in a classroom with the older kids.  I taught the girls.  I had to lock and unlock five doors before I got to the classroom.  I never really was afraid, though I had been told – the first couple months, they sent a guard with me, security with me.  After that, I said I really didn't – how can I describe this?  They couldn't wait to get down to the classroom, the girls.  You took four or five at a time; that's all you took.  First of all, their whole level of learning was different, and there were very short periods of time in that place.  What I was supposed to do was to call their school and get their books and then return the books.  But they were there for such a short time; it was kind of ridiculous.  So, I set up my own curriculum.

JR:  How long were they there for, generally?

FS:  Generally, maybe two weeks, sometimes four weeks.  It depends upon – the thing is that you listen to them, and of course, the matrons or whatever you call them knew their history, and almost all these kids had very bad home lives.  They were physically abused, sexually abused, [had] parents who were alcoholics, drug addicts.  Only one child -- we could never really find out why she went bad.  You talk about a bad seed, but you really can't believe that.  They really couldn't wait to get down because they used to – I tried very hard not to be judgmental.  They used to ask me – there was one girl who was pregnant who was found on the roadside drunk without any clothes on, virtually naked.  They wanted to know what I thought about that.  I said, “Everybody makes their own choices, but I'll tell you, it's nice to have somebody else to kick out of bed at two o'clock in the morning when the baby is crying,” and left it at that because there was just no point.  They used to wait to come down.  There were several Jewish girls from time to time.  I remember one very distinctly.  She was very bright, and there was nothing that I could teach her that she couldn't handle.  It seemed that she had run away and went to the

Village, which is not far from Teaneck, and got pregnant. Who did she get pregnant with? She got pregnant with a Black man because that was the worst thing she could think of to do to her family. But she said, “This pregnancy is very early. My family will take care of it.” [inaudible] It was kind of sad. She's the one who got into a fight with a girl who was at least seventy to eighty pounds heavier than her. They were going at each other, but I did something. I stepped on the big one's foot and said, "Excuse me. Let's stop the whole thing." Meanwhile, I had told one of the girls to go – I had a phone in the classroom – to call for a guard. But that was – just stepped on her foot accidentally. That sure stopped the whole thing.

JR: What subjects did you teach them?

FS: Almost everything. Math and English, primarily. History. That sort of thing. You don't go into anything else. We did reading. The best Hamlet I ever taught I taught in that class, I remember. But later, I went back to do my master's, and one of the questions – I was working with juvenile delinquents because I was interested in having Bergen County set up a residential [center]. We used to have to send the kids far away, and I thought we ought to have a residential center. As a matter of fact, they set it up and told me it was on account of my thesis. At any rate, I went back to do some interviews, and one of the questions I asked [was], “Do you like school? If you don't like school, when did you start not liking school?” Invariably between third or fourth grade. What was it? “That damn teacher kept me back.” When I went in as a psychologist, that was the thing I remembered most. If you're going to retain a kid, you got to do it in kindergarten, first grade. They already give you indications they're going to have difficulty with learning. Don't save it until third or fourth grade when the kids’ egos are just being developed. [inaudible]

JR: How many hours a day would you have them for?

FS: I kept them each about an hour, an hour and a half for class. Since I only worked part-time, usually it was mornings because I had three kids at home, and my husband arranged his – he was chairman of the department by that time. So he could do what he needed to do. But it was interesting. You could write a book about those kids. It was always heartbreaking. You know what their backgrounds are and what they come from. Some of them we sent right back. The social worker [inaudible] give the thing to the judge. I never went to one of those court cases because that was not my prerogative. But I was always curious what really happened there.

JR: Did you see any of the same girls multiple times?

FS: Oh yeah. [inaudible] "Oh, you're back. What'd you do this time?" I mean, that sort of thing. But my relationship with them was pretty good. Never really felt – there was an incident when I came in with a guard. The matrons told me that the boys had beaten up the math teacher, assaulted him, and tried to escape. Of course, they can't escape. At any rate, the girls told me about it, too, and they said, "What would you do if we did that to you?" I said, "Well, I don't see any need for that." Now, they knew I had the key; it was in the top drawer. I said, "I wouldn't hurt you, and I don't expect you to hurt me." I said, "Besides, it's wintertime, and you don't even have a jacket. Where are you going to go?" That was that. I never felt threatened. Just lucky.

