

Freema Shapiro Transcript

FRAN PUTNOI: We're delighted that you've consented to let us spend some time with you. We're really interested to help preserve the lives of all the extraordinary women that have been part of our community. So, we're delighted you consented.

FREEMA SHAPIRO: Well, I haven't been a very active member of the community.

FP: Well, you know, we are looking at all the members of our community. So, we're very interested in knowing about you.

FS: My first connection with Temple Israel was my present brother-in-law—my late husband's brother. He lost his wife when she was twenty-seven years old, and he was beside himself. I think he was a member, or he became a member of Temple Israel. She was buried in Temple Israel. I think they had the service at Temple Israel. She is buried in the Temple Israel Cemetery, as is his mother, and father, now my late husband is buried there and they have a place for me. So, I'm going to be buried next to my husband and with his late wife and his present wife wants to be buried with us, also. His first wife's parents are buried there too.

FP: So, the whole family. This is in Wakefield?

FS: This is in Wakefield. So, when I moved to Boston, he offered me -- this was after my husband died in 1965—we had just moved to Boston, and he died eleven months after we moved. We lived in Weston at the time. Susan was a young twelve-year-old. She lost her dad very young. So, I said, "Would you become a member of Temple Israel?" I hadn't quite changed my affiliation from Great Neck. I was a member of Beth Israel there.

FP: Who was the Rabbi?

FS: Rabbi Ruden. Both of my boys, although the younger boy, I think, we moved in that interim, to Great Neck. I think they were both bar mitzvahed—one was bar mitzvahed with Rabbi Ruden and the other one was at temple in Jamaica.

FP: Oh.

FS: But they were both bar mitzvahed. Then along came Susan, ten years younger than her brothers, and somehow we sent her to prepare for bat mitzvah. But she wasn't interested in this aspect of learning about Judaism. Somehow it was not—she couldn't make a connection with it. I think she would have loved to have learned Hebrew. I think that was something you were interested in. But not so much the historical stuff somehow didn't connect with her the way it was being taught.

FP: You know, it would be interesting for us to kind of start at the beginning of your life, and to learn a little bit of these wonderful pictures of your parents that you have here, and tell us a little bit about them, and how they came to America, so we have some chronology to you. Then we'll let you talk about anything that's important to you. But I'd love to kind of set the stage.

FS: Yes. Well, my mother came here after her mother, who died when she was about fifteen. Then her father died when she was about eighteen. So, she came here with a young cousin—two young girls came to New York, but they were coming to Boston. That was their destination. To meet a cousin that was going to welcome them, and then they were going to live with this cousin in the West End, I believe.

EMILY MEHLMAN: What was her name?

FS: Friedman. My mother's name was Sarah Friedman. So, she arrived here and they warned her against slavery—the white slavery—and, “Be careful, don't get caught by

anyone.” Well, they, sure enough, fell into the hands of some driver, who promised to get them to Boston, and he took their money, and they never got to Boston. So, they cried.

They went to the Traveler’s Aid Society and they helped them and got them to Boston, to this cousin.

FP: Who was the cousin?

FS: The cousin’s husband was Eli Weinstein. Eggie was his wife. Eggie was my mother’s cousin. She was coming to Eggie. So, Eli came and picked up these two greenhorns. They were already here maybe five or six years. He came back home in horse and buggy and he said to his brother, Simon, “Simon, there are two greenhorns here, but one of them— but the other one is a beauty.” Of course, my father ended up marrying her. So, that’s where they met. They had a lot of family togetherness, of course, in that early time. They stuck together so closely.

FP: How did they earn their living here?

FS: My father was a—well, he was a young boy. He came here with his mother prior to the time that my mother arrived. He had already been here about five years. So, he went to school for about four years, so he had little education. But my mother didn’t have any, except Hebrew, and going to a cheder, I think. So, he was the one who interpreted the English to her and helped her.

FP: They were from Lithuania?

FS: Lithuania.

FP: Do you know the town?

FS: Kovna. Kovna Gibernia.

FP: That’s where my husband’s family is from.

FS: A lot of East European Jews came from that area.

EM: That's right. I think these surroundings, greater Kovna.

FP: The megapolis. [laughter]

FS: I want to go back there sometime.

FP: Have you been there?

FS: I've been to Europe, but I haven't quite gotten—I went to Russia just on a two-day side trip.

FP: Yeah, it's a trip I'd like to do, also.

FS: But I'd like to go to Lithuania.

FP: So, you had three siblings?

FS: Three siblings, yes. Two sisters, older than myself. I was the youngest daughter. I think my parents were kind of looking for a boy. [laughter] I felt, I think, somewhere in my deep soul, that I was supposed to be a boy, and that I was a disappointment to them because I was a very girl. Along came a boy the fourth time. It was two-and-a-half years. I have lost him. He's passed away. Fifteen years ago.

FP: And your other siblings?

FS: My oldest sibling died, but I still have one eighty-seven-year-old sister, at Orchard Cove.

FP: Oh!

FS: She has a lovely apartment there, which I bought for her, and she's very happy there.

EM: Were you born here, in Boston?

FS: I was born in Roxbury. Malden, Massachusetts. When I was about two years old—

EM: Could you tell us when?

FS: Sure. December 5, 1915. I'm eighty-one.

FP: You're eighty-one?

FS: Yes. I remember my parents had a little house there, on Faulkner Street. I was about two years old when we moved from there, to Roxbury. I remember my mother sold her diamond engagement ring to buy furniture. So, my father wasn't a very affluent businessman, but he was a wonderful human being, and I think I got the whole joy of living and the whole wonder of life from his joy. Because he was not materialistic—he didn't care about material things at all. He loved people, and he loved music. He was full of joy in life, somehow. I got that from him, somehow.

FP: That's wonderful.

FS: Yes.

FP: That's a great legacy.

FS: My mother had very high ideals since she was a very beautiful, elegant woman, but she never had an opportunity to learn or to study, but she wanted it, as all Jewish or immigrant people want for their children. That they achieve and be educated and so forth. So, she had very high ideals, and I think she was hit by a Victorian ethic somewhere. [laughter] So, I think she was a little bit more strict and more stern than my

father. He was much more open and much more free.

FP: Did she work? Or was she home?

FS: She was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. She worked very hard her whole life. So, she came here as a young woman and started to work in the dress factory, where they make these house dresses by the hour. You know, I have pictures of Lilly Hahns up in the hall.

FP: You do?

FS: Yes. Of these women, working. Well, she was one of those. She made, like, eight dollars a week.

EM: Do you have any pictures of her?

FS: No, but just the typical era of these women who came and worked. You know, it's repeated now with women who come from other countries. All these immigrants that come—they give them the most menial jobs. So, she worked very hard. But I had an uncle—her youngest sister's husband—a furrier. Somehow, she moved into a more well-paying job by working at Furs. So, somehow, that's where she made quite a bit more money. She worked hard. And boy, she was up every morning. The curtains were clean. The windows were clean and polished. I don't know how she did it.

FP: She was raising her children and working?

FS: Yes. And my father had a store, finally. [laughter] He had, like, three or four stores. He was a storekeeper, essentially. When she first met him, he was in a man's haberdashery, and he looked very gallant and very attractive, and she fell for him. I guess, there was something about him that was attracted to her. But he didn't measure up to her great expectations. I mean, not too many women do. [laughter]

FP: [laughter] It's never what it always seems, right?

FS: She always wanted him to be different. I don't know if she valued what he had, what he offered.

FP: What was Jewish life like, in your home, while you were growing up?

FS: At that time, my father had a store in Arlington, and I went to the first, second, and third grades there. My oldest sister, who was nine years older, evidently was in the higher grades there. I remember her talking or having it said, "Oh, we will now hear from the Jewess." I remember that in the family jargon and I remember I felt very uncomfortable because I think I was the only Jewish child, but my father had the store in Arlington, on 472 Massachusetts Avenue.

