Sara Wallace Transcript

IRIS GEIK: Today is Saturday--. This is very loud. Today is Saturday, February 8th and I'm interviewing Sara Wallace in her home under the auspices of the Jewish Women's Archive, Temple Israel Oral History Project in Boston, Massachusetts. And, well, Mrs. Wallace, we've already had an opportunity to talk. But I wanted to ask you to start with some reflections on your life if you could start there. I'm extremely impressed at what I know in the outer world about your journey to become a lawyer and continue to be a working lawyer, and of your prominent contribution. I'm wondering what kinds of early childhood experiences do you feel most shaped your adulthood?

SARA WALLACE: An expectation that I would learn, and that I would be honest. Perhaps not very rich. And respect—and respect other people, different people. That's, I think, about the size of it. Parents who worked hard, were known in their community. They didn't move about. And respected. And expected the same of my brother and me.

IG: How did they convey that to you? And how do you remember that being conveyed to you by their actions, their words?

SW: I think their own actions. My mother was very outgoing, always family and people would come to visit. We lived in Winthrop. And there were always plenty of visitors, particularly in the summer. And she was always ready for—always ready for people. There were only four of us. But there was always—there was always enough for whoever came. We had some very regular visitors in my father's family who were very intellectual people. One of them I particularly remember was separated from his wife. Was one of the founders of [unclear] Farm, was very involved in that. I can't say that my parents were. But they were interested in the things he talked about. But they weren't about to go and do that, participate. He came—he would come almost every Sunday for

a long time. He didn't have many places to go. His children were then living with his wife and in Boston, the West End part of Boston. And my family visited them regularly because in the early days in Winthrop there weren't any stores. They would shop in Boston, and then visit the family and then come home. And when I was young they would take me along. So I was exposed to this family, my father's--. She was my father's niece. She was about twenty years older than my father. And her children were more closely—close to my father's age. So I was sort of the baby there. And one of their daughters--. They were all educated. And one of their daughters, their youngest daughter, had become a lawyer. So she was one of the very early lawyers. She didn't have the economic background that two prominent Jewish women had who were early lawyers and became judges—Sadie Schulmer and Jennie Lightman Baron. But Jennie Lightman Baron was a Grossman, and Sadie Schulmer, I don't know. But Mathilda worked--. She did mostly conveyancing. She did title examining. And then she began to work for one of the large law firms that did mostly real estate. And she--. I think she was one of the people who kept saying, "You should go to law school." Things will be different when you're older." [Laughter] And she was very encouraging about that.

IG: Meaning different for women?

SW: Different for women. And we certainly were very poor [unclear] when I was admitted. There was a handful of women. And when you sat within the bar enclosure some clerk would tap you on the shoulder and remind you that this was for the bar members only. That would be the first time you came. The second time they'd have to be more polite. But that's the way it was. And I think for her to be enthusiastic about the law, the limitations or the advantages to her personally, I think was a bit unusual. So those were some of the early things. And then I think I had very good teachers in Winthrop. And they were old—the old guard teachers with classical educations. And they loved children who liked to learn. They would come and visit at your home even though the parents didn't speak English well or anything. But they warmed up and I've

never forgotten them, you know, whether it was grade school or high school. And I felt I was very close to several of my teachers [unclear] right through high school. So I was fortunate in that respect because I met people who were in small communities and they didn't get as much. But that doesn't mean that there weren't teachers like that everywhere. And my son's first year at Harvard, he had a roommate who came from out in the boondocks really. He was educated in a one-room schoolhouse with all these other classes. They didn't have a science lab for chemistry [unclear] what they learned. But they had all the academic backgrounds that books and interested teachers could provide without other things. So even to this day there are those opportunities. And I think that it depends on the emphasis the schools are providing whether the children are really going to learn those things.

IG: This is jumping to another area of what are some of the most important things in your life personally and professionally in the sense of how you would like to be remembered?

SW: Well, personally I'd, you now, I loved school and I think that was pretty obvious even in high school with the things that I did. In law school I was first in my class. That doesn't say very much because that was the day school at what was Portia Law School, in the New England School of Law. But I learned—

IG: What do you mean it doesn't say much? I think that's quite an accomplishment.