JR: Were there many other women working at this place?

FS: No. Just the matrons, and then there were social workers that came in every once in a while. Sometimes they would come and ask me something, but very rarely. I had very little contact with anybody in the building except the matrons. They would tell me somebody new or what it was, and it was really none of my business, but they liked to talk. I was told to buy anything we needed. I bought a whole series of – most of the classics, paperbacks. Sometimes they would disappear. The matrons would find them. As they're [inaudible], they'd go through their stuff. But that didn't ever bother me. If

they wanted the book well enough to read it, they're certainly welcome to it.

JR: Did you go into psychology because of your work there?

FS: Yeah. It seemed to me that girls who are thirteen or fourteen don't just wake up one morning and get themselves into trouble. My husband always got my jobs, usually, and he always sent me to school. So, this time, he comes walking in, and he brings me a federal fellowship. It was a consortium between Jersey City, Montclair, Seton Hall, [and] Rutgers [inaudible]. It was a great thing. It was completely tax-free. It was a lot of money [and] paid for your tuition. It was an internship and an externship, for which they paid everything. [inaudible] Two more years of school. That makes it about twenty years of school, right? Fortunately, the kids were well on their way to growing up. The youngest was four because it was first grade.

JR: When was this?

FS: This was in 19 – let's see. She was born in '63, so this must have been about '67.

JR: What were the years that you were doing this teaching?

FS: The two years before that. I went right from there straight.

JR: '66, '67?

FS: Yeah. The man who was in charge of that hospital – it was a county hospital – was also in charge of the shelter [and] apparently wrote a very good referral. So, at any rate, I went back to school for two more years. It was a good thing. What had happened is the state had passed what they called the Beadleston Act, which required child study teams of a psychologist, a learning specialist, a nurse, an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, and a speech therapist for all – a team. They didn't have very many school psychologists. When we came out – when we were in the program, they told us

what we had to do and how much money to expect. I mean, it was wild. But they stood in line. I had three contracts, and they all called and said they managed money, so they were pretty desperate because they had to meet the regulations of the law. So, that's what happened. I went to school, and I came out, and I was determined to work only with the youngest children. I was determined to work in the same town that my kids were in because our holidays never meshed. I mean, another kid was standing in line waiting to see me. So, this worked out well, and they paid me good money. That was a great twenty years.

JR: You enjoyed your work?

FS: I didn't mind getting up in the morning and going to work, and it worked out well. The kids were in school. I could be home at lunchtime. They were never allowed to get sick except at lunchtime, so I could take care of them and call my husband to come home. It worked out well. But I was a psychologist in the building my kids were in. The principal called my supervisor and said, “Do you think this is a good idea?” He says, “Yes, it's a very good idea.” It worked out well, except one day, my little girl knocks on my office door. She comes in with another little girl. She says, "This is Mary, mother. She's in my class, and I think she has some problems." I think she was in third grade.

JR: What were the greatest challenges for you about your work with the kids?

FS: Was to make contact with them and – I couldn't expect to correct them, to heal them. We used to be available to them for whatever they needed and to be as little judgmental as I could and yet get my point across to them. I think that was much more important than the academics, actually, because it was such a brief, short time. But at least it let them know that somebody was interested in them as a person. I don't know whether I succeeded or not. I was always glad when I came in and didn't find somebody I knew from before.

JR:  What was most rewarding about the work?

FS:  I think just having a job, and one that I felt was satisfying to me.  It wasn't a drudge.  I didn't spend that many hours there, but it was good.  It's what really changed my mind – you see, I had a fourteen-year-old at home, and I'll tell you, I used to go in and take another look at her sometimes at night just to count my blessings.  My little poor kids.  It was a shame.

JR:  Did you feel any conflicts between your family responsibilities and the work that you were doing?