FP: Do you know what kind of store it was?

FS: Oh, sure. One of these little grocery/bakery/meat markets. My father used to work in the meat market down in Fulton Market. He had many jobs. He worked very hard, but he never made a lot of money. I think after the storekeeping era passed, he then got a job with these meat-packing companies. I remember he delivered butter and eggs and provisions in a great big brown truck that you see going around. Whenever I see one of those, I think of my father. It has a big butter and provisions sign.

FP: Do you have any pictures from that timeframe?

FS: I have quite a lot of pictures. Let me grab hold of them.

FP: Well, not right now.

FS: I do, probably.

FP: We're looking, when we're creating this exhibit, to be able to document some of this time.

FS: Oh, I have a lot of pictures. [laughter]

EM: You moved out of Arlington at a young age?

FS: Yes, third grade. That's when we moved to Roxbury, where we moved up, and my mother felt it was time to go to a Jewish community. She pushed towards going to Roxbury.

EM: What street did you live on?

FS: I lived on Michigan Avenue, which is right off Blue Hill Avenue. Actually, I was on 31 Michigan Avenue. And I had a good childhood there, from fourth grade to high school.

FP: So, you went to high school at Roxbury High School?

FS: Yes. I graduated from Roxbury Memorial High. But my mother decided—with my father, of course—but I think it was a great deal of my mother's expectations, she wanted us to go to Hebrew School. Whereas my older sisters—the one who is living now, who is five years older than I am, and my eldest, who was nine years older, didn't have that opportunity. But I, in my childhood expectations, didn't realize that I was getting a great benefit, and they never learned Hebrew. They've always been a little bit envious of me and I've always been envious of me because they were the smart ones. My oldest sister was very bright, oh, she was very bright. Oh, she was wonderful. I loved her. My youngest sister, who was five years older than her, was also wonderful. She was a little jealous of her older sister. I was a good little girl, but always encouraged to be cute. Not to grow up. So, I didn't help with the dishes. I didn't help with the cleaning on Sunday. I went to Hebrew School.

EM: That's very unusual.

FS: Yeah. But the other two girls sort of did that because they were the big shots.

FP: Did you go to Hebrew College, too?

FS: I went for two years, and I didn't do so well in Talmud. I have something upstairs that said, "Your daughter will have to repeat Talmud." [laughter] Thirty dollars for a session or something, and my father signed it.

EM: Did you have a traditional Jewish home—kosher?

FS: Yes. My mother never used pork or shellfish, or lobster.

EM: On the holidays?

FS: Oh, yes.

EM: What happened on Friday nights?

FS: We used to light candles—oh yeah. She used to light candles. But somehow—my father worked, so—Friday nights, as a young child, I remember, we lived in Arlington for first, second, and third grade. I remember we had clean clothes every Friday night. Clean clothes, ready for Shabbos. We lived very modestly.

FP: But she cooked special food for Shabbat? Did she like to cook?

FS: Yeah, she was a nice cook, but she wasn't one of these great cooks like some Jewish people are. We had older relatives who did the cooking, you know? I remember it was Momie, probably a great-grandmother on the other side somewhere. So, we always went to her brother-in-law's home. The cousin she came to. I guess they were more of mother/father figures.

FP: Sure.

FS: Interesting how I remember we always—like when we were in Arlington, we'd go to Fairfield.

FP: And seders were seders?

FS: Oh, always. Oh, yeah. We had seders. Over the years, we had more celebrations at home. You know, had our own seders.

FP: Do you remember the synagogue at all?

FS: Oh, yeah.

FP: Did you ever go into the synagogue?

FS: I remember I went to Glenway Street, to the Hebrew School on Glenway Street.

FP: Beth El.

FS: Beth El. I went there for a good many years. I guess my parents used to go to the shul there, but it was more Orthodox than Conservative. But I think when they moved to New York after my husband and I were married and we moved to New York and brought my parents there. I think they went to a sort of semi-Conservative Orthodox temple.

FP: In Great Neck?

FS: Not in Great Neck, it was in Jamaica. That's where they lived. They had an apartment there.

FP: I grew up in Rockville Center.

FS: Oh!

FP: So, I know Great Neck well.

FS: Well, we lived in Jamaica. First, when my late husband and I moved as young bride and groom, we moved to Brookline. We had our first son born there. Then we moved to Jamaica, and they had a little three-bedroom house there. Our first home. The other boy was born there. Then, our daughter, Susan, was born there, too, in Jamaica. But when she was two, we moved to Great Neck, where the boys went to school.

FP: I want to get back to when you finished high school, you went on to nursing school.

FS: Yes. When I finished high school—I was a junior in high school when I met my late husband. His sister—my mother's cousin's daughter—we were friendly, and we used to go there for the holidays. She was about a year older than I. Very close. Cousin Phyllis. Phyllis Speck. Alice Speck is very well-known in the Jewish community.

FP: Is that Norman's father?

FS: Norman's father. Norman's my second cousin.

FP: There are no surprises in this world. [laughter]

FS: His mother was my first cousin.

FP: Oh, they're wonderful people.

FS: Oh, yes.

FP: Norman was my daughter's pediatrician and adolescent...

FS: Right. Norman's mother was my very best friend. So, she was going with a boyfriend to Chelsea, where they lived, and she said, "Gee, I think we'll introduce Arthur to Freema." So, they introduced the boyfriend's friend. [laughter] And our first date was

at the Shell, you know, down on Memorial Drive.

FP: Oh, the Hatch Shell?

FS: Yes.

EM: I don't think the Hatch Shell was called that back then.

FS: I don't know, but we heard Beethoven back then. And he looked at him and I looked at him, and we kind of liked each other. I had just finished my junior year of high school, but he was just going into his second year at the University of Michigan and his family lived in Chelsea. His father, his brother—a very, very philanthropic, well-known family in Boston—the Shapiro family. They were cousins—their whole family. Very philanthropic.

FP: What—?

FS: They live in Swampscott now, Sam Shapiro.

FP: What was your husband doing the time he was in college?

FS: He was in his second year of college. After he met me, two weeks later he went to visit his uncle in Baltimore—or his cousins who lived in Baltimore—and I got a postcard. The postcard said, "Bewitched! Arty." His name was Arty.

FP: [laughter]

FS: That was the beginning of the romance.

FP: When did you get engaged?

FS: Well, I was in training as a nurse then, when I graduated from high school. I had one more year, and I didn't know what to do. I wasn't trained for anything. I had given up my Hebrew. My mother really wanted me to be a Hebrew teacher. That was her

expectation of me. But somehow, I didn't connect to that. It wasn't what I think I wanted for me. But I wasn't able to say it. But I think I was anemic. She took me to the doctor and the doctor said, "Well, she goes to Hebrew school three times a week and she's taking violin lessons." He said, "Well, what do you want to do? Kill the child?" [laughter]

FP: So, the next thing I believe—everything sort of stopped. And what should she do? Well, be a bookkeeper. They didn't expect me to do anything in that era.

FS: The expectations were very different.

FP: Yes.

FS: If I could open my mouth I would have said, "Look, I want to dance. I want art and music. This is what I love." But I never could say that. But now that I'm eighty-one, I'm beginning to realize that—

FP: I guess you said it because you have children that are artists. So, you must have figured it out and inspired them.

FS: I don't know. I was a pretty silent kind of a kid growing up, I think.

EM: I think it's pretty typical of a lot of people.

FS: Yes. Be good and be nice. But I had a very warm, close connection to Judaism and Hebrew. I mean, I learned Hebrew. I can read Hebrew, and when I go to temple, I enjoy reading the Hebrew, even though I don't speak it well. But I can catch the words, pretty much.