SW: Well, no, I mean it wasn't a big school. And many, or a number of the people who attended weren't as serious about pursuing law as a career as sort of what do I do next, you know. And some of them were younger and some of them were much older. Some of them were women who were married. One was married to a physician. She must have been in her forties, which I thought practically senile at the time. [Laughter] But then there was another, a Catholic woman who was head of a very large Catholic social service agency. And she became a very good friend of mine. She was a very serious

woman. She's connected with all the—her family, married and otherwise to people who were politically very well informed and running the state and the city and all. And she wanted to do that because she wanted to try her own cases for her--. She was head of the Social Service Bureau in Connecticut. And she felt that her clients were not being well represented in court. And that was the only thing she wanted to do. So, you know, there were some very serious people. Then when I took the bar exam there was a lot of publicity. I was the youngest. And one letter said I was first, one letter said I was one of the top three. But only twenty-four percent of those who took it passed. And that was a way of cutting down on the number of lawyers because it was the Depression. They didn't want any more people. And this woman's brother-in-law was a very important judge. I had met him because she talked about me to her family. And I knew another judge. And despite the fact that I knew these people, and Regina's family—she was the Catholic person, very prominent—she said, "Nobody--." Her brother-in-law said, "Nobody's hiring young, ripe lawyers. They're a dime a dozen. Unless they have a background of some business and can provide business, or they're related to people in the firm, they're not going to get anything." So that was—that was the way it was. And what I was doing was tutoring for the bar exam and correcting papers for the law school. I had an office with someone whose—a woman who had come to school, to the law school. Her husband was a lawyer. And I had space in that office. But I didn't—I really wasn't happy with that arrangement. And somebody else I knew had said I could use the space in his office. And that's the way it was. And then by that time I was married. My husband was an intern. He'd just graduated medical school and was an intern. So we had about four years of internship and residency because he was a pediatrician and that's what he was going to do. And when I came to Brookline I was young. I was on that—the Combined Jewish Philanthropies and United Way. They don't lose a minute when they know there's somebody else who might go out and do some campaigning. And I think it was either Jenny Ludman Baron or Sadie [unclear] Schulmer for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies for the young lawyers. So I was soliciting funds for that

and for the combined--. And when I—when my son was born I just--. I was still doing some correcting and a little bit of tutoring. But it wasn't much. I would go in about once a week with the papers and take those. But I was doing a lot of volunteer things, that kind of thing. And then I joined the League of Women Voters. And I don't know whether the name Erman means anything to you, but—

IG: What does that stand for?

SW: He--. What's that?

IG: What was the name?

SW: Herbert Erman. He was one of the counsel in the Saccho-Venzettii case.

IG: Oh, okay, sure.

SW: And he had written the play, which probably bombed. Of course, you know--. But he wrote a great deal about it. And his wife, Sarah, who's a very, very intelligent woman--. She was one of the people who was a leader against the death penalty and very involved with the Framingham before Reformatory for Women, supporting Dr. Miriam Van Waters who believed in time out for the women to go into the community and work. And so I went to a couple of their meetings and Sarah just really organized the League of Women Voters in Brookline. She sort of dragged me in. And she was the first person. And so I was very active with that. And at the same time I was very involved with Children's Hospital. So I was keeping—I was keeping pretty busy.

IG: You have a real straight history of community involvement and dedication to building—it sounds like building community organization.

SW: Building community organizations. And that was what I was doing. And United Way, of course--.

And we'd push the carriage up the street. My daughter was an infant. My son was three years old. And I never went into anyone's house. But I would ring the bell and I'd have David just not move, you know, because she was old enough to sit up or fall out of the carriage. And he asked me what I was doing. And I said, "Helping provide some money for the poor." And he said, "Are we so poor that you have to [unclear]." [Laughter] But anyway, that's what it was.

IG: And what do you think was that--? You have a really strong community spirit. I mean it's almost--. Given your accomplishments, it's an understatement to say that. I mean you've talked a little bit about your early childhood. Can you point to a few things that pushed you in that kind of direction?

SW: Yeah, well, we didn't have any money. My parents—everybody in my family had come from Warsaw, Poland. Everybody had been born there. But when my mother and father were married they immediately went to Berlin. That's where my father worked. I had a little business. And my brother was born there. And then they-- the only reason I was born in Warsaw was that her parents had told her to be sure--. There was one brother, my mother's brother—there were ten of them altogether—who hadn't left Warsaw. Persuade him to come. So they were there. And my father's nephew—my father's brother was quite affluent. And his son had gone to Vienna to medical school because you couldn't go to medical school. Jews couldn't do that. And he—

IG: You could only go to medical school in Vienna if you were Jewish?

SW: Hmm?

IG: You could only go to medical school in Vienna—

SW: If you had the money you could go. He had the money and he went. But not many could, you know, but it was a--. There was no reason why any Jew would want to stay in Poland at the time. So there was something about my mother. And he felt that she

should stay until I was born. And then I was sick. So we stayed a couple of years. And that's how I happened to be in Poland rather than in Berlin or the United States. But, so, my father started a--. He was working for someone for a long time. He was running a leather bag factory, which he was doing in Berlin. And they didn't have a--. You know, we hadn't--. We had—we had plenty of the best food and everything else. But they didn't go off on vacations or anything else. But my mother never turned anybody away from the door even when someone or my father or I would think it was sort of a fraud. But she said, "Well, if they—if they come to the door and ask, it can't be that good for them." So, you know, she never turned anybody down despite the fact that she was never able to give very much.

