Anna Castleman Transcript

ANNA S. CASTLEMAN: Get my voice back. [laughter]

FRANCES GODINE: Your voice is just perfect.

AC: Better not [inaudible] quite so high when I get excited.

FG: Oh. Put these earphones on just to do a little check.

AC: Okay, and I'll ask you to help yourself.

FG: I will do that. Thank you.

AC: Because my hand isn't steady ever, and at this point, it isn't. This is fun. [laughter] I'm really enjoying this.

FG: Great, great. I'll say that today is Tuesday, December 17, 1996. I'm Fran Godine interviewing Anna Castleman in her home under the auspices of the Jewish Women's Archives Temple Israel Oral History Project in Boston, Massachusetts. Anna, would you just say good morning so I can check the volume for you?

AC: Oh, yes. I'll say good morning, test my voice timbre, and see how things come across. Okay.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

FG: We are recording at this point.

AC: Okay. I hope it's alright if I semi-read rather than talk extemporaneously because then I've got my thoughts down on paper.

FG: That's wonderful.

AC: I was born in Dorchester in 1912, and we moved to Winthrop when I was about two years old, and there was my childhood. Winthrop was in – the part of Winthrop where we lived was very much of a small New England town. Very pleasant. There was a park in the middle of the street where the neighborhood children played. There was the security of cousins across the street and cousins around the corner. Sunday mornings were Sunday school at Temple Israel on Commonwealth Avenue. Led by my older sister, Harriet, we took the narrow-gauge railway train, the ferry boat, and three streetcars, and we did all this for granted – took it all for granted every Sunday morning. Every Sunday, the Sunday started with the assembly led by Rabbi Levi in the downstairs assembly hall on Commonwealth Avenue – those of you who knew that handsome building there. Rabbi Levi conducted every children's service of the Holy Days. He took every confirmation class on Tuesday afternoon. In those days, Sunday school was eight years of Jewish history, and we learned the Bible. When I was at Wellesley, the only course I got an "A" in was biblical history.

FG: Oh, how wonderful.

AC: That was due to my Sunday school training. The achievement there that I was proud of was being president of the confirmation class. Then, sometime during this period, we moved to Brookline. I'm going to stop for a minute for a drink.

FG: Okay. I was wondering what you might remember of preparation for confirmation at that time.

AC: Oh, yes, I remember confirmation class very well. It was every Tuesday afternoon, and Rabbi Levi – let me see. [inaudible] My mother was highly spiritual. She came from the traditional Orthodox family where her father had always brought home the stranger from shul, and whatever they had, they had, they made do. My father's family was

different. They had lived in East Boston. My grandfather had been one – my father's father – had been one of the starters of the socialist movement in East Boston. And he had left – well, he came over to this country as a Yeshiva Bocher, highly trained, and he carried the scrolls. That was the most important thing he took over. But eventually, once here from East Boston – living in East Boston and walking to the shul, I guess, in the West End, because you wouldn't ride on Saturday.

FG: Shabbat, right.

AC: At some point along there, he was a great reader and a great student. The myth in the family is that he had a brilliant mind, and I suspect he probably did. He came to the conclusion – anyhow, at some point, he turned socialist, and he was one of the founders of the Socialist Party in East Boston. They were all very poor, but they all read Spinoza. But my father worked twenty-four hours a day and became a successful grocery man. He somehow reconciled his socialist beliefs [laughter] and earned a good living for his family. We never asked him how. These cousins in Winthrop – these families in Winthrop are all my father's family, so we weren't brought up in the traditional Jewish household. It was a highly spiritual household. It was certainly very busy being non-materialistic, maybe a little hypocrisy there, but it was very busy being non-materialist anyhow. I enjoyed Sunday school. I always liked history, and I liked the Jewish history, and I liked the Bible, and I certainly believed what Isaiah said. And I certainly – I think Jeremiah is one of the most fascinating – I still remember these people. I think Jeremiah is one of the most fascinating characters that's come down. But that was different from being religious. Rabbi Levi must – at that point, everyone was proud of the Reform Movement and felt that it served a purpose in Boston. I remembered that when my son, Paul, was studying for his Bar Mitzvah, he was at Roxbury Latin, and he had to have somebody special to teach him Hebrew because he couldn't go to the school afternoons. I remember that young man telling me that he was at college at the time of Rabbi Levi, and he said that he was the one who kept people like him in Judaism because they had

