Lillie Steinhorn Transcript

Jean Freedman: This is an interview with Lillie Steinhorn. It's July 7, 2001. We're in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm Jean Freedman recording this for the Jewish Women's Archive's Weaving Women's Words project. I always start out my interviews the same way, and that's by asking the person to tell their full name and when and where they were born.

STEINHORN: I'm Lillie, L-I-L-L-I-E, Steinhorn. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland May 26, 1911.

JF: Okay. Can you tell me something about your family and where you grew up?

LS: Well, my family came from Romania. Which had been Austria but during World War II, it was changed to Romania. I don't know whether my parents came over together. They were cousins. But they, her sister-in-law introduced the two of them and they got married.

JF: In the old country or in this country?

LS: They got married in Baltimore.

JF: Oh, in Baltimore.

LS: I have their marriage license. And they came into – I don't know whether it was both or not, but when they landed in Baltimore, Halloween was on. They thought the Americans were crazy. As were most of the people who first landed in Baltimore, they were downtown. Way, way downtown. I was born on Exeter Street. The house I was born in is now thrown down. I don't know what. Mom said it wasn't there anymore. And we lived on 144 North Exeter Street. Pop had a tailor shop and that's where my sister

and brother were born.

JF: What were your parents' names?

LS: Samuel and Pauline [maiden name Wechsler]. My sister's name is Dorothy, well her name is LaSov, L-A-S-O-V. Capital S-o-v. He passed away. And she had one son with him. Now, her first husband, his name was Bickman, B-I-C-K-M-A-N. And they had two children, Norman and Marlene. And then Larry was with the second husband. Three wonderful children. Norman had two daughters from his first wife. One of his daughters, Stephanie, is coming in from California and I will see her tonight. The other daughter, Paula, is in nursing. She lives in Ellicott City too, Norman lives in Ellicott City. Paula is a nurse and works someplace near there. Marlene has three children, Beth is the oldest, Pam, Pamela is the second, and the third is Nathan. Nathan was recently married. Married in January. And his wife is studying law. She's studying for the bar. And Marlene, as I said, has three grandchildren, my doll babies – Jared who is just six, his sister who is three, and Carly is Pammy's little girl. Beth has the boy and the girl. And Pammy has Carly. And Carly and Jared are whiz kids. Jared played chess when he was four years old.

JF: My word.

LS: He plays now. Very sports-minded. And Carly has phenomenal memory. She hears a song once and knows it word by word. And she sings. And she collects Barbie dolls. I understand she lines them up. She's a pretty little girl, blonde, blue eyes. And Julie, the younger one, Marlene says she hasn't begun to show any talent; she is still a baby. But you give them a bag of jewelry and I wish you could see what they do with it. But Jared is a very, very smart little boy. And that's my family.

JF: Tell me, do you have any memories of growing up? Your family, your parents, the neighborhood?

LS: No.

JF: What was the neighborhood like?

LS: Well, it was all Jewish, I'll tell you that much. Because that's where, as I said, most of the immigrants landed there so they lived there. I don't know how long we lived there. The only thing I can remember about 144 North Exeter Street – we had no indoor bathroom. That was outside. The floors in the kitchen I can remember. We also had no hot water. My sister scalded herself when she was a baby with hot water heated on the kitchen stove. They didn't think she was going to make it. In fact, when she did live they thought they would have to amputate her arm. She has a scar around the elbow, the doctor said, that had the water reached the crook of her elbow they would have had to amputate. He sat with her all night long. And I remember her scars on her face which have disappeared. She has a big scar on the other shoulder and the other scars are all gone.

JF: She's younger than you?

LS: Yes. I'm the oldest. And I'm the oldest of the second generation that is alive. There are only five of us left. And I'm the oldest. And I think my sister and Sidney and Saul and Phil. Phil is from the Wechslers, my mother's side.

JF: I'm getting a little confused. You had one sister?

LS: And one brother.

JF: What was your brother's name?

LS: Morris Harry.

JF: Morris Harry.

LS: Yeah, he was the architect.

JF: And was he also younger? Yes, you just said you were the oldest.

LS: Yes, I'm the oldest. Yes.

JF: So when were your brother and sister born? Do you remember that?

LS: My sister was born in 1912. We're a year and about six or eight months. She's younger than I am. And my brother, may he rest in peace, was younger, about five years younger than I was. He died from Alzheimer's.

JF: Were you close to your brother and sister?

LS: Yes. Yes.

JF: Do you have memories about what you did together for fun? Playing together?

LS: My sister was never too well. And my parents always said, "You're the oldest, you take care of your sister and your brother." So, what did I know? I did. And my sister could be a devil. Mom always used to say, "You wash the dishes one night and you dry. Then the other night…" But I found a diary of my sister's, and I peeked in, and she had "Made Lillie do the dishes tonight." [laughter] My brother was the serious one. Pop never – well, he couldn't afford too much, and I put him into Maryland Institute. He wanted to study [to be] draftsman. And he graduated there with a scholarship and then he decided to go onto to architecture. Went to New York and worked for nothing. Just to get the experience. And he was the architect for the Jewish Convalescent Home here.

JF: Wow.

LS: He got married for a second time, left Baltimore to drive to California. He turned the plans over to another architect but my brother got the credit for the building.

JF: That's great.

LS: He did a lot of work here for the city. Made a school, he did a school. He did a school that was way downtown. And his name is on the plaque. He did some of the Holiday Inns. He was a good architect. Unfortunately, he had Alzheimer's.

JF: When did he die?

LS: January 9, 1992. He had it bad. He couldn't speak. He used to beat on me. I went to the Convalescent Home one day and he was sitting at the table with two other women on each side of him, five of them and one aide. I said, "Uh-huh. This isn't for my brother." So from that time on, every day including Saturday and Sunday, and during the week after work, I'd go over. I'd go down to the kitchen, get him his tray and feed him. Well, they let him catch pneumonia. It was winter night. The window was wide open, and he was sitting in a chair on the wooden floor without shoes or stockings and wearing a half-sleeve T-shirt, and as I kissed his forehead, I said to my sister, "He feels warm." I quickly dressed him, shut the window, put shoes and stockings on, put a sweater on him, and I fed him and then just before we left, I kissed him goodbye; his head was cool. That night my sister-in-law called me. The nursing home took him to the hospital with pneumonia. That was the second time he had pneumonia there. I don't want to say anything here because I understand the Jewish Convalescent Home has now a change of management, and it's much nicer. Oh, the food that I used to feed him. I think of the meat. Well, anyway. We were all close. I used to take my sister wherever I went. She didn't finish school. She went through the seventh grade and as I remember she was very good in algebra but she decided she didn't want to go to school anymore.

JF: Why was that?

LS: I don't know. She just decided she wanted to go to work. Worked in an umbrella factory. My uncle knew one of the owners, and through him, she got a job. My mother

understood that she wasn't too well.

JF: What was the matter with her?

LS: I think that her IQ was low. I had another cousin who was the – well, our families were cousins, my mother and father. We picked up the weaker points of it. I don't know what I inherited from them. I did graduate high school. And my brother, of course, went on to become an architect. But and it's the same way. My father's sister, one of his sisters married one of my mother's brothers, and they had a daughter and three sons. The daughter had an IQ of whatever – fourteen or sixteen. She died. This was before coumadin came in. She had a blood clot. They amputated one leg and then the other blood clot hit her brain. And then she had three brothers, one who was a barber, and the other two – Phil was an upholsterer, an excellent upholsterer. I wish you'd see the book, the frame that he made for me at the Senior Citizen Club. And his younger brother who was a schoolteacher was wounded during the war but my aunt, their mother died of cancer and Max the oldest boy, he died of cancer and Morris died of cancer. Phil is still living. Jenny of course, when she had blood clots, died.

JF: Now who is Phil?

LS: Phil is my aunt's son.

JF: Your cousin.

LS: Yeah. A cousin.

JF: And you said your parents were cousins?

LS: Yes.

JF: Were they first cousins?

LS: Yes. So I'd say it's because of the closeness that the weaknesses showed up. But anyway, I took care of them. I remember one night my mother and father went to movies and left the three of us. And my brother awakened and cried and cried, and I couldn't stop him. I ran out of the house, ran up to the movies [laughter], got my parents out, and they came home.

JF: How old were you then?

LS: Oh glory, I don't know. I was in elementary, high school, elementary school at that time. I don't remember. There were five years between my brother and myself. And then when I graduated high school, I wanted to go to work to help out the family. We were living in a – I would say a hoity-toity neighborhood. We had a man in politics across the street from us.

JF: When did you move there?

LS: From Ruxton Avenue? I don't remember, oh wait a minute. I started to commute to Washington so it must have been 1935 or before that because I was, I had gotten my job with the government.

JF: If you wouldn't mind, could we back up a little bit?

LS: Yeah, surely. Go ahead.

JF: I'd like to ask you some questions. Do you remember about school? Could you tell me about the schools you went to?

LS: I don't have too many memories of school. But when we lived on Exeter Street, I was in kindergarten. Then, one day they came in, [and] the teachers came in and put me into the first grade. I was always tall and skinny. They put me in the first grade, and it scared the life out of me. I saw the teacher put a piece of tape over a girl's mouth, and

all the girls seemed so much taller than me. I was scared to death. But I managed all right. And from there, first grade, second grade – third grade, we moved from Exeter Street. We moved to a place called Chase Street.

JF: Where is that?

LS: I couldn't tell you.

JF: Was it in East Baltimore?

LS: It was called Uptown.

JF: Uptown.

LS: It was not a Jewish neighborhood. The Nussbaums were Jewish. The rest of them were Italian. And my brother couldn't speak a word of English because my mother always spoke to him in Jewish. We always spoke to my mother in Jewish and my father in English. And my mother would plead with us, "Please speak to me in English." And my brother, speaking only Yiddish, got along with them, and we were friends. But we didn't live there very long. Then we moved uptown to Mount Street. We had a family next door who were Presbyterian. In fact, I still have a bible she gave me. I was just fourteen then. I just saw it the other day. And we used to sit on her front steps and she had a brother who knew all about astrology. And he told us about the stars. One time I could tell you what the stars were.

JF: Did he have a telescope?

LS: No, he didn't have. But he would tell us. He said, "This is the Belt of Orion and these are the Seven Sisters." I don't know whether I could do it today. The Big Dipper. And Miss Lewis, she was a teacher, her husband had been working, not her husband, her brother had worked with the railroad and they had a strike so he wasn't working. And

they had a mother who was in her early nineties, and she couldn't see. I remember sitting on the steps. I used to get terrible headaches. I would sit on the steps and put my head back in her lap and her hands would just rub my forehead. I have pleasant memories. Mom would send in Jewish foods, the bakery things at holidays. And Mr. Lewis showed me a picture of himself when he was four years old. You would have thought it was my brother. That's how much alike they looked in the picture. It was surprising. And we lived there until – where did Pop have his? He had his tailor shop, I believe on North Avenue at that time. And we moved up to Payson Street. We were getting up in the world. And that's where I started to go to Washington. I think it was Payson Street.

JF: Can you tell me what you remember about your father's store? Did he own the store?

LS: We had a store on Exeter Street. I'll get a picture.

JF: Okay, great. I'd love to see it later.

LS: Oh, later?

JF: Yes, I'll take a photo of it. That would be great.

LS: It's not a good picture, but it shows him. I have someplace a picture of him sitting on the table cross-leg. One of these days. I'm going to send them down to the Jewish Museum. In this picture, it shows him sitting there with neighbors or customers or something. I just saw it this morning.

JF: So what did he make? Anything?

LS: He made suits from scratch.

JF: Suits.