IG: So you were following your mother's model.

SW: It was just sort of a thing that--. And I think that is true of many Jewish people. I think the idea of giving is something that they expect, you know. If you don't have much you give a little. If you have more you give more. So I could see where the monies were going. Anyway, so I did the League of Women Voters thing. And I was president for four years. We became one of the largest leagues in the country at that time. But that wasn't just because I was president. That was because the McCarthy hearings were on. We had three lawyers on the board. There were two others beside me. And the other people were also very democratically minded. And it was a very interesting period both for the legislation nationally and the state legislation. And I was on the state board of the League of Women Voters for Constitutional Law and Planning. Those are the two things. But I did what I was supposed to on the state board for a couple of years. And that wasn't what I really--. It was the local thing that I was more interested--. I felt we could do more.

IG: Do you think that if you'd been--. If you had been born--but if you had been born a man do you think your legal career would have taken the same kinds of direction?

SW: No. No. I think more people would--. No, I think it would have been different. It was difficult for any young lawyer then because there were a great many. And now, what is it seventy-eight percent of people pass the bar exam. Twenty-four percent of nine hundred, close to a thousand were admitted. And they're just trying to put a cover on this to keep it down because there was a lot of ambulance chasing. And there were a lot of things of that sort. And it's really not good for them, for the prestige of the bar so that there were not very many opportunities. But I don't know, I had some clients—

IG: Your opportunities are pretty much the same as a man in that sense?

SW: Not quite as good because I think even the public would be more inclined to go to--. That was just the way I thought it was then. That's not so now because there are women in every single field who are as much in demand, let's say, as the men. Well, maybe not as much. But they still have a rough time. And they're working very hard to make partner or to, you know, get the recognition that the men get.

IG: Right. [Unclear] you said that. I'm sorry. Are you in--? There are a couple of threads that I wanted to pick up on. And one was your--. This is jumping a little bit in a slightly different direction. And I want to get back to this as well. Some historical events--. You had talked about being born in Warsaw and then growing up, I imagine, in Berlin.

SW: No. I didn't—

IG: You didn't grow up in Berlin.

SW: No I came--. I was here two and a half years old. And we came to the United States—

IG: Sorry. I misread—

SW: To my grandfather and grandmother's house very briefly.

IG: How did your family--? Why and how--. How'd your family manage to come to the United States at that point in time, or what compelled them to come here at that time?

SW: Oh, I think—I think my grandparents were here. And the younger members of the—

IG: I see. That's why they sent your grandmother to [unclear].

SW: And all the younger members came here. And they were all working. My grandfather had a large factory. It was the same name of a business that he had in Warsaw, Paris Paper Box Company. And the younger, unmarried members all came. So there were four of them who came. And one of them, my mother's older brother and older brother's sister, married and lived in London. The next oldest one lived in Switzerland. My mother was in Berlin. So they were scattered. And my grandparents were urging them all to come and they did at about the same time. So actually, my grandfather took me to the kindergarten in Dorchester. And he said I was just very small for my age.

IG: How old were you?

SW: I wasn't three years old.

[Laughter]

SW: He said they were waiting for the papers or whatever. I did that and I learned English.

IG: And you stayed--. And they believed--. And they put you in the kindergarten?

SW: Yeah.

IG: Always ahead of your time.

SW: Except for when the family was in Winthrop. I had been sick for a long time.

IG: With what?

SW: Heart. And when they moved to Winthrop I never attended first grade, only to the second grade. I think I was five years old. [Laughter] Anyway, it was fine. But that was really childhood, early childhood kinds of things.

IG: What was the--? Well, what were your grandparents' sense or what kind of information were you all having about the Holocaust while you were here? Were there still—were there relatives in Europe at the time who you were hearing from?

SW: The grandparents were urging them--. As a matter of fact, two of them, two of the aunts and uncles, and one of them, the oldest sister who lived in London came to this country. And they went to Medford and Millis. And my aunt and uncle came and they moved to Roxbury. My uncle was a—he was an expert in Swiss watches. Two of my uncles—

IG: I'll change the tape.

SW: But that--. Anyway, they all came except this one brother that my mother could not persuade.

IG: Was he a brother in Poland? Had he gone—

SW: Warsaw, Poland. He was the one closest to my mother both in age and because they were so--. There was a year apart. I don't know which one was the year older. And he would come, but his wife didn't want to leave. And my mother, from the time she got here, wrote to come. And before 1941, just before the war, his wife didn't want to leave her family. So they all died in the Holocaust there.