been brought up – you ask a question, you get a slap. In those days, on Sunday morning, because services were Sunday mornings, the temple would be filled to overflowing, and many, many college students attended there because Rabbi Levi, I have always believed, was a bridge between these men coming from traditional homes to secular, Harvard, BU [Boston University], wherever. Rabbi Levi was the bridge who – and I noticed it with my husband, not with Rabbi Levi. But Ben came from a highly Orthodox home. As you see, he was at the Mass General and entirely in it. If you are at the Mass General and you're immersed there, and some of his friends married non-Jewish nurses, etc. His parents were very happy with me when he married this nice Jewish girl, and Ben would have strayed far from Judaism. But I had belonged to temple – grew up there as a child and continued belonging there and felt it had a great purpose. Ben went along with me, so watching Ben and his friends, who had been brought up in very strict homes without that much intellectual understanding of it and left it entirely. I thought then, and I still think, that Reform Judaism has a very important place and, as it was under Rabbi Levi, I think it had great spiritual content. Rabbi Levi must have been used to many people like me. He said, "Well, if a clock works and if there's a clockmaker, then the universe works, and there's a maker that makes it work." Now, when you say preparations, there wasn't preparation as such. We had had the eight years at Sunday school. Ruth Alpers' grandfather was my teacher in the eighth grade there. We read Stranger than Fiction, and he was somebody who really could hold us. It was that combination of caring but with a –

FG: Intellect.

AC: Yes. So that was confirmation. When I went to Wellesley, I was a mediocre student. As I say, my one "A" was in biblical history. But I always liked it there. I was very much at home on the campus. I had liked camp as a girl, and I liked dormitory life. When I was widowed, I decided these experiences and my years in a small school for girls stood me in good stead as being happily part of a group of women. I realized, too,

that perhaps I was widowed at a good age when being part of a group of women now has its relevance. I had always enjoyed it in my girlhood, but my big landmark was marrying Ben, and we were married by Rabbi Levi. At that time, I was teaching in a small, progressive school in Cambridge, so we lived in an apartment near the school. Then, we moved to Belmont, where our three children were born. Then we moved to a big, old-fashioned house in Brookline. Just the time we were ready to move, my father died suddenly.

FG: Oh, my.

AC: My mother was just – was sixty-five. We didn't say "just" in those days. It was taken for granted that she was going to live with somebody. Since I had the youngest family and the smoothest family, in a way, I think – anyhow, my mother came to live with us in Brookline and felt that we rented a big, old-fashioned house on Clinton Road, big enough for three generations. I always had household help, anyhow. Then, my mother had transferred all her respect for Jacob, my father, to Ben. Ben was very smart and always knew how to get along. [laughter] Ben was full-time, and as a pathologist, he came home at six 'o'clock every night for dinner. We'd have a family dinner, and then he'd go do his work. But when he came in, he'd always greet my mother [laughter] as if it was what he'd been waiting for all day. He didn't have to say another word to her all evening.

FG: How did you feel about it?

AC: Oh, no, that was fine. That was fine. And then it worked too – well, I'll go on about Harriet later because then Harriet and Haskell moved to Brookline, and they were right up the hill. So I would say to Harriet, "Can you have Mother for dinner tonight?" or something, and she was always there. Haskell, my brother-in-law, took over my mother's things completely to take care of her so that it all worked. But that's the diversion. Let me see where I am now. Oh, we started in Cambridge. We moved to Belmont. Then we

brought up our children in Brookline in a big, old-fashioned house. Then, when they married, we moved to Belmont, to Belmont Hill, to my dream house, a ranch house on Belmont Hill.

FG: Oh, how lovely.

AC: Then, when Ben died, I didn't want to stay there alone, and I moved to Cambridge. So that's my full circle. [laughter]

FG: Your route. Had you ever lived in Cambridge before?

AC: When we were first married. [laughter] Just for half a year.

FG: How did you come to choose Cambridge at that point?

AC: That's a big question. Harriet still lived in Brookline. I always had good friends in both Brookline and Belmont. Cambridge is Cambridge.

FG: Just to clarify, Harriet is your –

AC: My sister.

FG: – sister.

AC: She'll come in often in this. Here is her – didn't I have her –? Oh, here is her picture. I have a – where did it go?

FG: I'm holding the –

AC: Here it is.

FG: Oh, right.

AC: Some place up there, the woman alone. There she is. There's Harriet. And I'm just going to get a piece of Kleenex.

FG: Certainly.

AC: Ben was the pathologist at the Massachusetts General Hospital. He started as an intern, became Chief of the Department and a named professor at Harvard Medical School.

FG: And you were married all this time? At what point –?

AC: Oh, let's see. I met Ben in 1935, and he had just finished his residency program. So, I didn't ever have to go through that.