LS: And I remember the bales of material that he had. He would soak them to shrink the material. And he had patterns. Beautiful patterns that he had maybe carried them from Europe. His mother had nine children – six boys and three girls. And then, she married a widower with one son. She was the one who told them what profession they were going to be in. She must have been a humdinger. I understand she was also a madam at one time.

JF: Really? Is that true?

LS: I don't know. I was told that. [laughter] And she made up the – my father said he was six years old when she sent him to another *shtetl* [village] to learn the tailoring business. And he turned into an excellent tailor. He had a number of big people in Baltimore that he made suits for. There was a man named Dietrich who was a steelman. Others I don't remember. Do you know how I got my job with the federal government? Through a doctor that was one of my father's customers. At one time, you had to have a physical examination before you could go into the government. That's way back in '35. I was taking my examination, of course. He saw my name. He asked me if I was related to Samuel. And I said, "He's my father." So after he got through examining me and all he said – I was below the weight requirement. He said, "If I didn't know your father, I couldn't have passed you. But knowing that, you're passed." That's how I got into the federal government.

JF: Isn't that interesting. A weight requirement.

LS: Yes.

JF: Imagine. [laughter]

LS: I was always so thin. When I had a hysterectomy quite a few years ago, I went up to a hundred-and-forty-some pounds. First time in my life I heard a doctor say, "Watch your calories." But I didn't have to. I just automatically just went down, and I stayed at a

hundred and thirty now. With all this moving and all, and went down to 126, between 126 and 128 pounds.

JF: Many women envy you. Being able to do that. When your father, your father had his own shop. Was he able to get one immediately, or did he have to work in another shop when he first came to this country?

LS: As far as I know, he had his own shop.

JF: That's great. And when you lived on Payson Street, were you still in elementary school?

LS: Yes.

JF: You were still in school.

LS: I didn't go into high school until – let's see. I graduated in '30, so it's 1926 that I went in.

JF: Were you still living on Payson Street then?

LS: Let me see. No. No. When I moved up to Ruxton – because Western High School was within walking distance, and I used to walk up to Western. Then, Western moved to a new location, and that was in 1930. The trees that are around that school now are trees that we planted.

JF: Really? How nice.

LS: But Western, I left – I graduated a half a year after they were built. We were a February class. They didn't have graduation classes in February, and I had to wait until June. And graduated in June.

JF: Do you have memories of going to Western?

LS: Well, the old Western downtown [laughter], four flights of steps we had to walk. There was a woman who came in with her daughter. She was interested in an apartment here for three months because she comes from Florida and she doesn't like the heat down there. So, the sales agent introduced us, and we started to talk, and this woman said she's been a Baltimorean but living in Florida because she can't stand the winters here. She said she had gone to Western. She was a year older than I. And I'm ninety. And we were talking about school. She said she went to Western. I said, "So did I." She took the commercial course. I said, "So did I." And as she said, "Did you have Mrs. (Minnick?) for bookkeeping?" I said, "Yes." Even my nephew, who was standing there, couldn't get over it. And Audrey, the sales agent – they all hear that I'm talking to a total stranger, and we had the same background in school. I don't remember too much that happened in school. I wasn't one who mingled. I was very shy. I'm not so shy today. And I didn't do too much.

JF: What was it that made you want to do the commercial course?

LS: The commercial? They told us – we were actually talked into it. That it was a machine world. So, I learned how to operate an adding machine – Friden, Marchand – but when I started to look for a job they wanted a steno. They wanted stenographers. I didn't know steno. So I went to school at night. I went to the YMCA and took stenography, shorthand. And then found I am a perfectionist. And if I can't make my characters just right, I can't read them back. So I just concentrated on typing and the machines. And my first job with the federal government was [as] a card punch machine operator.

JF: I've just got a few more questions about before graduation and then we'll get to that. You say that the first neighborhood you lived in, Exeter Street, was a Jewish neighborhood?

LS: Yes.

JF: And then the next one was not?

LS: No.

JF: And the next one was not.

LS: The next one was.

JF: The next one was.

LS: We were a mixture, but the majority were Jewish.

JF: How did this –? Did this affect you in any way?

LS: No.

JF: You didn't experience any antisemitism?

LS: No.

JF: Did you experience any in school?

LS: No. No. I never did. And I was, people just, I had remarks thrown to me on the street about, because I looked Jewish and I've had strangers as they pass me, that was on East Baltimore Street, make a remark to me. But outside of that, I never experienced it. My mother was an unusual woman. She had a housekeeper. Of course, she was Black. And we had to call her Miss Rose. We couldn't just call her Rose. And then one day, I saw Miss Rose on one windowsill; my mother is on the other windowsill, and when it came to turning the mattress, my mother had one end of it; Miss Rose had the other end. I said, "Mom, you're paying her all this money." I said, "Why do you do it?" And she says, "Because she is a woman." In other words, my mother didn't look at color.

JF: Interesting.

LS: And this she inbred to us. But my father was different. He had a stereotyped vision of Black people. Yet he didn't mind hugging them. And he was a ladies' man. So, this is how I grew up. I remember when I was working for the federal government, they sent me to Washington on detail for a while, and the boss was a Black woman.

JF: That would be very unusual.

LS: Yes. And we all went out to lunch, and I went around looking to people – "I'm sitting with a Black woman." Now it's hugging and kissing. One thing, when we started to work, the Black women had their group and the white women in the other group. I had two groups. I was the only one. The only group leader that had a group of twenty white woman and on the other side of the room, they couldn't sit with us, were twenty black women.

JF: What job was that?

LS: That was card punching in Social Security. I worked in Washington April 28, 1935.

JF: Was that your first job?

LS: That was my first job. I had little jobs. One day here, one day there, but it didn't amount to anything. There was one job I had. I will never forget this. They had no heat. They had a kerosene heater –

JF: Was this in Baltimore or Washington?

LS: In Baltimore.

JF: Baltimore.

LS: It was just to be for three days. The place was a warehouse. And after I finished the one day, all of a sudden, I blacked out. I didn't go out. Everything turned black. And I

got up, and I walked in the warehouse because it was cold. Came back to the office. We did not work Saturday and Sunday. I went back on Monday morning because they told us to come back for another two days. And not only I but another girl as we were walking down the steps, we both had to sit down. And it damaged my nervous system, and I had to go to the doctor.

JF: What caused it?

LS: The kerosene. There was gas coming through. And the doctors told me what it was.

JF: This was before you went to Washington?

LS: Yes.

JF: That's another thing I wanted to ask you. You graduated high school in 1930, right? The depths of the Depression. So, what did you do?

LS: Yes. Well, every day, I had another friend who graduated the same class, and we'd go downtown, and we'd go to different – we'd go to typewriting places like Underwood and Royal and we'd sit there. We weren't the only ones there were other women who sat there. And we waited. And sometimes they'd send us out on a day's work. We just sat and typed and got paid two dollars a day. And I just couldn't find anything. I had an uncle who tried to find something for me. And one day, Uncle Julius took me one place, and the man said to me – that's what made me stop. He said, "Can't you find your own job?" So, I just thanked my uncle for being so nice, and that was it. And I went on my own. And then I had taken a city job, a city test. They called – oh, first, it was the state. And during tag registration, I went down.

JF: What's tag registration?

LS: License tags. This is the only time I felt prejudice. The man said to me, “I don’t know why you were sent here,” and I knew what he meant. And so I started to work anyway there. And one of the girls came over to me one day, and she says, “Are you Jewish?” It’s the only place that I ever experienced anything.

JF: What did you say?

LS: I said, “Yes, I am.” And I let it go.

JF: And that was it?

LS: Yeah.

JF: How long did that job last?

LS: Three weeks. It was just for – and they called me back the following year. And so I did that two or three years. I don’t remember. I could look down the street and see all these people waiting in line to get their tags. And was there another place that I was? No. That was the only place. Then I got a job with the city hall. One of the women was going to Europe, and she was going to stay – I don’t know. Well, no planes. You had to go by ship. Four months. I was paid – I received a fabulous salary – twenty-five dollars a week.

JF: What year was this?

LS: Oh, it had to be – everything is before ’35.

JF: Before ’35. So sometime between ’30 and ’35. That was good money then.

LS: Yeah, that was good money. And they hired me as a typist. I remember the first letters I typed I didn’t put down “Mr. So-and-So.” The letters had to be done all over. They thought it was so stupid. I guess I was. But anyway, I did put in four months. And

then I got called into the office. Politics. What do my parents –? How do my parents vote? I said I didn't know. I didn't know. My father voted, not my mother. And they knew I wasn't of age – oh, I had to be under twenty-one; that's voting age. And then they told me they were the Republicans, and they wouldn't let me stay because I wasn't a Republican.

JF: Oh my word.

LS: There had to be another job. So I was out of work again. I had one job in a jewelry store, and they promised me – Saturdays, they were open until twelve o'clock at night. They promised me that they would see to it that I got home safely. But they were doing crooked stuff there. They were selling watches that didn't work to the seamen who came in. Because it was right at the wharf. And I had to remember just where to put all these watches. Every day it had to be a certain place, polish them up, and put them in. I wasn't told when I was hired for that job that I'd also have to be a salesperson. I thought my job was in the office. And that Saturday, the first Saturday – and I was getting all of twelve dollars a week on that. So, the first Saturday I was there, nobody wanted to take me home. I had trouble at twelve o'clock at night, especially around that neighborhood. So finally, they did take me home. I never went back.

JF: They don't sound too honest.

LS: No. The man who was the boss there made some remark about being married, and I said, "No, I'm not married, but I'm engaged." I took this ring and put it on this hand.

JF: So that was not a real engagement.

LS: I think they had other things in mind.

JF: Oh, dear.

LS: So I just left. And then, all of a sudden, I got this letter from the federal government asking me if I would like to work in Washington for six months temporary, and of course, I accepted.

JF: And so this was 1935?

LS: Yes. April 28.

JF: What a memory.

LS: Well, they had it down on records here because my years of service counts from April 28th. I went to Washington and worked for him. For Mr. Baugh, B-A-U-G-H. I've never forgotten his name.

JF: What agency was this?

LS: The Civil Service Commission. And Mr. Baugh called me at home. I was off one day. He called me at home, and he said, "I have a job for you." And it was a promotion. I was getting all of $1260 a year. My salary was based on the $1260 a year for the three months, and he was sending me to a job that was paying $1440 a year.

JF: Was this a civil service job?

LS: Yeah.

JF: Was it an increase in grade as well?

LS: Increase in grade, and the agency was Resettlement Agency. Resettlement. They were apparently, from what I can remember, part of Agriculture because when they closed down, they went out of – it was a two-year job. I remember he told me. And I was glad to get anything. When the time came – it was getting close to the two years – I remember typing letters that had to do with farms. Carbon paper. And every time you

made an error, you had a number of copies to correct. Then they sent me to another department in Resettlement, where I was to be a switchboard operator. I never did that kind of work. Oh, that's another place – prejudice. And for some reason – there was another Jewish girl working in the office. There were three of us. Two Jewish girls and one non-Jewish, and she made up stories about me to the boss.

JF: The Jewish girl or the –?

LS: No.

JF: The non-Jewish girl.

LS: The non-Jewish girl. And the other Jewish girl told me. She said, "Be careful Lil." And they sent me up to another department.

JF: Was it antisemitism? Or was she jealous of you?

LS: I don't know what it was. I was a very quiet, shy person. I don't know what it is because she didn't do any harm to the other person, the other Jewish girl. But she did to me. Well, I found out later that she and the boss were having an affair. So she could get her way with anything she wanted. And from there, they sent me up to this other job, and that's where I had a good time.

JF: This is still in Resettlement?

LS: It's still Resettlement.

JF: Am I correct in thinking that was a New Deal administration? A New Deal agency?

LS: Yes.

JF: So tell me about it. You said that was a good time.