EM: Can I ask you when you were married and where you were married, and can you describe the wedding?

FS: Oh, I was married in 1936. I graduated from high school in 1933. Then the nurse's training for three years. My husband wanted to get married and said, "Forget the nurse's training. Give it up." I said, "No, once I started, I'm going to finish." So, I finished that and I got six months after I graduated. [laughter] So, we got married in 1936 at the Buckminster Hotel on Clarendon Street. That no longer exists. It's right in the back of Trinity Church. We had a gala wedding. My husband's father and mother wanted to have a big wedding. He was their first son. We couldn't afford a big deal, we never had too much. I grew up very modestly. So, we said, "Look." My father-in-law came to my father and mother's home and he was a wonderful human being. He said, "Look, we want a big wedding. Whatever you have, put it towards the wedding, and we'll meet the difference in the cost." My parents had an insurance policy, I think, of a thousand dollars for the wedding. They had this big, two-hundred-people wedding at the Buckminster Hotel. My sister sang—my sister who lives in Orchard Cove. She sang at the wedding and it was beautiful.

FP: Who officiated, do you know? Do you remember?

FS: I think they chose a rabbi for us. I don't even think I have a ketubah anymore. But we had a chuppa and the whole thing.

EM: How old were you?

FS: I was twenty-three.

EM: Where did you live? Together?

FS: So, at that point, we lived with his parents for about two months, and then they shipped us off to New York to find our way. For him to manage a factory. They were kind of a large family.

FP: What was the business?

FS: Ice cream cone business. It was here, in Boston. It was called the Eastern Baking Company. But then they grew and moved to Baltimore, and eventually, their large company became Maryland Cup Corporation, and they were on the big board at last. But this was after we got married that it developed into that.

FP: Your husband worked in that business, as well?

FS: He worked in that business? He worked in the business, but there were different factories in different parts of the United States. So, they felt that in New York they would like to have a factory become more important. There was one in Baltimore and one in Boston. So, they said, "Arthur, here." So, they gave him this factory, which was failing and not doing very well. He was a dreamer, an artist, a brilliant guy. But not interested in making money in business. He was very clever at inventiveness. He was like a think-tank man. He was a really brilliant guy. But he wasn't happy in the family business, particularly in that slot. Make money and prove yourself. If you don't make money, you're not worth too much. If you have ideas, that's fine. But it has to prove that your ideas can make money. He had the ideas, but he wasn't able to do great in the business. So, he struggled with it, and things were going along. Then my kid brother, who is two-and-a-half years younger than I, graduated from college, and he liked my husband a lot, so he came to work with him. When he came to work with him, he took care of all this management of the office and the factory, and he relieved my husband to the point that he could start a machine shop, which is really what he liked. He developed, simultaneously with his uncle in Baltimore, they had a gigantic machine shop. They had more money. They had more opportunities to develop that. But he was just a little guy, and he was doing his thing here. He was developing paper cups, these little paper cups. They called them two-piece paper cups. So, he got quite interested in that. And then he got asthma, a harsh problem. At first, it was asthma and the machine shop went dead. So then, his father had to do something about it because you can't—if you're a businessman, you can't leave a machine shop idle and he was quite sick. He had

asthma a lot, but a lot of it was emotional about the business. Well, his own pattern in life, really—he couldn't—he was going to be a doctor, you see, and he never quite did that. His father would have encouraged him to do anything he wanted, but he somehow had inertia and didn't do that.

FP: In the interim—

FS: They all thought that marriage was the answer and here's sweet little Freema. But Freema couldn't be the answer. But, marriage never is the answer. You've got to find your own path.

FP: Your own inner strength.

FS: And your own inner strength. Marriage can help. We worked together the best we could, we loved each other. But at that point, psychoanalysis was very popular, way back in the 1940s. I said, "Gee, it really would help. But if you went to see a psychoanalyst—my brother-in-law was a psychiatrist, my older sister's husband—so that we were tuned in to psychiatry. He said, "Oh, you're worse than a good Catholic." [laughter] Because I was preaching psychoanalysis to him. Because I thought he would benefit from it. He said, "Well, it's so great. Why don't you do it?"

FP: He's probably right. It probably would have been helpful.

FS: So, I did go in for psychoanalysis a few years later. I've always been interested in psychology and finding out myself and who I am and why I'm here in this world.

FP: In the interim, you had some children.

FS: Of course. So, we were married in 1936. In 1941, our first son was born. In 1943, the second son was born.

FP: So, it was during the war?

FS: Yes.

FP: Were you living in Jamaica?

FS: Jamaica, correct.

FP: He didn't have to go into the Service?

FS: He didn't have to go into the Service because he had poor eyesight. He was very near-sighted, and that saved him. Otherwise, he was fairly healthy. Maybe he had some asthma problem, and I think that was part of this, too. But for some reason, he was not taken.

EM: How long were you married when he died?

FS: He died in 1965. We were married in 1936. So, it was nearly thirty years.

EM: Did he stay with the business his whole career?

FS: He stayed with the business.

EM: Was he happy?

FS: My brother helped him to then find a very important—but then my brother said he had to go off and see the world. He wanted to go, and he ended up in South America, my kid brother did. That was quite a loss to my husband, he liked him so much. He was like his right hand. But then he got a very fine manager who came in and helped him. They were very devoted to one another. It was running quite nicely. But he never found his real inner self. He was brilliant. He was like a sparkler. He could have been a doctor, an engineer, a scientist, a scholar. He would have made a wonderful professor.

FP: Was his brother also in the family business?

FS: Yes.

FP: Did he feel the same way about the business?

FS: No. The kid brother was dynamite in business. The competition, I'm sure, was there. But the kid brother showed up, and he still does in that area. But, of course—

FP: Is he still alive?

FS: Oh, yes. Yes. He's eighty. He's a year younger than I am. I'm eighty-one.

FP: He lives where?

FS: In Swampscott.

FP: So that's Samuel Shapiro.

FS: The family was Shapiro. He's a very, very fine philanthropic and wonderful man, just like his father was. Very philanthropic. His father was at Kehilleth Israel, more Orthodox. Milton Bornstein—you probably know Milton.

FP: Yes.

FS: Well, Anne is Arthur and Sam's sister.

FP: Oh!

FS: You got that?

FP: Okay. I know Milton and Anne.

FS: And Milton's—

FP: They're very involved in Hebrew College, too.

FS: That's right, very. But in different philanthropy from my brother-in-law, Sam. But they're all very philanthropic.

FP: Yes, they are very philanthropic.

EM: Did you ever practice nursing?

FS: Not one day. I graduated and the first year we were married in New York I said, "I'm going to take my R.N." So, I came to Boston, which is where I practiced—studied nursing—and I took my R.N. here, in Boston. I got my R.N., but I never practiced. I didn't have to bother. I was comfortable and his family was comfortable.

FP: So, money was never an issue for you?

FS: Money was never an issue. It was, in a way, to my disadvantage because I didn't find my own true worth. I didn't feel that I was much because I never went to college and I wasn't intellectual. I always felt that I wasn't much.

EM: Well, you raised your children.

FS: Yes.

EM: You didn't have to work. You must have had help in the house.

FS: Yes, always.

EM: So, how did you fill your time?

FS: Well, I wasn't interested in ladies, you know? My sisters were both Presidents of Sisterhoods. My sister-in-law, Metta, was President. Very active in temple life. My sister, who is now living, was in the sisterhood. And somehow, I didn't believe in that. I don't know why. Yet, I loved the holidays. I loved the rituals and I loved being Jewish. But somehow, I didn't go for all these meetings, and all these ladies, you know? I don't

know why.

FP: We understand. [laughter]

FS: I was looking more for -- I was very interested in psychology.