FG: A wise woman. [laughter]

AC: That's when I met him. I met him that summer, and we were married in December because he was earning all of forty dollars a week. He was full-time at the hospital. He was an instructor at the Harvard Medical School, but forty dollars – we thought that was dandy. We never felt poor on forty dollars a week. So that he started as –I didn't know him as an intern. He started as an intern, became Chief of the department and a named professor at Harvard Medical School, and was still active at the hospital, although officially retired when he died at age seventy-eight. I think I'll take a pause now again.

FG: Shall I turn this off for a minute?

AC: Yes. [RECORDING PAUSED] Okay, now you can turn it back on. My married life was family, friends, community, volunteering, and involvement in Ben's life, and Ben's life meant the Pathology Department. My brother – there's my brother looking out at us, the low one there. That's my brother. My brother was ten years older. There was a strong feeling of affection, and our families were always together at holidays and if anybody was

in need, but different households. My sister and her family were always interwoven with my family, and fortunately, Ben and Haskell, and Haskell is the framed person over there, had a great understanding, a great affection and great friendship for each other. My volunteering was when I was still in – this was during the war when I was still in Belmont at the Mount Auburn Hospital. Then, when we moved to Brookline, the Eye and Ear Infirmary, because in those days, I always took public transportation, particularly during the war.

FG: What type of volunteering was it at that point?

AC: Not very – bedside patient volunteering.

FG: Visiting?

AC: Yes, doing for patients. At the time I moved to Brookline, an Education Committee was forming. [RECORDING PAUSED] I talked about my brother, and I talked about Harriet, and I talked about – oh, I know. The Education Committee in Brookline, formed under the auspices of the Boston League of Women Voters, was largely initiated by Ethel Lurie, who is Ruth Alpers' grandmother. Linda was Ethel's daughter, a few years older than my daughter, Ruth, chronologically, but miles [laughter] – very many years – they were entirely different groups. And then, Ruth Alpers is Linda's daughter.

FG: Could you describe the difference in the groups a bit?

AC: Oh, I'm not going in with the – not going into the Ruth and Linda.

FG: Oh.

AC: That's another thing. But the Education Committee.

FG: Yes.

AC: Largely, Ethel Lurie and a few women who lived on what is called “Pill Hill,” doctor’s wives at the Brigham. I joined that and became very interested. Then, the League of Women Voters started a Brookline Branch, and I was the first Education Chairman. From that, there was no parent-teacher structure in any of the Brookline schools. We started the parent-teacher organization, and I was the first president at the Runkle School.

FG: I noticed that in your questionnaire. I was intrigued by that.

AC: [laughter] That’s right. I was. That was very important to me. We lived on Clinton Road across the street from the school. At the Mass General Hospital, some of the wives decided to fill some of the unmet, non-medical needs. We formed what was first called the “Staff Wives” and later, “The Service League.” It was not fund-raising; it was entirely service. One of our early projects – this was shortly after the war in the late 1940s and early ‘50s. There were many young men from – many from Japan, many from the South American countries who came to study at the General. Very little money in any case, but in these particular cases, the rate of exchange was so low. When their young wives and young families would come with them, there was no way of explaining to them what they were going to have to meet. For many of these young women from South America and Japan and whatever, it was their first time being away from extended family living. And here they were, alone in the city with these little children. I think that one impetus to starting this was they heard of one young woman who didn’t dare leave her apartment, and you can imagine what kind of apartment it was for a whole year. We had a desk there that was manned – well, not manned, but had somebody there every day, and we would help these young people find apartments. We had a furniture exchange to help them have some beds or whatever they needed for their houses. We would arrange exchange visits, some focus of hospitality for these young women to bring their little children to so that they could meet each other and take them to find out where the supermarket was or the laundry and whatever. I guess that continued for quite a while.

We also had concerts in the chapel because, in those days, patients, particularly orthopedic patients, stayed in the hospital for quite a while and weren't that ill, so we would wheel them to the concerts in the chapel. We also initiated Information Desks at intersections of that great maze of corridors to help people find their way to wherever they wanted to go in that maze of places.

FG: And this was primarily the women?

AC: This was the women. It started as doctors' wives in the late '40s after everybody came home from the war, and these young people were coming from other countries to study here. Then, the name changed to the Service League because they were hoping to attract other community people in addition to the doctors' wives. I was president of that at one time.

FG: It sounds as if you had your own young family at this point as well.

AC: Oh, I did. I did. But they were all in school, and life was easier for us, those of us who were fortunate in those days, because there was always somebody in the house to take care of the children, either live in first when the children were babies or somebody during the day or whatever. It seems to me we were more – it seems to me that those of us who were fortunate were more fortunate in those days with ease of living. Another group of friends formed the Hadassah study group, which I enjoyed enormously, and we continued with that as long as the leader was able to be with us.

FG: Can you describe some of the types of topics that you –?