LS: Because the people were so friendly and so nice. We moved into a hotel.

JF: Oh, that was another thing I wanted to ask you. Were you commuting from Baltimore before this?

LS: Yes. The first commute I did was with the WBA. Don't ask me what the letters stand for. They went out of business. And I had to be on the train at seven o'clock in the morning, and it would act as a train until it reached the suburbs of Washington, and then it became a streetcar.

JF: You didn't have to change?

LS: No.

JF: It just became a streetcar?

LS: I just sat in it. And they stopped at every street and picked up passengers [and] dropped off passengers. And then when we got down to the end of the line, I was with a couple, two or three blocks of Seventh where the – oh, that was with Civil Service Commission, and I'd walk and then come back and take it home. And then they went out of business. And this time, I didn't have to leave my house until six minutes of – the train left from Pennsylvania Station at six minutes to eight. I remember that. And I had to walk two-and-a-half blocks from my house. I took the streetcar, and either walked from North Avenue down to the Pennsylvania Station, or if there was a car coming, streetcar coming, I could get on it and ride down. I met a girl who worked in Washington. There were two of us who worked in Washington. One who worked for Hecht Company [and] sold shoes. She came back to Baltimore, and the other girl worked in another agency. So when we got in – I think I was at Resettlement Administration which wasn't as convenient as Civil Service, but we would take a cab. And the cab driver would drop us off wherever we wanted to go. Coming back, I took a streetcar back to the train station and then came in. We were living on Payson Street at that time. Because the train

stopped at a station. And I would walk from there to my home, which was faster than taking a streetcar.

JF: How long did the commute take?

LS: Well, on the WBA, it was over an hour. And the train was three-quarters of an hour.

JF: That's not bad.

LS: Yeah.

JF: I wish they still had something like that.

LS: I wish the streetcars were still. Those buses. But I have pleasant memories of being at Resettlement. There was one single woman, and I became very good friends. One of the man – it was nice. We were all friendly. Did things together. And then Social Security.

JF: When did you move to Washington?

LS: That's what I –

JF: I'm sorry. I interrupted.

LS: No. I was living in Washington. When I was in Resettlement, the office was going to work overtime. So, I didn't want to commute where I'd have to wait at night. One of the girls said she knew of a girl who needed a roommate. So I moved in with her. I don't remember her name. I moved in with this girl. One bedroom and a bath.

JF: Was this an apartment?

LS: It was an apartment house.

JF: Where was it?

LS: I don't remember. Well, we had two beds in the room and the bathroom. We went out, and we bought a little heater – a little stove. We used the windowsill for our icebox. And the first night we used the heater, we cut the fuse, and we cut the electricity off for the house. The landlady came running around. We had to hide everything because we knew we weren't supposed to have that. One night the fire alarm went off. She grabbed her stockings and her fur coat, and all I could be was concerned with my hair up in pin curls, and I was taking the pin curls – it was a false alarm. But then she received a telegram. Her mother was seriously ill. And I helped her pack. She got on a train. And her mother was already gone. So she sent me a letter. Would I go out of the apartment? We got along very well. Fixed ourselves dinner – would I get out because she wanted to bring her father and two brothers into that one-bedroom apartment. So I was walking around one day. And I ran into a neighbor who was living and working in Washington and I told her my story. She says we have a vacancy. I went out to the boarding house – that was fun. Mrs. Wolk. I still remember her name. 1818 N. Northwest.

JF: What was her name again?

LS: Wolk, W-O-L-K. I don't know whether she was kosher or not. But she cooked. We had breakfast, and we had dinner. Because we all worked so you ate lunch out. And we were all women. I shared a room with a girl from New York. This is where I grew up. I became more of an adult then. Because we used to get together and we'd hitchhike and go out to hear concerts and things. We weren't afraid in those days to do this. And we got together every day for dinner. We had a special place that we, we'd go – we'll meet in this restaurant, and sure enough, they're there. Didn't have to eat alone. In the summertime, Mrs. Wolk didn't cook. No air-conditioning. One night, my roommate and some of the others decided we were going up on the roof to sleep. It was so hot. The

bats! So we all grabbed our beddings and ran back downstairs. [laughter] I liked it there. Then they started to publish about Social Security, so I walked over because I knew my job was running out. I walked over to Social Security office, and I asked them if they were hiring. And they said, “Not yet.”

JF: Now, what year was this?

LS: All still in 1935.

JF: All still 1935. That was a busy year.

LS: Oh, yeah. And so they said no, they weren’t hiring now, but they will very shortly. And it wasn’t more than two or three weeks later that I received a letter asking me – I still have the letter some place – if I’d like to work six months temporary or longer in Baltimore, Maryland. Home. So I wrote back and said yes. Meanwhile, Sylvia Bernstein came from New York, and she came to our boarding house. The girl had never been away from home. Her brother-in-law drove her from New York to the boarding house. And that night, she went down and asked the landlady for milk. [laughter] Poor Sylvia. She’s now in the group home on Park Heights Avenue. She has MS [multiple sclerosis]. And she’s going to be ninety in July. She always says when I go over to visit her, “My first friend in Baltimore. My first friend in Baltimore.” So, before I moved, I went over to say goodbye to her. I said, “I don’t know whether I’ll be coming back down this way anymore.” So, sure enough, April 28, 1936, I reported to Social Security.

JF: ’36 or ’35?

LS: No, this was in ’36.

JF: ’36, okay.

LS: And downtown in the Candler Building.

JF: Downtown Baltimore?

LS: Yes.

JF: What was that like coming back home?

LS: It was great. My father had to come up with a cousin and a car because I had accumulated so much. They drove me home. It was good being back home. My own room. Not to share. But as I said, I have pleasant memories. Of course, this is where I grew up. You learn personalities. It's just like here. The woman each have their own, and I sit, and I think to myself, "If I didn't have that experience in Washington, I would think some of these women were nuts." But I understand that this is the way we all are. We all have our own – so, as I said, it's one of the things, one of the things in my life that enjoyed so much. And then, I started in Social Security as a card punch operator. And we were all in one floor. The Black girls were, of course, not with us. There was segregation in those days.

JF: So you were separate?

LS: And then before long, I was sent to – they disbanded. They had regions set up. I was always Region Four. That was Baltimore, Maryland. All the states in this part of the country. I was the last timekeeper. Went before I went to my Unit Four. Region Four. That's where I saw politics. I could see how much production – we were production on those days. I could see women who had punched less than I and accuracy was less than mine get the promotions. That's another time.

JF: Why was that?

LS: They were partying with the bosses.

JF: Can you tell me some of that?

LS: Well, one time, we found out that they were all in jail. [laughter]

JF: Who was all in jail?

LS: The group leaders.

JF: The group leaders were all in jail? For what?

LS: They were partying. I don't know where they were, but we read about it in the newspaper. And the woman in charge of card punching, (Ann?) – I had a couple fights with her. Just friendly. She insisted that if you can't punch, you can't do anything else. I said, "(Ann?), that's not right." I didn't call her Ann at that time. I called her Mrs. I said, "Just because a person can't do one job doesn't mean she can't do anything else." And the girls that were Black – I remember I had a woman who graduated college as a dietician, and I had to write a letter of – fire her. Fire her. I had to write a letter.

JF: As a card punch operator?

LS: As a card punch operator. And so I told her – she showed me a letter that she had received from a college down South someplace – I don't remember where it is – as a dietician. And I said, "Take it." I said, "Because I have to write a letter of resignation for you because Mrs. M doesn't think you can do anything else." And she did. She went down South for that job. There were others. And I understand those girls used to like me because of the interest I took in them.

JF: This was when you were a group leader?

LS: A group leader, you were in charge of a certain amount of people.

JF: How long did it take to become a group leader?

LS: I don't know what year it was. But all of a sudden, they asked me to take care of this unit.

JF: So what did that involve? What did you do as a group leader?

LS: My job was going up and down aisles – because they were on production. I used to punch three thousand cards with one card error standing up. That was excellent. And I never got a promotion.

JF: Excellent.

LS: The promotion was a yearly – what did we call them? Administrative promotion. We had nine or ten steps to go to. And when I was timekeeper, the last timekeeper, I noticed some of these women who did less work were getting the step. How did I get my first step? I was going to the YMCA to learn shorthand, and Florence was taking a course, too. And I told Florence my story. She said, "Lil, Region Four has two promotions. I'm going to see that you get one." And that's how I got my first step. As long as she was in Personnel, we were very good friends. Then, after card punching, I was transferred to another department. I went from Accounting to Division of Program Analysis, and then I—

JF: And this was still as card punch?

LS: No, then I went into statistics.

JF: Oh, tell me about how that change came about.

LS: I don't remember how it did. The card punching went out. They only had a couple of machines because when we punched cards – when it first started – I have pictures someplace. In fact, they used it at the retirement party of the instructress with a group of us around her, and there is my little face right behind her. The woman was pregnant,

and none of us knew it. We just thought she was a heavy woman. We would punch cards. We had all the movie stars.

JF: What do you mean you had the movie stars?

LS: Because it was the SS5 where you filled out with all the – your name and your parent's name, and then you were given a Social Security number. And that went into the system. We would punch the information shown on the form SS5. The punch cards would be interpreted on the tabulation machine. And while we were punching these cards, we would throw paperclips at these huge rats behind the radiators.

JF: Rats.

LS: I tell this story. And the rats on the pipes that were up on the ceiling and the men with sticks trying to throw them down. And we women would sit there and look at this. [laughter] It was an awful place to work in.

JF: Where was this?

LS: This was way down East Baltimore. At the harbor. Right on the wharf. In fact, from our windows, we could look down and see the banana boats. And we used to go down. I never bought bananas, but some of the people would go down and buy a bunch of bananas. And the smells. There was a medical office there, and oh, the odors! No heat in the wintertime. We'd punch with gloves on and coats. And summertime, hot with these big fans blowing everything every place. They had these big, black water bugs, and I would go over and step on them because girls were scared to death of them. *Squish*. We went through a lot of – we first people who worked there, we went through a lot of discomfort because of the – and then they built the new one. It was a good part of my life. I kept going up the ladder – a promotion here. And then I was in the Division of Field Operation –

JF: Now, when was this? I'm trying to keep track here.

LS: I know I'm jumping from one thing to another. From card punching, I went into balancing.

JF: Balancing. What is that?

LS: Bookkeeping.

JF: Bookkeeping. Did you need additional training for that, or was that on-the-job training?

LS: No, there was a special department, and you just went in. It wasn't very difficult. You didn't have to know bookkeeping, but that's what it was. You had to balance accounts of – I don't remember too much about it. And then I went into what was known as Field Operation.

JF: And what's that?

LS: We had field offices. People came in and were interviewed on claims, benefits, and so forth. And they had a form that they had to fill out. How many claims they had received and how many claims were – how would you say that? – to balance. How many were cleared and transferred, and then the balance? And that form had all these figures on with claims – oh, I've forgotten half the other things that was on it. And we had adding machines, and you had, everybody was fighting for a Friden, so if somebody left and a Friden –

JF: Left a what?

LS: A Friden, F-R-I-D-E-N.

JF: What's that?

LS: It's an adding machine.

JF: Oh, so that's the brand name.

LS: Yes, and there was a Marchand, M-A-R-C-H-A-N-D, which was a little more complicated. Then there was another calculator. Oh, I forgot the name of that. That was really complicated. But I finally got rid of my Marchand and got a Friden. These forms came into our office. On Monday mornings, we worked because we had to balance these sheets. And meanwhile, we gave them to Virginia [inaudible]; she was the bookkeeper. She had a machine. That thing would be clocking away. We had to get figures in time for the commissioner by nine o'clock. By ten o'clock – whatever time it was. We came into work at 8:30. And we worked hard at that. And then, as the group leaders left, I kept stepping up the ladder there. Until finally, it was my turn.