FP: Did you take courses?

FS: I took some courses, yes. At one point I thought, "I'll go to college." So, that was in New York when my boys had grown up. When the boys were about twelve or thirteen, you know, after the bar mitzvah period, I said, "Gee, I think I'd like to take piano lessons." So, I took piano lessons for two or three years. That's what I did. Somehow, I loved music, and I used to go to a lot of concerts. We always went to concerts and theater, and we had friends. I was socially involved with people, but not a lot. I was more of a loner type.

FP: Did your children go to public school in Great Neck?

FS: Yes, both boys went to public school. At first, when they were young, they went to a parent/teacher cooperative type of school. All three children went to that kind of early childhood school. Also, when Susie was four-years-old, I took her to this parent/teacher cooperative, which was a very nice school, and Marguerita Rudolph, who was the Director at that time—when we first walked in, I was holding Susan's hand. All the kids were running around, playing and she said, "You know, Mrs. Shapiro, if you let go of her hand, I think she would [unclear]."

FP: [laughter]

FS: You know, I wasn't even aware that I was holding onto this third child. After all, it was a ten-year difference. So, that's the thing. What did I do with my time? I suddenly had a third child, so it gave me another chance at youth. Susie gave me a whole new

opportunity to be a young mother again. So, that's at the point if she didn't come along, I may have gone on to school.

FP: Did you like being a mother?

FS: Yeah, I loved being a mother.

EM: Do you have regrets about having no education—no formal education, and no career?

FS: I did up until the last four or five years. But I've been working, I've constantly worked at my job over the years. That's been my interest, and finding out who I am, and what my work is. Now I'm beginning to realize that it has a very important place in life.

FP: What is that place?

FS: Well, I've always been interested in health, as it goes back to my nursing experience. But from the place that I am standing now, I would much prefer—competitive medicine seems to be much more important to me than being a nurse who nurses ill people. So, preventative medicine has, somehow, in the last ten years, taken over a very important place in my life. I found a healer, a Korean healer, about twelve years ago. That's about when Susan and Andy were getting married—the young daughter—the only daughter. [laughter] She had colitis and she was really having quite a problem. They were getting married that year, and I was having a problem. I gained weight, and my psoriasis, which is a physical handicap that I've had ever since I was twenty-three years old, flared up, and it was very troublesome. I was fat, I had a flare-up, and I was feeling miserable. We had a girl cooking with us and she said, "Freema, how would you like to try this Korean healer?" I said, "Okay, I'll try him." So, I went to see this Korean healer in Jamaica Plain, and something about him won me over, and he said, "You must go home, eat more vegetables, cut your plate in half, and lose twenty-five pounds. After you've lost ten, come back to see me. The cause of your

psoriasis, the symptoms are not so bad. It's what's causing it. What's causing it is chronic digestion and stuff like that. It's a chronic condition. If you eat better and don't over-eat, maybe you can help this condition." So, I went home and I lost ten pounds in the first month-and-a-half, and I lost another ten pounds, and I felt much better." He said, "Well, now, after your daughter gets married, why don't you come back and have a fast with me." I said, "A fast? I've never fasted." He said, "Oh, well, you're Jewish, aren't you?" I said, "Yes. Well, I've fasted for Yom Kippur for one day." He said, "If you can fast one day, you can fast seven." I said, "Oh, well, we'll see about that." So, I went back and I lost the eight and I felt pretty good about myself. I bought a beautiful dress for the kids' wedding, and the psoriasis flare-up quieted down. We had a wonderful wedding right here in the backyard. Then I went to him and had the fast in October, and I fasted the seven days. It was like he said—if I could fast the one, I could fast the seven.

EM: Describe that, will you?

FS: Well, he put me on a water fast, but we had a little juice in the morning with the water, and a little juice at night. Other than that, he encouraged me—I stayed there with him, in his home. He encouraged a great deal of walking, yoga exercises, meditation, and finding a quiet place deep in your soul and opening yourself up so that you're not locked in. That's his whole theory. He had like a big wheel of health which includes environment: what you eat, how you feel about other people, how you feel about yourself. It's not only what you eat, you know? There's a macrobiotic community that believes that just what you eat is what makes you well or not well. But this Korean healer has a much broader outlook on health.

FP: What's his name?

FS: Master Boen Lee. He came from Korea, back about fifteen or eighteen years ago.

EM: And you still associate yourself with him?

FS: When Susan had colitis, she was on Prednisone. She saw how well I looked after my first fast. She said, "Gee, mom. Maybe I'll go to see him." I showed her that by doing it—I didn't know that I was doing it—but I went on my own because that's what I felt would be good for me. But I didn't push her into that. But she thought that I was looking so good after the fast she said, "Well, maybe I'll go see him," and she did. She fasted four or five times within a very short time, within two years. He's helped heal her. She got off the Prednisone and she does not have colitis anymore.

FP: I have a son with colitis who uses acupuncture and—

FS: Oh, yeah. Well, that's good. Alternative medicine. So, she likes him very much and he's helped her. Andy had a fast with him once. But it's hard for them to give the time, he's over in Jamaica Plain.

EM: You have to give yourself over to it. It has to be in your head.

FS: Right. Then when the children came along, you know, it's so involved with the children that they just didn't have time.

FP: How many grandchildren do you have?

FS: Five. My older son has two boys, the eldest is twenty-one now. The other one is just sixteen. That's the two boys in Portland.

FP: Portland?

FS: Maine. That's where the older boy lives. He's a mathematician and a very wonderful guy. Then I have a wonderful—

FP: Is he married?

FS: Yes. A lovely wife. My son, Kenneth, is two-and-a-half years younger than Ronald, and he's a wonderful, wonderful guy, and he's a sculptor—has done some sculpting. I'll show you some more of his work.

EM: Where does he live?

FS: He lives right around the corner, on Reservoir. Both boys were bar mitzvahed. Both boys enjoyed that and were confirmed, as well.

FP: Did you encourage the arts with your children?

FS: Not really. It was—

EM: Your husband obviously was an artist!

FS: Oh, absolutely.

FP: He was very artistic.

EM: He wasn't encouraged?

FS: No.

FP: That's why I wanted to know if you encouraged your children.

FS: No, we both, I think, were very artistic souls, and somehow the children absorbed it.

EM: Getting back to the health situation, and you don't have to answer this unless you want to—had you had any major illnesses in your life?

FS: I had a hysterectomy long before I met this Korean healer. Had I known more about alternative medicine, I would have said “no” to these gynecologists who wanted to take all my ovaries and everything else out. I was bleeding a lot and I had a scraping and I kept bleeding. Three doctors confirmed that I had to have a hysterectomy. So, when I woke up, they took everything. What I had was a benign growth as big as a pea that was causing all that problem.

FP: Oh.

FS: They did that. I was always very angry about that. But that's life.

EM: In those days, people didn't speak about these subjects, especially women's situations.

FS: Oh, yeah.

EM: How old were you when you had it done?

FS: I lived in Weston. Twenty-five years ago. I'm eighteen years here. I would say about twenty-three years ago. I'm eighty-one now. Twenty-five years ago.

FP: So, when you moved to Weston, the kids were still in school?

FS: College. The kids were in college. Kenneth was at Brandeis University, and Ronald was at the University of Chicago and had graduated there and was getting his Ph.D. at Brandeis when their father died. So, they were both at Brandeis. Ronald had just started his Master's at Chicago, and he was on a trip to England when he got news of his father's death. He died on his way up to visit Susie at camp. He adored her. He was complaining of discomfort, and my brother-in-law recommended a heart doctor to him when we moved from New York to Boston.

FP: Did asthma affect the heart condition?

FS: I have a feeling that it may have. From what I understand, he had two major coronaries: first, when he was forty-nine, and the second one when he was fifty. A year later. And he died of the third. So, it was an inherited tendency, but I think emotional patterns and, of course, they didn't know about alternatives.