AC: Oh, in the Hadassah study group?

FG: Yes.

AC: Well, you know, I've always liked history, and there, it was completely history. It began with the Bible, and it was very interesting that a lot of these women – the other women, I think, all came from traditional Jewish homes, but they didn't know the Bible. I always knew those prophets. I always liked them, [laughter] and I always knew them. The part that interested me particularly was when we got on to, not the Middle Ages of Jew – well, the Jewish village life before the Enlightenment with the different false messiahs and the whole Kabbalah movement. That whole part interested me very much.

FG: And how was the group lead? How did you decide what to do?

AC: Oh, we had a leader from Hadassah who led us and assigned topics.

FG: Did the topics come out of the group's interests, or was it a curriculum?

AC: No, it was a stand – I thought they had a standard curriculum for the study groups. It seemed a standard curriculum. We would progress, and then when we got to modern times, I remember reading the Tevye stories. Well, I had read those before, but that was part of it.

FG: Was it a lecture format?

AC: Oh, no, no. We all gave reports; it was discussion. She was the leader, but it was a discussion. No, I always liked discussions. I never liked lectures. I guess I always liked to talk. But my big interest – my big new turn of interest came with the invitation to be on the Ladies Committee of the Museum of Fine Arts. Oh, when you said – this came just the year that my youngest, Paul, entered college, entered Harvard. Perhaps this was indicative to me; there was a woman there, a younger woman whom I had sort of met over the years. Her husband was a doctor. I said, "This invitation came at just the right age for me. My youngest has just entered college." She said, "It came at just the right age for me." Her youngest had just entered kindergarten, and she came from Framingham, [laughter] where I lived right at Brookline, which I think was indicative of

how I lived my life. I enjoyed the – you're on the Ladies Committee for four years, and we led tours through the museum as the Speakers Committee, and we were the first speakers on the bus tours through the city of Boston. Oh, somewhere along here, I was on the Board of Student Aid at Wellesley College. I enjoyed it, but it was never all-engrossing for me as these others were. I'm [inaudible] essentially a board member. I realized as I wrote this that what I have always liked was doing something once a week when you're committed to doing it.

FG: Something with a more regular activity level.

AC: Yes, and not being a board member. Being a board member was never – I'm not a good board member.

FG: The committee meetings were not what excited you as much as the activities.

AC: Well, no, I liked the study group, for example, Hadassah,

FG: Right.

AC: But when I started to disperse this about the Students Aid at Wellesley, it was sort of a prestigious board to be on [laughter]. But it wasn't – it was interesting, and I liked the women there, and I certainly enjoyed what we did for the students, but it was always peripheral to me in a way.

FG: We're talking about a lot of community involvement, Anna. I wonder if there's anything about your – that you can connect to how you got involved in all these activities. Anything about –?

AC: I guess I took it for granted. I mean, I went to school. I wasn't that much – I ran my house, and eventually, I did all the cooking and the housekeeping, but my children were primary to me. But cooking and household and fixing up my house wasn't primary to me.

When we lived on Clinton Road, we lived across the street from the school, and it was an old-fashioned shabby house. My front door was always open. Well, my very good friend was Jeannie Slotnik up the hill. She and my sister, Harriet, had houses next door to each other. They were both beautiful houses and a lot of grounds, and each one had a full-time housekeeper. The Slotniks had one car. They could have easily had all the cars they wanted, but having one car was their thing. We would take the streetcar, and Jeannie would meet him in front of my house because I always lived near the streetcar. It was always public transportation for me.

FG: Is this by choice?

AC: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, sort of, yes. Yes, because Ben had wanted – before we moved to Brookline, Ben had wanted to buy a house up on Belmont Hill. The war was on at that point, and I wasn't going to live up on Belmont Hill far from public transportation because we always had one car, and Ben took it. [laughter]

FG: And you wanted to be able to have access –

AC: But I wasn't going to live up on Belmont Hill. [RECORDING PAUSED] Ben had had a few bouts of rheumatic fever. Actually, that's why he became a pathologist. He was very happy to be invited to be a pathologist as his internship right from medical school. Ben was a very poor boy. I mean, a lot of those young men earned their way through college, but Ben's family was really poor. Just when he graduated from medical school, finally, he had his first bout of rheumatic fever. Dr. Mallory, who had invited him to be an intern and one of the few Jewish interns of the MGH of 1931, kept the place open for him. Then, Ben had a few other bouts of rheumatic fever, which is why he wasn't in the service. He was rejected because of his rheumatic fever, so I was always aware of that, too. Of course, Ben was on an academic salary, and we had a lot of yichus. [laughter] I was always aware of what might be in the future – a little bit awareness, a little bit stubbornness, a little bit, it suited me. [laughter]

FG: Would you just say what yichus means?