JF: To be a group leader?

LS: To be a group leader. And Bill [inaudible], who was our group leader –

JF: What was his name?

LS: Bill [inaudible]. I don't remember how to pronounce his name. He was a nice young man. He recommended me for the job. Unfortunately, I was up all night long with a pain here, and we had a rash of appendicitis in the office, so my boss thought I was next. He was a wonderful man. He saw me walking around with my hand on my side and said, "Oh, there goes another appendicitis." But I called the doctor. In those days, doctors came to the home. And he said, "I'm going to have to send you to a woman doctor." I was thinking female doctor. And he sent me to Dr. Sondheimer. He's not a female. This man's a male. And he discovered when he examined me – I was so embarrassed – that I had a tumor.

JF: There is nothing embarrassing about having a tumor.

LS: And when he operated, it was black. So he removed it, and I had a complete hysterectomy with the exception of my cervix.

JF: How old were you?

LS: Thirty-five. So, when I came back to work, somebody is there. Helen. I remember her. And I had to break Helen into the job. Tell her what to do and all. We gave her a hard time. Not we – I.

JF: They didn't hold your job for you?

LS: Oh, yeah. I stayed at my own job. But I should have had that – it was a great promotion. But I should have had it because Bill had recommended me for it. So I went into the front office. "Mr. [inaudible], why was Helen put into the group leader job?" Well, she had so many years' experience." Mine was greater. "She had her name in a statistical book." I said mine was also in a statistical book. Everything he said about Helen, I could better her. Because I had been – I forgot to say – I'm jumping. Oh, wait a minute. That's right. Okay. I could better her in everything. So he said, "I'm sorry, Miss Steinhorn, but Alice [inaudible] did the interview." Alice was a brilliant woman. She graduated law. She took law. She was a statistician. She took law and passed the bar the first time. But you couldn't speak with her. A very reserved person. Dress, oh, until she married this guy. So, I said, "Well." So then, as I said, we gave Helen a pretty bad time. And so she decided to return to payroll, where she'd come from. And what do they do? They bring down another girl who was in personnel. In those days, you couldn't get a promotion if you were in what they called the bastard grade.

JF: What's the bastard grade?

LS: Even numbers.

JF: Why was that a bastard grade?

LS: I don't know. You could go up to grade four and then go to a grade five. But if you wanted to go to the six you couldn't go to the six; you had to go to the seven. So they brought her into my office. Gave her the five, and then from the five, she went to the seven. She went back to personnel. And again, I was deprived to what was coming to me. So, I got disgusted. That's when I left Social Security. I heard Army Chemical Corp was moving into Baltimore, and I went down, and the same thing there. They had a grade six, but I couldn't go from a four to a six.

JF: You couldn't go from a four to a six, but you could go from a five to a seven?

LS: Yes.

JF: How strange.

LS: Yes. And so what they did. I said, "So why don't you make the job a grade five and then you give me grade seven." So they did that. And I worked with them for three years.

JF: So you left Social Security?

LS: I left Social Security and went for five years. And the GI's were the statisticians. And they would say, "Lil, work up a [inaudible] square," or "work up another kind of …". I would work the formula, give them the figures, and they would do the analysis.

JF: So, what was your job?

LS: I was a statistician.

JF: Statistician. Okay.

LS: And I was so depressed. Because I thought I did the wrong thing.

JF: Why was that?

LS: I had been working in Social Security all those years and then to leave them. So, I had what they used to call a goiter. I went into the hospital and had it removed. And when I came back, nobody – you weren't friendly in the Army Chemical Corp. The girl that I had transferred out with, she and I were friends in Social Security. She transferred out before I did.

JF: To the Army Chemical Corp?

LS: Yeah. Because she was disgusted too. We both eventually transferred back to Social Security because they moved back to Edgewood. I didn't want to commute.

JF: Where is Edgewood?

LS: It's an Army camp.

JF: I see.

LS: And I didn't want to do any commuting. I had become sort of friendly with the personnel man, and I told him. And he said, "Well, let me see what I can do for you." Well, the Air Force had moved in. So he managed to get me a couple of jobs at the Air Force, and I was taken on one.

JF: As a statistician?

LS: I was in charge of a reference book, a statistical book. I had two people, an airman and a civilian, and we three had to get this book out by – we had a deadline. We had to meet that deadline. And we three of us used to stay in at night. Everybody was gone, and we'd get the book out. And the artists – they had a graphics department, Rudy and the other – I've forgotten his name. They did my characters. If it was good news, the thumb went up. If it was bad news, the thumb when down. And Rudy also transferred to Social Security, and he worked there. I liked it in the Air Force. It was interesting. I had

to interview. And I would go down to interview the generals.

JF: What did you interview them about?

LS: I asked them questions about the work. And I would write up a little article about it. Then I would turn it over to the statistician, and she would okay it or something, and it would being published. It was really nice. The only thing is I was corresponding with (Leah?) every year with Christmas cards, and last year I didn't receive a Christmas card. She had lost her husband and became very depressed.

JF: Who is this?

LS: It was one of the co-workers. [inaudible] I don't know. I have to call her and find out. I used to call her once in a while. She never called me. She had a husband, and then after she lost her husband – but anyway. Oh, and the airman's name was Joe. Comes from New England. And he probably went back. So then they moved back to Andrews. Well, this time, my mother had had a stroke. And her right hand, from the wrist to the fingertips, were paralyzed. She always used to say, "God, why did you take my right hand? Why didn't you take my left hand?" Because she was right-handed. She did a lot of beautiful handwork. I have some of it here. She did that scarf on that table.

JF: It looks like it's crocheted. Is that crocheted? That's beautiful.

LS: Yes. She did a lot of stuff like that. I have towels that I had hanging on racks. She put edging on towels. And so I had to dress her. I don't know why she didn't let my father do it. But I had to dress her.

JF: So you were still living at home?

LS: I had to put her corset on, and then she had varicose veins, and I had to wrap her legs up in an ace bandage. And I thought, "I can't this woman up at four o'clock, five

o'clock in the morning." I thought, "Well, I'll have to see about getting back to Social Security." But I was a three grade higher than I left Social Security. I thought, "Well, I'll have to go back to the old grade," and I started to go over there and be interviewed. That was before the union took over and I could do this stuff then. Now you have to go through the union.

JF: What union is it?

LS: The Social Security Union. I ran into – oh, I did go for one interview with Mr. Trafton, and he wouldn't hire me.

JF: What was his name?

LS: George Trafton. He wouldn't hire me because he made the statement to someone that I knew that I'd be unhappy going back from a seven to a four.

JF: You'd have to go back to a Four?

LS: So, I happened one day, I was downtown. The Army Chemical was on Baltimore Street, the old Butler Building. Are you a Baltimorean?

JF: No.

LS: So I'm mentioning names that you wouldn't know. It was the old Butler Building. Then the Air Force came down in Fallsway. And one day, I was up around Paca-Pratt – I don't know what I was doing – and I ran into Gladys [inaudible], who was in my one of my card punch units. And we became friends. We used to go – one night or two nights a week, we'd go up North Pennsylvania Avenue to eat crabs. We took swimming together. She was athletic, tennis player, strong. She learned to really swim. I can swim but not too well. And I told her my story. She had the mind of a computer. She was telling the mechanics what to fix. I told Gladys – I said, "I'm trying to get back to Social

Security." So, she said, "Let me talk to (Saul)." Well, (Saul Hearn?) was my driver at one time.

JF: When you were commuting?

LS: No, when we were at, instead of taking the bus or streetcar, he would take passengers –

[Recording paused.]

JF: This is disk number two, the interview with Lillie Steinhorn. It's July 7, 2001. We're in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm Jean Freedman recording this for the Jewish Women's Archive *Weaving Women's Words* project. Please continue.

LS: So, I run into Gladys [inaudible], and as I said, she had been one of my card punch operators. I told her the story that I was trying to get back into Social Security. So she said, "Well, I'm working on a time study with (Saul Hearn?)." She says, "I'll talk to Sol." And Sol had at one time been my driver. Took me back and forth to work. I knew his wife very well because Rita had lived on Bentalou Street right behind where we lived on Ruxton. So, Gladys spoke with (Saul?), and he took me back. I lost two grades. I went from a seven down to a five. I was just glad to be back in Social Security. But I worked as a grade five for him for one year, and I got my seven again at the end of the year. And that work was interesting. They were making a study of how much time everybody was spending on a particular job or whatever they were doing. And the information was put on card punch cards and then on tabulation, and that was in the building that I had started to work, Candler. I was in the Paca-Pratt, and then when they would find an error, and it showed up, I had to go down, walk down to the Candler Building, and tell them where the error is and wait there until everything was fine. And then come back. I walked back and forth those days.

JF: Were they far apart?

LS: Yeah.

JF: Oh, they were. How far?

LS: A number of blocks. I couldn't tell you. The Paca-Pratt was in the shopping area and the Candler Building was down at the waterfront.

JF: So this was all downtown?

LS: Yeah. So, we worked on that. And then that was over.

JF: Again, was that as a statistician?

LS: Well, I came in as a statistical clerk. And from there we, that time study was over and we – I think we all disbanded. We went to other offices. After that was over, there wasn't too much work to do. I hate to sit around not doing anything. One of the men who was a grade nine left, and I did his work at grade seven. Then I got a promotion to grade nine. At this time, I worked, unfortunately, for one of the worst men that anybody could have worked for. And unfortunately, he was Jewish. So he decided, and I had – I was broken into that office to be in charge of a reference book. The Blue Book, we called it. All statistics. And (Maggie Wiggins?) broke me in because she taught me. Because she was the one who started it. And she taught me the work. What I had to do. And then she went upstairs to the front office. She retired. She was a grade fifteen at the time. Then Ellen Wechsler came in. And I became very excited because my mother's name was W-E-C-H-S-L-E-R. But when they came into this country they pronounced it Wexler, and the immigration officers wrote their name down as W-E-X-L-E-R. And that's what it remained. I got so excited. Is somebody coming in with the same name as my mother? I thought maybe she was a relative. But I found out she was a devout Catholic. They gave her my job because she was a college graduate, and I wasn't. I was doing the work. And then the bosses were having, as I said, this one individual wasn't a nice person. He took over, and I found that the work I was doing was not taken away. It just

faded away, I guess. I was sitting there eight hours a day, five days and week with absolutely nothing to do. So I walked into his office one day, and I said, “Mr. [inaudible], I don’t have anything to do.” So he called Ellen in, and Ellen, by this time, had become my group leader. And he called her in, and she gives me a piece of work to do. I worked it up and said to her, “Here, Ellen, now you can throw it in the wastepaper basket.” I had done it before. So, I realized there was something coming up. Meanwhile, I had a Black group leader who was very nice. Between he and Mr. [inaudible] – I found out, Mr. [inaudible] wanted to bring somebody into my job, and I’ve forgotten that Black man’s name. He wanted to bring in a Black man. And I was the pawn. The analysts would have meetings with Mr. [inaudible], and Mr. [inaudible] would say. “When Lil leaves.” He had me leaving. I walked into his office one day. I was getting ready to retire. I mean, I couldn’t put up with all this stuff. And I thought, “Why not? Why shouldn’t I sit here and do nothing? They’re willing to pay me, I’m going to do it.” I walked into his office. I said, “Mr. [inaudible], I’m not leaving.” He left. He retired. But meanwhile, I had already reached retirement age.

JF: Oh, so we’ve fast-forwarded a bit.

