Molly Cone Transcript

ROZ BORNSTEIN: Hi, this is Roz Bornstein. And I am here with Molly Cone in Seattle, Washington for the Weaving Women's Words Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. And the date is May 22, 2001 and we're here today to gather Molly's oral history. Molly, do I have your permission to interview and tape you today?

MOLLY CONE: Yes, of course.

RB: Thank you so much. Thank you very much. Well, where would you like to begin?

MC: Well, let's start with one of my earliest memories. Would that be all right?

RB: That's great.

MC: One of my very earliest memories—I must have been about four or five years old—was coming into the kitchen one morning and hearing my father tell us (my two sisters and brother and me) that a new baby had come to our house the night before, and that the new baby was another girl. And what I remember is my brother's deep, loud sobs because the new baby was another sister instead of a brother for him. From that memory came my book, Too Many Girls. The only real thing in the story I wrote was that fact of this little boy who thought he had too many sisters. The rest was all fiction.

I grew up in a family of four sisters and one brother. I was born on October 3, 1918 in Tacoma, Washington in one of the upstairs bedrooms of our house on 2620 North Puget Sound. And I was the only child of all of them who was born at home. I was always interested in knowing why was I born at home. And it never occurred to me to ask my parents. But I much later realized that 1918 was the year of a country-wide flu epidemic. People in hospitals were dying. That is why, I think, my parents decided that I should be

born at home. There were actually six children born to my mother. There was another brother born right before me, who died as an infant of sixteen months. My parents never could talk about it. It was just such a heartbreak. I gather they were being very careful with this baby, and so I was born at home. I grew up as the middle child of five children. I was always too old to receive the privileges of the two younger sisters and not quite old enough to do what my older brother and sister did. and I really felt that I was very separate from the rest of the family. As a child, I never felt like a child. I don't know why but I always felt grown up, which is very strange, because once I grew up I never felt grown up.

My father came over from Latvia in 1906 and my mother followed him in 1909. She came with her mother, and our grandmother lived with us all her life. So being the middle child, I was always the one chosen to stay home with grandma when everybody else went out for Sunday rides. Which was okay, because my grandmother and I became very special friends . She only spoke Yiddish. We could understand our grandmother and everything she said and she could understand us but we never learned how to speak Yiddish. Which I thought was really too bad because it would have been such a great addition to have more than one language, particularly a native language.

RB: Molly, what were your parents' names?

MC: My mother's maiden name was Fanny Sussman. My father's name was Arthur Lamken but everybody called him Abe. My father had several brothers and they all went by the name of Lemchen—L-e-m-c-h-e-n. So I can only believe that my father Americanized it to Lamken—L-a-m-k-e-n when he came here.

I 'd better say this now, because it colored my whole life. My mother died when she was forty-five years old, just before I graduated high school and my grandmother was so bereft. To have a child die before you die is a very difficult thing. I'd always felt that my father and mother had a perfect relationship. My father was very much in love with my

mother. He was heartbroken when she died. She died in 1936, my grandmother died in ’38, and my father’s life ended in ’39. Those days, nobody knew much about depression. My father took his own life, which really was a big shock to all our family. But I could understand. He just could not live without my mother.

RB: How did your mother die? What was the [unclear]?

MC: You know, we never really knew. Once she went to the hospital we never saw her again, so it was a very hard thing to understand. I was told later, not by any of my family but by somebody, that the cause was spinal meningitis. It was before penicillin and sulfa were discovered. I understood that if we had had those miracle drugs she may have lived. My father came home one day so elated because my mother who was in the hospital was feeling much better -- the first day that she was feeling better, and the next day she died. You know that often does happen, when in those hours before death there suddenly seems to be a turn for the better. Anyway, that was the big tragedy of my childhood.

RB: How did that impact you at the time or impact your life over time?

MC: Well, as a young girl, I blocked it out as much as I could. We still lived in our house, which was a four or five bedroom house with a third floor and a big basement. It was a corner house. It had catalpa trees in the front parking and rose bushes all around. It had a big—we used to call it a snow bush. Actually, it was a hydrangea, a white hydrangea. It had a clothesline in the back yard that doubled back three times (this was before drying machines), and cherry trees which I loved to climb.

RB: Sounds wonderful.

MC: In those days I was the tomboy of the family. I wanted to do everything my brother did and I could pretty much. One of the other outstanding memories of my childhood was my brother’s bar mitzvah. Now, in those days, and perhaps it is in many families today,

the boy—the only boy in the family was the king of the household, you know.

RB: Is that right? Were the boys and girls treated differently?

MC: Not really, except that where we got a dime from the tooth fairy, my brother got a quarter. We took that for granted since he was the boy. Depression time we didn't get many toys and all. But he got the bike because he was the boy; I got the skates (and I loved riding bikes). But somehow—we never resented that. That was understood. And the other tremendous memory that I have is my brother's bar mitzvah.

RB: Tell us about it.

MC: There were no Jewish neighborhoods in Tacoma.

RB: None—none whatsoever?

MC: No. Jews were scattered all around. In Tacoma, there were two groups of Jews. There was the orthodox group who were the eastern Europeans, and the reform German background group — central Europeans. The central Europeans or the Germans started Temple Beth Israel, and the others the Talmud Torah Synagogue. I don't know whether there were more than fifty families or so altogether, but they were two rather distinct groups. However, I was confirmed at Temple Beth Israel because in our shul, as my grandmother used to say, the rabbis changed "every Muntik and Donershtik" (every Monday and Thursday). We never had a rabbi who stayed long enough to do much teaching. So I had a very spotty kind of Jewish education. Out of the total number of Jews in Tacoma, among the crowd of Jewish young people, there were only four or five my age. Three girls, two boys, something like that, which wasn't much of a group. In my confirmation class (a combined class at the temple for both temple and shul kids) there were five, which was different I'm sure from anything you ever experienced. However, when it was necessary, the two Jewish groups always came together. So that was the situation. We had a kosher house. The only big advantage that I saw to a kosher house

when I was growing up was that my grandmother never trusted us to do the dishes. My grandmother baked the challah and the bulkas, (little challah buns), and the pa-ragon.

RB: What's paragon?

MC: Paragon is—it's a dough wrapped around chopped meat

RB: Do you know how to spell that?

MC: I don't really know but p-a-r-a-g-o-n is about it. Let's see, there are other names for that in different areas too. Grandma would roll the dough into sort of an oval—put filling in the center, bring up the two round edges and crimp it down the middle.

RB: Sounds delicious.

MC: And, of course, it was brushed with chicken fat, then baked in the oven. My grandma made the bagels too, the bagels and the challah while my mother baked the sponge cakes and all the fancier kinds of things. They worked together very, very well. My mother did the cleaning while my grandmother did the cooking. One of my early memories also was coming home from school on Friday afternoon. And when I opened the back door, newspapers were spread on the floor to keep the floor clean for awhile before Shabbos came along. [chuckles] Of course, in those days the ink didn't smudge off the way it does now. If you read the newspaper today your hands are black, but not then. I started to tell you about the bar mitzvah, didn't I? I used the business of the bar mitzvah in my book, A Promise is a Promise.

RB: Wonderful.

MC: I also used our neighborhood and sort of our family but not really our family, but I did use the neighborhood and the man who lived across the alley or down the street. A lot of my memories of my childhood are in this book A Promise is a Promise.

RB: That's wonderful.

MC: The story opens with the family planning for the bar mitzvah and, you know, all the baking and the cooking. Of course, they didn't have freezers in those days so they would bake a week ahead -- the cookies and that kind of thing. The bar mitzvah, of course, was held at the shul. Afterwards all the Jews in town were invited over. (I remember the cartons of pop stacked up in our kitchen for my brother's bar mitzvah —strawberry pop and orange pop. and others (this was in the days before coco-cola). I also remember that formal invitations were sent out to everybody for the bar mitzvah.

Let me just back up a little bit. Living in a neighborhood where you were surrounded by Christian families was sometimes difficult. Every house but ours was lighted with Christmas trees at Christmas, of course. Ours had Hanukkah candles. At school, few teachers even knew what a Jew was. We were all supposed to sing Christmas carols about Jesus and I'd mouth the words but I would never sing. It was such a painful time for me because I felt so different. I was always the only Jewish child in any of my classes through Washington Elementary School, Allen C. Mason Intermediate School and Stadium High School. Although there were other Jews in town, I was the only Jew my age, either boy in girl, in any of my classrooms.

RB: Oh, my gosh!

RB: Where did the other girls go in your confirmation class?

MC: The same school but never in my same classroom. Of course I took this all for granted. My best friends were two little girls, Marguerite and Marjorie, who lived in the neighborhood. Marguerite was an only child. Marjorie (had two older brothers) was of a Scottish family—her mother was very active in the arts. And her mother always felt sorry for me. You know, you hate to be a victim of someone feeling sorry for you—she always invited me over at Christmas to help decorate their Christmas tree. The neighbors were

very nice but it was just a typical neighborhood with just no understanding of anyone who was non-Christian. Yet, I had a happy childhood—it was a busy family and a wonderful growing up time.

RB: It also sounds like you had a very rich Jewish home.

MC: Yes.

RB: Can you describe that for us a bit?

MC: Well, it wasn't rich as far as history was concerned. Because we never learned anything about our parents' background (in what they referred to as "the old country)" or about Jewish history other than what we picked up. Of course my grandmother and mother lit the candles every Friday night, and on Shabbos—now, it's "Shabbat" but in those days it was "Shabbos"—we were never allowed to cut or draw because that was work. I played with paper dolls. The only thing you could do on Shabbos was read, which was fine. I loved reading. But we didn't do anything that was classed as work—which meant cutting or coloring or anything to do with scissors or pencils or crayons or anything like that.

Saturday afternoon my mother and grandmother always had a lot of the ladies over for tea. My mother used to make these cookies—we called them bagelach. They were little circles with knots—sour cream cookies. And she'd bake them in great quantities. We had a big kitchen—we had an icebox which had ice in it and a pan underneath, so that if we forgot to empty the pan every night we'd wake up to a flooded floor—[chuckles] in the morning. For ice delivery, we had two signs to put in the kitchen window—one said fifty and the other said twenty-five. Fifty, we'd want a fifty pound block of ice and twenty-five, we wanted a twenty-five pound block of ice. The ice truck would come along probably was once or twice a week. And then the iceman would come up in his leather apron, carrying the chunk of ice with these big tongs and put it into the refrigerator -- into the

icebox. Anyway, I started to talk about the cookies. We had this big kitchen, a couple windows and a wood stove to start with --and a pantry. The pantry had the sink in it and a big counter and shelves all around. One side of the pantry was for milcheka dishes and the other side for fleshicha. (I was never allowed to do dishes because my grandmother didn't trust us kids not to mix the dishes.) But the cookies—my mother would put these cookies in big cans or jars—and she'd stick them way up high in the pantry on the highest shelf. Of course, we kids soon learned to climb onto the counter and help ourselves when we wanted to.

They really were wonderful cookies. My favorite thing was to take a handful of those little bagelach and sit in the big leather chair crosswise with my feet hanging over the arms, with my book, and a lap full of cookies, and munch and read. [laughs] I remember that was such a satisfying sort of thing to do.

On Saturday afternoon and sometimes in the middle of the week too, ladies would come for tea. We had one of those houses, which were sort of Victorian style. The entry hall was as big as a room, and to the right of it was the front living room. We called it "the front room." Behind it was another living room with a fireplace. There were glass doors between the front room and the living room, and to the left of the living room was a big dining room. It was a square house cut into four divisions, a hallway, a front room, a living room and a dining room, all practically equal rooms. And then the kitchen, behind that. When company came, they sat in either the front room or living room or sometimes the glass doors were open and, they used them both. My mother would serve tea with a kind of a cherry preserve that my grandmother would make. They put a spoonful of the cherry preserve into the hot tea and drink the tea. My father was a tea drinker too. He would put a lump of sugar in his mouth and then he'd sip the tea through the sugar. I loved it. Of course, I realized that all his friends—you know, all the eastern European friends, did exactly the same thing.