IG: That must have had an enormous impact on your mother.

SW: Yeah. It was, you know, he was her favorite sibling. Anyway, so that was that.

IG: Marching back into--. Since we're on historical events, we'll go back into some other kinds of things. Just wanted to get some sense of your--. Obviously, you've lived through some, as we all do, lived through some extraordinary moments in history. There is the creation of the State of Israel, civil rights movement, Vietnam and—

SW: I think the Second World War. I had a brother who was just a little more than two years older than I. And we were very close. And he wasn't married and—at the time. And he wasn't married either. And he was a pharmaceutical chemist. And he said he was going to be drafted and he may just as well go and enlist. And he refused officer training. He said he knew he was going to be called so he might as well do this. But he wanted to get out as soon as possible. Well he was in for the duration. And my mother was beside herself because he was in the South Pacific. There were times when we didn't hear from him for months. I was constantly after Red Cross. Where were they? They were in Guadalcanal. They were--. He was in every, you know, every engagement setting up advance hospital and their supplies for emergencies. So that had a--. That was had a great impact. My husband was rejected. So he was home. But so many of our friends were in that. And we tried to keep in touch with all of them. That more than Vietnam because by Vietnam it didn't--. But civil rights movement, yes. That was, you know, I just felt that the time had come for changes here. And I think it was reflected in some of the things that I did. I had been involved in planning and regional planning because the town didn't have a department. They just had a board. And the Selectmen appointed me to the first urban renewal project in [unclear]. And that was quite a step. In towns members who were elected in cities, they were appointed by the mayor. But because this was the first one I was appointed. And there were problems right from the start. It was…you're not a Boston resident so you don't know the upheaval of the West

End when Jerry Rappoport was in that. I knew Jerry. His wife was a friend. She's was a very prominent Catholic who was involved in United Way, which is how I knew her. But we didn't want that to happen here. And I really didn't want to run after the problems I was having with that authority. But I was urged by, I don't know, hundreds of citizens. And I said, "I'm not going to spend any money. I'm not being paid for this. I'm spending days and nights doing it." They ran a campaign. And I was elected. And I must say that I wasn't happy with the rest of them. Four Catholics were elected and I. And the Monsignor was so afraid that the urban renewal project was going to cut into his—what do they call it. Anyway, it was his parish. That he was terribly opposed [unclear]. So anyway, the whole thing was a nightmare. And I could see that four to one votes. We had dishonest people coming in. There was no criteria for who would do what.

IG: And why did they--? Who was encouraging these people to come in? When you said dishonest people coming in voting or dishonest people in terms of contracting?

SW: Contracting. People were coming in. There was no criteria for what they would do. Who would be our director, who would--? What was the criteria for the selection of a developer?

IG: And what year was this?

SW: About 19—I was appointed in 1957. And in 1958 I had to run and I was elected. Mike Dukakis ran then for the first time. Mike's an old friend. Mike was in his senior year at law school at Harvard at the time. And I—he called me. He wanted to be on the slate. And I didn't think he would help. Our meetings were going until twelve o'clock at night. It was before the open—before the sunshine laws. And the chairman—I was vice chairman. He was chairman. Somebody else was chairman. They would keep the meetings closed. I don't know how many people outside waiting to come in to hear it. When people left at eleven or eleven thirty they opened the doors. Nobody at law school who wants to make Law Review and get a really good job is going to do this night after

night. It was bad enough for me because my mother was sick at the time. And I was running over to the Jewish Memorial Hospital at night anyway. So when they appointed a dentist from Florida, and I had—[unclear] to be the developer. And they wouldn't let me explain why I voted no. I resigned in protest. I didn't resign for personal reasons. I said exactly why. And I had a member of Temple Israel who is a very prominent judge read my letter so that I wouldn't be sued for slander and libel. It was short of that he said. The only thing he did—wrote back, "Sara"... He sent me a book of instructions of how to type. [Laughter]

IG: Who is this person at the temple?

SW: [Unclear] I don't know. Before your time—

IG: But it's a nice memory of somebody in the temple.

SW: He was a very, very--. I never--. Don't mention it because I don't want anyone to know who did it, who reviewed my letter.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

SW: Eventually the town sued the leader of the party. I had been keeping them informed about the problems we were having. But since they were elected, and the Selectmen are elected, the Selectmen were very reluctant to interfere. So that was what happened. But eventually they sued the redevelopment authority. And eventually, because I was getting federal money and we were paying off the redevelopment authority's debts, we got rid of the redevelopment authority. They were spending money, you know, pulling it from construction and development to salaries. And we put an end to that. But it was almost twenty years later. Anyway—

IG: I'm going to stop and change the tape now.