FP: They weren't doing triple bypasses?

FS: No, that was in 1965.

EM: You've been on your own since?

FS: Ever since. I'm forty-nine years old, and Susie was just twelve years old when he died.

FP: You raised her as a single mom.

FS: Yeah. We both talked about her going to the Cambridge School of Weston at that time. We lived in Weston. Kenneth was at Brandeis and he said, "Gee, Mom and Dad, this is a great school for her." She went one year to the public school in Weston, and it was a little bit—we were more free spirits. So, we wanted her to have more of a different—

EM: So, she went there?

FS: So, she went there and she met with the Dean there, who was wonderful.

FP: Mr. St. John or Mr. Cheeks?

FS: Cheeks. Adolphus Cheeks and we loved him.

FP: I taught at the Cambridge School.

FS: You did!

FP: My husband was a medical student.

FS: So, we got Mr. Cheeks, and we loved him so. But he died that summer and I said, "Gee, what'll I do?" Well, he chose it with me. Let's send her there. So, I sent her there. But then he died, and it changed.

FP: The school?

FS: Yeah.

FP: It was never the same.

FS: It was never the same again.

FP: It's had a resurgence again.

FS: Yes, it has. But she came into a period where it was too permissive. I, being a single parent, was kind of naive. They had the boarding kids there, so Susan was looking for family and was very lonely at home with her gray-haired mother. So, she found friends at the school, and she had friends who lived in Littleton, Harvard, Mass. A very close friend of hers lived in Harvard, Mass. And somehow, she was always going there and I wasn't able—

EM: Did she come to sleep at night, or did she board?

FS: Oh, no. I wouldn't board her at all. But somehow, after school, I didn't quite grab her in. I was too naive.

FP: It was a complicated time.

FS: Yes.

FP: To have lost your husband and were raising a twelve-year-old.

FS: Yes.

EM: Getting back to my original question, how did you spend your time? Here you were, a young widow.

FS: Right.

EM: One child at home.

FS: Well, I took piano lessons during this period.

EM: Really?

FS: I bought a piano. After my husband died, I had a little acro sonic when I first took lessons back in New York. One of those pianos. But that was one of my dreams—I should get a baby grand. So, after he died, I bought a baby grand.

FP: Do you play?

FS: A little bit. For myself.

EM: You don't take me as a person that would ever be lonesome because you're very vibrant.

FS: Well, I learned. When Arthur first died, we moved to Weston with the idea that we were going to find a bigger living room, so that we could entertain more. We were looking forward to being more socially involved. Somehow in New York, we were a little bit lost. We were social, but not the way his brother was in connecting with the community more. Unfortunately, he died eleven months after we moved there.

FP: How did you make the decision to move to Cambridge?

FS: Well, ten years later. I stayed there for ten years.

FP: Did you feel lonely in Weston?

FS: Very lonely. But I learned how to be alone. You see, we came here with the idea of getting to know old friends again, maybe getting to know your mother, even though I didn't know her. But you know, that kind of thing. He had many friends that he wanted to reconnect with. His family was here. My family didn't have that much important social effects on the community, but his family did.

FP: They were very prominent businessmen.

FS: Yes. And we were looking forward to—

EM: Did he grow up on the North Shore?

FS: No, Chelsea.

EM: Well, that's the beginning of the North Shore.

FS: Right, right. Correct. Then his dad and mom lived in Brookline. Then when Sam remarried, this woman said, "Look, they should have a little home, and let's get them a little doll house," and they moved near them in Swampscott.

EM: So you lived for ten years in Weston, and then you decided to Cambridge.

FS: Well, when Susan graduated from Cambridge School, she wasn't working up to her capacity. Bright girl. Artistic. She could have gone into science. She wrote beautifully. But she wasn't applying herself. It was very hard for her. Her brothers were off at college, living at home. So, she didn't really work up to her ability.

EM: She was a creative person, obviously.

FS: Yes. But she was very good at writing, very good at science, and interested in science. But she just wasn't doing any work. She was flipping around.

FP: As you said, Cambridge School at that time was a very permissive place.

FS: Smoked a little marijuana. Of course, I was scared to death of that. I said, "I don't want you to dare have that here."

FP: How old is Susan now?

FS: Forty-four.

FP: So, it was in that era.

FS: It was smack in that era at the beginning of the whole. She'd have a friend home and I'd say, "I think I smell something. I don't want it here at all." I was beginning to get more in control of my life.

FP: Sure.

FS: She was looking for that, and I wasn't quite giving it to her enough. I was always a very permissive mother with the boys, and my husband was, too. [laughter]

FP: It was the combination of being a permissive mother in an era when the country was basically exploding.

FS: Yes. I didn't know—I didn't want to pull back too hard because then she wouldn't be happy. You know, I wasn't sure of myself.

FP: Sure. So, did she go on to college?

FS: She did, but not right away. She wanted to go to RISD. Oh, for the last three months of high school, she was doing beautiful ceramics. And she decided that that's where she wanted to go. But she couldn't get into RISD, so she said, "I think I'm going to go and take some courses in Arimont, Tennessee, and Big Sur, California." I'm not sure if that was in the scene at the beginning. Penham, North Carolina. So, she took these ten-

week programs and I had to let her go. She was very strong. Because when she was sixteen, I wanted her to go to Radcliffe, of course. That's where I wanted her to go.

FP: [laughter]

FS: So, she said, "Mom, if you want to do it, you do it."

FP: [laughter]

FS: Even when she was sixteen, she was able to say it nicely and clearly. "You want to do it, you do it. But don't push me to live your life for you," is really what she was saying.

FP: She got to say what her father couldn't say.

FS: Yeah. And she got to say what I couldn't say to my parents, in a way. Very much so.

EM: You raised her permissively so you got back what you—

FS: [laughter] Isn't that amazing, how that works?

FP: It's true.

FS: She's a wonderful kid. But she found her own path. She wrote me a little note—senior graduation, she was going off to this program. As long as she was going to a definite program, I felt fairly comfortable. I paid for schooling, which was a ten-week program at Big Sur. So, she wrote me a note and put it under my pillow. We said, "Goodbye," but then I found it after she left. I still have it. She wrote, "Dear Mom, thank you for being the wall against which I can push away."

FP: It sounds like you were a pretty remarkable woman.

FS: Well, I wasn't at that time feeling very good about myself.

FP: But your instincts in raising your children obviously must have been right.

FS: Right.

FP: Because adolescents don't always feel that way about their parents giving them permission to become their own people.

FS: Right. No, she felt good about that.

EM: Tell me, how did your life change when you moved here?

FP: Why did you choose to move to Brattle Street?

FS: My children said, "Look, Mom, you are so alone out there." I think I decided that I wasn't any longer going to have this life with my husband. I was living this dream that sometimes he was going to come back. Or, that I'd find a man and marry him.

EM: Right. Had you thought about marrying again?

FS: Well, I met a few people. I turned to dance. Somehow it was my outlet for the first couple of years.

FP: Social dancing?

FS: Yes. But it wasn't what I really was reaching out for. I knew I had to do something -- exercise or move somehow. So, I went down—in Weston, they have a place called Mary French Dance Studio. I thought, "Oh, she must have ladies' dance classes. Maybe I'll do an exercise class." She said, "Well, no, we don't have that, but we have that, but we have ballroom dancing." I said, "Well, I don't have a partner. My husband died." She said, "Why don't you come over Sunday? We have people. Everyone dances together." I loved to dance. My husband and I danced and we enjoyed dancing together. He never was a great dancer, but he had great rhythm. You know, we took some dancing

lessons together, and so forth. So, I did that. Then I met a man who was quite nice. He was a retired teacher and a good dancer. A nice guy, but he was a little bit boring over dinner. [laughter] He wasn't as culturally interested in the things I was, somehow. He was too bland for me. But yet, he liked music and liked to dance. So, I dated him for a year or two, but then he wanted to marry me. I said, "I didn't feel right." By then I had learned how to be alone and I decided that I didn't need to marry for the sake of having company. That it had to be right for me, or I just wouldn't do it. So, he was going to Florida and he wanted me to go with him and I said, "No." And he came back a year later and he called me and he said, "Are you still?" I said, "No, I'm not interested in going to Florida." I wanted, first of all, to be around my children.