RB: What did the ladies come over for? Was it just strictly social or did they have—

MC: Strictly social. This was just visiting on Sabbath, which is what people did. I particularly remember one woman I called "Auntie Becca, " and I loved it when Auntie Becca visited because every time she came she'd bring little treats for us kids. She'd always have a little cookie for each of us, or a little something. I loved listening to the women. My older sister was always off doing something else and the two younger kids were often napping. But I was always sitting on the edge listening to the conversation, half of which I couldn't understand. I remember one woman asked me—she recognized that I was enjoying being part of this tea party--- which of the visitors did I like best. Now, that's a terrible thing to ask. [chuckles] And I didn't hesitate a bit. I said, "Auntie Becca." "Why?" she asked me then. I answered truthfully: "Because she always brings me something." I remember the laughter.

You know, I blushed a lot when I was small. And the reason I blushed—well, one of the reasons was that I lisped. I couldn't say my l's and I couldn't say my r's. I remember standing out in front of the house and someone coming up to visit and saying, "What is your name?" and my answering: "Ma-ee Yamkin." I remember how they laughed. How they laughed and laughed. I didn't get it for a long while, and then I realized they were really laughing at me, not with me. Such childhood pains. I more or less grew out of the lisping, but not until about the third grade. Is this the kind of stuff you want?

RB: Absolutely.

MC: I remember a happening in about the third grade at Washington Elementary School. I was a pretty good reader. I read a lot and the teacher was asking different students to get up and read a few lines out loud of a story about a squirrel. Well, even today I have difficulty saying "squirrel." I never could roll my r's. For a long time I couldn't even say my r's. Well, I stood up and read fine up to that word, "squirrel." I stopped. I wouldn't, I couldn't say it. I just stood there with my lips clamped together. Finally, the teacher

ordered me to sit down, and asked someone else to read.

RB: And back then they didn't have—

MC: They had no remedial help at all at school. If a kid lisped he lisped.

RB: One thing I read that was really striking is how your parents handled it, that they were matter of fact.

MC: They'd never mention it, didn't even bring it up. I don't remember that they ever corrected me—so if they did it was very gently. The family didn't make fun of me; it was always strangers. So blushing and lisping were part of my childhood. I have always admired anyone who spoke with ease. My husband can roll his r's and imitate accents. I can hardly say r, let alone roll it. [chuckles] That was always a handicap in trying to learn another language. I never could enunciate certain words properly. But, you know, those were very minor kind of ills for a kid—and I did have a very happy childhood. I loved school; I just couldn't wait to get to school. I loved to read. I remember t my mother coming to school with me the first day and sitting close by during the first hour. And I remember sitting there and looking around, looking around, expecting to learn to read immediately, and suddenly seeing my Mother's face bent close to mine, and hearing her whispering that she was going home now. That was fine with me. I didn't mind a bit. I couldn't wait to be taught to read. As soon as I learned to read, I decided I was going to be a writer. I was going to write stories.

RB: Right. That's when it—you think it first—

MC: It really started right then. I used to write odds and ends—lots of little things—poems, you know, as I told you once before. My poems were all about things I didn't know about. We had these green tiles around our fireplace. And one was loose and I'd pick it up and hide my scraps of writings underneath. In grade school—fourth, fifth grade there was an opportunity class. And just what that opportunity class was I don't

know —but I guess it was for the kids who learned pretty fast.

RB: But it was called an opportunity—

MC: It was called an opportunity class. It started in the fourth grade, I think. We stayed in the same class with the same teacher throughout two years. She was really a lovely teacher, you know, who just loved children. We graduated into the intermediate school in sixth grade. We were given a lot of privileges. So, I was really pretty confident about myself in many things.

RB: Wonderful.

MC: But I can remember [chuckles] going to intermediate school and our whole class being taken into the auditorium by the principal and being scolded for being so—he didn't use the word egotistical but something like that. I didn't really know what he was talking about [laughs] or realize that we were lording it over everybody else because we were part of this opportunity class. I think this opportunity class was probably one of the first attempts in public school to make some sort of a special class for kids who could go faster than other kids. The opportunity class disappeared in intermediate completely.

RB: Were boys and girls—

MC: Both boys and girls.

RB: Were they tracked differently at all or was it all one group in that opportunity class?

MC: It was just one group.

RB: [unclear]

MC: I think what was happening is that we were allowed to advance as fast as the teacher thought we could. So it was an interesting class. As I said, I was always

interested in writing. In intermediate school I contributed to the school newspaper. I had a school column. And then when we graduated into high school, I paid very little attention to anything else—except the journalism class.

RB: Do you remember what you liked to write about in intermediate school?

MC: I had sort of a column and I don't remember what the name of it was. But it was one of these kind of smarty-alec columns [chuckles] where, you talked about what other kids were doing or what was doing, and you turned the phrase so there was a quip on it. I'm sure the column died when I left school. [laughter] I was editor of the high school newspaper. I was part of the paper at the intermediate school too but I don't remember much about it. But I really loved the high school thing and I went out for everything I could -- the swimming team, the debate club, and all that—my friends were very active. I came home from school very late every day because I always had after school things. None of my three sisters ever wanted to taker part in school activities. I don't know why. But I always did.

RB: How was it as the only Jewish girl in those activities?

MC: The only thing I strongly remember --

RB: Yes.

MC: Well this was in grade school not high school. My two best friends went to the same church. And as soon as they started talking about church things I was the leftover one. I used an incident in one book—I would like to read you that part but I guess I can't.

RB: You sure can. I would love it.

MC: All right. This really happened almost the way I had it here.

RB: Is that right?

MC: (A Promise is a Promise) This was not a biography or in any way an autobiography. I just used a girl about my age and an older brother and no other children in the family. But I did use my grandmother as a model for a character. (Reading) Ruthie's feet ruffled up the newspapers under them and her grandmother came toward her in a hurry. "The feet," said her grandmother, in Yiddish. 'The feet,' and sighed as she looked at Ruthie's feet. Both her grandmother and her mother usually sighed whenever they happened to look at Ruthie's feet. Although Ruthie was a year younger than Herbert, her feet were bigger. They weren't even distinctly big like Sandra Wright's. Sandra had once borrowed her mother's evening shoes and had worn them to school all day. It was doing that sort of thing and not caring what people thought that made Sandra distinctive, Ruthie felt. It was Ruthie's opinion that neither her house nor the family in it had any distinction.

And I felt that because in my opinion my parents and grandmother cared too much about what people thought. An overflowing garbage can or a lawn that needed owing was "a shanda" (a shame) for the neighbors. This business of shame was one of the things that ordered our lives when we were kids. My parents believed that you should never draw attention to yourself and you should be very careful not to disrespect your neighbors. You asked me what kind of Jewish upbringing I had -- that was part of it. I used some of my parents' attitudes as well as my brother's bar mitzvah and some of my own childhood traumas as patterns in writing in the book. For example: in the book Ruthie tells her girlfriend that her brother was having a bar mitzvah. (Reading) "It's his bar mitzvah, "Ruthie had explained carefully to Sandra. "You mean, your brother has a party as big as a wedding just because he's 13?" It sounded kind of silly the way Sandra said it. "It's because we're Jewish," Ruthie said. And she did not like the sound of the word in her mouth. There was something about saying Jewish—no crisp consonants to clip off, nothing to roll out from the back of your throat. "I thought you said a bar mitzvah was a boy's 13th birthday," Sandra said suddenly. She looked at her suspiciously. "Your brother, Herbert, is almost 13 and a half. His birthday was last July." "You have to have

a rabbi for a bar mitzvah," Ruthie explained patiently. "Our congregation didn't have a rabbi last July. The bar mitzvah had to wait until the new rabbi came. That's how come Herbert's bar mitzvah will be in November instead of being last July." Sandra looked a little impressed. "Everyone in our whole congregation is invited," Ruthie said. Sandra sniffed. "Our Sunday school teacher is giving a party for us next Saturday," she said. "We can invite anyone we want." Ruthie looked at her reflectively. "Everyone is supposed to come in costume," Sandra said. "Practically everyone in the whole neighborhood is going to be invited.'" Costumes? It occurred to Ruthie that she could wear her queen costume, which she had worn as Esther at the Purim Festival. Sandra nodded. "And masks. Everyone is supposed to wear a mask.'" Ruthie smiled. She would put Herbert's airplane glue on a white mask and sprinkle sequins over it. They reached the corner where Sandra turned off. They paused together. 'But I'm not inviting you," Sandra said calmly. Ruthie felt a lurch of surprise. "I'm not inviting you because we're only supposed to invite prospective members for our Sunday school class. And I can't invite you because"—she had turned to go down her block and had spoken the last words softly over her shoulder—as you say, you're Jewish.'"[chuckles] That's the kind of thing that I contended with all the time. As it happened, I did go with my friend Margie to her church party.

RB: Tell us about that.

MC: I did go to that party in real life as Ruthie went to that party here in the book. And what happened at the party was this: it was held at a beautiful house on Tacoma Avenue. All the kids wore costumes and I did wear my Queen Esther costume [chuckles]—

RB: Great.

MC: —with a mask. The party was held in a big basement room. Maybe they called it recreation room in those days. It was a lovely—really a lovely house. So there was this big basement room and all these kids, none of whom I knew, except Marjorie and one

other. Anyway, we played the usual games -- pin the tail on the donkey and carrying peas on knives, which kids don't do anymore.

RB: I've never heard of that.

MC: Oh, [laughter] well, pin the donkey you've heard of.

RB: Of course

MC: You'd have two teams. The head of each line was given a dish of peas or little beans, and a knife. At the opposite end of the room were two empty pails. You had to put as many peas on the knife as you could and carefully carry them across and dump them into the pail, and then run back and give the knife to the next one on your team. The team that had the most beans in the pot won prizes. Well, my team won. And, of course, I was delighted to win a prize. I don't remember what they all were. The prize I was given was this little tissue-wrapped thing. And when I unwrapped it, it was a little cross on a chain. A cross on a chain! I could never wear that home! I felt awful. I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't want to even hold it.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MC: I said the proper thank you, I'm sure. And then I went back to sit on a couch, one of those big overstuffed couches that had big cushions—and I took the chain and I stuck it behind a cushion and left it there. [chuckles] I used that in the book

RB: Such a great memory.

MC: The painful things of childhood are so memorable. And they really are so funny when you look back on them though painful at the time. I had a lot of fun using that kind of stuff in this book. All right. Now, let's go on. Let's get out of childhood. Would you like some coffee?

RB: Sure. Do you want to take a break?

MC: Mm-hmm. Okay, just start?

RB: Yes.

MC: I'd like to pick up on my talking about feeling different because I was Jewish. The first time I went to Israel was in 1965 with a friend, Ruth Rayman,—a Seattle friend of mine. I went with my husband several times later. The trip we took was sponsored by the Jewish Agency. We spent a month in Israel. I loved Israel. What impressed me the most was the lack of restraint I felt surrounded by other Jews. I felt I could talk on exactly the same level with everybody we met. I had never before realized how careful I was in meeting strangers and talking to them or that I was always thinking, 'I'm Jewish and they're not.' I'd never realized before I went to Israel that I even had that feeling. In Israel, for the first time, I recognized what it was like being a Jew among Jews. That may not be so for a child growing up in the East where the whole school is Jewish and is closed on Jewish holidays. But that was never so when I was growing up. When we brought a note to be excused for a Jewish holiday we'd get this suspicious look from the teacher as if she wanted to say, "What are you putting over on me?" Though I never felt any overt antisemitism of any kind all my growing up, yet that uneasiness of being a little different than everybody else was very strong. I never discussed this with my sisters. I never discussed this with anybody. But in Israel, I felt this wonderful freedom in talking to someone on a bus or wherever we went. I found that very strange.

RB: How so?

MC: I had never realized that I was in any way constrained in my ordinary relationships with non-Jewish people.

RB: Looking back, did you feel—did you have a positive sense of your Jewish identity [unclear]?

MC: I never considered myself anything but Jewish. So I guess that is positive. It never occurred to me to rebel against it, except in those kind of silly little, childish kind of ways. I knew I was Jewish. I never questioned it. You are what you are, you know, and you accept it. You never think, 'Well, why aren't I somebody else or something else?'

RB: I guess I'm wondering what your parents and grandmother did to help buffer you from the effects of living in a non-Jewish community.