AC: Oh, pride.

FG: My Yiddish isn't –

AC: It's a Yiddish word, and it means, you know, pride.

FG: Esteem.

AC: Yes, that's right. That's right. Now, then, I go on –

FG: I'm going to take this minute just to turn the tape.

AC: Okay. [RECORDING PAUSED] Have you heard of gallery instructors at the Museum of Fine Arts?

FG: I'd like to know more about that.

AC: Oh, well, I could talk on forever. But anyhow, [laughter] of all my – that started from the Speaker's Committee from the Ladies Committee. But it developed into – took a life of its own, taking the school children around. Of all my activities, that was the most fulfilling. That's why I won't start it now because I'd never stop. I'll go on with the rest of my life. Then, if we have time later because I was – during these years, Ben started to receive invitations as Visiting Professor to less-developed countries. The first was a month in Rio de Janeiro. The other country was Cuba, a few times, where we saw the changing governments, first the elected government under [inaudible], then the dictator under Batiste, and then, of course, with Castro, it all stopped.

FG: Do you have any comments about that experience?

AC: Oh, yes. [laughter] I could go on forever about all of these.

FG: I'm sure.

AC: But you'd better mark the things to ask me later, and then I'll finish.

FG: Okay.

AC: And then we'll see how we go on.

FG: Fine.

AC: Twice in Guatemala. We were houseguests those two times. Bogota, Columbia; India for three months, where we had our own apartment and then continued around the world; South Africa as houseguests, and also in Uganda on the way, Spain, and Iran while it was still under the Shah. One interesting thing there was Rosh Hashanah with a Jewish family, a doctor, and his wife there. Spain. Oh, Japan was one of the early ones. And this was – it was the fiftieth anniversary of the Pathology Department, and this was in the early '60s, not that far from World War II for me. The only other visiting professor, along with Ben for that, was German. This was the early 1960s. I wasn't too happy. But the whole thing was difficult for me because this was before – the German professor, of course, didn't have his wife, and I felt the Japanese doctors were looking at me and wondering why Ben bothered to bring along a wife. This was before there were so many travel books for people to know what to expect in Japan. For many of these countries, I didn't find adjustment that easy. I had no examples. I had no role models, and there was only me because Ben would – we met at the airport and Ben would be surrounded by everybody, and he felt if they had invited us, that he had to give them – of course, he loved it too.

FG: What did you spend your time doing?

AC: That was a big question. That's a good question. I always enjoyed the pathology meetings. I always liked the other pathology. I always liked the pathology wives. By and

large, they are a very mild group, and by and large, their husbands have reached where they were going. They were professors, so there was no competition that I was aware of. They were all on salaries, and it was very – Ben was particularly interested in the International Academy of Pathology, and he was president of that at one time. And that's when we would do our traveling in Europe after the meetings in whatever city it was. Then we would travel in Europe. We had a wonderful few weeks in Israel when Ben spoke. There must have been two medical schools in Jerusalem. I remember Hadassah Medical School. That was before the big hospital was finished up on the hill. There were two medical schools in Tel Aviv and one in Haifa, and it was interesting meeting these two – Ben's generation, if they were pathologists, would have been trained in Germany or their own country, and the two in Israel were from Germany. Now, they went – when Hitler came in, of course, they went to Palestine, not Israel. But it was interesting. One couple, the one who was at the Hadassah, had been idealistic Zionists before they went to Palestine. The other couple went because they were forced to by Hitler. But when we returned to Israel a few years later, it was after the '67 war, and the old city of Jerusalem was open. The couple I admired particularly from the Hadassah hospital when they had gone as a young married couple to Palestine used to go to the Dead Sea. They took us there after their part was open. It was their first time back there, and it was a highly emotional time so that I saw – and it was an idealistic time to be in Israel because many of the people we met had fought in the Liberation, or if they were a bit younger, they were very much aware of the Liberation. There was still the idealism – I suppose there's still idealism there now, too, but it doesn't come across. [laughter]

FG: Do you remember your emotions at that time?

AC: Oh, yes. I was highly emotional. It was the same time I was doing this Hadassah study group, and the whole thing played into each other. It was an experience, particularly going to Safed.

FG: What were you feeling? What was it like at that point?

AC: I was all immersed in it. I was all imbued in it.

FG: With a hopefulness about the country?

AC: Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely. Oh, yes.

FG: Judaism? Humanity.

AC: Oh, yes, because definitely it was an idealistic time. Oh, yes, with hope for the future, and it was wonderful, particularly – well, we were there longer the first time. The second time we went there, that was the time we were in Iran, and Ben said we couldn't be in that part of the world without going to Israel, so we stopped there just for a short time.