FP: Sure.

FS: So, that was him. Then my sister's brother-in-law's wife introduced me to someone. Her friend's uncle, who lived in Montreal, Canada. Arnold. He was a very nice man. Arnold Fineberg. He had two sisters. One of them lived in Swampscott. I don't know if she's still living there, but I think so. And an older sister, who lived in Montreal with him. Well, we dated for about a year or two. He used to come in from Montreal, and I'd go there. We went to Europe together for a two-week holiday. Then the next morning, when we were at the hotel—we had separate rooms, and he was rather proper. But a very fine gentleman. I liked him a lot. He looked like David Niven.

FP: Oh!

FS: But he smoked and the first night after he took me out to dinner he said, "Well, how did you like meeting me?" Sort of? He sent me roses. He was very romantic. He sent me roses, so he obviously liked me and I liked him. But I just thought, "Gee, you smoke too much." He said, "Oh, we can change that," or something to that effect.

FP: [laughter]

FS: He never could. He would take me to the best restaurants, and he wouldn't eat. He'd touch a little bit, but smoking. He was a smoker.

FP: So, you—

FS: I went with him for about two years, and then I thought that he was too controlling. It was in Weston. I invited them to a Thanksgiving dinner with the whole family. My cousin, whose father was a very controlling father, said, "Freema, he is too controlling. Don't marry him." Somehow, she was right, and I thought about it.

FP: Then your kids convinced you to give up Weston and come to Cambridge?

FS: Yes.

FP: So that you'd have more activity?

FS: Right.

FP: You'd be more in the middle of things.

FS: So, that was the end of Arnold. Oh, yeah. When we were in England, the next morning after we had dinner was with each other, but he was chatting with another couple. We had wine that night. He said, "You know, you were very boisterous." I said, "Really?" Because I don't think of myself as a boisterous person. That really hurt my feelings. But what it meant to him now, in retrospect, is that I reminded him too much of his older sister, who was rather a buxom type of person, who was very boisterous, and that quality in me just showed up the tiniest bit. He wanted me to be like his little sister who lived in Swampscott, who was a beautiful, demure, lovely lady. But more passive. Something in me was not passive, even though I may have given him the impression of being a passive lady, but there's another quality in me that's not passive. That's the part of me that I found out in the last five, six, seven years.

FP: That's great.

FS: [laughter] I am beginning to say what I really feel.

FP: That's wonderful.

FS: Yes.

FP: Some people don't ever get there.

FS: Right. Well, I've been working at it.

FP: When you say that, what do you mean?

FS: I worked with a psychoanalyst in New York for four years. Then my husband wanted to come to Boston and he said, "Look, you have no choice, Freema." He met with Arthur once. Arthur was willing to meet him. After his first coronary, he did go to see a psychoanalyst. But I think it was too hard for him to dig into the deep issues of father and sibling stuff. I think it was too painful. Because his father was always his god, and no human being is a god.

EM: This is a long time ago. What about in the more recent years—your inner searchings?

FS: My feeling about it?

EM: Yes.

FS: Well, I believe that there's a God.

EM: No, no. I don't mean that. Your personal searchings.

FS: My personal searchings—oh. So, after that, I gave up my psychoanalyst, and then Susie, during that period of the marijuana, Susie's little friend in New York wrote her a letter, and she was going to a boy's house to visit. I can't remember the name of the family. They were very affluent people, out in Concord. So, I dropped her off at four-thirty, assuming that the parents were on top of things. Oh, I brought her a letter from home, this is Weston. I said, "Gee, Susie, there's a letter here from Karen." So, she opened it, read it, and dropped it in the back of the seat. So, I saw it and I read it. I didn't open the letter, but I read it because the letter had been opened. In the letter, it said, "Dear Susie, if I were you, I wouldn't fool around with those drugs. Marijuana isn't a good thing to do." So, I had a feeling that she was fooling around with it. When I read that, I was scared out of my wits. So, I called my son's psychiatrist right away. [laughter] I said, "What shall I do? I'm going to pick her up and I'm beside myself." He said, "Tell her that you found the letter and tell her that you're worried about her. I know the name of a good person that can see you and you can talk it over." [laughter] So, he sent me to a very wonderful woman. She was a Scottish psychoanalyst who lived in Belmont at the time. The poor woman got a tumor, or, what do you call it? A clot in her brain. So, I worked with her for about two years. Then, after that, I went to see a psychoanalyst in Lincoln. I worked with her for about five years. I've worked and—

FP: And you've stayed in good relationships with your children?

FS: Always. Then they were able to say to me, "You know, Mom, you were always too controlling." My son, Kenneth, said I was always controlling. And Susan, too. They were able to—and I would say, "Well, I learned not to be defensive," and to say, "Well, I realize, but it's the best I could do. I did the best I could as a mother. I'm sorry for that, that I tried to live through your lives. But now I don't have to live through your lives anymore. I found my own path." But I was willing to listen. What they wanted to know is that you acknowledge that you felt that way. That you did not understand them, and that it's okay, but that you did the best you could.

FP: One day, their children will say the same to them. [laughter]

FS: [laughter]

FP: Because the clock's turning.

FS: So, then I worked with Dr. Murphy, her name was. Ruth Murphy, in Lincoln, Massachusetts. I studied with her for a while. But then I decided that psychoanalysis wasn't exactly what I was trying to find. I was getting more interested in spiritual stuff, and I always—ever since I moved to Weston, I was a member of Temple Israel, but I was always alone because the kids didn't come into that with me. But then when I moved to Cambridge, my younger son, Kenneth, loved to go to temple, so he got interested in Sanders, Hillel. Since I always paid my dues at Temple Israel, I always had two tickets, but no one would go with me. Kenneth went to Sanders Theater to Hillel and loved it.

The older son said, "You know, Mom, we like the Conservative service better than the Reformed." They both were confirmed, bar mitzvahed, in the Reformed service with the rabbi. Rubin was marvelous.

FP: That's very interesting. Now, do they practice?

FS: They all inter-married, all of my children, all three of them. My older son—he was at the University of Chicago, and he was kind of shy. He had problems. When he was a young child, he was very quiet and very shy. After his bar mitzvah, he opened up. But with girls, and all, it was a little tricky. He liked the long, blonde girls, with the long hair, and they never looked at him, and he was feeling sad. He came home with a picture of this girl, Mary Dunn. He put his picture up in his room in Weston. I looked at it and I stuck it in the drawer. [laughter] Because I knew it meant something to him, but somehow, I was uncomfortable. He said, "Mom, why did you put her picture in the drawer?" I said, "I don't know. She's not Jewish. Really, I'd like you to meet someone Jewish." He said, "Well, I like her." I said, "Okay." So, I decided not to be too persistent

in what I wanted because my children had to find out what they wanted and what they liked. So, he married her.

FP: He married her.

FS: And she's a beautiful woman and I love her.

FP: How are they raising their children? Is religion a part of their life at all?

FS: Not too much, although my son is very proud of his Judaism. They always come here for Passover, Pesach. When Rosh Hashanah comes out on a weekend, they'd be here. But on a Wednesday, it's kind of far. They get challah there, and his wife does try to be traditional, but she's not religiously oriented, either. My young grandson, he's sixteen, and he says, "I'm half Jewish and I'm half Christian." They love coming for Passover, and they love our family, and—

FP: They love you, I'm sure.