MC: Well, I think the only thing that I can see that they really did is that they were very much themselves too—and very solid in their backgrounds. This whole business of respect for your neighbors—included keeping your yard neat, and not letting the garbage can overflow. I have a hunch that they were just more careful because the neighbors were not Jewish. So, yes, I would say I had a very positive upbringing, and, of course, my younger sisters were certainly robbed of that because my mother died so young. By the time you get to be a senior in high school you are pretty well who you are.

RB: Yes.

MC: I think they both suffered.

RB: What role did your mother play in that regard as far as a Jewish upbringing or being a role model?

MC: I'm not sure how to answer that. She was just our mother. [laughs] She was pretty content and she was obviously happy. I must have been in intermediate school or maybe even high school when my father bought my mother an electric ironer. You'd fold your sheets and they'd electrically roll through so you didn't have to stand there and iron. My mother got very adept. She was able to do my father's shirts on this thing —she just knew how to handle things. My mother was a good at a lot of tasks. She sewed a lot. She did beautiful embroidery, and she used to sew clothes, at least for the first kids that came along. I remember coming home from school one day and my mother was sitting in

the kitchen ironing all these sheets. I remember asking my mother something about falling in love. "How do you know when you're really in love?" I asked her, "How do you know?" And she just looked at me and said, "You'll know." She was right. When I met Jerry I knew. [laughs, I wanted all these explanations of what love is and all she says is, "You'll know."

RB: It sounds like she was very wise.

MC: I think she was. She was a happy person and a beautiful mother.

RB: After high school you began to work in advertising?

MC: I went to the University of Washington for a couple of years. For a short time I went to the College of Puget Sound too. My sister graduated from the University of Washington. I think during her last year there I decided I'd go there too. But I was still completely confused about what I wanted—well, I knew I wanted to be a writer but I knew that you can't just start making money by writing.

RB: Yes.

MC: I did the advertising jobs after I was married. Jerry's parents and brothers lived in Tacoma but Jerry stayed in Seattle when his family moved to Tacoma. His younger brother, Mort, and my older brother, Floyd, were the same age and they were in the same classes. They were very good friends. I didn't meet Jerry until after I graduated high school. He came to visit his family. I met him at a party. But I've lost my train of thought. What was I trying to say?

I received the Journalism Award on my graduation from high school. I was very good friends with the journalism teacher, Mr. Hoffman, and helped him write a book. I loved that whole business of book writing. When I graduated, he gave me a gift. It was a thesaurus. And I loved it. I still have it today. (It was just a month or so ago that I bought

a new thesaurus.) For a long time, while I considered myself a writer, I had never really published much of anything. After I had the first two children—I decided that if I was ever going to write I'd better start. I wasn't sure just exactly what I wanted to write, except I knew I wanted to write fiction. Although I had taken journalism, the idea of working for a newspaper did not appeal to me at all. I didn't like reporting in that way. So I decided I would write five children's stories—little short stories, you know, for the children's magazines. Then I would write five articles and then I would write five books. So I began by writing five children's stories. I sent off the first two or three, and they immediately sold. I was so delighted that I just kept on writing children's stories.

RB: Which magazines did you—were they published in?

MC: I don't remember which but one was for to parents read to children rather than children reading themselves.

RB: This was before you wrote "Only Jane."

MC: Yes, this was before I started really writing in earnest. During this sort of experimental time, I wrote a story and called it "Molly Magornish" (a play on a Yiddish word meaning "nothing"). It sold immediately and I wrote another one and sent it to the same magazine and it sold. When I was pregnant with my third child, I decided I'd try writing a children's book. We had just built our house at 6500 50th N.E. Jerry's always been very cooperative with all the writing. On weekends he'd take little Ellen off in her buggy or her stroller up and down those hills to give me time to write that first book. The title was "Just"— (name of character). My editor didn't like the title. And she didn't like the name I had given my main character. She said, "It really isn't correct to say "just" somebody" she said. "It should be "only."" So that's how we got "Only Jane." "Only Jane" started as a short story. And that started from a friend telling me about her daughter, Judy, who was a young teenager at the time.. This was Betty's second marriage. Her husband had two children from a first marriage. We were sitting in her

living room. This was in Madison Park and she was serving tea and telling me about her trouble with Judy and the boys. When Judy began to sprout breasts the boys got one look at her and started teasing, “Boom, boom, Judy. Boom, boom, Judy.”

RB: [unclear]

MC: My short story was about this young teenager who was just growing into woman—on a beach picnic with her parents and her visiting cousins. One cousin was an obnoxious little kid, and he did the same thing that Judy’s brothers had done. Humiliated, the Jane character runs off to another part of the beach. She meets a boy there and they talk. When she came back she was changed somehow. A little later I took this story and used it as the middle chapter. I went forward and backward and wrote the book which ended up as “Only Jane.” I was up to the last chapter of the book, and I knew what I wanted to do but I hadn’t quite finished it, when I went to a writers’ conference and met a woman who taught writing classes. I told her that I had never been to a writing class of hers but that I understood that she would critique a story. Would she take my manuscript and critique it? So she did. When she brought it back to me, all she said, “Why don’t you finish this and send it to my agent?” Which I did and her agent sold it. The acceptance letter from the editors (Thomas Nelson and Son) said they liked the story very much. But after they’d gone through all their committee’s readers, they had come to the conclusion there was one chapter that was just a little too strong for the rest of the book and would I do something to change it? That one chapter was the original story—the middle chapter (laughs].

RB: What a process.

MC: In all my stories—I always start with something real, even though in the end, there might be nothing real at all.. But I always start from something. Usually it’s from some ridiculous little situation that happened in real life, either in my childhood or in my children’s lives. RB: You have a great feeling for children.

MC: Well, [chuckles] when this letter came—the final acceptance of the story--we were all sitting at the dinner table and. I proudly read the editor's words aloud: "I must say, you have a wonderful feeling for children," I read, and looked up. My kids' faces were expressionless. About three minutes later I overheard my daughter on the telephone talking in whispers with her girlfriend. Giggling, she was saying, "They think my mother knows all about children." [laughs]

RB: Let's stop for just a second so I can check the time on the tape.

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein and I'm back on tape two with Molly Cone at Molly's house, and it is still May 22, 2001. We're continuing Molly's oral history. And Molly, do I still have your permission to tape you?

MC: Yes, of course.

RB: Thank you very much. Okay.

MC: We were talking about my children's reactions to a writing mother. Although I love writing, I've always hated writing letters. And one reason I hated writing letters is because I have such terrible handwriting. I never really learned cursive writing well. [chuckles] I remember once sitting at the dining room table autographing some books. One of the bookstores had sent them for me to pre-autograph before they were to be sold. I was busy doing that when my son came home from school.

RB: Eckstein.

MC: Eckstein School. That's right. He came into the dining room, looked at me and said, "Hey, Mom, what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, I'm autographing these books." And he said, "You mean you're spoiling those nice new books by writing in them?" [laughter]

Another time I was working in my study on the balcony—we had an open balcony that looked over the two-floor living room, and I had my desk and books and shelves there. At the entry of our house, you go down to the living room and up to the balcony and the bedrooms. I always tried to finish working by about three o'clock, and that day I was working a little late and trying to finish something before Gary came home. With my head bent over the typewriter, I heard the door open and two little boys come in. Gary and a friend with him. They pounded up the six or seven steps and stopped. "Hey, what's your mom doing?" I heard the friend say. Sounding a little embarrassed, Gary said, "Oh, she's writing stories." "You mean, your mom is sitting at the typewriter writing stories right now?" I looked around. Gary had screwed up his mouth and was saying out the corner of his mouth in a whisper, "Her handwriting isn't very good." [laughter]

I'd like to talk a little about another book I wrote. This was when Susan, our first daughter, was a teenager. We had noticed that she walked around the house as if she had a glass ball on her head. You know, she could see and she could be seen but she didn't seem to hear anything anybody said to her. She spent most of her time in her room with the door closed. Several years later I decided that I would write a story about this growing up time. I had read accounts of how an Indian boy went out into to the forest to find his vision on his way to becoming a grown man. I thought, in a way, this was exactly what all kids do at a certain age. They kind of hide from the world, go within themselves and when they're ready to come out-- they've passed—gone through that passage from childhood to the threshold of maturity. I recalled this time with Susan. I wanted to write a story using that somehow. Because I didn't want to hurt Susan's feelings and I didn't want to trespass on her private world—I decided to make the story about a boy instead of a girl. And so I wrote this book called Simon. Let me read what it says on the jacket flap. This 'Do you want people to think you're crazy?' Simon's father shouted when he saw his teenage son standing in the bathroom with a fishbowl on his head imagining what it would be like in outer space. Simon thought about it. 'I don't care,' he had to say. Simon spent the whole first week of summer saying, 'I don't care.' And then he decided

to escape, escape from his parents' bewildered whispering, from the everyday happenings that seemed so unimportant to him into his own private thoughts and imaginings where he felt happiest. In my story, Simon finds a wreck of a car behind a big outdoor sign in an empty lot. This is where he spends most of his time that summer. When I finished the book Susan was off in college, and Gary was down in San Francisco. He was working there and rooming with a friend—the son of a friend of ours. They had a house in San Francisco together, one of those big apartments. I must have sent a copy to Susan. If I did I didn't hear anything. But I sent one too to Gary. Then one day a letter came to me from Rob, Gary's friend. It said, "I read the book that you sent to Gary and I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed it. If I hadn't known that it was about Gary, I would have thought it was about me." And he said he knew the book was about Gary – because Gary had told him it was.

RB: Isn't that something?

MC: And I thought, how strange it was that I had never noticed that stage in Gary's life as I did with Susan. I never told either of them that the story came from Susan, not Gary.

RB: You know, it occurs to me we should probably just mention your children, their names and when they were born —

MC: We were married September 9, 1939, a week after Hitler marched into Poland, and Susan was born December 22, 1941 a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. We were living in an apartment in Seattle when she was born—the city was in complete blackout and we didn't have a car. Actually we didn't have anything. [chuckles]

RB: Could you describe that in some—tell us about that.

MC: One of our friends, whose parents lived in an apartment below, came in one day—I guess it was a Sunday—and said, "Jerry, where's Pearl Harbor?" "Well, that's in Hawaii. Jerry said. "That's where we have our Navy." Then she said, "Pearl Harbor's just been

bombed."

Susan was born a few weeks after that. That was the time when they interned all the Japanese in Seattle, which was really a terrible, terrible time, because so many of these families had been born right here. They were Americans. They had nothing to do with Japan.

RB: Just to clarify, you and Jerry were living in Seattle at this point.

MC: We never lived in Tacoma. We moved immediately to Seattle when we married. When Susan was born, we were living in an apartment at 13th and Union. I began to have pains in the middle of the night. We didn't have a car and there were no street lamps (because of the war, all street lights were turned off. We went to the hospital in a cab—it was completely black -- a very eerie time. Susan was born during that blackout, December 22, 1941. Our second child was born five years later, 1946. We were living on 49th Street. It was our first house, a little two-bedroom house on a dead-end street right next to Viewridge School. We had company that night. I was serving something and I went into the kitchen and started to feel these pains. So we said good bye to our friends. "It is labor day and I'm going to the hospital."

RB: Was it really Labor Day?

MC: Yes. It was September 2, 1946. We went to the hospital and Gary was born. And 10 years later—1956— I had my third child. There were five years between my first and second child, 10 years between my second and third— which made 15 years between my first child and my third. When Ellen entered school, I was the oldest mother in her class. [chuckles]

RB: How old were you when Ellen was born?

MC: Let's see, how old was I? I was about 38. My hair had just started to turn silvery. But it just looked blonder. Ellen was born April 23, 1956.

RB: Did you notice any major differences in having children at those different ages?

MC: Yes, our youngest child, Ellen, always felt that she was an only child. By the time she was old enough to realize what was going on Gary was in high school. After he graduated high school, he went to Israel for a year before he entered the University of Washington. So in a way Ellen did grow up as an only child in the house most of the time..