FG: Was that something you wanted to do?

AC: Oh, yes, very much so. I hadn't wanted to go to Iran. [laughter] Very much so, although I didn't have anything against Iran; it was that I hadn't wanted to go, particularly. Paul was going to be married then in a few months, and it wasn't when I wanted to be away, but that had nothing to do with it. Actually, Iran turned out to be interesting. I loved going to the – not the capital city, Tehran, but the old capitals, Isfahan and Shiraz, and they were both there. It was interesting. Then everybody would say, "And where are you going from here?" I was very happy that we were going on to Israel from Iran. But what was interesting was that the doctors we were with made a point of telling us that they were not Arabs, that they had been conquered. So, that's when the Mohammedan – that's when they became Mohammedan. That's when their religion was there. They had an interest in Israel. I remember one of the men saying to Ben, "There were so many well-known doctors who were happy to go to Israel to lecture; maybe you could persuade some of them to then come and lecture to us." There was an interchange –

Iran then had an interchange with Israel. Now, I don't know whether they had an interchange of ambassadors, but they certainly did of consuls and certainly – now, maybe it's because we said we were going on to Israel – but certainly there was a definite feeling towards Israel as another country and not an alliance with the Arab League because of course the Iranians are not Arabs. They're a whole other – it's Persia. Also, with the Jewish people we met, the Jewish doctors, and we'd say, "How long have you been here? How long have your people been?" because we were thinking in terms of our grandfathers coming from the old country, Russia. They'd say, "How long since the time of Esther?" Well, just recently, I met Cyrus Gordon. That's a whole other story, and he was saying that when he went – when he and someone else went to visit the tomb of Esther, and I said, "Yes, they believed in Esther as a real person." [laughter]

FG: In a literal sense.

AC: In a literal sense, yes, because the Jews had been there since the time of Esther. I mean, they felt their families had been there since the time of Esther.

FG: And these people themselves had also physically been in the country, or were they just using that as a metaphor?

AC: Oh, no, no. No, no, they were there. Now, there had been ghettos in Iran up to the time of the Shah's father. I [inaudible] somebody else—

FG: Jewish ghettos.

AC: Jewish ghettos. Actually, a friend of mine here whose husband is in the – Gregorian. Phoebe Gregorian was a classmate of mine at Wellesley. When I told her I was going there, she had me look up – actually, they turned out to be missionaries. How was that going to be? What was I –? Oh, and she had me look up a Jewish woman. It was Phoebe who had me look up a Jewish woman in Tehran who took me around. Now, she wasn't quite as old as I am but nearer my generation. She had been born in a

ghetto, in the Jewish ghetto, and it was the father of her – well, not the present child. It was the present child then who released the Jews from the ghetto. One of the Jewish doctors told us that there had been a whole scare at one time that the Jews were poisoning the wells. And it was the Shah who protected the Jews of Iran so that when the present – when this last revolution came in, I was very much aware of that. But when any of the doctors came to this country by that time, Ben was too ill to – they weren't any we knew well. Ben was too ill to help them.

FG: It sounds like there was a camaraderie that –

AC: Oh, yes.

FG: – overshadowed any religious or –

AC: Oh, yes.

FG: –country affiliations.

AC: Oh, yes. They felt Iranian just the way we feel American here.

FG: As a woman, what was it like to be there at that time?

AC: Iran was all right. Iran was all right for me. I wasn't in it as I was in some of these other countries. I remember one young woman; she was a technician, I guess. She was assigned to be my hostess. One day, she was with me, and she said, "I'm very nervous. Today, I'm going to see my children." She was divorced, and her husband had the children. Then, it was really these missionaries who explained to me the position of women. Across cultures, you can't ask those questions, and neither do they know what to tell you. Oh, I know. One of the doctors was a woman in Ben's coterie, so to speak. She had been a very – she'd come, very poor girl from a poor village, and she had been educated by the missionaries who knew the ones who my friend Phoebe Gregorian had

introduced me to. She said, “If any woman – if you meet any woman from a small town who wasn’t brought up in wealth and she was educated, it’s because of the missionaries.” Oh, I told her about this technician I had been with, and she said, “Oh, yes, any man can divorce his wife, and then he has complete power over the children, and he can take the children and allow the visiting hours as he will.” And he said, “That’s the threat that these men can hold over their wives.” Things are so much worse now; at least this woman could be a technician.

FG: I am going to flip the tape at this point.

AC: Okay.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

FG: – and we wanted to be able to carry them with us. I think we have it now. I will just say that this is the second tape of Anna Castleman’s narrative on December 17, 1996. Okay. I had just asked you if you would reflect a little on your experience as a young Jewish woman at Wellesley College.