FS: They love me, and we're very close, and that's the way it is.

FP: Have you ever traveled with your grandchildren?

FS: Yes. We went—these older boys, we went to British Columbia, skiing. And when they were younger, we went to Europe, on a skiing trip. But Susie's children weren't born there. Susie and Andy were just married. So, we all went on a family trip. But Kenneth, the younger of my two boys, did not go at that time. He was involved with a problem with a wife that he divorced, who didn't want to live with him any longer. When their daughter was four-years-old and he was heartbroken. She has problems. She was brought up Catholic, but not religious, either. Somehow, she has problems. She's on medication.

FP: Who has custody of the granddaughter?

FS: They share it. But now my granddaughter is sixteen. They lived with me for about three years while their house was being built. It was while they were building it.

FP: Yes, you have this nice big house.

FS: You wonder what I did with my life, but that's what happened with my life. [laughter] So, my son was divorced with his four-year-old daughter. He said, "Can we come and live with you?" Even though she was going back and forth to her mom's every week, she was here for a week with me. I was just coming to Ken and how he's divorced and that was a real sadness.

EM: He hasn't remarried.

FS: No. He's a very devoted father, and now his daughter, who is going to be sixteen in January—this September, chose to live with him because—

FP: Is she at high school, here in Boston?

FS: She was at BB&N, and last year she said, "I don't like this style of people here. I want to go to Cambridge Rindge and Latin. I want to see what real life is about." So, he was devastated because he wanted her to go to—

FP: Are you close to her?

FS: Very close. She loves me dearly, but she's not intimate with me. There's a difference. I mean, she's not intimate, like I am with my daughter. But she loves her grandma, and she thinks I'm very cute.

FP: [laughter]

FS: We have a closeness, even though we're not—she doesn't call me up. I don't request that of her. I take what you give me.

FP: You're a very smart woman.

FS: I took what I could from my daughter-in-law, who was ill. She's on medicine, and she gets very angry. Her anger builds up and she goes [unclear]. So, for a while there, she wanted to pull me away—wanted to pull my son away from the family.

FP: Are your children close to each other?

FS: Oh, yeah. Very much. They all know each other very well, and they know that they each have limitations in terms of being perfect. But they do care about each other.

FP: That's wonderful.

FS: So, as I pass on to my later years, I feel comfortable that my children care about each other enough so that none of them would ever be without—

FP: Did you ever, in your spiritual thinking, think about the synagogue in a way to do this part of your life?

FS: Yeah, I kept wanting to go back to Temple Israel.

FP: I'm interested in your spiritual quests.

FS: Yeah, because, you know, I'm very connected. But somehow, my children led me away a little bit, and they all inter-married.

FP: Because, you know, it strikes me, Freema, this is the first time I've had the privilege of knowing you, but there's so much at our community that you probably would have really—especially Rabbi Norman's teaching.

FS: Yeah.

FP: You should start thinking about maybe coming to Hebrew College and studying.

FS: I was thinking about coming back to Hebrew College one day.

FP: He teaches an incredible class on Bible on Thursday mornings. I drive into Cambridge—any time you want to take a ride.

FS: [laughter]

FP: He's really an extraordinary teacher.

FS: I know he's a very fine teacher.

FP: It's interesting because today it's so interesting when you think about this business of spirituality and people looking for some kind of inner peace.

FS: Right.

FP: We've all sorted in so many places, and I was wondering if the synagogue has ever been a place for you.

FS: Always. I used to go every Friday night. Not every Friday. That was our ritual. My husband and I would go. We enjoyed it. It was a social life.

FP: Sure.

FS: But then, when my husband died, somehow the social life changed, and so going to temple somehow—and the kids weren't around as much. Somehow, I wasn't able to put it across to Susie. I wanted her to be bat mitzvahed, but it wasn't what she wanted, so I didn't push. Maybe she regrets it today that I didn't. It was my fault, maybe, that I didn't. Who knows? But she was more interested in the academic aspects of—you know, the cultural pieces and the way the school was taught in those days and even from the way it's taught now.

FP: Oh, yes, it's very different.

FS: I was really interested for her son to be bar mitzvahed because—he's Jewish because he has a Jewish parent. Some of the boys didn't have a Jewish parent. But I didn't want to push. It's up to them. It's their life, their job. So, she found LaSalle College, which has some kind of a Hebrew school.

FP: It's a Sunday School. It's some kind of secular school.

FS: Yes. For some reason, she didn't move toward temple, but she knows I'm a member there. She has a friend who is not Jewish but whose husband is Jewish, who converted, whose children go there, and so we went to a Chanukah party there, and I was delighted, to a Chanukah dinner that night. She doesn't take to that.

FP: Oh.

FS: So now, she and her friend who is Jewish—her very good friend is a Jewish gal who [unclear] is Jewish. So, I have the hopes that they'll be bar mitzvahed, but now I don't know. They may both have to have tutors.

FP: That's the way to do it. There are plenty of tutors. My brother-in-law in New York is a cantor, and he does—a lot of lifecycles for people who do this all differently today.

FS: Right.

FP: Almost everybody's journeys are such different journeys.

FS: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's interesting.

FP: There's no homogeneous—

FS: Well, that's very interesting that you're open to that.

FP: You know, even the synagogue is open to it now because probably a quarter of our membership is intermarriage. So, the congregation has had to be a lot more open to the

changes.

FS: Yes. You see, I love the choir, and I love singing, I always have. To me, that's religion. [laughter] Also, I can read the Hebrew, so I enjoy it.

FP: That's great. So, how are you friends with Ronya?

FS: When my husband first died, Ronya somehow met me through someone and sort of was attracted to me, and I was attracted to her. I knew her for about three or four or five years. She knew Susie in Weston. They were very good friends. But somehow, she was too nervous. So, I liked her and I respected her. She's brilliant.

FP: She's brilliant.

FS: But I got into the healthy stuff, and so she didn't go along with that.

FP: Yes. She got very involved with Temple Israel.

FS: Oh, yes, which was wonderful.

FP: To this day, she comes every single Thursday, like Golda Meir.

FS: Yes.

FP: She's the person who encouraged us to do the whole Soviet Jewry effort.

FS: Oh, yeah. She's a very bright and wonderful woman. Then there came a point in my life where I was moving towards finding my own thing, in the holistic way, alternative medicine and stuff like that. You know, and having dinner with someone who would share the same kind of meal. She didn't want to go out and eat, and I always could afford things more.

FP: Sure.

FS: So, we had a good time together and walked together. We were very close. But then I didn't call her that often. I thought, "Well, the next time you don't call me, I'll never call you." I never called her. I think it was the breaking point. I felt bad about it, and often I think about her, and I heard of her son dying and all of that. I feel bad.

FP: Yes, very tragic.

FS: I'm not angry at her, but I don't feel that she—I'm a much more —well, emotionally, I found a different inner peace, and she really makes me uncomfortable.

FP: Did you ever do anything like Sisterhood at the synagogue?

FS: No.

FP: You never did?

FS: I never got involved in that too much. No. It's right at the bottom of that page. You see, when Susie was four-years-old, it was the beginning of my opening up, a little bit. That's when I decided to go back to school. So, I went to Queens College and I took English. But I had to have math. I never had math in high school. I was missing math. But I started with something I felt comfortable with, which was English. I had always loved English. I still remember my English teacher, Winifred Nash. [laughter] She was a great woman, and I loved her because of the strength about her that left a mark on me. So, anyway, I took English I and I got an 'A' in it, and my husband helped me with the papers and everything. He said, "What do you want to do that for? God, you're more intelligent than all of these college kids. I didn't marry you for that." So, he sort of blew me away with that. Then, Susie was born, I think, after that. That's what it was.