FS:  I tried not to, but I know that when I was going to school that the kids kind of resented that.  I remember an incident when I was at Harvard during the summer courses.  I came home to my mother's house, and my little one – she's the oldest [inaudible] – looks at me, and she says, "Don't bother me.  I have homework to do."  I went in the bedroom.  I sat there, and my mother said, "See?"  I know that at times they – there was always work to do.  There was always another report, more readings to do.  I tried to avoid that, but you just can't.  You know yourself.  You go to school.  It's just very difficult.  I don't know if that resentment continues to this day.  I have a daughter who – my oldest one has two masters.  My son has a Ph.D.  My daughter has a Ph.D.

JR:  In what fields?

FS:  So maybe they understand better.

JR:  What fields are your children working in?

FS:  My daughter is a speech therapist.  My son is a molecular biochemist.  My daughter is a clinical [psychologist], the younger one.  She's got it rough, too.  She works in a trauma unit.  Now, I think she volunteers at something – a rape [crisis center] or domestic violence [shelter], I can't remember which one.  The Israelis deny domestic violence.  It's

only in the last couple of years that they talk about it. They have plenty of it. They're such a diverse community, and there are some cultures in which this is perfectly acceptable. So, it's rough. I was a psychologist at Micha, a preschool for deaf children, the year I lived in Israel. That was an interesting time. Fortunately, the psychologist I was training was just out of school, and she spoke both English because we would do it between us. I would tell her in English, and she would translate to the parent. It was unusual.

JR: Did you stay involved with juvenile offenders in your work?

FS: Only to the degree that I had them in school when I had to evaluate and make recommendations. Don't forget I was working with very young children, from birth to about seven or eight. On occasion, I had to evaluate older children, which was primarily my responsibility. We had to watch out for physical and sexual abuse, so we had to work closely with social workers. We were also involved with placing children who were in shelters to make sure they were in school, that it was arranged for them to be picked up, and so forth, and still try to keep the man out of the picture. I had one mother who had three boys, all different fathers. The first one she was going to marry and he was in a truck accident and died. The second one, she didn't know he was married, she tells me. The third one was the result of a rape. All three children required academic support. We had one little girl, I remember, who was locked in a toy chest and beaten. We found these marks on her legs. Why was she beaten? Because she was whiter than any of the other children. We called the police. You call DFS, Department of Family Services, took Polaroid pictures. Sometimes you get a feeling from a kid that something's not right, not necessarily with the child but with the mother. So, when you have them in, you tell them outright. "Do you get hurt?" The mother will say, "Yes." I say, "Does he hit the children?" She says, "No." I say, "Well, we're watching those three kids. If we put our hands on their shoulder and they wince, they're going to the nurse right away, and you tell him we call the police in. Now, what do you want to do? I can give you some

referrals." Day after day, you had those. Teaneck's a very diverse community. Famous baseball and football players. You have those stories all the time. The thing to do is to protect the child as much as you can, and your responsibility is education. We have a little girl who tells me she's been humped by her cousin. She's all of six years old. Call the mother in, and – I don't think she was with the mother. This was the grandmother – and you warn her. My problem was that DFS is not as always as efficient as it could be. First of all, their caseloads are so heavy. We had a case of a foster-placed little boy who was brought in by the foster mother. Sweet little girl and wonderful mother. Then she tells us that the social worker – the child was brought to the hospital, and of course, the doctors right away could see what was happening, so they called DFS, and DFS took the child away. But the social worker visited the house, the natural mother's house, and she finds there's a twin there. She leaves him there, and then a month later, he's dead. The thing is that Jersey – I don't know if they have it in Massachusetts, but [in] Jersey, you are responsible, whether you're the nurse or the teacher or anybody. If you're involved with the child and know there's something going on, you're held legally responsible. We would tell parents that. "You know, the law says." That was pretty much it. But we had kids – I wasn't always dealing on a regular basis with the older kids, but I know the kids that you work with – it's when you don't have another report three years later from the kid that you feel, well, you've done something good for the kid. At least he was not showing up again. But some kids we know – knives, drugs, ramifications of evil.

JR: How long were you doing this kind of work?

FS: Twenty years. It's the longest I ever stayed at anything. I never stayed more than four years any place.

JR: It must have been satisfying for you to stay.