We celebrated Jewish holidays with two other families, the Schrieber family and the Kaplan family. We always celebrated the holidays together. Together, we'd go to the Oregon Coast for over New Years. The Oregon Coast has a wonderful shoreline—tremendous winter storms. Later we went to the Washington Coast. The three families, the Schriebers, Kaplans and our family, considered ourselves one whole family. Once our kids started growing and marrying and we started having all these grandchildren we had to separate for the holiday dinners because there were just too many to seat at one table.

RB: So you celebrated Jewish holidays with these families?

MC: Yes. Always for Pesach seders and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the break-the-fasts. We'd divide up the cooking and go to each house in turn.

RB: Were you affiliated with the synagogue at that time?

MC: Temple Beth Am. The -- we, the Schriebers and the Kaplans helped start Temple Beth Am.

RB: Is that right? Can you tell us a little bit about that? I know—

MC: Jerry and I belonged to Temple De Hirsch at the time. Susan was confirmed at Temple De Hirsch.. But Temple De Hirsch was so large—we never really felt part of it. So we started to talk about having Friday night services here in the Viewridge neighborhood with the Schriebers and the Kaplans and a few other families.

RB: Which is in the Northeast part of Seattle, for those who are outside of Seattle, Viewridge. I'm just thinking for those who are outside of Seattle. Do you just want to kind of mark the boundaries?

MC: The northeast section of Seattle is very close to the university district. Albert Schrieber was a professor at the university. Chuck Kaplan was a pediatrician but he had a lot to do with the university. Both the Schriebers and the Kaplans came from back east after the war. They were some of the new professional families who were moving in shortly after the war ended. We met the Kaplans at a party given by our friends, Jeanette and Water Lowen. The Lowens lived in Laurelhurst. The Kaplans bought a house on 50th. They still live there—6548, same as their telephone number. And we built a house at the end of that block on 50th at 6500, and the Schriebers lived around the corner.

We met the Schriebers this way -- one morning I and my two-year-old son Gary were visiting Lil Kaplan. Jerry and I were living on 49th Street. Gary and I had walked over and we were sitting in the Kaplan living room. But Gary wanted to go home. "Go sit on the front step in the sunshine," I said to my little boy. "Just sit there and I'll be there in just a few minutes. So out he went. The front door was open and Lil and I continued talked for awhile before I left. But when I went out Gary was not there. I looked up and down the street and didn't see him. And, you know, I really didn't know what to do. Then I saw this very tall, lovely woman coming toward me. And she was holding Gary in her arms. (He evidently had decided to go home by himself). That's how I met Jeannette Schrieber. From then on, the Schriebers, the Kaplans and the Cones became almost one family.

RB: Isn't that something? And so, you would meet together to—

MC: Well, we'd have dinners together. We went on vacations together. . We took our families to the ocean together or we'd go on picnics together. And we celebrated the Pesach holidays and Rosh Hashanah and the Yom Kippur dinners together. We'd go from one house to another, in turn, you know, through the years. As I said, we continued doing that until just a very few years ago. I began to have so many grandchildren—we couldn't all fit around one table. Jerry and I felt that we were overwhelming these holiday dinners with our offspring [laughter] and we started to divide up.

RB: Now, how did the founding of Beth Am come about?

MC: Oh, I started telling you that and got thrown off, didn't I?

RB: I interrupted you.

MC: All right. At that time (1956) there was only one reform congregation in the city of Seattle and that was Temple De Hirsch. My husband, Jerry, and Dorothy Saran went to the Temple De Hirsch board with the suggestion that the board start a branch of Temple De Hirsch in the north end. They listened very politely but they were in the throes of planning an enlargement to their own temple—and they didn't want to have anything to do with it. Jerry came home and said, "Let's start it ourselves then. We (several interested families) put an ad in the "University Herald" asking anyone who was interested in starting a North End congregation to come to a meeting at Hillel. We set up about 25 chairs at Hillel on a Friday night and about 100 people came. From then on—well, you know, we had Friday night service. We met there for a little while and then starting making plans for our Temple Beth Am congregation. Most wanted to start a reform congregation —several families came who came wanted a conservative congregation and eventually they started Beth Shalom. We rented the Unitarian Church for our services the first year or two, hired a chaplain from Fort Lewis, and affiliated with UAHC.

RB: [unclear]

MC: We were a very independent group. Wearing yalmukes was completely open. You could wear it if you wanted to or not. We definitely decided not to have a sisterhood or any women's auxiliary because we wanted both women and men to share responsibilities equally.

RB: Very interesting.

MC: A few years ago I noticed that the Temple Beth Am was forming a sisterhood, and thinking "Why are they doing that?" [chuckles]

RB: So times have changed. How has it evolved over time with Beth Am? What changes have you noticed for better or worse?

MC: Beth Am was a congregation that attracted a lot of independent people, a lot of the university people, a lot of professional people and a lot of mixed marriage couples too, which was fine. And it grew. During the first years at a board meeting we discussed whether we should cut our temple off when it reached 250 families. Well, [chuckles] it now has almost 800. It's so easy to decide to do that and so difficult to do, you know. So, we just continued to grow with both men and women on the board. Women were very active at Temple Beth Am without a sisterhood.

RB: That's wonderful.

RB: How did it [unclear] the community for you and your friends? How was it?

MC: At our first open house or dedication of Temple Beth Am, we sent invitations to the rabbis of all the denominations throughout the city to come. No orthodox rabbi came The orthodox, you know, have never really recognized the reform movement, either here or in Israel, and in Israel it's still a very big problem. True Judaism, we felt, changed with the

times—had to change with the times -- preserving the values of Judaism while adjusting the rituals or customs to modern life. As reform Jews, we firmly believe that. Now, many reform congregations, as Temple Beth Am has been doing, are bringing back yalmukes and the tallism and the weaving back and forth when you're praying. Beth Shalom—are you Beth Shalom? Beth Shalom, being conservative always had that. Now more and more women are very much a part of that, aren't they?

RB: Yes.

MC: Today, if you would go into Temple Beth Am, you probably wouldn't find it much different than the services at Beth Shalom.

RB: So there's more Hebrew that's being introduced into the service?

MC: Well, we always did have a certain amount. But also being introduced is more of the rituals, the wearing of the yalmukes and the tallism and a lot of singing, which we never had. I'm just wondering where reform is going from here, because it seems to be going into conservatism. The conservatives always preserved the rituals. The reform did much more change. But now reform and conservative seems to be coming closer together. The orthodox are still fencing themselves off. What is going to happen in the future, I don't know. It's just interesting to see.

RB: Fascinating.

MC: It is fascinating, the kind of changes that are coming about. I wrote "Dance Around the Fire" when our friend's children were turning orthodox.. The story is completely fiction, of course.

RB: I've read it. It's marvelous. "Dance Around the Fire." It's terrific.

MC: I was particularly pleased with the title. I had been doing a lot of writing for the UAHC Press—for Sunday schools. I was fascinated with the story of the fire—of Moses coming down the mountain and finding that the people had made this golden calf. That he made them grind the calf into powder, and drink it (made into a potion with water). I was so fascinated that in my book I used orange juice as the symbolic golden calf drink.

I was also fascinated with what I've always considered the mystery of being Jewish. I had written quite a lot for the UHC Press. One time, the UAHC editor called me and said, "What would you like to do next?" What would I like to do next? I had been reading something of Sigmund Freud and run across a letter he had written when he was seventy years old. In it, he said: "Only to my Jewish nature did I owe the two qualities which had become indispensable to me on my hard road." Because he was a Jew, he said he was free to question all things and, being a Jew, he was used to standing his ground in the face of all opposition.

What evolved out of this conversation with my editor was a book called The Mystery of Being Jewish. It is stories of different Jews-- some who converted or tried to convert and some who didn't. All the questions that I ever had, I tried to answer in the research of this book. I started with: Do I have a Jewish nature? I had realized that I did but didn't really know what that nature was.

RB: How did you make your choices in this book?

MC: Well, I had a hard time. I read a lot. First of all, I wanted people who would be understandable to kids—twelve, thirteen-year-old kids today. I wanted a mixture of people. I wanted some women and I wanted some people like Theodore Herzl. How did I figure it out? I probably have it stated in the introduction to the book. I chose people whose Jewishness was a part of their life, whether they recognized it or wanted it or even knew it was there. I chose Woody Allen as one subject because he always said that his art had nothing to do with his Jewishness. If you read his stuff, [laughter] you know, it's

filled with Jewish values, and Jewish background. Even when he is in conflict with them, it's filled with them.

RB: Did you interview these people at all or did you—

MC: Very few of them. I did talk to some. Many were no longer living. I did interview Ruth Westheimer, [chuckles] the sex doctor.

RB: Oh, [unclear].

MC: I was in New York and she had agreed to interview with several people. UAHC arranged it so that I was one of them. There were three or four other people. She's very quick and very staccato. We sat there in a room in her publisher's house. The first thing she announced was "Do not ask me any questions about my childhood." That's what I wanted to ask her, of course. None of her answers to the questions asked were very satisfactory. I got such a different impression from meeting her than I did from some of her writings. What I used of her childhood was what she had written. I thought it was a good idea to have someone like her —she was so different from anyone else.

RB: And so willing to talk about sexuality.

MC: Yes, oh, that's all she wanted to talk about and I wasn't as interested in that as in her own life.

RB: Yes.

MC: The medical physicist—Rosalyn Yalow --I didn't meet her but I talked to her over the telephone several times. I corresponded with Marion Mendelow, this woman in Israel. Barbra Streisand—I talked to her secretary. Many of these people were impossible to talk to although I had some contact with each them -- not always personal.

RB: And when you approached them or their secretaries or—what did you seek out from them? What information were you looking for?

MC: Let me think—let me try to remember what it was I was asking them. Mostly it was—how being Jewish affected their choices of career or actually, the career itself. Rosalyn Yalow, a medical physicist, was a very bright woman who kept kosher, was very orthodox and managed it all just fine. Golda Meir, was a marvelous subject, having been an American woman. When I went to Israel, Golda Meir was no longer living but her secretary was. She was a flighty little woman. She had been only 15 years old when Golda Meir had hired her. Unfortunately, she wasn't very helpful because she looked upon Golda Meir as an angel on a pedestal. In her memory, Meir was perfect. What I wanted to find out were the strong and weak things, the good and bad, the quirks of personality, the things that weren't all just wonderful, because how can you write about somebody unless you know that. There's nobody who's just perfect.

RB: That's right.

MC: She was really no help at all. [chuckles] But I was able to see Meir's letters and get into the archives and see the things that she had done. So most of what I found came from research. Andrew Goodman—I included because he was so young and courageous.

[END OF SIDE 1,TAPE 2]

MC: Maurice Sendak—did I ever talk with him? I don't think so. But I always able to talk to somebody who was close if not to the person.

RB: A marvelous selection. So do you remember what—how you went through the selection process? What were you thinking when you were looking at—

MC: Well, mostly I wanted to see how their being Jewish affected their lives. Most of them were very outgoing in all the things they wrote and said and did. It was easy to see the Jewish influence even in someone like Woody Allen who maintained being Jewish t hadn't affected his life at all. Barbra Streisand—was so definitely affected by a mother who had favored the other sister -- which is so interesting.

RB: In writing this book, how did it impact you over all?

MC: I think it just gave testimony to what I had always felt, that being Jewish is woven into your life. It's just part of your life. Even those who convert to something else are still Jewish in their souls, I feel. Now, why I feel like that, I don't know.

RB: Yes.

MC: Did you ever know Arthur Lagawier? He died not too long ago.

RB: How do you spell his name?

MC: L-a-g-a-w-i-e-r—Lagawier. He was a man who on both sides—paternal and maternal – came from a long list of rabbis and scholars. And he was a brilliant man. He called himself an orthodox atheist. Though he was never ordained, he had all the orthodox education of a rabbi and a scholar. He's not one of the characters in the book but part of my introduction came out of what he told me when we talked. I have this here. (Reading). It is something inside the individual that makes him a Jew, said the philosopher and theologian, Franz Rosensweig. He called it something infinitesimally small, yet immeasurably large. Perhaps more than any, he knew what he was talking about. Brought up as an assimilated Jew, Rosensweig at one time decided to convert to Christianity. He changed his mind on a fateful Yom Kippur evening when that something within caused him to reclaim his Jewishness. And that mysterious something present in the Jewish makeup was noted by others who lived long before Rosensweig. In the Yiddish language it was called, 'Dos pintela Yid.' Yid is the Yiddish word for Jew. Pintela

is the Yiddish word for dot, originally meaning the tiny point that stood for the letter Yid of the Hebrew alphabet. Dos pintela Yid translates into the dot of a Jew and was used to mean the quintessence of one's Jewish identity according to a Yiddish legend told to me by an elderly Jewish scholar. (That scholar was Arthur Lagawier.) According to Yiddish legend, even though the dot may be no greater than half the size of a pomegranate seed, it has the capability to bloom within the self and from it may come--who knows?'" [chuckles] And that's what Lagawier actually said.