LS: No one wanted to give me a job. They were afraid they would break me into something new, and I would retire. So, for the rest of my working career, that’s all I was, was a Grade Nine. I told that to my last commissioner, associate commissioner. I said, “Mr. [inaudible], the one thing I regret is working all these years, and all I have to show is that I’m just a Grade Nine.” He could have rectified, but he didn’t say a word. But you should see the speech he made about me and an article that he wrote about me when I retired. They had an award ceremony every year, and they would award for twenty years, thirty years, and special – he showed me, so I got a couple of the letter and the reply, and sure enough, I was invited, and I was introduced as Lillie Steinhorn, sixty-five years with the Federal – I hadn’t reached sixty-five yet. But I was [inaudible]. And I walked up by myself, walked up on the stage, and the commissioner turned me around to

face the audience. It was a big commissioner – [inaudible], who was the last commissioner. They got some woman in there now. And I just smiled, and everybody was standing up. A standing ovation. My family was sitting on the side.

JF: That's great.

LS: I was honored that day. But time went on, and I didn't want to retire. But finally, someone said, "When are you going to retire, Lil?" I said, "One of these days, I'm going to wake up in the morning, and I'm going to say this is it." And that's exactly what happened.

JF: You certainly didn't retire when you were sixty-five.

LS: Yes. was getting up at six o'clock every morning, and I thought I didn't want to get out of bed. And I was lying there and squirming, and all of a sudden, I thought to myself, "Lil, April the 28th, you're going to have sixty-five years and May the 26th, you're going to be eighty-nine. Quit." And I came into work that day, and we had a staff meeting. I announced it. They would not believe me. They would not believe me. I said, "I'm going out on April the 28th. I'm going out." They couldn't give me a date. According to the payroll, you can't leave at the end of the month; you have to leave at the first of the month. So that's why I retired on May the 3rd. I was eighty-eight at that time. Three weeks after I retired I became eighty-nine. Then I became ninety. Up at the office, when I'd go up to the fitness center, they all came over. People I didn't know. They recognized me. I've got the folders in there. It's got cards and things. Big placards they had all over the place. And they told me I was number one. The commissioner called down to my office and told them to make a big deal about it. I didn't know I was number one. I had been called about two, three years before, I was number three. *Washington Post* wanted to send a reporter to interview me, but the affair with Clinton and his girlfriend broke.

JF: I guess that was a little more – what should we say?

LS: Yes. More interesting.

JF: I wasn't going to say more interesting because I don't think it is more interesting but more gossipy. That's the word. Gossipy.

LS: So the reporter never showed. When they came and told me I was number one, I said, "What happened to number three?" They said, "No, two persons left before you," and Commissioner [inaudible]. said, "Make her something. Make her retirement party into something big." And then he didn't show up at the retirement party. A lot of other big shots. Sarbanes was there.

JF: Really.

LS: Well, I knew Sarbanes some time back when I received my fifty years award. He was working at Social Security at that time. I was called up by the commissioner. Who was acting commissioner? Anyway, called me up into the office, and my chief came down to the office – not my chief. Well, the boss, Phil, came down. Phil Young. He came down to my office, and he said, "Come with me." And I had just come back from lunch. Two of my co-workers took me out to lunch to celebrate my fiftieth year. My hair was a mess. The dress I was wearing I didn't realize was tight on me. I threw that away after I saw the picture. And he took me into another office, Paul – whatever his last name was. He left us and went to Washington, and the three of us marched up to the commissioner's office. All these men are sitting around, and when she walked in, they all stood up. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, what's going on?" I was presented with the first paperweight. Where is that thing? I'll probably find it someplace. A paperweight. And we have a picture taken. I was the first person to ever receive this paperweight. I remember Mrs. [inaudible]. And this bit about the seniors' thoughts, they come and they go. And Mrs. [inaudible] told the men there that this was the first paperweight. They hadn't seen it before. That this was it.

JF: And this was for fifty years of service?

LS: Fifty years. My brother wanted to have my name put on it. But he never did. And had my picture taken with her. It was published in the *OASIS*. We have a magazine, *OASIS*, Old Age Survivors Insurance. With me and Mrs. M. and the paperweight. I read in the newspapers after that quite a few famous people got that paperweight.

JF: That's interesting. When you retired, you had sixty-five years of service.

LS: Sixty-five years and five days. They have me down at record as sixty-six because I had a lot of sick leave. If you have a year's sick leave, you don't get paid for it, but you get years of service.

JF: I see.

LS: I had to call OPM—it's the Office of Personnel Management for some information, and as I gave him my name, he looked it up on his computer. He said, "Sixty-six years? That must be a record." I said, "It is."

JF: So, it is a record. So when you retired, you were the longest – you have the longest –

LS: Longest federal employee on record.

JF: On record, wow. That's quite impressive. Now, most people don't wait until they're eighty-nine to retire. What was it that made you want to stay all those years?

LS: When I reached retirement age, thirty years, and the next month, I became fifty-five. That's retirement age. President Johnson, the only President in the United States who has ever visited Social Security. He came up, and we had an award ceremony. It was a gorgeous day in October. Beautiful. It was all on the outside, and he flew in with his helicopter, landed on the school grounds. Then they brought him over with a car. All the

children were brought over, thousands of people around, and we people would go up on the stage and receive our awards. And I remember there was a famous baseball player. He was sitting on the stage, and he was a handsome man, and I was more interested in looking at the baseball player. He was a Social Security recipient. His mother received Social Security benefits because he was one of her younger – he was under eighteen. If you're under eighteen, the mother gets benefits.

JF: Who was he?

LS: I can't remember his name. Now. I did mention his name once, and they said, "No, it wasn't him, it was somebody else." So I don't know. It's probably on Internet. Because I remember that. And I told them about that. And oh, it was just beautiful. President Johnson said a few words. They have his words, what he said, on tape. I don't remember what he said, but it was such a gorgeous day. I was taking pictures. And every time, I stood up to take a picture, the Secret Service men were taking a picture of me. It was high security. The President said what he had to say, and off he went. But he's the only President that has visited SSA, and I said that on this tape that I made, and they took it down. So my career ended.

JF: So what was it that made you stay? You were getting towards retirement, and you said that they wouldn't give you a new job because they were afraid that they would give it to you and you would leave. You'd retire.

LS: Yes. No, I didn't leave. I decided that I was going to stay. Because if the government was willing to pay me a salary to sit there and do nothing, that was fine with me. I knew that the guy was pushing me out, the [inaudible] because the analyst told me what he said. They hated him. Nobody liked him. In fact, when they gave him a retirement party, I'm standing here at Ellen's desk, and she was the one who made the arrangements. I don't know why she did. We all felt – well, I know how she ended up being a grade fifteen. Didn't know what she was doing. But anyway, she didn't really

know. The analyst would ask her a question. "Well, I'll get to you later. I'll let you know." And then she'd call, find out the answer, and then tell them. And they all knew this. They all knew that she was just a fake. And now she's a grade fifteen. She worked her way into it. But I'm still friends with her. I just now received this week a letter wishing me luck in my new apartment. She and Pauline [inaudible]. Pauline is a nicer person than Ellen, but I knew all about Ellen's family. I sort of grew up with her family. She'd tell me stories because they live in – they don't live in Baltimore, and her mother and father – she had a grandmother, two sisters, and a brother. But this morning, I awakened, and I thought to myself, "Lil, you don't know how much time you have. Why don't you retire?" As I said, nobody would believe me when I told them. When the time came close, they could see. But at the award ceremony – a day in October – I used to do what all government workers do. Count the day until retirement. I used to do the same thing. But that day came, and it just was out of my mind. I never thought of retiring; it was just another day in the week for me. I enjoyed the awards ceremony. It was gorgeous out there that day. And then all of a sudden, as I said, I was going to wake up one day and think about it," and that's what I did.

JF: But you were telling me that this Mr. [inaudible] wanted you out, and you decided to stay? So what kind of work did you do after that? You said at that point they were paying you to do nothing. But I can't imagine you doing that for twenty-five years.

LS: No. After he left, they disbanded EMS, Evaluation Measurement System. It was a good department. We were saving the federal government money, but they wanted to get rid of Mr. D. He wanted to come back as a consultant. They wouldn't take him.

JF: So then what happened after that was disbanded? Where did you go?

LS: They disbanded the EMS, and we were all scattered. I went into another Department. It was Carl (Christianson?) and Ellen [inaudible], Pauline, a couple of the guys, one who's passed away. We all worked – we worked in the same office but in

different branches. And I didn't have anything to do where I was. But they put me in charge of POMS.

JF: POMS?

LS: POMS, P-O-M-S, in capital letters. It was Program Operations Manual. In it was the bible. It was the laws, the rules, and everything of Social Security. And if anybody needed to find out some information and they have a case they can't solve, they go to POMS. I was in charge of it. It was a library. And everybody had to sign in and sign out. Besides having other work. [Recording paused.]

JF: So you were telling me that you were in charge of POMS. When you say in charge of, what did that involve?

LS: They're books that were the manual, and when people wanted to borrow the book, a book, because there was a number of them, I would have them sign in, and then when they brought it back, sign them out. And then that was taken from me and given to a higher-paying clerk. What was I doing then? I didn't have too much to do. Oh, from there, I sort of – they had the claims folders, these are cases that had already been awarded or disallowed. And the folders went from the original claims office who did the – who did the confirming of the – who awarded the benefits or disallowed them. And then, they would send it to one other office, and they reviewed the case to see that everything was done properly. Then we get the case. And each clerk had to check over the report, and sometimes there were errors, and I had to make changes. We, it was an interesting job. My job was to remove a certain form that gave the synopsis of the case and file it. And then, once a year, they had to make a special report. The analyst would ask me for copies of this report – the account number that they gave me. I would make a copy of it and give it to them. So they did whatever they wanted with it. It kept me busy for quite a while. They were getting ninety-eight percent of folders. So, I was busy practically all day. Other jobs came up that I was responsible for. And then they

changed the sample, and I wasn't getting any folders. I sat there and maybe had a few folders a day, and the rest of the time, I read. I went down to the fitness center. And I guess, maybe, that was, in a way, responsible for me leaving. You know, making my mind to retire. It wasn't enough to do. I couldn't keep up with these people. They knew the law because they were working with it all the time. And so I couldn't do the work that they were doing. I wish you'd see some of the work, these beautiful charts that they made on the computer. And I have trouble with the computer. They make more fun of me every time they saw me coming in. Somebody would say, "Chuck, here she comes." But they wouldn't teach me. I'd say, "What did I do here?" "Get up, get up and let them sit down." And they did it. And I didn't like that. I said, "I want you to teach me!" But I used to send e-mail. I have a friend in Boston – Housatonic, Massachusetts. She was a retired schoolteacher. Taught history. Oh, I would have liked to have learned history with her. In fact, we still correspond with each other. Now by hand. Because I don't have a computer. Alice [inaudible] is her name. I wrote to her and told her that I moved into this new development that has a computer room. She says, "Well, hurry up and send me e-mail. I've got lots." Oh, she used to send me over e-mail. Wonderful articles about growing older and other jokes. And I'd make copies and pass them around. [laughter] And I met her on a trip in Newfoundland. We became friends. And there was another woman, Gretchen (Cooke?), who came from Boston. And she worked for the Museum of Art in Boston. And she must have taught too because her last letter to me said something about "my students coming to visit me." She's now ninety-one, I believe. Been around the world twice. No siblings. No family. She's all alone in the world. She made up her mind that on her birthday, July the 29th, that she was going to be on a vacation. So every July 29th, she goes away. She was on the trip in Newfoundland. And we three became friends. In fact, the two girls – Alice and Gretchen's birthdays are around the same time. So they celebrated two of them. Oh, that was a wonderful trip. I went to church with Alice. I said, "Do you mind if I come along?" She said no. So I went to church with her. And it's interesting. I go to these different churches. She didn't

understand the services, but she knew what she had to do. I can't remember whether it was in French or what. As I said, we kept in touch, and I still correspond with Gretchen. Unfortunately, she has macular degeneration in both eyes. And no hearing. She was wearing hearing aids. And then she had a stroke. She lived in a one-room in a former building owned by Standard Oil, but they gave her wonderful service. She loved it. It was on the twenty-first floor. The scenery was so beautiful. And then she had another stroke, and she went into the hospital. Stayed there a long time. And now, she is in assisted living. So I wrote and told her. She asked me questions about what I had here. And I told her. And now, I'm writing on the computer because my handwriting is getting so bad. And I can type the letters on the computer. Maybe eventually. But that's the stint. And do you know I've been out a year and three months, and I feel like I've never worked before.