FS: Yeah, it was draining, but the job psychologist carries its own prestige. Fortunately, most mothers didn't really – they didn't have a fear of it. I'll tell you, the higher up in class

you were, the less you wanted to know about psychologists. But most of them couldn't wait – the mothers – to come in, and sometimes they were happy with what you said, and sometimes they were not. My real feeling about the whole thing was to be able to go back to – the teacher refers. She's the initiator – is to go back to the teacher and tell her, "This kid has perfectly normal intelligence. Now teach him." "Oh, he can't be that smart." So that's what the numbers read. Now, what's really the problem? You have a battery of tests, and one of them is called the Bender Test, which is a series of drawings, ten drawings. They're not only used for visual motor skills, but it also has a psychological component in it. One time my supervisor said, "Look, I got three interns. What are you going to do with them?" I says, "Let them do the whole kindergarten." I taught them how to do it, and they did it. The sad thing is that when you score them – of course, I did all the scoring – is you can pick out right away those kids who are going to be academically disabled. It's a wonderful instrument. As a matter of fact, one of the girls who was doing it, I looked at – she was doing it alone, and I said, "How come you don't like your father?" She's like, "I hate the bastard." She says, "How do you know?" I said, "You just told me so." [inaudible] But there are things that can – and then what do you do with those kids that you see? Well, you put in some extra effort. You tell the teachers. You set up a program, and that's it. I think the saddest part is when a doctor calls or parent calls with a newborn – spina bifida, cerebral palsy – what's the other one? I forget. They used to call them mongoloid, but they're not that. Oh, Down syndrome. Because we were responsible in New Jersey for the placement of those children in an educational environment, we took them at three years old. Within the school system, we had a program. But from zero to three, there were other – there was a cerebral palsy thing, and you always made sure that the mother was given the information to go ahead and set up the kid. Then we would visit the kid on a six-month basis and check the progress. As soon as they were three, you'd hold a conference with all the teachers and all that stuff and get the child taken care of. So there was a lot of satisfaction in the child. It was rough, you know, at times, but it was worthwhile. It was a good twenty years.

JR: When did you move back to Massachusetts?

FS: I was married forty-three years. Got married on Saturday, came to New York on Sunday, took me forty-three years to get back home. I've been here ten years. I left my house. I left my husband. My kids haven't forgiven me yet, and I'm having a great time. But there are moments when – I don't mind being alone. I never did it to shut my door. I'm perfectly happy. There are moments when I wonder if I did this right. My husband's not well. There are some guilt feelings. But that's it. I've been back ten years.

JR: Why did you choose to come back here?

FS: Because I lived here. This was my home. This was always where I wanted to come back. There was never any question about it, and as soon as I got here, I contacted Hadassah, and there I was.

JR: Let's talk about your involvement with Hadassah. You told me a little bit about how you got involved. Why were you moved to throw yourself into it, do you think?

FS: I think because it was in my family. It was Jewish and activism, and this was what I chose. As I said, I found my friends there. Frances Gordon, who had called me to ask me if I was Jewish, invited me immediately to a Hadassah meeting. I mean, there was just no question. I got on well. I spent over nine years. Yeah, I think nine years. They were great, my friends. It was wonderful. When I moved to Teaneck, of course, I not only had Hadassah, but I also had my colleagues with whom I worked, but Hadassah was always the place. It's true here. We moved back East, and Gabe was at Jersey City State, and they told us there was an apartment across the street. I had the little girl, Aviva, who was seven, and Dave, and I was pregnant. They sent me across the street, and the woman's name was Schneider, Gloria Schneider, tall, blonde, slender woman. She showed us the apartment, and she asked us if we liked it. I said, "Mrs. Schneider, I have to tell you something before we agree. Dr. Sanders and I are Jewish." She says,

"Oh, I'm president of Hadassah this year. What job would you like? I'm looking for a vice president in charge of education." So, there it was. It was really nice.

JR: What kinds of programs were you involved in?

FS: Educational programs, speakers, some of it light, and some was more heavy. I tend to be on the intellectual side, but I do believe that you've got to be entertaining too. I think I was here two, three years before I became president. But at our age, it's kind of hard to find people who want to give the time anymore. Let's see. We've had rabbis, woman rabbis, man rabbi – we had a rabbi who [inaudible] "Where's God in Purim?" He's not even mentioned. Stuff like that. We had doctors who come in and talk to us, particularly on osteoporosis. I'm trying to get somebody for arthritis this year. We've had food – they love the food program. I try to meet my financial responsibilities to Hadassah as best I can, and that's pretty much it.