RB: Marvelous.

MC: I'm not a historian—and I'm not an expert researcher. But when I'm looking for something—not dates and history and all that-- but an idea, I just completely lose myself. I mean, I'm completely enthralled by it. I think that's one of the really wonderful things about being a writer. When you are sitting at the word processor, or typewriter or even with a pencil, and you're writing, you are completely taken up by it. I sit down and work on something 9:30 in the morning and when I look up again it's 12:30. Wherever those hours have gone, I don't know. I have no feeling of sitting in a chair. I'm in another world and that's what I love about writing. What you're working on completely transports you.. That kind of philosophy (Freud's and Lagawier's) really spoke to me. So that's where this book comes from.

RB: It's really, to me, so meaningful to hear you talk about your creative process.

MC: I hardly even think of it as a creative process.

RB: So how do you think of it then?

MC: I don't know. It's just a part of living because I think you get those same feelings whatever you're doing. It doesn't have to be writing. It could be building a chair or baking a cake. It could be anything. It is so fascinating that one can be so part of something else and still be oneself, you know. As I said, I am not an historian, I'm not a philosopher. I'm

not anything really. In fact—(in my late teen years) I was taking some classes at College of Puget Sound, which is now the University of Puget Sound, and I was sitting there talking to one of the advisors. He asked me what I was interested in. "You know," I said, "I don't really know." And he said, "I think you're a dilettante." I thought that was an insult [chuckles] but it's probably quite true.

RB: What—

MC: A dilettante is someone who is never deeply into anything but is slightly into everything. I don't know whether I'm a dilettante or not but I do know that I feel deeply about certain ideas which express themselves in many ways.

RB: Which of those ideas could you share with us now? [several words unclear]

MC: Well, I think one of them is the business of being Jewish. You know, one can never really express it but it's there. It is really there. You don't have to be kosher and orthodox, and you don't have to go through all the rituals -- if it's there, it's there. I think what attracted me about reform thinking is the idea of that essential dot, the little nucleus. You know what that is and you're secure in that. That's very important to me.

RB: This is Roz Bornstein and I'm with Molly Cone at Molly's home in Seattle, Washington and the date today is May 29, 2001. We're here today to complete Molly's oral history for the "Weaving Women's Words" Project for the Jewish Women's Archive. And Molly, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

MC: Yes, of course.

RB: Thank you very much. So, let's see, where shall we start today?

MC: You asked a little about my Aunt Lena. She was an aunt on my father's side—she was not my father's sister but related. And I don't exactly know how. When we grew up,

living in Tacoma—2620 North Puget Sound—(I'm surprised to realize that I remember that and our old telephone number too, Proctor 1506)-- she would often come to visit. After my father died and my sister married and she and her husband took over our family home (in which I, my brother and two younger sisters were living), I decided that I really didn't want to live with them. So I asked my Aunt Lena whether I could come to live with her. I had the feeling that this would be okay with her. She was not a particularly lovable aunt but she was an interesting person in herself. She was quite tall, large boned, with very dark hair, which she wore severely pulled into a bun at the back of her head. She had dark eyebrows, very strong eyebrows—very dark eyes. She and her husband, Harry, had one daughter—Rose who was always called Rosie. Aunt Lena dressed Rosie meticulously. Even when she brought Rosie over to our house to play with us. Children didn't wear jeans in those days. I don't remember what we wore but I'm sure it was just cotton dresses or cotton skirts and socks and bloomers. Rosie was of the age of my sister, Phyllis, who was four or five years older than I was-- and maybe Rosie was even a little older. Aunt Lena would bring Rosie to visit dressed usually in a white dress with a sash around the middle, a big pink or blue satin bow. A real dressy dress. [chuckles] When Rosie wanted to come out in the backyard to play with us her mother would invariably call after her: "Don't get dirty." Aunt Lena was crazy clean. Her own house was absolutely meticulous. When we went to visit we were only allowed to go through the back door. The front door was used only for the rabbi and very special guests. Aunt Lena was a very neat woman and she had very high standards, and she expected all her friends and relatives to meet her standards. The kind of feeling I always had, was that the drawers in our house had to be clean because Aunt Lena would open them and look inside. She had a very critical eye.

When Rosie would come and play outside, our aim was to help Rosie get dirty. [laughter] We tried to get her into games that would mess her up. Rosie had a lot of qualities of her mother. She was beautiful. She was really beautiful. She had the same dark hair and dark eyes as her mother and lovely features, and she was tall. She married

Abedeaux Friedman, who unfortunately died when their two boys were fairly young.

RB: Do you remember what year that was, or approximately?

MC: It would be in the ‘30s. The two sons, Jules and Harold, were so different from each other. Jules was rather quiet and unassuming like his grandfather. Harold was like his mother and his grandmother. When Aunt Lena and her husband Harry came to our house for dinner, Aunt Lena would pick up her husband’s plate and dish out his food for him as you would do for a little kid. [chuckles]. Harold was very bright, very outgoing, very talkative, very handsome—cute little boy. The reason I’m telling you this is because a bit later I want to tell you about Aunt Lena’s funeral and Harold’s eulogy to his grandmother. Aunt Lena was such an interesting person that I made her my model for a character in the book “A Promise is a Promise.”. Did you read that book?

RB: Yes.

MC: She was a wonderful cook and baker; Aunt Lena was. She made these wonderful pastries. Her specialty was tagelach—do you know what tagelach are?

RB: No, I don’t.

MC: It’s a rich cookie dough rolled out into long strips—each strip rolled around a piece of candied ginger or a walnut meat and made into a little ball, baked, then stored in a honey syrup.

RB: Oh, sounds delicious.

MC: Delicious, kind of sticky, but delicious. Aunt Lena would make taglach for all the bar mitzvahs. In that generation, to be asked to bring something to a special occasion was an honor. If you weren’t asked, it was a dishonor. [chuckles] I think I used that in the book somehow. It was the pattern of the times in my mother’s generation -- at parties, such as

weddings or bar mitzvahs—to contribute specialties.

RB: Wonderful.

MC: So every time there was a bar mitzvah celebration, Aunt Lena and other good cooks would contribute their favorite pastries. It was a very small Jewish community in Tacoma , although divided into two factions, the temple and the shul. After my father died when I moved over to Aunt Lena's house, she gave me what had been her daughter Rosie's room. Aunt Lena's house was very neat—Oriental rug in the living room and very nice furniture and satin drapes—a living room seldom used unless company came. Aunt Lena was very sweet to me, very nice to me. She had a shower party for me when I became engaged to Jerry. I moved in with her just a few months before I married Jerry. One of the first things Aunt Lena did when I moved in with her was to show me where the dust mop was. I was supposed to make my own bed, of course, and dust the furniture and mop the floor in my room. Which I did conscientiously and I thought I was doing it very well until I came home from school early one day and found her re-mopping and re-dusting my room. I realized then that I was not up to her standards (though she was kind enough to hide the fact.)

After Jerry and I were married and after our first baby was born, Aunt Lena came to see us in our little apartment in Seattle. I immediately said, "What can I give you-- tea, coffee?" "Nothing," she said. "Nothing." So I took her at her word. I didn't make tea, and afterwards I heard she plaintively told somebody that I hadn't served her anything. [chuckles]

RB: Yes.

MC: I realized then that in the mind of Aunt Lena, "No, don't bother" was a polite way of saying, "Yes, thank you." [chuckles]

RB: Was that typical of women her age?

MC: Oh, yes, in that generation. Aunt Lena had very strict standards, not only for herself but for everybody else. And she lived those standards—if anyone was having an affair she'd be very ready to give them advice. To give a proper affair, "You must do this and you must have that, and you should have this and you should have that." [chuckles]. I lived with her for two or three months. She was very good to me—and I've always had a very warm feeling about her, even though she had a few little porcupine quills to her character. When she died—she was buried in the cemetery in Tacoma and I went over there for the funeral. For some reason—Jerry couldn't come with me. My sisters were there, of course. And her grandson—I can't remember whether Jules was there but her son, Harold, was there.. Before he entered university, Harold stayed with us for a week. And when he stayed—I'm jumping all over

RB: That's fine.

MC: We were living on 50th here in Seattle. And my husband, Jerry, had just put in a new speaker system. Double speakers one on each side of the room. Jerry was showing Harold his speakers and how they worked and how if you put them, one in one corner and the other in another corner the voices would come together and give you wonderful sound.

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein and we're back with tape—or rather, mini disk three and I'm here with Molly Cone. The date is still May 29, 2001 and we're in Seattle, Washington for the "Weaving Women's Words" Project for the Jewish Women's Archive. Molly, do I have your permission to continue taping you?

MC: Yes.

RB: Thank you. We were talking about Harold's visit to Seattle prior to his entrance at the University of Washington.

MC: As I said, Jerry was showing him our speaker system and Harold said, “Oh, I have a speaker system like that at home.” “You have?” said Jerry, obviously surprised. “Two speakers,” said Harold. “My mother speaking to me from the kitchen and my grandmother from the bedroom.” We laughed and we laughed. His mother and grandmother were both strong voiced women. [chuckles]

Now for Aunt Lena’s funeral. There was a big crowd and Rabbi Rosenthal conducted the funeral and said many nice things about Aunt Lena. Then he said: “We all loved Mrs. Rotman. But I’ve got to tell this. As everybody knows, I hate tagelach. I’ve never liked tagelach. Every time we’d have any event at the temple, Mrs.Rotman would bring tagelach. She’d put the plate down on the table and she’d say, ‘Rabbi, taste it. You have to taste it.’ And I’d say, ‘You know, I don’t really like them.’ But she’d insist. So I had to taste them and I don’t like tagelach.” It was a lovely appropriate story for everyone knew Aunt Lena and everyone laughed. Then Harold read a clever essay that he had written about his grandmother and made everyone laugh some more. This is the first funeral I had ever been to that people were laughing -- not at the deceased but in honor of her. She was a unique, wonderful woman with a very strong personality. I came home and told Jerry, “This is the happiest funeral I’ve ever been to but it’s not because she died; it’s just because it was so enjoyable.” So that’s my story about Aunt Lena. [chuckles] She was a very interesting woman.

Now, I think you asked me something about my procedure of home life when I started to write in earnest. I had a pretty good procedure. Let me back up a little bit to my pattern of working. Just as soon as the kids went off to school, I would get to my typewriter and start working and not stop until the kids came home from school. I had to have dinner pretty much ready because there wasn’t much time for cooking, you know, after they came home from school. So what I did was shop once a week and cook once a week. When I shopped I’d buy meat and a chicken and other things —enough for three or four main dishes. I’d do all the cooking at one time in one day or one morning and get it all

properly wrapped and put everything in the freezer. I'd buy bread six, eight loaves at a time and put them all in the freezer. And that worked very well because then I could take the cooked dish out of the freezer, pop it into the oven, and have dinner ready in a very short time. Adding a salad and doing a vegetable didn't really take much time. And, of course, I cleaned once a week as my mother had always done too, with a cleaning woman to help. I had the house really organized so that I could spend time writing. One day we were sitting in the dining room at dinner—Jerry and I with our three children, Gary and Susan and Ellen. Jerry and I were talking—nostalgically—remembering the dishes our mothers made. I talked about the taste of my mother's delicate sponge cakes. I recalled how she would sit on a kitchen chair, the bowl in her lap, and with a wooden spoon stir the egg yolks and sugar until the batter was lemon colored— almost whitish before it was ready. Jerry remembered his mother's roast chicken, how she would put the chicken in the oven and there would be these little brown roasted potatoes and they'd be sitting all around the chicken and they would be brown and roasted and crisp. We were going on and on about this, back and forth. At first pause, our son Gary put in: "Do you know what I'll remember when I grow up and talk about what I remember about my mother's cooking?" Feeling pleasingly expectant, I eagerly asked, "What? What will you remember?" Gary reached out and picked up the basket of bread from the table—"Bread, half frozen in the middle," he said. Some of my funniest memories come from Gary and I don't think he ever realized how funny he was. [laughs] Anyway, that's my story about arranging my household.