JF: Why is that?

LS: I don't know. I don't know.

JF: Well, you're leading me very nicely into another area of questions I want to ask you. We talked a great deal about your career, and it's very impressive. The longest-serving federal employee. But there is a lot of life outside of work. And that's what I'd like to hear about now.

LS: Well, I love the theater. I joined the Mechanic. Even before the Mechanic, we used to go downtown.

JF: What's the Mechanic?

LS: The Mechanic is now known as the – it was known as the Ford's Theater. When they were downtown. But every Saturday matinee, we'd go there. In fact, in the beginning of Social Security, we all used to go to the matinees at Ford's, and we'd be sitting there with Bob (Ball?); all the big shots would be there Saturday matinee. We'd

call each other by first name. They were the grade threes. We were the grade twos. We looked up at them. And we used to go down there. They threw the theater down, and they built the Mechanic. Well, I had a subscription. I had a meeting that I was very active with.

JF: What was that?

LS: It was, we were known then as B'nai B'rith Women. But the men wanted us to wash the dishes, and they would get the money. And the women told them, "No way. Well, if you want to stay and be the B'nai B'rith Women, you'll have to pay us an enormous sum just to keep the B'nai B'rith Women. No way." They had functions that we used to attend. Men and women. It was great. It was nice. We'd [play bingo. It was a good way of being with women. And now they're known as the Jewish Women's International. We are no longer connected with B'nai B'rith. Our chapter – we were the Business and Professional Group – dwindled down to maybe, if six or seven or eight women came to a meeting. We changed it from night to day because most of us couldn't drive at night. We became older and older, so we combined with a middle-aged group, a young married group. They don't meet at night. They have their families. They meet at night. They don't meet during the day because they're working. All working. We don't have – I just pay my dues. That's it, period. They had a donor affair out in Hunt Valley, and I wouldn't drive. I don't know how to get out there. So, I called and said, "I'd like to come, but I need a ride." They managed to get me a ride. And that was the last thing. It's not like it's been. It's no fun.

JF: Is it mainly a social organization?

LS: Yes. Well, we did charity work. We did the bingos, and we had donor affairs. We had donor affairs. I held every job from president down except corresponding secretary.

JF: Can you tell me a little bit about that? What did that involve?

LS: I don't know. I just worked up into it. They needed a treasurer, so I volunteered. I was the treasurer for a number of years. They needed a recording secretary, I was the recording secretary until – I missed so much.

JF: Because of your hearing?

LS: I can't understand words. And we went to conventions. We had picnics. In fact, I still have some – I threw away some of the movies of the picnics that we went on. We went hiking. It was a lot to do. But we were young. We could do it. But as we got older. We also became very good friends with the Catholic Daughters of Baltimore.

JF: When you say "we," that's the B'nai B'rith Women?

LS: When we were B'nai B'rith Women. We were friends for over twenty-five years.

JF: Did you have functions together?

LS: Yes.

JF: That's interesting.

LS: We taught them. We'd have Pesach. We'd have Passover food for them. Hanukkah, we had other – and we had Dolls for Democracy.

JF: What's that?

LS: We have dolls – I don't know who has them – of Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, all the big people. All those that made history. And they had – and I just saw her death notice not too long ago – Eva, oh what a woman, [inaudible]. Polish. She, in fact, got to the point where she was understanding Jewish. And she had a group of women who would come with her. And they would invite us. We would invite them to our meetings, and we set up beautiful services that we made for them and explained it to

them. They did the same to us. We'd go to them in February, and they came to us in November. And Eva [inaudible] – we had a living Dolls for Democracy one time. Where we had the actual members be a doll dressed in the character. She was Golda Meir. We had Golda Meir. We had Rosa Parks and Dr. King. They cost a lot of money to make, but they were wonderful. And one of the girls would take them to schools and show them at schools. I never did it. I never tried it. But there was so much going on. Until finally, one time, they were running short of presidents, so they asked me if I would become the president. So, I became the president for two years. And we had a donor that year. The largest donor we have ever had of two hundred people. I was the last donor chairman. I mean, I was the last donor president. After that, the donors fell down to just practically nothing. I can't complain. The good Lord has been good to me. He's given a complete decade of traveling in the country.

JF: Tell me about that. Tell me about your travels.

LS: I traveled with two sisters, (Ann and Rae Pushkin?). (Rae?) worked in Washington and retired from there, and then came into Baltimore. But even when she was working in Washington, (Ann?) lived in Baltimore with her mother. The three of us would get together. (Rae?) was the one always because she was the oldest. Very reserved, old-fashioned woman. And (Rae?) would make the arrangements – "Let's go." And she had a travel agent in Washington, and he would make the trips so the three of us would travel together. And one time, we were out West, and I came into the area that was the living room. I shared a room with the two of them. Always on the cot. But I came out to hang my little pants and wear nylon toe pads. They don't make them anymore. I had to come out of the bathroom, clothes hanging all over. (Ann's?) the little one – we called her the little one. She had brought six slips. We're only gone eight days. Six slips. She decided because her sister was washing, she was going to wash. I had two small pieces, and I said, "Where do I hang these pieces?" and (Rae?) says, "Don't worry. We'll make room." Make room. I said, "My gosh." So, the next day, I saw the tour conductor. I said,

"What chance is there of getting a cabin to myself?" He said, "It won't cost you anything. It will cost you fifty cents a night." I said, "Get me another cabin." I came back to the girls. I have my own cabin. I can't put up with them. Because they were doing little things. I went with Leona (Marsh?). and Anita Goldstein, Anita (Tannen?). at that time. The three of us went to New York. They insisted that I was going to go to the cot. This is what I've always [inaudible]. I went with two other girls [who] always gave me the cot. Big deal. And me with a bad back. And Leona says, "Oh no, we take straws." And sure enough. She cut up straws. I won. I got the cot. But the next night, one of the other girls took it. We did a binge of New York. Theatres and shows. Wonderful traveling with those two. And I traveled with them a number of years. But they were so different than the (Pushkin?) girls. And so then, one year, I decided – in 1955 – that it was time for me to go to Europe. The two girls, the two sisters, couldn't go. They had a mother they had to take care of. I went down to the – well, they're now the American Express. It was the Metropolitan Travel Agency, and I signed up for a trip to Europe. I went by ship. I took six weeks off of work.

JF: By yourself?

LS: By myself. When I got to the destination, I found out there were only three other women on the trip. We had four of us. We were met at every station and taken to the next stop. But when I got into – when all four of us marched into a hotel, they all gave me their passports; I took care of their passports. There were two sisters-in-law from California, bankers' wives. The other woman was a widow, fifty-five years old. Who didn't know what – her husband left her some kind of business that she was losing. She didn't know how to handle it. And she had a lawyer. She let me know that he was Jewish, who took and put the business back up on good terms, and she was traveling with the interest that she was getting from her business. But she was – for a fifty-five-year-old – the other two women had more pep in them. They were up in their sixties or seventies. And they were always going down for their cocktails. I preferred going with

them than with her. She was more interested in sitting in her room. She was making a pillow for friends that she was visiting there. But boy, did the travel agency take advantage of her. On her trip, she could have left the trip and visited with her friends and then picked up the next tour because that's what the two women did. They didn't have friends, but they had to go someplace that the tour didn't go. So they left us, and they went on this trip, and I was left with her. She was interested in eating all the time. But then I was left by myself. I finished the trip. I met two women in Paris. We had a ball. Saw "Madame Butterfly" done in Paris in French. We went to an American restaurant where the college boys were going, and we had dinner that night from soup to nuts. I had a wonderful time with them. And I came home and said to my mother, "Mom, if I could go to Europe alone, I going every place alone." And that's what I did. And then I traveled back in the States because I didn't want to leave her, she was not too well. And my first trip in – Pop died in '68. And I waited a year. And then, in 1970, I went to Scandinavia. And there were a number of Jewish people. A group of women from Boston – one of them became ill and had to go back. Her suitcase followed us throughout the trip. And there was a couple from Philadelphia and a couple from New York. Boy, were they something. They must have taken dancing lessons. You should see them. And there was a couple from Philadelphia and Ina, her mother, and brother. Ina was a young schoolteacher. She just retired last year. And every summer, she would go on a trip. She traveled practically around the world. And one time, I said – we have not seen each other. We have spoken on the phone. I said, "Ina, we have such a beautiful country right here in this state. Why don't you visit us? Visit the country." Well, her cousin didn't want to. So where did she go this time? She went back to Norway, back to Scandinavia, and she hadn't been back there since the '70s. I'm waiting now to hear from her. She's probably there now. And her mother – her mother and I had an interesting experience in Finland. It doesn't get dark there until quite late. So, after we finished dinner, the guide said, "How about coming with me? There is a fort that I want you to see." So a group of us followed him. It's about 10:30. It was starting to get dark.

So we said, “How much further do we have?” “Not too far. Not too far.” But we’re going back. The following day, we were leaving in the afternoon. I decided I was going to find this fort. And Ina’s mother, whose name was Lillian, wore these wedged shoes with just a strap over. Traveled throughout Scandinavia with a hat and a wig, which she never wore. We started to go. She saw me. She said, “Where are you going?” I said, “I’m going to try to find that place he was telling us about last time.” So she said, “Do you mind if I come?” I said, “No. Company is great.” So the two of us went out. And sure enough, we found the place. And while we were looking around, another couple from the group came. So the four of us were there – one man, his wife, and the two of us. We got lost. We were leaving that afternoon, and we didn’t know how to get back. And you couldn’t ask; no one understood English. So finally a car came by, and this man said to him the name of the hotel. The man pointed down like this. Well, we went down like that. I don’t know how Lillian ever made it because you had to hold onto branches because it was down. She didn’t have walking shoes on. The other three of us did. Where do you think we found ourselves? In the backyard of the hotel. [laughter]. We were so shocked, and we ran to get our luggage and everything. That’s the one thing about traveling; you do all kinds of things.

JF: That’s true. All kinds of experiences.

LS: And then in ’71, I went to Israel. That was that composition I one time wrote in high school. And told the teacher that my first trip would be Scandinavia and my second trip would be to Israel, and I don’t remember where else. And the teacher wrote a little note on it—“You don’t have to go to these countries. You can get books and read.”

JF: So, what did you think of Israel? What was that like?

LS: Of which?

JF: Of Israel.