JR: What's most satisfying for you about the kind of work that you do here?

FS: Here? Well, I feel it's worthwhile. Having been in Israel, having lived there, you know, I know that many Americans – I don't know if you've ever been to Israel? But the Israelis are very aggressive and arrogant, and I think it's very difficult for many Americans to accept that kind of behavior. I mean, we're Americans. We'll give you money. That was never my husband's or my attitude about it. In fact, our neighbor who became a very good, close friend says, "How come you never complain?" I said, "There's nothing to complain about. I'm here to enjoy myself and to learn." I had trouble with the younger daughter. Now Aviva was at Hebrew U [University], and we were in Ramat Aviv, and the two kids were in public school. We didn't send them to religious school. They were in ulpans and all that kind of stuff. The teacher calls me in, and she tells me that Shira's work isn't what it ought to be, and she's passing notes. So I said, "Well, I'm not really concerned about the academics because, in America, she's head of her class." I said, "But I really want to know, what does she write in the notes? Are they English or

Hebrew?”  She says, “Oh, they're Hebrew.”  I said, “What else do I want?” [laughter]

JR:  She’s fine.

FS:  I mean, what do I want?  I have them here to learn the language and to make friends, and to learn about the country.  No problem.

JR:  How old were they at the time?

FS:  She was in fifth grade, and David was in seventh.  Yeah, they were in different schools.  They were both scholars.  They were both bright kids.  They really had no trouble, and I wasn't at all worried about them academically.  David carried his own math book with him.  I wanted them to have the language and the experience.  We traveled all up and down Israel.  It was great.  Shira always knew she was going to go back.  She got her Ph.D. in December [and] made aliyah in January.  In two weeks, she met the young man she married.

JR:  Wow.

FS:  He's from Belgium, speaks French.  He speaks French to the kids, and of course, they [speak] in Hebrew daycare, so they know all three languages, and they know them.  You can say anything to them in any language, and they understand.  The only thing is they would always – when you ask them a question – like, I'd ask them something in English, they'd only answer in Hebrew.  This last time, the little girl, the middle one, said something to me back to me in English, and we made a whole big great kol ha’kavod [‘all the praise’], and the older one heard it.  So they spoke English to me all the time I was there.  In fact, I called on the phone and chatted-boxed her ears and got to talk, and she talked completely in English.  That was nice.  My Hebrew is wretched.  I think I've taken ulpan classes, ten of them, at least ten.  Can't get it.  I'm too old, I think.

JR:  How do you think your contributions have affected others?

FS: Very important to this group. I am in a group of older women, and we really held that group together. Not only that, but we've taken in two other groups who were virtually inactive – no meetings. Some fundraising in one of those groups, but not very much. So we've managed to hold this group, this Henrietta Szold group, and take in the other two, and we have reasonable success. People keep coming back to the meetings, and I felt that was as good a contribution as we could make. We keep losing them because they're old. The last donor we had – walkers, canes, wheelchairs. It's sad, but at least they evidence interest, and they come out, and I think that's the most important thing now is to really keep the group together and to have activities in which everybody can participate. It hasn't been easy, and I'm always very worried that if some of us just step aside, the whole thing will just fall apart. We can't let that happen. It's hard to know how hard you can push on fundraising with these women. They're all probably on fixed incomes. They've made their contributions down through the years. We were saying we have had problems in the front office. We don't raise that much as a group anymore. They're very dependent upon the younger group, as they should be, and we do really have to put our emphasis there, but we can't forget these women who've given many, many years of service. So, I think that's the most important thing that I can do for Hadassah right now is to keep the group as active as can be. We have thirty-five, forty women coming to meet, but we have a membership of five hundred in the age group. But they're old. They're in assisted living or Hebrew rehab. I told my brother that we have to go to the Hebrew rehab to see what arrangements can be made when I'm ready. [laughter] He wasn't too happy about it, and I thought, "Well, he's a lot younger than I am, thirteen years younger." He's just a very good brother.

[Recording paused.]

JR: You were saying how your activist work has affected you.