RB: You know, that's actually fairly significant though because you had a system. I mean, nowadays, we often will buy fast food. So was that much of a custom back then? Did people eat out as much?

MC: I don't think I was ever in a restaurant until I was about fifteen years old. The Depression started around 1929. The '30s when I was a girl was really a depressed time and there was no fast food in those days, except hamburgers—but there wasn't all this

fast food that we know of now.

My mother's house was really a well-regulated house. My mother and grandmother had this whole system about the house. It was, as I said, a big house with four bedrooms plus a third floor—a small bedroom way up on the third floor and a big, big basement with an extra stove. In fact, when the kitchen stove was changed from a wood to electric the wood stove went down into the basement. On holidays my grandmother would use both stoves. My father would get kosher meat and chickens and salamis from Seattle. My grandmother regularly made challah. She usually made bagels too but sometimes my father would bring bagels from Brenner's Bakery in Seattle. For fresh fish, he'd go to the markets downtown. We always had a lot of fish. My mother did her big grocery shopping once a week so that's probably where I got that. She did the washing on Monday (washing for a family of a grandmother and two parents and five kids can be a lot of washing). My mother had a washing machine but there were no dryers in those days. She'd hang the wash on lines in the backyard. On Tuesday she'd do the ironing. Wednesday—I think she'd go to meetings. Friday, of course, was cleaning—not only cleaning day but baking day for the Sabbath. My mother would do the cleaning and my grandmother would bake the challahs and the little bulkahs. Then after all the baking was done my grandmother washed the kitchen floor and lay newspapers over it to keep it clean for awhile. Saturday was the day people came to visit. We not only had people come to visit on Saturday but Saturdays and Sundays were the days our friends and relatives from Seattle would come. We also had relatives come from Detroit. I just loved it when we had overnight guests. [chuckles I talked about my Aunt Fannie—remember?

RB: In an article you did.

MC: Her family lived in Seattle for years and then moved to Detroit. Her husband drove a fruit truck—from California to Seattle—then they moved to Detroit. My Uncle George opened a supermarket there. Aunt Fannie and her three kids and her sister, Lydia, and

Vivian, Lydia's little girl, would often come and visit us. We kids would all double up in the beds. My mother would put four kids in one bed, two at the top and two at the bottom. We didn't have sleeping bags in those days.

Aunt Fannie 's supreme desire was to be on the stage. She was rather short and I remember her as being sort of zoftig. She was very outgoing, very dramatic. She had big blue eyes and she'd roll her eyes and she could roll her words too. She could imitate anyone. Almost from the time her three kids were born she had them taking dancing lessons. Every time they came to visit, they'd put on a show for us. And, of course, Aunt Fannie would insist that all of us kids be part of it. Well, we were a very understated family. None of us had any dramatic qualities. None of us could sing. [laughs] We did have a piano and my sister Phyllis could play it. As I said, we had this front room and living room with sliding glass doors between them. We'd use one room as the stage and sit in the other room. Under Aunt Fannie's direction, the glass doors would open and the show would begin. Aunt Fannie would insist that all of us kids say a piece, a poem or something. Well, we all just hated it. [chuckles] We loved watching—but we hated having to perform. My sister, Evelyn, would absolutely refuse to be part of any of this. She'd run upstairs and hide in a closet [chuckles] or somewhere they couldn't find her. My Aunt Fannie never realized that getting up to perform in front of people wasn't the thing that we would most love to do. [laughs] She had trained her older two —Billy and Paralee (Dickey was the youngest)—to do an exotic dance They were beautiful children. She had made their costumes—a little street girl costume for her five year-old, with a tight short skirt and a tight little bandola and her hair pulled up in curls. [laughs] And they would put on this kind of dance which would end with Billy, who was a couple of years older than Paralee, dragging Paralee across the floor by her hair. And we'd clap and clap and clap. We really had wonderful times.

RB: Was entertainment often at home? Did you—or did you go out much?

MC: The only real entertainment we had were the Saturday afternoon movies at the Proctor Street Blue Mouse Theater, which was about four or five blocks up the hill from our house. On Saturdays, they showed serials for kids.. Do you know what a serial is? They were action movies and they were often western stories. It always really annoyed me that at the end of the episode, the heroine was at the top of the cliff with the villain pushing her over. As the curtain closed she seemed to be falling, leaving us anxious to go back the next week to see what happened. But the next time she was at the top of the cliff and she was saved before falling. [laughter] I never had anyone to complain to but I thought that that was really cheating. So that's the kind of entertainment we had. My husband, Jerry, who lived in Seattle had a different experience. His mother would take him and his brother to the Orpheum Theater where they would have shows that were brought from New York—music and dancing and stand-up comedians. So he saw wonderful stuff when he was growing up. The only kind of theater I saw was when I went to a high school performance, or when my friend's mother, who was in an art group, would put on a play and invite me to come see it. As soon as Jerry and I married we started going to every play or performance we could afford. I remember we went to see Othello with Paul Robson. It was at the Olympic Hotel, which has since become the Four Seasons Olympic. On the University Street side where their main entrance is today, there was a small, legitimate theater.

RB: I think they had really big acts at this theater.

MC: Yes, they did. These were wonderful plays [unclear]. So I didn't really get into any drama and theater and music until after we were married and came to live in Seattle. We'd go even though when my husband was making $15 a week and I had no job. [chuckles] So you see that we really didn't get good seats anywhere we went, but we did try to do a lot of things.

RB: It sounds like there wasn't much travel between Tacoma and Seattle.

MC: There was a lot of travel actually when I was growing up.

RB: There was? Okay.

MC: We occasionally went to Seattle and our relatives often would come to Tacoma. We had relatives in Everett and in Seattle, and we had a big house and we had all these kids and very hospitable parents. I can remember relatives coming over from Seattle and we kids standing on the sidewalk in front of our house arguing about whether the mountain's name was Mount Tahoma or Mount Rainier. And, of course, we in Tacoma always lost such debates. But we really had some wonderful times. My two younger sisters had so little of that, you know.

RB: How old were they when your mother died?

MC: Well, let's see. Estelle is about five years younger than I am and Evelyn about three years younger. I was in high school when my mother died. Evelyn and Estelle were best friends as well as sisters. In those days "the smart one" was my sister, Phyllis; "the shy one", my sister, Evelyn (whose baby picture won a beauty prize); and "the baby," my sister, Estelle. [chuckles] Floyd was "the boy." and I was 'the middle one'.

RB: Well, you mentioned a beauty—a beauty contest.

MC: When she was little, Evelyn's photograph was entered in a most beautiful child contest, and her picture won.

RB: Was this just for girls or were boys—

MC: I think it was for babies. My sister, Evelyn, was the one who had the most difficult time of us all growing up. Her confidante and lifelong best friend was her younger sister Estelle. Today, for Evelyn's kind of shyness, and for the way I lisped as a child, parents take you to a psychologist or a psychiatrist or a consultant. But in those days when you

had some difficulty you were expected to grow out of it. That was the phrase -- "She'll grow out of it." Well, Evelyn did grow out of it to some extent, found a good job, and made a happy marriage. And I did too--despite my lisp, I had a very happy childhood.

And speaking of happy childhoods, our son, Gary—as I told you before, went to Israel for a year after he graduated high school and before he went into the University of Washington. The Jewish Agency had a program in Israel for young people.

RB: Is this the Federation?

MC: I think it was sponsored by the Jewish Agency -- probably some Federation money went into it. I don't know. It wasn't just for Seattle; it was for students all over the country. Gary went for a year and part of it was schooling in Jerusalem where they learned Hebrew and Jewish history and for part of it he worked on Masada with Yigal Yadeen. A wonderful, wonderful experience. Another part was living on a kibbutz—down near Bersheva. Gary wrote wonderful letters. He was a better correspondent than I was. After he returned home, he received a letter from a kibbutz friend addressed "To the boy with a happy childhood." That—instead of his name—the only indication I ever had that he had a happy childhood. [laughter] Gary was always a very conservative little boy. For example, when he'd go to a birthday party, he never wanted to play the games. Later I realized that he really was having a good time observing but he never wanted to be part of all those pin the tail on the donkey games. One of the snapshots he sent home from the kibbutz in Israel was a picture of him standing in front of a barn holding in his arms a tiny baby goat, just born. The letter with it said he had "helped born" this baby goat. And I looked at that photo and I knew he was going to be a wonderful parent to his own kids. He was cradling that little goat as if it were a newborn baby, which it was, of course. [chuckles] I always loved that snapshot.

RB: When was he there? What year?

MC: He graduated high school in 1964 so it was ‘64-’65.

RB: Now, how—as far as the creation of the state of Israel, how—? What was the response here in the Jewish community?

MC: Oh, that was a great day. The creation of Israel changed the consciousness, I would say, of most Jews. It changed their attitudes and, of course, the Holocaust, as well as Israel, changed their attitudes too. The Holocaust was the culmination of everything antisemitic that anybody had ever experienced. The establishment of Israel made Jews realize they were of as much value as anybody else. The state of Israel was a great delight to most Jews of my age.

RB: How much were people aware of the history leading up to the creation of the state of Israel here in Seattle, from the end of the war with refugees coming over—

MC: That’s just the chapter I’m now writing for the history book I’m working on.

RB: [unclear]

MC: What was too bad was that, and this is true not just in Seattle but all over the United States—Americans did not really realize what was happening over in Germany until the war started. All those years of the late ‘30s—you know, the Crystalnacht, and the barring Jewish children from German schools, the boycotting of Jewish businesses, and beatings, all the kind of thing that went on—burning of synagogues and burning of books—we really didn’t get much news of that until afterwards. We did get some stories but it just kind of filtered out to us that things were bad. We didn’t know how bad. We didn’t even realize that there were gas ovens—although we knew that the Germans had established concentration camps. I think the first one was established early in the 1930s. Hitler came in in 1933. The first concentration camp, I think, was created the next year. But we didn’t hear much of what was really happening and what we did hear was so unbelievable, people just didn’t want to believe it. I don’t remember any real talk of

what was happening in Germany at all. And maybe it's because I was just a teenager then and, wasn't paying much attention to anything going on. But I don't think there was a great deal of talk at the time. And I don't think that was just here; I think that was all over the United States. I think people didn't realize what was happening and when they did hear, the first thing they said was, "Well, that's impossible. That wouldn't happen. That couldn't happen." You know, that sort of thing. The people who came over early had not felt the full brunt of it. And many of them who stayed—even those who stayed and then had their lives end -- couldn't believe it was happening there. Well, much less could we believe it was happening when we heard about it here. Of the hundreds of survivors who landed in the Seattle area or in the Washington State area, very few would even talk about it—there were years of silence. I think almost 20 years passed before we started hearing the real stories from people who had suffered them. Now, of course, there is just a plethora of books and articles and movies about what had really happened and how people felt. But one must say, the creation of the state of Israel—the Holocaust and creation of state-- was the most powerful thing that happened in our whole lives. I think it's hard for the younger generations now to realize how important that was. The strife that's in Israel today—it's just hard to realize that all this time has gone by and they've not found a way to live peacefully. And being Jews, having been ostracized and pogromed almost to death, why they are allowing some of that same thing to happen to the Palestinians. That is something I just don't understand. Anyway, I think Israel is—was a great happening.

RB: You've been to Israel several times.

MC: Mm-hmm, several times.