[end of tape 1, side A]

SW: --town form of government, are you?

IG: No, I'm really not. I'd love to hear some more about it. So this is--. You got rid of them and this is the beginning of your involvement in civil rights.

SW: Well, not really, no. [Unclear]

IG: Not civil rights but in [unclear].

SW: In other town affairs. I was a town meeting member.

IG: And protecting the rights, certainly, of people.

SW: I don't call myself a civil rights advocate. I go and--. Well, in community a sort of fairness--. But anyway, before—while I was--. I think it was just before I finished my last term as president of the League, the Selectmen had asked me to attend International Conference at Bard College on community relations. That's what I'm interested in. Well, I was interested in, of course. And I went to that. It was very interesting. And it happened because more youngsters were coming from the Catholic St. Mary's High School to the Brookline High School. And it was sort of Catholic/Protestant relations rather than Jewish and other. And so I went to the conference and came back. And we were organizing a community council. And I was president of that for four years until United Way stopped funding that. And the outgrowth of that was that we—

IG: Excuse me for a moment.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

IG: Okay.

SW: Heads of various departments were on the board of the community council: the school committee, the library trustees, social service, health director. So I know all these people well anyway. And we got some—we set up a program of jobs for teenagers. And we got--. Teresa Morse and I went to the head of some of the departments in the state and got a little money for that. And the outgrowth of that was that we formed the Brookline Community--. We formed another organization because there was some federal money available. And we--. I was president--. I was chairman of that. And we had to join with other communities to get the money. What we got money for Head Start and money for jobs for youth because we were no longer in the community council able to carry since United Way wasn't going to give us--. They gave us all of $4,000 a year. But with volunteers we were able to do those things. So we got—we joined with Newton, Waltham, Needham and other communities for the home health care organization—Inter-Community Home Health. And that's about thirty years ago. And I--. It was going along. We were doing a good job. But when we needed a change of directors, we got a nun who was a social worker. She'd been in New York and she was here. She did a very good job for us. And we were able to do home care for all these communities. And I was president of that for four years. And I'm still--. You know Ruth Cowan.

IG: No, I don't.

SW: Well, she's—she's been a trustee at Temple Israel. Her husband was a lawyer, Philip. They're both friends of mine. And Ruth's a social worker. And she's been with—she was teaching at BU. And she's a very good social worker. And so we—she and I are still involved in Inter-Community. It's not called that anymore.

IG: What's it called?

SW: But we've joined the VNA. And it's VNA Care Plus. And what we had, what we organized and what we developed was a service that had trained over a hundred home care people.

IG: How marvelous.

SW: And they went to these communities. And we were sought after because we could be paid through social security. And various hospitals wanted us. But we turned it down because we could see an end to what we were doing. When the VNA came along we felt--. We were very impressed with the person who was the head of it. And it's a big corporation. But what they hope is that they cut down on administrative costs by having VNA's, not only the Devon VNA, but Cambridge and the North Shore. And they have a day care center. They have a hostel. They have a place in Needham. They've just expanded. We're pleased to be with it. So we're overseers for life. We're directors for life, Ruth and I.

IG: It sounds like this and, organizations and other organizations that in many ways you were the first Jew, Jewish person—

SW: No question about it in some of those. Community council, well, Sarah Evans was on that first board. And as a result of that board the physician in Brookline who was head of the—who was the health officer for the town, Al Freschette, was appointed director, health director, for the state when Frank Sergeant was governor. And Frank Sergeant appointed me to the hearing board, Meat and Poultry Hearing Board. My children made fun calling me the chicken lady. But I learned a lot about the contents of cans and what comes first and what's in it, and also--. In fact, it was a funny experience because when I went to the Bard conference, Mrs. Roosevelt entertained us at a cookout at her little cottage there. And she was then on the UN. She's really my dream lady.

IG: Please tell us a little bit about Mrs. Roosevelt.

SW: And--. Well, I was one of about forty people at her--. And there was someone who was doing the barbecue out in back. And she was late. She was coming in from New York from the UN where she was a representative at the time. And she dashed out with

her dog, you know. Remarkable. She said hello to each of us. If she didn't catch the name, she didn't pass it by. She said, "I didn't get it." She was sure that she knew it. So that was very interesting part of the--the rest of the conference was interesting because it led to forming the community council here, and then to the Brookline Community Action Committee through which we got head start and jobs for youth. Those are my applications and I got them.

IG: We thank you for that. In those organizations—to go back to the Jewish identity a little bit—did you bring a Jewish community perspective to the work do you feel?

SW: No, I—

IG: What role did your being Jewish play in it?