FS: Well, it's given me friendship and self-esteem, surely. When I come in a room, everybody says “hello” and “how've you been?” and that kind of thing. I try to remember everybody's name, as many as I can. They’re always surprised when I can't remember a name. My memory's getting so vague. But that sort of thing. The only other thing that I have outside of Hadassah is I belong to a group called the Elder Arts. It's part of the YMCA here on Huntington Avenue. It’s primarily for elders in the South End, Fenway, and Back Bay. It's intended to be a very diverse group. That's why the South End and Fenway are involved. It’s been absolutely wonderful because I get free tickets to the Boston Pops. In fact, I just arranged for four of us to go to Tanglewood absolutely free -- ballet, all the concerts, the theater. It's really been great. The nicest thing is that I get the tickets, and I can give them to my friends, share it with them, and that gives me a great deal of joy. Not to show off or anything, but just to be able to share that with them is a nice, nice feeling. But Hadassah is really very important to me not only for emphasizing friendship, but I really feel that it's something that – I would miss it. I would miss the activity. I would miss the – now, we have a study group that's about fifty years old, which I am now the facilitator. We meet once a month. It's great. It's an intellectual exercise. We have current events, and then we read. We're into the Legends of the Bible by [Louis] Ginzberg, now, and of course his relationship with Henrietta Szold – but it's the kind of thing that I like to do, that I've always, always done. I read a lot. A lot of it is trash. For twenty years, I wrote reports and read technical reports – neurologists and psychiatrists. So I just kind of give myself a release with these Regency novels. Sexy as all hell. Pornographic, as a matter of fact. But I did read the Red Tent by Anita Diamant.

JR: Did you like that?

FS: Yeah. I see it just came out in paperback. I just saw another one. Something about Yiddish, something about the language by [inaudible] Gilbert. I have to get it from the library. Maybe I'll do a book report on it. I keep saying that.

JR: When you were talking about getting involved in Hadassah, I was wondering whether your increased Jewish participation as a family came before you got involved with Hadassah or more as a result of –?

FS: Oh, certainly after.

JR: Afterwards.

FS: Yeah, because we were at school for three, four years together. He was getting his Ed.D., and I was getting a bachelor's, and that was about all we were involved with because that was all we had time for. We used to pass each other on the elevator at school.

JR: What was your husband's Jewish background like?

FS: He came from an Orthodox family, but not a very technical one. The mother did whatever she remembered her mother did, but it wasn't always what I thought was [inaudible]. She was very upset that I was not religiously inclined. I really wasn't until the children came, and then I felt that was an important element in all our lives.

JR: So how did that take [inaudible] –

FS: Manifest itself?

JR: Yeah.

RS: Well, we lived right around the corner from the Conservative synagogue. We had Beth El, which is Conservative, in Akron, Ohio, and then we had [inaudible] Jewish Community Center, and we were both very active in it. The Sisterhood -- my husband was on the board. He had something to do with the education part. He was responsible for adding rooms onto the Beth El, stuff like that. In fact, we were the only ones ever mentioned by the rabbi on the pulpit. My husband was very proud. That was something

of a -- I guess when we came back from Russia. Oh, yes, Russia. We were there –

JR: When did you go to Russia?

FS: – in '58.

JR: Oh wow.

FS: Five weeks.

JR: What were you doing there?

FS: Education. We were studying the educational system, and we spent five weeks there. I could spend five weeks telling you about it. [laughter] We tried to contact my father's family but couldn't. We had good experiences, but some interesting experiences, and a couple weren't so good, but that was fascinating.

JR: Did you make contact with other Jewish families?

FS: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Our guide was half-Jewish, the same age as my son. We used to have long discussions. She used to quote [Vladimir] Lenin on assimilation. My response to her was that nine hundred years ago, her people were drinking out of skulls for cups while her father's people had already participated in medicine and mathematics and all that kind of stuff. That’s what I gave my children, the inheritance I gave my children. I don’t know what you're going to give, but that's what I'm giving, and I'm not changing. We used to have discussions – oh, we made contact with the Jews, of course. We had come with tallit and mezuzahs and some prayer books. Used to be very strange -- you put them underneath your hip and move over, and the other garment was over the top of it. We brought back a poster that was written in Yiddish that hadn't appeared for maybe forty years –

JR: What did it say?