AC: Well, I would love to. I have to come back then to my childhood again.

FG: My pleasure.

AC: Good. When we moved from Winthrop, from this small town and this secluded, sheltered girlhood with cousins and the easy associations with the neighbors in the park, and we moved to Brookline, and I went to the Devotion School, and that was certainly on another level from the Brookline school. One was seated according to your ability in the schoolroom, and I was in the last row. Of course, I didn’t know anybody there at first. Well, I did make some friends. I remember eventually, I became friends with two girls. I always had very bright friends. I had very bright men because Ben was very bright, and Aaron was bright in his way. I always had very bright friends. I made friends eventually,

sort of friendly with two girls who were in the first row there. I remember one, Rosemary. I guess she was Irish. It was the same street where I have since – it's where the Kennedys were born and brought up. I remember she asked me to do a report with her, and I went over to her house, and I thought, "Is that what people do?" But still, I didn't do it for some reason. I remember that she was supposed to make a scrapbook or something, and I didn't do anything. The teacher was – I didn't like the teacher, but she must have meant very well. I remember her coming over to me and telling me where my mother could get the magazines cheap in the subway. Well, I never told my mother because I didn't want anything to do with the project. The next year, I went to a private school. My mother would have bought out all the magazines. I just thought it was the most foolish thing to cut things out and paste them in a book. So I must have done something, but certainly, I was a poor student and got poor marks there.

FG: How old would you be around this –

AC: This was the –

FG: – scrapbook?

AC: – sixth or seventh grade.

FG: Okay.

AC: My sister went to Choate School for Girls for one year, and I went to Wellesley. I had many, many colds all the time when I was a child. She'd tell my mother about the little – the younger girls having a rest – having a hot meal and then a rest. Then I went there to Choate. Now, there were just about seven or eight girls in the eighth grade. We sat around the dining room table. It was in a beautiful building. It was high up – 1600 Beacon Street. It's now an apartment house, and it was built in the style of an old French chateau. We'd sit around the dining room table, and Miss Choate would read Scott's novels out loud to us. She'd look out up at the tapestry. We didn't write any character

studies. We didn't write any plot developments, but we knew those novels. And there was no busy work there, like cutting something out. But these girls did not go on as good students, the ones who I was there with in the beginning. That was just fine for me because I remember sitting in a history class and the teacher reading out loud what I had written. This was eighth grade, freshman year, whatever it was. I thought, "I'm not dumb after all." And that was that whole – then, in high school, a whole new group of girls came in, and they were all bright. They lived in Brookline, perhaps in Newton, but essentially, they were small-town girls. We all wore gym clothes; this was through high school. We all wore gym clothes. None of us used makeup. None of us had any social life. We were together for – it was a whole-day school. We were together five days a week, and then on weekends, we each went around our own business. My business was usually with cousins or one or two good friends – one or two friends. Now, we all had a kind of loyalty to each other even though we weren't close in that other sense. We were all close to our own backgrounds, and after Ben – I sort of saw some of them over the years, but after Ben died, there were two of them – the two who – well, one wasn't – well, whatever happened to the others? There were two who emerged as very close to me, and I just got a card from one of them yesterday saying her husband – she lives in Maine now. She said her husband is failing and, "I remember last year being at your house, and that was the best day I had the whole year." Now, this was the kind of loyalty we had to each other, but it wasn't a closeness.

FG: Were you the only Jewish girl there at that time?

AC: I was the only Jewish girl in that group. We were all presidents of – we were all the class officers, and I was the only Jewish girl in that group there. My senior year – my family lived in a big house in Brookline, and senior year, two or three cousins came to live with us. They had to for various reasons. One was Florence, who worked as a secretary, and her parents had moved to a small town in upper New York, "How would she ever meet anybody there?" So, she lived with us. She was very feminine. She was

my first friend who was feminine. We became very close. She couldn't understand anybody like me; she'd never met anybody like me before.

FG: How would you characterize yourself at that time?

AC: Oh, well, I had just had my braces taken off, but I wore braces. I was skinny. I wasn't thin; I was skinny. Since I had no social life, I didn't try to dress socially. I'll tell you how I characterized myself. I remember my daughter, Jean, when we lived in Brookline coming home from the library once, and Ben's mother was there. She just came home from the library, all enthusiastic. Grandma Castleman said, "Without lipstick?" [laughter] And Jeanie said, "I went to the library to study." I recognized myself, my high school years.

FG: Jeanie was your soul mate at that moment.

AC: [laughter] Jeanie was my daughter, yes.