SW: They all knew I was Jewish. The Children's Hospital, I had been a patient there when I was three, four years old. But that didn't--. And they followed me through high school and took good care of me, I think. And my husband, who was on the staff there for forty years, and he was interested in cardiology in that department. He was a clinical teacher. He was not a professor. He was a very good, very good clinician. But his being there had nothing to do with my—what I was doing. I got involved in the first public campaign for funds. And there were other Jewish people, I'm sure. But the fundraiser would come here. Almost all the meetings that I had were here because I was home because I had children coming, you know, school and one thing or another. And my husband helped with the fundraising. But I did a lot of it. And I was appointed—I was elected a trustee, which was of the—except for Cahn--. What was his first name? Lester Cahn. He was a great--. He was THE Jewish contact for every Christian organization, you know, he was it. So he was on. And I was on.

IG: Did you encounter any antisemitism in these organizations?

SW: No. No. No. Once you're there--. I was on. But the women's committee, which was very snobbish—

IG: Because you're Jewish or just snobbish in general.

SW: Oh, just snobbish in general. They were members of a--. I know their sewing circle was a debutante follow-up kind of thing for these ladies. And they were doing, I must say, a wonderful job at the hospital. They were volunteers. Their day at the hospital come rain or no matter what, they were there. So you couldn't criticize that. But it was limited to a number of people. And somebody had to die before anybody else could be appointed, which is contrary to any fundraiser aspect. If you want to raise funds you have a lot of people. And then I got a call from one of the snobbiest of all. Would I be interested in becoming a member? Frankly—

IG: This is which organization, I'm sorry.

SW: This is the women's committee at—

IG: The Children's Hospital.

SW: And frankly I really wasn't. But I felt somebody was going to do it and it may as well be somebody who was doing a lot, you know. And so I became a member. Of course, it's changed since. And the women's committee is a very representative thing. I'm a life member. But I seldom go to anything. I just don't have time. And because trustees were being sued they changed the format of the leadership or public kind of thing so that they had a handful of maybe twelve trustees and the rest of us all became corporation members. And then after that all became overseers. And so a couple of years ago--so I've been an overseer. I've been connected with the hospital for as long as the league--. I became an overseer for life at the hospice. I'm an overseer for life at the Children's and a director for life of the Inter-Community. But it's forty or more years that each of those organizations and the league. But there were a number of things in, you know, in

between.

IG: Do you think--? I mean--. Make that--. I'm sorry. I had just--. It was tantalizing at a slightly different time when you said that meetings, people came here to meet because you had young children. I thought maybe get a little sense of how you kept your rich—what's the weave of your life when your children were young and growing up. It sounds like you were doing many things.

SW: I was doing many things but I was always here when my children came home from school.

IG: For the record would you just say how many—say your children for our record here. You have three children.

SW: I have three children: David, Marjorie and Deborah. And Deborah is the youngest and she's six years younger than my middle daughter, and nine years younger than my son. Almost a different generation, but because of their ages--and not only because of that I was always here. All the League board meetings were here. The meetings for the Brookline Community Council were here. So--. And I knew these people. Nobody hesitated to come here, you know, whether it was the health director, or the library or the trustees. I knew them pretty well. And so those meetings were at my house. And in the meantime there were some other things that I was doing. And when my youngest daughter was in fifth grade or sixth grade, we decided that she should go to private school. She's very bright. I was becoming less satisfied with the teachers here. My son had the very best. We were enthusiastic about the teachers he had. Marjorie did extremely—the second one did extremely well, too. She'd get all As. But the teachers were all substitutes one after another. And, you know, they were learning the same thing over and over again. It was repetition because of that. So I wasn't happy about that. She wanted to go to the high school even though she was accepted some place else. And she did. And we had the same experience with my son. And he—he was an

extraordinary student. There was no question about where he would go to school. He had his choice of anything. But while they were here, while they were home, I was at home. But when Debbie went off to Windsor and she was not going to come home until about five o'clock, I thought it was time for me to do something. So I spoke to Phil—

IG: Phil is your husband.

SW: Phil Cowan. He was town council. And that was a very part-time job. He came once a week for the town meeting, for the Selectmen's meeting, which would be one night a week. And did the other legal work. And he would also—he would engage special counsel for special things. But I felt that worked very well. You can't be a specialist in everything. And he said, sure we've got some probate things. A lot of people owe the town money on their probate stuff. They've got--. They were helped by the town and nobody's collected the monies. And I was doing that. While I was doing that he handed something to me. Said there's some money out there for something. And he said I don't think there's anything to do but why don't you read it. And I read it and I said I think we can get some money. So that was the first application that I wrote for the town. I'd written some things for which we'd gotten money for--. We got money for jobs and detached social worker to stand around Coolidge Corner, that kind of thing.