FS: – and published. Nechama Lifshitz. She came here to America. She was a singer. In Yiddish, it was “Shtetele Belz,” all the other Yiddish songs. It was amazing. Put it on a poster. When she came, she came to Akron. We had the poster to show her. It was very interesting. They knew we were from America. They could tell by our shoes, if nothing else. They would wait until services were over, and they'd crowd around us. We were there for Rosh Hashanah. How much did I pay for the dress? “Do you have pictures of your house?” I had a picture of my house with two cars in the driveway. My daughter's picture went all the way around the shul and came back. But it was interesting. Then, you tell them – they tell you they have relatives in New York, Chicago, and so I would say to them, “Have you written to them?” My Yiddish was rusty, but I remember I could say words I don't even remember hearing. It all just came back. They wanted to know what I thought. She’s got three grandchildren. Not one word of Yiddish. We talked to them about relatives. “Yeah, we have [relatives].” “Do you write to them?” They won't like it. [inaudible] So I said, “You don't have to say anything. All you have to say is, ‘I'm alive.’ That's all they want to know. You don't have to tell anything.” “Well, they may not like that.”

JR: What were they afraid that they wouldn't like?

FS: Well, Stalin has just been gone for two years. The thing with Stalin was in '56. We were the first Americans of any large group that came into – '58. We came as part of the educational group. It was rough. To hear those people. A young man sidled up to us when we were walking in the street. Gorgeous. Oh, was he a beautiful man, really beautiful. He's telling me he's married to a Polish Jewish girl and that he wants to leave. So I said, “So” I know from nothing. So he tells me if he gets to Warsaw, he leaves. From Poland at that time, you could get out. You couldn't get out from the Soviet Union. That’s all he wanted was to go back with his wife to Warsaw. Now she could go, but he couldn't. They wouldn't let him. She says, “Yeah, he spends his whole day going from office to office.” They spent a lot of time on that, but that was a fascinating trip.

JR:  Did you feel in danger at any point?

FS:  Well, we kept our passports close to us, except they took them in the hotels [inaudible], but not really.  There were three of us: myself, my husband, and a man called William )Rickman?), who was at the University of Pennsylvania.  Never really felt – the last time I was picked up, I was in my thirties.  A sailor comes trooping up.  I'm always walking ahead.  The two were behind me, and the sailor comes and talks to me in Russian.  I knew what he was asking, but then the two of them came up [inaudible].  He scrammed fast.  It was so funny.  But I was telling him [inaudible] picked up.  But funny.  Very sad there.  High poverty.  Came back, and I talked to my father, described it.  He says it hasn't changed for forty years since I was there.  He says, "I'm sorry, Dad.  I can't do it for you."  They schlump along.  Even in August, it's cold.  I remember our hotel room was awful.  [inaudible] extra blankets, but they had the hats and the hoods and the boots.  Just like when my father left, [there was] a lot of poverty.  You don't see it so much in Moscow as you see – some of the streets, you don't know where to go.  But when you leave Moscow and go down the roads [inaudible], we went to some apartments.  They sleep in the hallway.  A teacher gets more privileges than a medical person, doctor.

JR:  That's certainly a switch from this country.

FS:  Yeah.  There are still places here [inaudible] sleep in the streets.

JR:  Oh, that's certainly true.

FS:  In Moscow, you can't sleep in the streets.  It's too cold.

JR:  Yeah.  I was wondering if you were involved in the women's movement at all.

FS:  I used to belong to the League of Women Voters, but I'm not anymore.  I do belong to a Planned Parenthood [and] pay my dues.  Trying to think of what else I pay my dues to.  I'm not particularly active.  I think I belong to the Archives.  I think I have [inaudible].

JR: I just wondered because it seemed like your story was in some ways not conventional in terms of the kinds of education you got and career paths you chose

for a woman at the time.

FS: Not really. I'm trying to think. In my past, right? Well, I really don't know. I haven't been that active in women's things by themselves because I'm devoted to Hadassah. Not really.

JR: Did you ever feel like there were obstacles or challenges to the choices you were making as a woman professionally?