FG: Yes. [laughter]

AC: Anyhow, that's how I – but Florence introduced me to boys. That was my freshman – the spring. My braces were off. Florence introduced me to boys. That was the spring of my senior year at high school, and they were all Jewish boys from Jewish fraternities. From then on, I was all right. When I went to Wellesley, my roommate was Jewish. She came from Cincinnati, and the two girls next to us that came from New York City were Jewish. The four of us became very good friends. It was the first time I'd ever had a group of very good Jewish friends. We became very close friends. I thought it was – and Wellesley, in those days, one lived in a small house in the village freshman year. I thought it was just chats, and I thought how lucky that Helen and I were such good friends. A few years ago, Helen said to me, "You know, nobody would allow today what was done to us, what our house mother did to us." I said, "What do you mean?" She

said, “Clumping four Jewish girls together at one corner of the …”. That had never occurred to me. I always thought I had chosen them, and I always thought I was lucky to be with them. Then we moved to a house in the Quadrangle; we had a whole corridor of Jewish friends and were very good friends. With Janet, one of the girls – this was Depression years; this was the early ‘30s. Janet, one of the girls from New York, had to leave because her father probably didn’t lose all his money in regular terms, but in their point of view, they no longer could have a chauffeur or whatever. So, she left. And somebody came in – this was junior year. Somebody came in who transferred, and her father was a bishop. He was the Methodist bishop of Boston. He was just a remarkable man. Bishop Burns and Mrs. Burns used to have us all over. They lived at the Vendome Hotel. They didn’t have any money, but the church put them up at the Vendome Hotel, and the Burns’ would have us all for dinner and stayed good friends. Virginia became very good friends with us, but she [laughter] was the one who we took in, so to speak. I was always – I was very happy with my group, and then, of course, as happens, the group enlarged. You meet other people. But we also all had our own other directions in the school. I went to Wellesley because Harriet had gone there and because I took it for granted. I was very happy to be admitted. I didn’t take it for granted I was going to be admitted. I never did well. It really wasn’t my place. Miss Choate liked me. I think she was happy to have one of her girls go to Wellesley because the top students went to Vassar. My two best friends went to Vassar because that’s where Miss Choate had gone. Well, I think she was very happy to have one of her – and I’m sure she wrote a very good recommendation. I got along. I got along. I wasn’t top, but my friends were all top there.

FG: But you felt a welcoming atmosphere as a young Jewish woman.

AC: Oh, yes, I was always happy there because [inaudible]. I think that those early years in Winthrop stood me in good stead. We all knew who we were as cousins, but we all had our friends in the community. One thing had – maybe it was like Ben and Aaron.

One thing had nothing to do with the other. We all knew who we were; there was never any question about it, but you had friends with other people. Well, my mother set that pattern, perhaps. Harriet, who always lived in a bigger world than I did, was asked to be president of one of the large Jewish organizations in Boston and, the same year, asked to be President of the Wellesley College Club. She went to my mother to talk it over with her. My mother said, "Harriet, how will those people ever know what Jewish people are if you don't mingle with them?" So, that that was always – I think we always had the idea that it was us to bring the word, not to the unenlightened because they were very fine Christian people, but it was always us to bring the word in a sense. I don't know how else to put it.

FG: Your mother sounds like a person with a lot of vision.

AC: Oh, yes. My mother, in her very gentle, very ladylike way – wasn't anything like Harriet and me. Harriet and I aren't like her. I mean, she was never a student. She had a very lady – very little ladylike ways. I joined a society at Wellesley because Harriet had belonged to one. I think first, I was the only Jewish girl, and then the next year, Helen joined me, and I was very happy there. But, you know, they were my girls' groups.

FG: Was it a social society?

AC: Yes.

FG: That's like a sorority, but –

AC: Well, they weren't sororities, and originally, they had a serious base, but they were more like a club, as it were.

FG: Friendship.

AC: Yes.

FG: Did you have your meals there?

AC: Oh, no, no. We only met once a week.

FG: Oh, I see.

AC: We only met Sunday. No, I always lived in the dormitory. Everybody did. We met once a week on Sunday afternoon. I think we prepared an informal Sunday night supper. That's what it was all about. But it was pleasant, and I was happy to be invited to join them. But I always had – and Helen and I are still – Helen's always lived in Cincinnati. She's very much Cincinnati. She and I were always very good friends, and the others have disappeared or died. No, there's one other who lives in Florida.

FG: Is there anything else you want to say?

AC: No, [laughter] I think that's it.

FG: Oh, well, I thank you again for a most wonderful afternoon.

AC: Well, I thank you for listening to me.

FG: Turn this off here.

AC: You must be starved.

FG: No, not really.

AC: Did you finish the coffee?

FG: This is a hearty cake, but I do have to –

[END OF INTERVIEW]