IG: So this is the same job you've had--. To this day you've been—

SW: To this day. I didn't want to work full-time. I still had everybody at home. I wanted to work part-time. And so I said I would do this as a consultant.

IG: How did you manage juggling—the '90s word—how did you manage juggling this job and taking care of your family?

SW: Well, I took care of my family okay. After all they were by then--. Nobody was home until--. And my son was by then probably in college or going to. And that was--but I cut down on some of the other things I was doing. I was on the board of the League

only because they wanted continuity. And I said, "I'm not going to be running to, or be running meetings and that sort of thing." But I would come to meetings when I could, and the same thing with Inter-Community. I was doing that, still doing that. And went to the Children's Hospital which, you know, being on—a corporation member or an overseer, doesn't mean that you're making any real decisions.

IG: So you mean you had time to—

SW: I felt that I could do things.

IG: Psychological time to do those things.

SW: Yeah, I could. And, actually, I had also been elected to the Brookline Savings Bank board of directors.

IG: What do you think your activism, what kind of effect this wonderful activism has had on each of your children, each one separately?

SW: Well, my son is very smart. He's a--. Well, he participates in--. He had run the marathon a few times. He doesn't--. He's never comfortable with a lot of people. He's not—he's not one to talk about small talk, you know. But he, for instance, has volunteered with the Recreation Department in Wellesley. He has no children.

IG: Is he married?

SW: He's married. His wife is much older than he and she's not Jewish. But she's—seems to work out. And he's volunteered in the recreation department on the youngsters who run and that kind of thing. And he's quite a--. I never knew it until somebody at Wellesley told me he was doing it. He runs a bio-lab. And he's very good about me, you know. He makes sure that he calls regularly. And if I'm not--. If he doesn't get an answer, he'll call until he gets me. My middle daughter is in Sudbury. And

she is very active. She's never run for office herself. She married someone from New York who was one of these computer whizzes but not much else. And they were divorced. But before that she ran a campaign for him to Selectmen in Sudbury, which was unheard of. No Jew had ever--. And for a New York Jew to move to Sudbury was really something. And shortly after that they were divorced. And she had been chairman of the finance committee in Sudbury. That's like our committee here, advisory committee, for years and years and years.

IG: Does she have children?

SW: No. And she also does negotiating with the school department for the town. She was over at--. She had been at WGBH for a while doing PR, doing—not PR, but traffic. She did some very good jobs in New York. She's a graduate of the University of Michigan and got her master's there. But when she came here she had difficulty. She was with Gray Advertising in New York. Had really good jobs. And she's over at Harvard Business School doing the materials for the summer sessions they have for executives. I was hoping she'd stay there. But, you know, Harvard pays very poorly. And by then she was divorced.

IG: The honor of working there.

SW: My youngest daughter—the one that went to Windsor—married young. And again, not keen on the person she married though he's—he had gone to private school, to Milton Academy. And of all the boys I think I liked him least. But he's smart. And he became managing partner of one of the largest law firms in Boston making huge salary. They live in Lincoln. Debbie went back to get her master's degree. And they were divorced. She has three children. And she was in school. She had been an editor at the [unclear] company from the time she graduated college. She turned down the grant because she was getting married and he was still at law school. And--. But she continued and she got her doctorate despite two pregnancies and three children.

IG: Is she the one who most takes after you in that sense of balancing and managing things?

SW: She's very organized. And they each do something. And David in his way does a great deal. Marjorie has been very active in Sudbury. Debbie has not done that. But she's done the other things.

IG: How old are Debbie's children?

SW: My twins.

[Pause]

SW: These are the twins.

IG: Oh, twice as beautiful.

SW: They're freshman, college freshman. And this one is the old one and she's a junior at Smith.

IG: Oh, my goodness. Do you see them much?

SW: Well, not now. But I try to. But you know, you see children more when they're little because they have to see you. I went out there every week to see them. But they were lovely babies. Anyway, but when they get to be teenagers it would seem as though when I came there there'd be three girls all about the same height and three visiting. So I almost couldn't tell the difference between mine and theirs because there'd be six girls in a room, or they were some place else. I saw them during the summer. I would drive out. But now they're at school. And I see them once or twice when they come home for whatever the vacation is.

IG: Are they involved in--? Well, let me back up to your own children. You've been a member of Temple Israel for, I think, forty-six years.

SW: Fifty-five probably some fifty-five years.

IG: Are—were your children involved in Jewish rituals when they were growing up?

SW: Well, they—

IG: What kinds of rituals did you have in the home?