FS: Oh, yeah. I think the Y experience in Akron, coming out as an economist. You have to know that I was the only girl at Columbia, sometimes, in those classes. Labor economics was all men. I was the only girl. I was the only one who knew how to use a calculator. I knew how to do [inaudible] show them all how to do it. But not really. I've gotten annoyed sometimes about any kind of limitations, which I can't come up with particularly, but I know that I must have from time to time. But I had much more interest, to tell you the truth, in being a Jewish woman than a woman as such.

JR: What did that mean to you?

FS: Well, raising children, seeing that they could be whatever they wanted to be. There was never any question with any three of my kids of what they were going to be. That was always their choice. They always surprised me [inaudible]. I never expected my younger one to go into psychology, but she did, and she's good at it. I always encouraged women to go back to work or go back to school. In the twenty years I was working as a psychologist, that was one of the things I always asked – “What did you do? What do you want to do? What can we do to get you going?” That kind of thing. I felt I made more contribution that way than actually going out and passing out pamphlets. But

you know what? I think that's something I should have done. I should have been more involved in that because I feel strongly about it. I'll go home and think about some wonderful thing I did, but right now, I can't come up with anything.

JR: Did you have any role models?

FS: Just my mother, really. Like I said, when we weren't home, mother wasn't home, but when we came home, she was always there. She had worked sporadically. But we always knew that mother had things -- you're probably too young. You probably don't even know about the OPA [Office of Price Administration]. That was during the war, and it dealt with shortages, food shortages primarily, and the queuing.

JR: What did it stand for?

FS: Office of Production something or other, but it really dealt with rationing. I know my mother served as some kind of -- not a supervisor, but she was a snoop. She would watch for people who were lying, taking, and hoarding. She'd give them lectures on the spot. She was never hesitant about speaking her mind. Dad, of course, was a warden with the helmet and the buckets and the flashlight and that sort of thing. Now you have to know my sister and my brother are not like that at all.

JR: You mean active in --?

FS: My sister never was. She passed away. My brother certainly isn't.

JR: Why do you think you followed in those footsteps more?

FS: It's because I was the oldest, and it was going on. I seem to be much more conscious of it, and I married a man who was encouraging. Now, my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, was brought up in a Jewish household, again Conservative, I think. The mother was in Sisterhood and all that kind of stuff, and she's not. Then [inaudible] and

none of my sister's children – she has four of them. Two of them were [inaudible] divorced. One brother's youngest son is very [inaudible]. Every child married Jewish, except the oldest one; he converted, but he converted [inaudible]. She would never go out a second time with a non-Jewish boy, and she told him – (Barry?). He says, “Oh, I’ve been thinking about converting now for a year.” So he converted, whatever kind of conversion. So that's the divorce. But like I said, the other two were Orthodox. But I think it was primarily my mother, and I've always had socialist tendencies. I mean, there's no question about that. I always will, though I'm now I’m in the upper class.

JR: How do your socialist tendencies manifest themselves?

FS: I think primarily by complaining about taxation and really being interested in people and their welfare and in economics. [inaudible] Mostly, I just try to [inaudible] one friend who's an absolute bigot. I have to keep from getting angry, but I also have to keep saying what I have to say. It bothers me because she's really a very nice person. But it's hard. I don't know why she stays friends with me because I keep telling her, “You know, it's not really what's happening.” It's hard, but racial prejudice has always been something – like I told you, we talked about the Scottsboro [inaudible], the two younger ones? I said [inaudible]. Money was more important to them. None of my kids are in business. They'll never be wealthy. They all three have lovely homes, though, which is nice.

JR: Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to tell me about?

FS: [laughter] I think we've done pretty well getting my whole life history. No, there isn't much more, yeah. Time is passing on me, and sometimes I get a little frustrated that I haven't done more. I want more time.

JR: It sounds like you've done a lot.

FS:  Well, I'm talking about day-to-day.  I wish I would do even more.  But it's getting hard.  I've got a bad right arm right now.  I'm right-handed.  Try to get into a bra when you can't move your hand.  But that, too, shall pass.

JR:  Yeah.  Well, thank you so much for your time.

FS:  You're quite welcome.

JR:  I really appreciate it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]