FP: Did you ever take classes now, in Cambridge?

FS: No. I somehow never did.

FP: That's just never been a—

FS: I was always afraid that I wouldn't be good enough, and so forth. That I wasn't smart enough, and all that. You had to do a lot of reading. I wasn't a reader. My older sister, when I was three-and-a-half or four years old, was going to the library and she wouldn't take me and my mother said, "Take her," because I had a bottle. [laughter] She said, "I'm not taking her to the library. She's got her bottle." [laughter]

FP: So, do you see yourself—

FS: I never thought that libraries were for Freema or books. I never had many books in my childhood.

FP: Were you artistic? Did you like to—?

FS: Oh, yeah. So art is something that I've been doing.

FP: What kind of work do you do?

FS: Free expression. When I was a youngster, growing up, I used to doodle and my mother would say, "What are you patchke-ing?" I was patchke-ing everything. On the telephone, I doodled.

FP: So, do you paint?

FS: Yeah, but I do patchke-ing. [laughter]

FP: [laughter] That's kind of odd that—

FS: What I express is what I feel.

FP: Freema, do you know Ann Jackson?

FS: No. But I met a gal, Helen Hawes, that does that kind of patchke-ing artwork. I went to an eight-week course with her last season and loved it. So, I think I'll do it again this year.

FP: That's great.

FS: We took a few classes—Susie, Arthur, and I went to Rockport for a week or ten-day vacation when we lived in New York, and we did an art thing. We had fun. I have a picture from when she was seven or eight. Then this spirituality started to open up with the Korean healer. He's very spiritual. So that, combined with my interest in healing, health, and psychology—somehow they worked together. He helped me quite a lot to feel good about myself. They loved me there, and they felt my spiritual soul, and they said that I'd brought them success and life—that when I wasn't there, they missed my being. A lot of the people there liked me, and so, that became my spa and my—

FP: So, is it a retreat center?

FS: Some people live there.

FP: Some people live there?

FS: Yes, and they moved from their original place to Jamaica Plain, and I helped them because I valued what they were doing. I was interested in health, and they were helping people be healthy.

FP: That's wonderful.

FS: And so, they loved me and I became very—

FP: How often do you go?

FS: I sort of backed off the past few years. I go once in a while. I'll go for a tune-up, they call it.

FP: [laughter]

FS: So, I get acupuncture. He believes that there isn't such a thing as illness. The illness is imbalance. If you have an imbalance, it causes illness. But once you balance, the illness goes. So, that's his theory.

FP: It's wonderful.

FS: He says he doesn't give a name to illness. He doesn't care what you call it. Cancer, arthritis, lung problems—it's because there's an imbalance in your body.

FP: Well, it's definitely a belief system that seems to have affected a lot of people.

FS: I'm very much interested in preventative medicine and spirituality as it connects with that. Now, about three years ago, Susie gave me a card and she said, "Mom, you still have some unresolved issues." I said, "Oh, yeah, sure." [laughter] I put the card away. "Did you ever call this guy? He's a really interesting fellow." She met him and thought he was interesting. She said, "I think you ought to call him." So, I did. I called him, after her urging me to do so. I met with him and I found him very interesting.

FP: And what does he do?

FS: He is a psychologist who is a spiritual healer, and he doesn't call religion by any—you can be Jewish, you can be Buddhist. He tends toward Buddhism and Tibetan influence. He studied with an American Indian Cherokee woman, who is a twenty-seventh-generation Cherokee Indian. She was encouraged by her grandfather to share her teaching like our grandparents wanted us to share our teaching.

FP: Right.

FS: They are the early American teachings of being close to the earth, close to nature, and close to animals. He learned a lot from her. He also studied with a fellow who is doing spiritual work with animals, and it's sort of moving into a place where psychoanalysis has not been too successful. Psychoanalysis somehow doesn't help you find your spiritual self on a cellular level. So, psychoanalysis—you lie there and you say what's on your mind, but you don't get it out on a cellular level as much as this style of therapy. So, it's a new style of therapy that I'm involved in now. I see this guy once a week, and I find that it's wonderful.

FP: I really admire your—

FS: It's helping me find my path. He said, "Your path is that you love people and that you shine to people, and they feel it, that you affect them. And that's how you radiate to people." I didn't believe it at first, but so many people like me, and yet, I'm not socially involved with people. I went to a psychic with him, who is in Marion, Massachusetts, about four months ago, and she said, "Now I see you with a fountain, radiating out, reaching out to people." She said, "You don't even have to be with a person. They can be sitting, looking out their window, and there's something about you that helps them to feel loved."

FP: That's fantastic.

FS: It's very interesting. Then we talked a little bit more and I said, "I'm so sad about my son who is divorced," and then she said, "Does he have a child?" I said, "He has a daughter." She said, "Tell me a little bit about the daughter." I did. "She's going to be sixteen in January," I told her that she insisted that she wanted to go to Cambridge Rindge and Latin. She said, "That girl is going to do for you what you didn't do for yourself." She said, "You lived through your husband most of your life." I told her about Arthur and how sensitive he was. She said, "But now I see you opening up." We had a similar view, where we talked. Not so much about my parents, but—

FP: Right.

FS: She said, “I see you opening up and letting go of him. I see him in the ethereal space, and that you are now finding your own true worth and path.”

FP: Well, you seem to be—

FS: Isn't that interesting?

FP: It's a spiritual moment, being here with you. W really thank you.

EM: It's been very, very special.

FS: Thank you. I don't want to tire you. [laughter]

EM: It's hard to believe that we haven't met you before.

FP: Well, she's had a different journey.

EM: Yes.

FP: I wish she had taken the path into Temple Israel because I have a feeling you would have had another path.

EM: There are a lot of people who would like to hear about this.

FP: Yes, but evidently—some of that had moved in—I had invited Susan to participate as an artist in the exhibit.

FS: Yes.

FP: That's how Susan heard about it. Then called us to tell her that her mother is a member of Temple Israel. Between Emily and I, and a lot of women in the congregation, I know a lot of the women because I was President of the temple and Emily is the rabbi's

wife.

FS: Yes.

FP: So, we know a lot of the women. But I had never had the pleasure of meeting you. I hope we can rectify that now.

FS: I was saying to Andy's mother, "I've never been to a temple service. She said, "Well, I'll take you, and I'll take her to Temple Israel some time."

FP: Our services are at 5:45 now. and they're wonderful.

FS: So many times I've wanted to, but somehow, I'm very involved with the family.

FP: Sure.

FS: So, when Kenneth was here, I had a cook. For ten years, she's worked for us, ten years. First Kenneth came here with his daughter. Susan and Andy would come over here, and we all ate together, with this cook. Then, Susie and Andy moved.

FP: Is she a macrobiotic cook?

FS: She is, but because of my kids, she's become more broad with that. [laughter]

FP: [laughs]

FS: Kenneth, particularly, isn't so into the healthy stuff as we are.

EM: Are you into cooking as well?

FS: I'm not strict, but I do like vegetables and good food. And I like a lot of this rich stuff. But she's a wonderful cook. You see, I'm a very simple, good cook. She's a wonderful cook—this girl from Italy—she learned how to make gefilte fish and chicken soup and

knaidlach. But I haven't got that gift. But I'm very happy to go with someone that knows how. [laughter]

FP: Freema, this is just a release—

FS: I'll get my glasses. When I went to this fellow about two or three years ago, I said, "I'm Jewish." He said, "You can still hold on to your strong Judaism. It doesn't matter at all. Jewish, Christian, whatever." But his whole philosophy is that we have to bring the one world together.

[END OF INTERVIEW]