RB: Do you remember the years or approximate years that—

MC: My first trip was in 1965. That was the same year Gary was there. The Jewish Agency sponsored a kind of a study tour, one month in Israel. It was very

reasonable—we would be visiting kibbutzim and cities, going from one end of the country to the other. So, knowing Gary was there, Jerry and I decided that I should go. I went with a friend, Ruth Rayman. Ruth and her husband, Mort, had two children, Jacob and Eva. Ruth and I went for the month—I think it was the month of July. And I just absolutely loved it. During my visit there, I met with Gary and visited his kibbutz. The group we went with stayed in many places. Part of the time we stayed at Kibbutz Gesher Haziv, north of Jerusalem. It was near a border and it was a very interesting kibbutz. In fact, I went back with Jerry a couple years later and we stayed there. We visited Israel again after that with our neighbors, our non-Jewish neighbors, showing them what Israel was like. On my first visit with Ruth -- Ruth loved being in Israel. I was loving it too, but I think I loved it in a different way than Ruth. Ruth was very restless here in Seattle and she loved hot weather. She liked to paint and draw. She was a very bright, very interesting woman and I think with a degree in social work. Anyway, Ruth and Mort lived several blocks from us in the Viewridge area and they were married ten years before they had children. Finally—finally, Jacob was born—their first child. And, oh, there was such celebration, you know, with the bris and the baby naming and everything. Then shortly after Jacob came, their daughter was born. Ruth was so excited about Israel and all that Israel stood for that, in 1968, her whole family moved to Jerusalem. And Ruth was in ecstasy. She believed it was important for Jews in the world to move to Israel to help Israel grow. Well, tragically, Jacob was killed in the Yom Kippur Two Day War. Jacob was supposed to come home for that weekend but a friend of his stationed at one of the border areas asked Jacob to trade with him because he wanted to go see his girlfriend. So Jacob traded with him. That border patrol was attacked and Jacob was killed. Jacob's death affected not only Ruth and Mort's lives but everybody that ever knew them. Ruth would not allow herself to come back. Jacob's body is there; they won't leave Israel. It's a very very sad thing.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 3]

MC: I think I told you what effect Israel had on me. You know, everything was Jewish. Buses were Jewish and the restaurants were Jewish and the trees were Jewish and [chuckles] I loved it. Two years later Jerry and I went to Israel together and we had a wonderful time. A few years after that -- it was before Jacob was killed—we made another trip to Israel with our neighbors Fran and Don Olson and this is how that happened: Our neighbors on the other side of the Olsons were Joyce and Roy Dubisch. Roy was a mathematics professor at the University of Washington. He took his family to Ethiopia—to Addis Abbaba where he worked with teachers of mathematics. They were developing books for teachers as well as students. The Dubishes had been gone a year when the Olsons said to us, “Let’s go visit them, and we said, “Sure, why not?” Our priorities in those early years was to see as much of the world as we could .

RB: Why is that? What was your passion for traveling?

MC: My husband, Jerry, is very curious. And a wonderful traveler because he is so curious. I had had no travel growing up at all, unlike kids today (all our grandchildren have been to Europe). [chuckles] But I loved seeing other places, seeing how other people lived, and seeing other kinds of people. Jerry and I both love travel. At the time we visited the Dubishes, we had been to many places but had never been to Ethiopia. So we went. Addis Abbaba is sort of one big main street with all the airline offices on each side of it. But a half a block off of each side—people are living under trees and in huts. Almost a Third World place. The Dubisch’s house was in an upscale residential district. It had about an eight-foot wall all around it and a night guard. It was a lovely kind of a stucco house—very open rooms. And Joyce was very happy there. This coffeepot is the coffeepot people use in Ethiopia. A coffee service in Ethiopia is much like the tea service in Japan. I mean, it’s a ceremony. You do it certain ways—grind it certain ways, boil it certain ways. The coffee grounds are put at the bottom of this pot. It has a round bottom and is set directly on the coals of the fire or on the burner of a stove. On that visit we decided that as long as we were going to Ethiopia we would also go to Israel. The

Olsons had never been to Israel and we'd been there twice. So we not only went to Ethiopia but to Israel and to Kenya as well —none of us had been to Kenya before. The picture outside our door is one that Jerry took in the Samburu Game Preserve in Kenya showing the acacia trees.

To get there we went to a travel agency in Nairobi which arranged for a two day stay at a lodge in the Samburu Game Preserve. We would start in the morning and be there for lunch, The agency gave us a car and their card with a prominently printed telephone number on it. Because of the wild animals around, their instructions were explicit: Follow the marked trail and don't get out of the car. So we started out and it was fascinating. The only trouble we had was with the "marked trail." It wasn't. Every time we came to a signpost it was knocked over. [laughs] We didn't know whether to go this way or that way. But it was early in the day and we didn't bother to worry about it. Gamboling all around us, were dick-dicks, little animals the size of dogs that looked like deers. When we came to a strange clay structure about 10 feet high, despite instructions we had to get out of the car to examine it.. We walked over to where it stood and found it to be an anthill. The sides were full of little doorways, little holes. It was beautiful—really—all made of mud, a fascinating thing. We got back into the car and kept going, guessing at which direction to take every time we came to a knocked-over signpost. It was way after lunchtime before we realized we were completely lost. Fran opened her purse and pulled out the agency card. "I have the telephone number of the car agency," she said brightly. After much laughter (no cell phones in those days), Fran peered at the sun on the horizon. "I think we go that way," she said, pointing. So not knowing what else to do, we followed her advice. When we finally came to the lodge area, the sun was setting and the proprietors were rounding up a rescue crew.

The Samburu Game preserve lodge was a delightful place. Mainly it was a building with a grass-covered, peaked roof, over a big round area open on all sides, furnished with tables and chairs for meals. We had a lovely little grass hut of a cottage with big

screened windows (no glass), and beds with mosquito netting draped all over them. We were told not to leave the cottage at night because of the wild animals roaming around, and not to open any of the window screens because of the monkeys who will come in. It was a wonderful trip. We enjoyed the people living there. I think we were about the only visitors at the time although there were quite a few cottages around. Anyway, we had a great time—the pictures hanging in the entrance way—did you notice them?

RB: I'll have to take a look.

MC: (With several framed photos taken in Kenya and Ethopia, a Kenya doll and an Ethiopian basket.)

RB: Oh, look at this. Wow!

MC: These were native Kenyans we met at the entrance to the Samburu.

RB: And you took this picture?

MC: I think Jerry did—either one or the other. We were both taking pictures. This was in Addis Abbaba -- Ethiopians—beautiful faces.

RB: Yes, yes.

MC: Very narrow. Ehiopians have coffee colored skin, and very delicate, almost Arabic sort of faces.

RB: And what is this that she's holding in the picture?

MC: Oh, this is a basket. We came home with baskets and various things. (Brings a leather covered woven basket) This woven basket is an Ethiopian lunchbox.

RB: Oh, that's marvelous. Look at that.

MC: I must tell you about visiting Lalabella in Ethiopia.

MC: Lalabella was a little town—a little community way out—I can't even tell you what direction it is now. But in order to get there we had to take a small plane (a DC3) with just one pilot. There were about eight or 10 seats in the front half of the plane, and we and the Olsons were the only passengers there. The passengers in the back half of the plane were goats—

RB: [laughs]

MC: —with their feet tied [chuckles. We were flying very low, which was great, except for the fact that I became airsick. The pilot gave me a half of lemon. He said this would help and it did. The other three weren't affected at all, either by the smell of the goats or the action of the plane, but for some reason I was. We finally reached our destination which was a grassy field at the base of a big hill, on top of which was Lalabella. We walked from the plane to a small round structure—open on the sides, equipped only with benches—an open waiting room. The choice of transportation up the hill to the town of Lalabella was by foot, or on a donkey, or in a Jeep. [chuckles] We Jeeped. Lalabella was once called the new Jerusalem. A unique place because of its many churches – all built from the ground down, not the ground up.. People lived in little grass huts, shared their houses with their animals, and cooked outside their front doors. We were there the year before Haile Selassie was deposed. We stayed in the one hotel --if you could call it a hotel. It was at the very top of the hill and owned by Haile Selassie's sister. (I guess any kind of moneymaking enterprise in Ethiopia was owned by the Selassie family.) There were two or three other couples staying there, one an American woman with her husband. The husband had a camera and a pocket full of balloons. He'd blow up a balloon, give it to little kid and then take the kid's pictures. All his pictures were of kids holding balloons. [chuckles] The other couple was—well, I don't know—this might have been the same couple; I can't remember now— the husband had been advised by his

doctor to eat cereal for breakfast every morning. So following the doctor's orders, he and his wife were travelling with suitcases full of boxes of corn flakes. Corn flakes!

RB: Excuse me, Molly. I just wanted to ask you quickly about—did you—you wrote several articles about your travels for the Seattle Times—

MC: Yes, I did.

RB: —because you've traveled extensively. And was this one of the first trips that you took that you started to write about.

MC: Did I write one about Lallibella—I don't remember. I'll have to look. I have them somewhere off in my files. One of the first was about a trip on the Burgundy Canal in France with another couple on a barge that we propelled ourselves.

RB: Did you take notes that you then thought later, "Oh"—

MC: No, I didn't. I kind of work from my emotions rather than facts. When I try to recall where we went, I go back to the passports. On the other hand, my friend, Fran, always kept a journal. She could tell exactly where they went every single day and what they did. Well, I might have written more articles if I had taken notes. But no, I didn't take notes.

RB: How did you come to write for the Times though?

MC: I just went down to the Times and told them where I'd been and asked whether they were interested in an article. And yes, they were interested; so I wrote several for them. I didn't keep it up, because I had so many other things to do. You know I was busy writing books at the time. Oh, one more thing I want to tell you about Lalabella before we leave Lalabella.

RB: Yes, please.

MC: It was the first evening. We had had supper, I think, and night was just coming on. We were standing at the top of the hill in front of our hotel, looking down at the hillside, which was filled with these little houses—little huts. But all I could see in the darkness were tiny little beams of light. Oh, it was like looking at stars except they were down instead of up. Then I heard a kind of a melody floating up toward me. It wasn't music exactly—but a musical sound. Then I realized that the sound was coming from people sitting in front of their houses, cooking their dinners, and the lights were the little bonfires, the little cooking fires.

RB: Oh.

MC: And the sound was the music of people talking—talking to their families and their neighbors as they cooked and ate. It rose in the air like a melody —delicate music. It was one of the most memorable moments I've ever experienced.

RB: Is that right?

MC: In Lalabella at dusk and hearing the people talk. It was a wonderful—it was really just wonderful.

RB: Did you travel with your children or after they were grown?

MC: No, our children are so widespread apart in ages. What we did with our children were mostly camping trips. We travelled in the very cheapest way we possibly could, even though we went to all these exotic places. We never stayed in any first-class hotel. When we went to Italy we stayed in pensiones (bed-and-breakfast places) you know, and the same in France, and in England and other places. We were travelling as economically as we could.

RB: Did you meet many other Jewish people traveling—

MC: Not really. Except in Israel, of course. [chuckles] After we had made a good many trips to all kinds of places on our own or with various other couples, we started going on elder hostel trips. For example we went to Costa Rica on an elder hostel trip and to Spain and Portugal on another—in such groups there were always a few Jewish people.

RB: I see. Could you name some of the other places that you traveled to?

MC: Okay. Our first trips were to Denmark and to England. We've gone to Italy and France and Greece as well as to Israel and Ethiopia and Kenya. We've taken several trips to Mexico. We've been to Sweden, and to the Soviet Union's Leningrad, before its name was changed back to Petersberg, to China and Nepal and Thailand, and to Guatemala. I could talk on and on about each one of those adventures. We went to Germany in 1978, although I disliked the idea of going to Germany, and yet I wanted to see Germany. We went with our friends Charles and Lil Kaplan—not on an organized tour but by ourselves. In Germany we went to a synagogue in Dusseldorf for Rosh Hashanah services and visited relatives of friends of ours in Seattle who had cousins who had gone to Israel escaping from the German Holocaust and then had returned to Dusseldorf. I couldn't understand why they would; I just couldn't understand it. But they did and we visited them, and it was very strange. I never could understand my feelings in Germany. I was kind of uptight.

RB: What do you mean? What do you mean by uptight?

MC: I couldn't get over the feeling that the people who were there were probably the same people who had taken part in all the atrocities against the Jews. We went to Munich and to the Rhine area. Germany makes these very sweet wines and wonderful sausages. In the Munich taverns, the beer glasses are quart size—for each person. It was really a different, different life to us. On this same trip, we did go to some favorite cities in Italy, (visited Venice for the third time), and to Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia. (This was shortly before the Serbs and the Croations began their fighting.)