LS: ’71. There is a couple downstairs, who I had breakfast with this morning. They had a daughter who lived in Israel twelve years, and they would go back and forth every year. We were remarking at the change. And they wore guns then too. When we went to the Western Wall, they were walking around with guns. There’s people who’ve had it. And I was telling – there is a man here; (Itzy?) is his name. He wears a yarmulke. Rabbi Max was supposed to come here last night, but he canceled because the week before, there were just three or four women. This time he would have had seven or eight of us. So he backed out. So (Itzy?) came over; there was two of us sitting there. He said, he started to talk to us. And the one interesting thing he told me. I said, “Well, I never thought of that.” He said, “Where do you think the Jews came from?” I said, “Well, I never gave it any thought as to where.” I said, “They were always here.” He says, “No, they came from Abraham. Arab.” And the second name, which I can’t remember, but it sounded like Israelite – the other religion, Islam. I said, “You know, I never thought of that.” It was good. He spoke about the fact that this week is a bad week because, in 1968, the war began. It’s one thing these people here – they tell you. You hear stories. Of course, this wasn’t a story, but it was interesting. I told him – I said, “Please talk slower. I can’t understand.” I watched his lips intently. I think he gets so involved he would forget himself when he’d talk. I’d look up at him. And then I went to Greece. And it was each three weeks. The trip to Greece was tough on me. They overbook. And I come into my room, and there’s a man. He could stay, and I had to move. And another woman – same way. A man took up, but they gave her someplace else too. And here I was, sitting out on the deck, and the purser – in front of the purser’s office – wasn’t outside; it was inside – with my luggage no place to go. So they put me in with a young woman who was supposed to be the massage gal. Little tiny thing. I said to her, “I can’t go up there.” She said, “No, I’ll take the upper.” If you’re going to the bathroom, you have to close the door to go into the bathroom. [laughter] You couldn’t get – tiny. Well, I let them know I was very disappointed and I was going to report them. They called me a couple days later and they told me they had a room. They took the woman – oh, what’s

the word? It's not coming to me. Oh, this so-called [inaudible]. She was a – I want it to come, and it doesn't come. She did the announcing. The mistress of ceremony. She had a beautiful room. And they gave me her room. I don't know where they put her. When I came home, I showed my travel agent, Hilda [inaudible] – she was a member of B'nai B'rith, and she opened her own travel agency. I said, "Hilda, this is the letter I'm sending to them." She looked at it. She said, "Lil, let me tear this up. I'll write my own letter. You're too strong." [laughter] And that was it. And I spent three weeks in Japan. That was so interesting. I have two little dishes that they eat rice out of. I bought those in the market. I had a few pennies left of Japanese money because we were leaving Japan, and I used it to buy this – I wished I had more money. They didn't know what American money was, so they wouldn't take it. This is a typical market. [inaudible] two little dishes was what I had. It was a town. We didn't spend the night there. All our luggage was out on the hall. People going back and forth, and the tour conductor says, "Don't worry about it. Nothing will be touched." And that is it. We went into this theater all performed by women dressed as men. Beautiful musical show they put on, and then we went to lunch. And then we came back for the rest of the show. This time it was a story, and they gave us it in English writing so we could follow the story. The women who took men's parts were just magnificent. And the review. Oh, my did they do a beautiful job. And then we came out, and they picked up our luggage for us and put us on the bus. We went to the next stop.

JF: Sounds lovely.

LS: Where we spent the night. You meet people. I corresponded with a number of them that I met. Then the correspondence fades away. And Japan. In China, I went with Goucher College.

JF: Wow.

LS: That was interesting. We had very interesting experiences there. I walked up on the Wall. I was walking on the Wall. Leona and Ceil and Lila were someplace else, and I was by myself. I was walking on the wall, snapping pictures. And this man – now I stopped someplace. And this man was standing there, and he asked me where I came from. And I told him. I said, "Where do you come from?" And he said, "New Haven." I said, "Oh, did you, by any chance, know Isadore Wexler?" He said, "Oh, yes. He was a big educator in New Haven." I said, "He was my cousin." And then, I met another girl who also lived in New Haven, and she wrote a card to my cousin's wife and mentioned my name. My cousin's wife called and spoke to her.

JF: Isn't that funny?

LS: I went to the Baltic countries. And there it was tough because the people – I don't know what you call these non-Jews. There was a mother and daughter, and the woman that I became friends with was not Jewish, but she had been married to a Jewish man. She always used to say, "My Morris this, my Morris that." She had one son. She wanted him to be bar mitzvahed. This rabbi would not do it because the kid had a gentile mother. She found another rabbi, who did do the bar mitzvah, and she gave that rabbi a good donation. Because her husband was in the furniture business. She knew more about furniture. But there were two priests on the trip. Both Brother Frank. One was good; the other one –

JF: Not so good, huh?

LS: It always ended that the four of us sat at the same table. We had the best wine. They took their robes off and wore business clothes. When we arrived in the town where the black church is – I don't remember the name of that town. There was a synagogue around the corner. It was right after the earthquake.

JF: What country is this?

LS: In Romania.

JF: Romania.

LS: And it was right after the earthquake, and we went into one of – the good Frank came in, and we explained to him – a Jewish doctor and his wife were there. We explained to him the *yahrzeit* [memorial] lights. The men were busy repairing the synagogue because it had been damaged by the earthquake. So I asked the cantor there – I said, "Do you know anybody by the name of Steinhorn?" He said the name didn't sound familiar to him – this is a Jewish – didn't sound familiar, and then he disappeared. So I just, and then all of a sudden, he is back. He said, "There was a Steinhorn here, but he left." How close I was. And the little boy that was little – I call him little because he was short. He had just finished. He was a registered doctor. He had just finished and now became a full doctor. He was acting as the tour conductor. His parents came from the same county my parents came from – Czernowicz, Romania. Bukovenia, Czernowicz. Czernowicz had a big to-do during World War II. And I told him one day – I can't remember his name. "How about m?m?lig??" Do you know what m?m?lig? is?

JF: No.

LS: Cornmeal mush. That kept my mother alive many a time. We'd eat it with cream cheese or milk. I used to like it with milk. But mom – they had a poor life. And many a time, that's all they had to eat. And he did. When we got to this place, the restaurant, he says, "Miss Steinhorn, you can get your m?m?lig? here." And everybody on the bus had heard me. But it wasn't m?m?lig? like my mother made. It was mixed with meat. It's interesting. Hungary – oh, they were nasty to us.

JF: How so?

LS: They made us sit at the border all day long, played around with our passports. The bus is full of Germans, no trouble. They came out and in. And our tour conductor said, "Whatever you do, just keep quiet." The other was – Romania, Bucharest [inaudible] other country.

JF: Extensive travels, obviously.

LS: Every year, it was another place.

JF: Well, we've touched a little bit on the next topic but not really gone into it. Since this is the Jewish Women's Archive, one of the things I wanted to ask you about was about being Jewish and how that manifested itself in your life. Did your parents belong to a synagogue or celebrate the holidays?

LS: My mother did. My mother would celebrate the holidays until she became ill. So she made Passover and Hanukkah, and she baked and cooked on Passover. Well, then she became ill and stopped it. I never was religious. I am Jewish, and I will not deny it. If anybody asks me, I say I am Jewish. I don't observe the dietary laws. Dr. Kaplan – I had taken a couple courses with Dr. Kaplan. He had been retired, and he was in his nineties. This was just before I started to work in Washington. I was visiting friends of mine who were teaching me how to play bridge. They were excellent bridge players. And Dr. Kaplan had the course. He told us the reasons why we didn't mix meat with milk and other reasons, and he himself said it's not necessary to stay kosher because the foods are now prepared so much better than in those days. Oh, I ate everything.

JF: Did you ever belong to a synagogue?

LS: No, my parents weren't affiliated, and neither was I. My father would go. When his mother went to shul, he would go. My mom never. Her father was very nasty to her when she was a child. She hated him. He was an Orthodox butcher. My mother's mother was a caterer for a rich family, and he took my mother out of school when she

was in the third grade, gave my mother an inferiority complex by calling her ugly and by calling her stupid. My father told me this. And she had two other sisters; one was nineteen, and one was eighteen. One was engaged to be married, and both the girls died of tuberculosis. My mother had three brothers. The one brother, Harry, was the oldest, I think, of the three. He came with tuberculosis and died in this country. And his son was the educator. There was an article about him in *Reader's Digest*. Winchester School. He was principal. After his death, the school was named after him. And her one brother came over, came here with my mother. The younger brother died in the concentration camp. When he came to this country with my mother, they both came together, our government turned him back because of his eyes or something. They thought he was contagious or something. Maybe he had glaucoma. I don't know. Mom and Pop didn't have any trouble with their eyes. But the three of us did. My sister, myself, my sister has the degeneration, and my brother had trouble with his eyes. Dr. Goldberg said was something that didn't happen to young people. Only to older people. And in fact, he told my brother, "If you ever have this trouble in the other eye, come right back to me," and my brother was an architect.

JF: So his sight was very important to him.

LS: Yes. And my father had five other brothers beside him. Six brothers. Three sisters, and then his mother married a widower with one child. So she had ten kids to feed.

JF: That's a lot. That's a lot. Growing up, did you see a lot of your cousins? Did you have a very close-knit family?

LS: Not anymore. When the first generation was living, the older uncle, Uncle Hyman, formed a family association. And we would meet, and then after he passed away and then one after another, the older people left. I am the only one left of my sister, my brother, and two cousins of the second generation. We are the five that are left in that generation.

JF: Did you stay close to them?

LS: No, we don't. We talk occasionally on the phone. Sidney was a chiropodist. Now they call them podiatrists. He had a wonderful wife. She passed away. And then he remarried. His wife now is in Florida. She sells real estate in Florida. So she comes up here, and he goes down there. We don't see him. In fact, he wasn't invited to my party. All the others were.

JF: Your party?

LS: My ninetieth birthday. All the other relatives came.

JF: Tell me about that. That's an event that not many of us get to experience. A ninetieth birthday party. Could you tell me about that?

LS: Well, they let me know they were going to give me a party.

JF: Who is they?

LS: The kids.

JF: Your nephews?

LS: My nephews. The oldest nephew is going to be sixty-one this October. His sister is – I think she is already in her fifties. Larry has two sons. Matt is seventeen. He's going to be seventeen any day now. I'll have to look at the calendar. And the younger one, Josh, who is fourteen. Two different personalities. Matt must be over six feet. And he's going to take after Diane's family. He's going to get big. And Josh is skinny like his father, but but he's studious. Matt went to Europe with his class last year. We pitched together, you know, I helped, I gave him spending money. Marlene gave him money. His grandfather is Dr. Sussman, a leading surgeon in Baltimore, [who] unfortunately, while he was operating, he got a rapid heartbeat and have to give up his business. But

he's so nice.

JF: You were telling me about them planning your ninetieth birthday party.

LS: Yes. They just said, "Who do you want to invite?" I said, "Well, the family." "Well, don't you have any friends?" I said, "All right, I'll give you some names of people I know." So, I did. I gave them the names. And I invited my office. I gave them – and I got hell for that because the caterer only has so many orders, blah, blah, blah. As it is, one individual showed up. I knew they weren't going to come. He happened to be a Black man. He made a big hit with my family. I told him, "Ted, you sure made a hit with my family." He liked my family. They treated him just like everybody else, and he had his camera, and he took pictures. He made up a set for me. They had beautiful services. They got it from a deli. Mark's Deli in Glyndon. Everybody went to town on that. So I had all my relatives, and I had the people – one girl who worked out with me in the fitness center. She said, "Lil, when you become ninety, I want to come to your birthday party." So I invited her and a few others. I had a couple, Doreen and her husband. I had attended her retirement party eight years ago, she said, and so, of course, I had to invite her to mine. They came. And cousins of mine. One cousin didn't come. I called him to find out why. I said, "If you needed a ride, Phil would have" – Pacy, we call him to – "Phil would have picked you up." He says, "That's not it." Hannah had her eye operated on, cataract surgery, and she had to wear a cup over her eye.

[Recording paused.]

JF: This is disc number three. The interview with Lillie Steinhorn. It's July 7, 2001. We are in Baltimore, Maryland. I'm Jean Freedman recording this for the Jewish Women's Archives Weaving Women's Words Project. A few more questions. As I mentioned earlier, before we started recording, the idea of this project was to talk to Jewish women in Baltimore. So, it's kind of a three-pronged thing. We've talked about being Jewish. And now, I'd like to ask some more questions about being a woman and how that

affected your life and your career.