SW: Not much. Even I didn't have very much. My mother would have in my own home. My mother would have. She tried to have a kosher house. Nothing like some of the kosher houses that--. She didn't go to such extent. But she didn't buy meat, you know, in a supermarket. There were no supermarkets anyway. But she didn't. And my father--. My father's family, I would say, were more agnostic than anything else. They never--. They all professed to be Jewish and they had Jewish interests. But they weren't religious, none of them. There were Zionists and Adventists and all sorts things in that family. But they weren't religious. So my mother, you know, my mother tried. And that's what we had. In my own home, well, we were Jewish but weren't real temple goers. We went for High Holidays and for some other things. And my husband was involved with his practice. Pediatrics is a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Well, it was. It's not that anymore. And I think people who aren't involved in that kind of practice have no idea of how demanding that was. I think the first thing my two-year olds would say. We had two telephones that were always ringing. "The doctor's not home, call the office." They all knew that. But so he—his father professed to be Orthodox. But, you know, he worked on Saturday, that sort of thing. So, you know, they—all my children went to Temple Israel. They were all confirmed. And David was bar mitzvahed there. We didn't do anything big. My father-in-law was dying of a stroke. But he was bar mitzvahed and we had some people and that was it. But David went to the temple. He

knew I was upset, not even so much about religion as the difference in age. He'd gone to the temple and he was assured by the young assistant rabbi there at the time that I wanted him to join the temple. Now he's a member of the temple. And he and his wife attend the high holidays service, you know. You can't expect much more. Marjorie has not joined a temple in Sudbury. And Debbie's former husband wasn't at all interested. He was just—he was more interested in people who were not Jewish who had a lot of money, appropriate clients. So that was it. So I was doing what I was doing. The first grant I got was down for the Coolidge Corner area. I got two and a quarter million dollars to do streets, sidewalks, curbs, tree lines and systematic housing inspection.

IG: What year was that?

SW: That was 1963. And that was a two-year grant. And, in addition, we got approximately a million dollars in three-percent loans for the residents who had to do—correct these code violations. And I was supposed--. I took--. We didn't go to court too often. But when we did the--this is a criminal offense violation of Article 2 of the state sanitary code. But the DA were authorized somebody--. He didn't want to try those cases. So we went to court on some of them. And that was very successful. And when we finished the north Brookline area I applied for a second grant for Washington Square. And got another two and a third million dollars for that area. And in addition got some money for playgrounds. And practically every year I've applied for money to renovate playgrounds. Brookline is very small, six miles, fifty-five thousand people. And half of them, more than half of the area is crowded. And the other half has two golf courses and a couple of cemeteries and a lot of rolling estates, South Brookline. But the northern part of the town is very heavily populated. So I was getting money every year for playgrounds and sewers and, you know, whatever. But it was amounting to a lot of money. And then in 1976, '75, the congress voted the community development block grant. And the community development block grant is awards based on the previous grants for the five previous years, which was a very happy coincidence because—that was--. The town

had never got this kind of money. And that was the formula. I can't explain the formula. But the formula depended on it.

IG: But you came in at a high point because you've gotten so much money. This must be an accomplishment of which you're very proud of.

SW: Yes I am because as I go around the town I can say every single one of these parks—the parks, the swimming pool—Lars Anderson Park, which is a showplace, every one of them has got anything from a small amount to $700,000 at a time. And the town would not have done this. Some of these grants were a fifty-fifty town. Some of them depending upon what I could get would provide sixty-seven percent [unclear] whatever the demographics.

IG: Excuse me. I have to pause for a moment.

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

SW: So I can no longer attend meetings. But I voted for Metco. We were sold on the idea that there were going to be students who showed a serious interest in learning. And that they couldn't get it in Boston. And as good neighbors I thought, certainly. But that's not the case. When you have to send a truant officer to try to find out why they don't come, that's not serious students. And I don't think we should be spending our money because certainly you don't get enough from the state to compensate for it. So that's that. So I've been doing--. In addition that money that we've been getting, I've been applying for a variety of other, whenever there was anything available. And a number of years ago in 1980 there was a competition for the secretary—that's the secretary of HUD, secretary of HUD's discretionary funds for programs that could be replicated by other communities for affordable housing. And the town had just gone condo. So that all the affordable units, the owners who had them who were stuck with low rents, turned them into condo and were selling them. And a number of people couldn't afford to buy.

And they then couldn't afford to rent in Brookline because it was either high rent or buying, one or the other. And so I thought this was a good opportunity to put some federal money--. Federal money--. It costs about $7,000 a year to support [telephone rings]--. Excuse me—

[Recording paused.]

SW: I suppose it's about $7,000 a year to support someone in public housing. And so what the proposal was is to assist people who were living in the units that had gone condo—

[END OF INTERVIEW]