RB: Well, you know, I think that it's important to hear about your passions and travel is certainly—[several words unclear]

MC: You see people with different cultures and different ideas. For example, one time Jerry and I were talking about going someplace---we didn't know where until we saw a little item in the Sunset Magazine about a walking tour in Japan, and we signed on. It was a three-week walking tour for twelve people starting in Tokyo, though we didn't actually walk from city to city. We stayed in Ryokans which are family style places-- like our bed and breakfast inns. We'd go out everyday walking the city, and then we'd take a local bus or a train to a nearby town and walk around there. We had some wonderful, wonderful experiences. I could talk much, much about that but—[chuckles] well, I'm going to skip to the end. After the tour ended, Jerry and I stayed two more weeks –

RB: You know. Actually, Molly, what I'm going to do is stop the tape for a moment. I need to put a new tape in. So bear with me

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 3]

RB: This is Roz Bornstein and I'm back with Molly Cone. It's mini disk number four and the date is still May 29, 2001, and I'm at Molly's home in Seattle, Washington for the Weaving Women's Words Project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Molly, do I have your permission to continue taping?

MC: Yes.

RB: Okay. We were talking about your trip to Japan.

MC: Yes. Well, it started out with this walking tour and there were many incidents I would love to tell you about but I don't think we have time. But there is one incident I'd like to mention because it had to do with the difference in culture. As I said, we would take the local transportation to various places and we'd get up every morning and we'd

walk through the areas and see everything and talk to people. And often for lunch we would just picnic. We'd go into a grocery store, pick out whatever we wanted and go to a park, and picnic. This was cherry tree time so it was beautiful.

RB: [unclear] gorgeous.

MC: And so one day we did that. Our leader was a Californian who had been married to a Japanese woman, and could speak Japanese, so this was very nice, because it's pretty hard to get along in Japan without speaking the language.

RB: Sure.

MC: Our leader had brought along a tarp and he spread it out on the grass for our picnic. Now, some of us sat on the tarp, and some were sitting just off the tarp. Some dumped their lunches out onto the tarp, and some took off their shoes. Some shoes lay on the tarp, and some off—you know how it is. It was a typical American picnic, with us and our belongings all over this big tablecloth tarp. I looked around at us and we were all in such disarray, [chuckles] -- but we were having a great time. A few feet farther on, a group of Japanese people were also having a picnic and they also had a tarp.. But instead of sitting on the tarp, as most of us were doing, they sat around the edges of the tarp. Each had taken off their shoes and laid them down—each pair of shoes neatly behind each person. They were sitting on their knees in a perfect circle and eating their lunch. I looked at them and I looked at us and I thought, 'Wow!' [laughs] this is a cultural difference —both groups were having a good time but were so different.

RB: Marvelous story.

MC: I always remember how neat and lovely their table was and what a mishmash ours was. [laughter]

Now, let me preface this next story. A number of years ago, my brother, Floyd, and his wife, Rose, who live in Tacoma, went to Japan for the first time. They were standing on a street corner somewhere in Tokyo looking at a map when a young Japanese woman stopped and said, “May I help you?” They got to talking, she invited them home, and they met her family. When the trip ended, they corresponded. And in due time Rose and Floyd invited Yoko to come to Tacoma and finish her graduate schooling at the University of Puget Sound. Which she did—and she lived with them for a year or two. Now, she didn’t do any dating here because there had been an arranged marriage for her back in her hometown. When she finished her schooling in Tacoma, she went back to Japan and in due time invited Floyd and Rose to come to her wedding. They went to Japan for he wedding and at the birth celebration of the first baby, they went again. When Yoko heard Jerry and I were going to Japan she invited us to come visit her in their home in Takamatzu. And that’s what we did after we were finished with the walking tour. Yoko’s husband, Shinichi, was a member of the faculty of the university in Takamatzu. By the time of our visit to Japan, they had had two children, a little boy about four years old and a baby girl. Housing space is very tight everywhere in Japan, and houses are tiny. Yoko and Shinichi lived in a very small apartment. They had a living room, a kitchen and another room which they used either as a bedroom or a playroom. They had a tiny balcony, with all kinds of toys stored on it. At night they’d just pull out the—what do they call it?

RB: Futon.

MC: Futons, yeah. They’d sleep on futons. Jerry and I also slept on futons wherever we stayed in Japan. In the morning, the futons were rolled up and put in the cupboards. While we were visiting in Takamatzu , Shinichi wanted us to go out and meet his parents who lived on a farm outside the city. It was a fairly short train ride, maybe an hour or so. We said we’d love to. So they packed up their kids and we took the local train. On the train Yoko was telling me all about her family. Shinichi was the oldest son of his family

and by custom, his parents expected him to stay home at the farm and run the farm for them. But he decided he wanted to go on to school and become a professor. So the younger brother took over his duties on the farm instead. Yoko said—when she and Shinichi were married (an arranged marriage and luckily, it was such a good arranged marriage) by custom, she should have come to live in her husband's family. And then she started to tell me how much she had learned in America, you know, and how really modern she was compared to a lot of the young women she'd grown up with. She talked about how far away she felt from the cultural patterns that she had grown up with, and how very happy she was living with Shinichi in their apartment. She was so glad she was not on the farm. By the time we got to Shinichi's parents' farm, I was really convinced that her American experience in Tacoma had changed her a lot. [chuckles] Embarking from the train, we found that Shinichi's parents had sent a taxi to take us to their farmhouse. It was a big old-fashioned farmhouse. At the entry was a little enclosed porch area where everyone leaves their shoes. In Japan, you don't step into a house with your shoes on. We took off our shoes and stood in the entryway and watched as this very modern young Japanese woman greeted her mother-in-law. She greeted her by getting down on her hands and knees and bowing with her forehead on the floor in complete [laughs]—

RB: Submission.

MC: I looked at Yoko bowing to her mother-in-law, thinking "Boy, wait until I get home and tell my son's wife how this daughter-in-law greets her mother-in-law." [laughs] Anyway, it was a very interesting visit. The living room in the farmhouse was a beautiful, big bare room with a very low, large table in the center of it. Neither Shinichi's mother or father could speak English. We sat around the table on cushions on the floor nibbling on all kinds of little sweet delicacies Shinichi's mother had prepared, for us. Then she showed us around the house the farm. The kitchen had a regular size table with legs which they all sat around for main meals. It was really, really very, very interesting. But so different --

RB: So different from American— or Jewish?

MC: From either—from both Jewish and American. That's right.

RB: This reminds me. This is completely off the subject so bear with me. It reminds me of something that I really wanted to ask you and that is the role of women and if you have seen—what changes you've seen over time.

MC: Oh, the role of women.

RB: Yes, having traveled the world, author of several books.

MC: Well, you know, I don't think there's any place where the women are as privileged as they are in the United States. In Japan, a woman is very definitely secondary – particularly in the business world. Yoko had talked to me a lot about that. It was very difficult for her to get a job. When she had a good job the boss felt she should be home with her children. I think that is gradually changing now. Our grandson—our oldest daughter's son, Josh, is now teaching at a university in Japan. He teaches American Literature and also English as a Second Language. I get sort of different stories from him because he's single and is part of a whole faculty group. He's going to be here in August, which is very nice. But he has been teaching in Tokyo f or the last five years, a wonderful experience. He's a wonderful young man anyway. [chuckles] What did I want to tell you? Oh, for women there are so many things everywhere that are so different from life in America.

RB: You've traveled so many places. Is there an area that you haven't traveled yet that you would like to go.

MC: We've never been to Turkey. [laughs] There are really lots of places we've never been. We had a wonderful experience in Indonesia because Ellen—our youngest daughter—lived there with her family for three years. She's a lawyer. But when her first

child came she took six month's leave off from her lawyering job and hasn't gone back yet. Now she has three children. Her son, Nathan, was bar mitzvah last year. Ellen's husband is a lawyer who is now a partner in a firm in New York. He was sent to Jakarta in Indonesia for three years to run their office there. In 1994, while they were there, we went and stayed five weeks with them. Indonesia -- that's where you really see differences.

MC: Ellen had two children when they went, three when they returned. In Jakarta Ellen had a household staff of five servants all of whom only spoke the Indonesian language. Ellen said that in the first three months she did almost nothing but learn to speak Bahasa Indonesia. She said it was the hardest thing she had to do in her life – and she had to learn it quickly because otherwise she could not communicate with her people. The differences are so great there—particularly for women. In Jakarata it is not the custom for women to drive, for instance. Ellen had a driver and a car to go to the grocery store, or wherever else she wanted to go. The driver would come with the car and stop at the front door, would help put the kids into the car, strap them all in. He'd drop us right in front of the supermarket store, help take the kids out of the car—then he would park the car and sit around with all the other drivers to wait until the shopping was done and he could load the bags and the kids back into the car.

I'll get back to the Bahasa language. During our visit to Jakarta, we went to Bali. The place we stayed was very Indonesian in structure—run by Indonesian people who did not speak English. One morning I found Ellen in deep conversation with the clerk at the front desk. Suddenly she started to laugh. "What were you laughing about?" I asked later. She said, "He asked me whether I had an Indonesian husband because I talked Bahasa so well."

RB: Wow.

MC: I, who am very poor at languages, was much impressed.

RB: [unclear] the different cultures.

MC: Their life in Jakarta was very different. Ellen's kids went to an international school because the regular Indonesian schools had no facilities for non-Indonesians, nor were there many Indonesian doctors available to non-Indonesians. The international school in Jakarta was like a college campus—a beautiful area with half a dozen different buildings for classrooms, two swimming pools, two gyms, and the most extensive school library I have ever seen. Sarah was born before Ellen and Wendell returned home. And like most non-Indonesians, they belonged to a little international medical group, a kind of a clinic in Jakarta. But all through her pregnancy Ellen took the plane to Singapore to have her natal checkups. And since the Singapore planes do not allow pregnant women to ride their planes within something like or three or four weeks of when they're due, she had to take an apartment in Singapore and live there for the last few weeks of her pregnancy.

RB: Oh, my—

MC: A long ride. Wendell would bring the children over to see her on the weekends. So little Sarah was born in Singapore. But Ellen said when it came time to return to Jakarta with the baby, she and Wendell almost had to buy her out.

RB: Citizenship?

MC: They had to pay all kinds of fees in order to get her home.

RB: That's a fascinating story.

MC: Nothing was easy for them there. When the baby was a few weeks old—she was stricken with some sort of throat or chest complication. The medical group they belonged to in Jakarta sent Ellen with the baby, accompanied by a clinic doctor, to a Singapore hospital to take care of the problem. So, they were being very careful.

RB: How old is Sarah now?

MC: She was five years old in February.

RB: Well, you know, our time is actually almost over and I wondered, you know, what final thoughts you have or how you want to wrap it up today.

MC: Well, let's see.

RB: Any reflections you have on your life.

MC: It's not easy to answer that. Let met think—well, I remember my friend, Belle Ruth Clayman Witkin, who died just this last year or so. I grew up with her in Tacoma. She had one brother, she was the older—a beautiful child. When she was four or five years old she was struck with polio and was crippled for the rest of her life. But Belle Ruth was a girl with a very wise mother who insisted that Belle Ruth try to do everything anybody else did to the best of her ability and not look upon herself as handicapped. Which is exactly what Belle Ruth did. Most of her life she walked with crutches. Later on, she had one of those little motorized chairs so she could get around. Despite her handicaps, Belle Ruth married and had one child, earned a Ph.D., taught, worked as an administrator in the California school system, and wrote books on hearing and speech. Belle Ruth and I would often get together and talk about many things. Once she said—"What I think is, it's not what is handed you in life that's important but what you do with it." I can't help but reflect that what Belle Ruth did with what she was handed was tremendous. I have begun to believe very strongly, that how you cope with what's happened to you is more important than anything else. So I think—those are my parting words.

RB: Molly, thank you so much.

MC: You are welcome so much. How often do we get a chance to just sit and talk about ourselves? [chuckles]

[END OF INTERVIEW]