LS: I don't know. I'm a woman.

JF: It's a pretty open-ended question.

LS: Yeah. I never had dates.

JF: Why is that?

LS: I've gone out once or twice. But men, for some reason, weren't interested in me. As I had a friend who married quite late in life, she said, "No man ever broke down my door."

JF: Why was that?

LS: Because she wasn't married at the time. And now I picked up that phrase. When somebody said, "Why didn't you get married?" I said, "Because no man ever" – in fact, I told this to one of my great-nephews. I said, "Because no man ever broke down my doors to get to me."

JF: Were you that interested in getting married?

LS: I would have liked to have been married. I think every woman would. But it didn't bother me that I wasn't. And I don't mind it. I won't say that I don't mind it now. I would have liked the companionship. I would have liked to have had somebody. As I see some of the couples coming in here, other couples I know, it's good to have someone. But when you're younger, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter in the least. As my mother said to me, and I'll never forget it, "When you're," and I was thirty-five, "if you're not married by now, you'll never get married." And I just shrugged my shoulders. When Social Security first started, we had a union. I was friends with this one man. I've forgotten his name, too, now. Frank. And Frank used to invite me to the parties at the union. And one time, I said to my mother, "Mom, what would happen if I came home and told you I was

engaged to a non-Jew?" And she looked at me, and she said, "If you're in love, it doesn't matter." My mother was a very unusual woman.

JF: She must have been. Yes.

LS: I always remembered that. It doesn't bother me, though. But now, every once in a while, I think it would have been nice to have somebody around the house.

JF: You're obviously very self-reliant.

LS: I have to be because my parents put me in charge of my siblings. And after my sister left and my brother married, I took care of my mother. My father really didn't need care though he was – he had a stroke and had a bad leg. He died at eighty-four. He had a massive stroke. I did what I wanted to do.

JF: Did you live with your parents until they died?

LS: Yes. All the time. Except when I lived in Washington. But I was home every Saturday. Monday morning, I took the train and went back right to work.

JF: So you stayed very close with your parents?

LS: Yes. I liked to do things for them. I enjoyed taking my mother to New York every year. And I'd get tickets for the – I don't know whether I've told you this before. I'd take tickets for her television shows and musicals and have a picture taken of her in front of a hotel with her hat. She looked gorgeous. Her cheeks would get so rosy. And she loved it. We spent about four or five days. Then we'd go shopping for the two little ones, and Larry came along. Those were the days.

JF: Sounds lovely. So you did have a lot of companionship with your parents.

LS: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JF: Did being a woman make a difference in work?

LS: No. Except at one time – I think it's different in the federal government. A woman won't go ahead.

JF: Because they have rules?

LS: Yes. There's nothing about male or female in the government. I had three friends who were written up in the newspaper as the three highest-paid women. Grade sixteen. And I think the next two steps you have to get presidential approval. In fact, one of them now lives in Florida. The other two, I don't know. Oh yes, the other one belongs to the alumni office at Social Security, and I saw her at one of the annual luncheons. And she came over, and we spoke. Her husband was my boss at the time when they did me dirt about bringing in somebody to be the [inaudible]. He was much older than Mildred. Mildred was his daughter's girlfriend. And when he met Mildred, they became an item. He divorced his wife and married Mildred. He was a much older man, and he one time said he was going to write a book, but he never did. He was a nice guy. He was not liked. I liked him because white was white and black was black. He said it as it was. He didn't make any beans about it.

JF: Didn't pull any punches.

LS: Yeah.

JF: Well, continuing with the subject of women, being a woman. You've seen a lot of changes.

LS: Yes.

JF: For women. And I wonder if you could comment on that.

LS: I've seen women go up the ladder. As I said, outside of these three women, men were given the preference. But now, there is no difference whatsoever. If a woman showed the abilities she would get it. She was awarded for it. I didn't see too much difference in the last years.

JF: Continuing on this theme of how things changed, one of the things that is really nice about being able to interview you is that you've lived in Baltimore almost all your life. You've lived in Baltimore for almost ninety years, and that's wonderful because you can tell us how Baltimore has changed.

LS: Oh, it changed. Oh, it changed. It was nice in the old days. And I say old days when we were downtown, and you moved. The poor families all came, and they were poor. And as they made a living, they went up into uptown. We went from Chase Street. We went further uptown to Mount Street. We went further to Payson Street. We went further – not Payson Street, but to Ruxton Avenue where the big shots. Our next-door neighbor on Ruxton Avenue had a valet and a maid. As I said, across the street was this politician who resembled Governor Ritchie. And we'd see all these big people come up. And I remember when television, radio came in. This man across the street had a radio. We kids would go over and sit on his steps to listen to his radio [laughter]. And then during the war, during the Depression, Pop couldn't keep up the payments on the house. We had to move back to Payson Street. And that's when I started to work in Washington. And I was able to help with the support at that. My brother and I were very much affected by the Depression because he could see, and we could both see the difficulty it was on the family making a living. Pop, as I said, had been a tailor from scratch, and then all of a sudden, men's suits became manufactured. So it broke his business, and he became an alteration man. And boy, he used to do alteration. He would take the men downtown – what was their name? – and look for suits that had a defect in them. And the man would get his suit, a good suit, at a reduced rate because of the defect in it. My pop would take it back to him and fix it up for him. You couldn't even

see it. My mother one time had a favorite dress of hers. She was ironing and somehow or other burned the front. You wouldn't have known the dress had ever had a burn –

JF: That's incredible.

LS: – when he got through with it. He was just wonderful.

JF: Was he able to keep his shop during the Depression?

LS: Yes. He didn't do too much. But as time went on he began to do very well.

Mostly in alterations. And when we moved into this – when we moved from Annellen Road into the apartment, he didn't give up work. He had the women coming in, and he worked in the basement. He had a sewing machine, and a walk-in closet was full of clothes that he was doing for people. He kept busy. He'd get through his work on Saturday afternoon, go out on the street, and hitch a ride, hitch a ride to Reisterstown Road Plaza. And my sister and I – we would come back from downtown. We'd go in and pick him up and take him home.

JF: Did you keep on moving after you lived on Ruxton Avenue?

LS: From Ruxton we went to Payson. And then from Payson we went to Annellen Road.

JF: Annellen?

LS: Yes. It's two girls' names. Ann and Ellen.

JF: And where is that?

LS: It's off of Dolfield Road. I can remember it's off of Dolfield. Somebody asked me this morning where was Annellen. And I couldn't remember Dolfield. And the neighborhood changed.

JF: How so?

LS: And when I say changed, Black people started to move in. But that isn't the reason that we moved. My brother and my sister said, "Move." Because Pop had been left with a weak leg after a stroke. And he would go down the cellar where his shop was. His customers used to come in through the back. And I had rose bushes. Mom loved roses. I had rose bushes all around. And these women would come and break off a rose to make me mad.

JF: Who would? Who would do that?

LS: This white car belonging to this psychiatrist, and he one time said, "Well, Pop told him we were moving." He said to me, "Don't ever let your father stop working." I said, "I don't intend to." And Pop was working up until the time that he died.

JF: Where did you move to from there?

LS: Annellen Road and into the apartment. And he wanted a first-floor apartment but it was a Sylvia [inaudible], who was working in the rental office, who found out that my father used to bounce her on his lap when she was a baby. So she said, "No, Mr. Steinhorn, wait. There is a terrace, a brand-new apartment coming up." So we waited for that terrace. But he wouldn't walk out through the back. He had no step. He walked up the front steps. Get himself all dressed Saturday because his two daughters were going to pick him up later and go to the Plaza and gab it with the other people. He was a character.

JF: He sounds like it. So as you moved, you saw how Baltimore was changing. We were talking about that.

LS: And now when you go down to the – at one time, it was unsafe to walk around at the wharf. The harbor. But today you can go down to the harbor place.

JF: It's beautiful. Yeah.

LS: I used to take the subway, not the subway, yeah, the subway up to Charles Street, and then walk down and spend the day at the harbor.

JF: Okay. I've just got a couple more questions. Again, this is something that you've touched on, and I just want to add a little bit more. And that is you've seen a lot of world events. Probably the first one would be World War I.

LS: I can remember.

JF: And that's what I wanted to ask you about. How these world events.

LS: I can remember the soldiers marching on East Baltimore Street. I guess they were coming home, and we were all standing on each side of the street, and what do I remember about that? Wrigley's had put out chewing gum, and they were giving out samples. That's what I remember. And I can see the men, and we were grabbing the chewing gum. That I can remember vividly. Korean War, I did volunteer work at the Air Force. We used to chart the skies. We had maps, and if we saw something suspicious, we'd report it. We had dry runs of if it's an actual enemy fire. And that was interesting. And I made a friend there, and every once in a while, I'll meet her. I did volunteer work at the hospital in World War II. Everybody just put their hands in it. There wasn't a person that didn't do something during the war effort. And after that, then the world was changed. We became more vicious. Before the war, everything was pleasant. I wasn't afraid to walk in the street at three o'clock in the morning.

JF: I wish you could do that now.

LS: I was invited to a New Year's party. I didn't have a date.

JF: When was this?

LS: Oh way, way back.

JF: Before the war?

LS: It was before the war. I went down on a streetcar. The party was someplace down on Broadway. I came home. There was nobody to take me home. At three o'clock in the morning, I walked up the street. I got on the streetcar. And came on home. You can't do it today. And remember when Jack Louis won his fight?

JF: No, actually.

LS: He was a prize fighter. I walked down Pennsylvania Avenue, which is all Black. My girlfriend had a father who had a store, I believe it was in the 1200 or 1400 block of Pennsylvania Avenue. And I walked down. The men were celebrating. Nobody said a word. Nobody did anything. And I didn't have to worry. And then (Ann?) walked me back to North Avenue and then walked back herself. You couldn't do it today. Not on Pennsylvania Avenue.

JF: Not many places late at night.

LS: It's not nice. There are two young girls that come up to this family home on Park Heights. They're kosher little girls. They come up to spend time with the women residents at this home. And I said to them – this was last week – I said, "I think what you girls do is wonderful. You give up a Saturday afternoon to sit with a bunch of old people." I said it low so that the others wouldn't hear. And they all have something wrong with them. And they smiled at me. And I said, "One thing I regret when I look at you young people is that you can't walk freely in the streets like I did when I was your age." They were sixteen.

JF: That's true.

LS: And now.

JF: Well, of all the changes that you've seen in your ninety years, are there any in particular that stand out?

LS: You mean in the changing of things?

JF: Yes.

LS: I guess life itself. The fact that we have become so hateful to each other. Brother after brother fighting. Look at what's going on over in Europe. We're in danger in this country. Whites can't get along with the Blacks, and the Blacks can't get along with – why? Because your skin is different? You're still a human being. And over in Europe, Palestinians – look what they did to the Jews. Why? Because we believe differently? It makes me sick to think how the world has changed that way. At one time, look, I could walk down Pennsylvania Avenue and not be afraid. And now I wouldn't do it. When I went to Israel, it made me sick to see the young boys marching around with guns. Let the Jewish people live in peace. And the Arabs and the Palestinians – I don't know. And then the African countries that are fighting each other. They're brothers. We all believe in one God. We call him different names. But we believe in one God. And why can't we just – I had a co-worker who used to say, "Thank goodness, I have many more years behind me." It's the same way I feel. Because I can tell. I can remember when the days were good and the nights were safe, and people weren't killing each other until this day. The more quote " civilized" we are, the more uncivilized we are.

JF: Very well put. Well, I have just one more question. It's the same for every interview. Is there anything that I haven't asked that I should have asked? Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

LS: No. I think you did very well.

JF: Well, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]