Marion Stone Transcript

Q: OK, here we go.

MARION STONE: Yeah.

Q: So, here's our introductory statement. We're speaking with Marion Stone, who I'm calling to in California. And it's February 24th, 2004. OK, so, Marion, we're going to start. I kind of gave you a brief overview of the questions, right, last time?

MS: Well, you talked about, I think, my early experiences and some Jewish identity—

Q: Right.

MS: —and some family history and this kind of—

Q: Your activism. Yeah, that kind of stuff.

MS: Right.

Q: So maybe if you want to start with your background, your early years, if you want to just tell me briefly about your childhood, where you were born, that kind of stuff.

MS: Well, yeah, I think it was very influential in whatever I did, because my parents were immigrant parents, and they were extremely anxious that I have all the experiences that they felt that they didn't have. So, I led a very privileged life, from that point of view. I'm not talking about materially. But they had a great sense of education and the need for education and the need for learning. And so, everything was always reading, more education, more books. If I wanted to learn to knit, they would say they'll buy me the sweater. "You just read." [laughter] And if you want to play cards, "No, you'd better read." They came from Russia, and they had this great thirst for creating in their children

the opportunities that they never had. I think that another very important influence in my life was living in a small community. We lived in a very small community, Chicago Heights, which in those days was not connected by the IC train, so that it really was a small community, and there were forty Jewish families in the community. It was a traditionally stereotypical small town, with the traditional railroad track running through it, dividing the population by race on each side of the track—and economics. I think that that whole experience had a lot to do with my rage at inequality.

Q: Forty Jewish families. What was the rest of the makeup of the town?

MS: So, the makeup was mainly ethnically probably Italian and Jewish. Out of twenty thousand people there may have been eight thousand black people that were brought up during the First World War to work in the chemical plants. So, it was the kind of community that you read about. There was such a division in population. But the kids did get together by the time they got to seventh grade. There was a common school where everyone went to high school together.

Q: And what year was that?

MS: Well, I was born in 1920.

Q: OK.

MS: So, we're talking about right before the Depression. I think that this early sense of discrimination and poverty and so forth really was a seminal experience that I took all through my life. And, of course, the Depression at the time, and so forth. But in this small community, there happened to be a group of very well-educated women who were very community oriented. And they expected, of the forty Jewish families, that you really get involved in community life. I think I was about nineteen when I had the first Black Girl Scout troop that they ever had. These women were also involved in our Jewish education. We didn't have a temple. So that the National Council of Jewish Women

would run the Sunday school. And we were all really expected to make a contribution in the community, at a very early age. And they embraced my parents, who were immigrants, and allowed them to flower into the things that they could do the best. And they were part of this family. We all had Seders together, and we practiced the cultural Jewish things. I mean, there wasn't a great religious impact. But culturally. We had a sense of the way the community looked at the Jewish population, were always aware that we should put our best foot forward. And, you know, the women and the men served on the school board, on bank boards. I mean, it was a very unusual situation. In fact, David Broder comes from that little community. And his mother is one of these women who was extremely involved in community work and so forth. So, I think that that was an extremely important part of my beginning. And then secondly, I think probably going to the University of Chicago. This was during Hutchins' time. And it was a very exciting time at the University of Chicago. We sat at the roundtable with the Hutchins and Adler great books courses, and all the emphasis on the great philosophers and thinkers and so forth.

Q: And what did you study, again?

MS: Well, I got a Master's in social work, from the social work school. But as an undergraduate, from '37 to '41, I was a member in the social sciences. And it was an extremely enlightening time for me, from a small town and quite unsophisticated, to get to the University of Chicago.

Q: Yeah!

MS: And I lived in International House for three years—

Q: Oh, wow! Hm!

MS: —which also, you know, embroidered a lot to my life and—

Q: Yeah, did you choose the I House—

MS: Yes.

Q: Yeah?

MS: Yeah. Mmm hmm. Because I was always curious. Thought it might add to my whole educational experience. Probably didn't quite take as much advantage of it as I would now. But as I look back, it was an exciting time. You know, when you went to university, the first book they gave you to read was called *Straight and Crooked Thinking*. That is by a man named Thouless. I'm sure it's out of print by now. And he emphasized reasoning, you know, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning. And I really think I learned how to analyze concepts and not to think in terms of black and white. I look back at that whole experience as one of the most exciting times of my life, and I wouldn't say socially. I mean, this was academically. So then I made the decision, after I graduated, to get a degree in social work. Now that was another family thing. My parents were very insistent that you had to have a profession. And that was way back when most young women went to school, unfortunately, as I learned later—they were told to find a husband.

Q: Right.

MS: And that may still be true, I'm not sure. But my mother and father really felt they wanted me to have a profession, so that if anything happened, I always had something to get back to. And so I chose social work, partly because I was always interested in behavior and psychology and so forth. And so I went to social work and got my degree in psychiatric social work. And then—let's see.

Q: Well, if we could back for a second, a little bit—

MS: Mm.

Q: Where did your parents immigrate from?

MS: They came from Russia, which, of course, was in the pale when they came. But it'd been Poland, and back and forth.

Q: Did they grow up in the same town?

MS: No, they didn't. They met here. My father came when he was fifteen, and was one of eleven children. He was the first that came, and started on the streets of New York, and then came to Chicago for some reason, and met my mother, I suppose through some relative or something. It's funny. They decided to find a business where they could sell sporting goods and appliances and things like that. And they went around to, like Frigidaire and Whirlpool and different places to find out where they didn't have an outlet. And Chicago Heights was one of them.

Q: Oh, wow.

MS: So, they picked up and moved to Chicago Heights. That was how they started. My mother came when she was about fourteen. She lived with a family, and she had a brother here, and her mother had died. So, she came and lived with a family in Chicago, and I'm still in touch with the family. But it's quite amazing the courage that these people had, with no language ability and really limited education, but great curiosity and great strength of character. I mean, as I look at my children and myself and what we can endure, it's really quite amazing. I think they were a great source of expectation for me. Some of it was a burden, because I had to take all the lessons that you could imagine, from elocution to dancing to piano, to whatever, that they never could have. They imported piano teachers. [laughs] So anyway, that was—

Q: So—

MS: —mainly—Do you have any other question about that part?

Q: Yeah, do you have any grandparents that you got to know as a kid? I mean, did anybody—?

MS: No.

Q: None of them came.

MS: No. A step-grandmother was brought over. But I never had any grandparents, actually.

Q: And how about siblings?

MS: I have a sibling, who is five years older than I am, and lives in Chicago. And, in fact, she's out here right now. And she's been active in the community also, in Chicago. But she has lived in Chicago, where I lived in Chicago Heights. I didn't think of all this until you talked about archives. And I didn't realize I'm at that age when I've got a lot of living experience it's time to look at. That's one of the reasons I wanted to think back and share some of them, particularly with my children, who I never asked the right questions. Because when my parents came, I think they wanted to forget their childhoods. They lived in a community where there wasn't this ethnicity that a lot of Jews moved into, where they felt more comfortable. They had to Americanize very quickly. I mean, they spoke English immediately and—

Q: Wow. Yeah, they were young too, so.

MS: And they were young. But I think it's quite amazing the influence, as I thought back, that they had on me. And this community participation was a community they moved into. It was a very unusual community, something that I think people should realize occurred in Chicago Heights. Because we didn't have the traditional Rabbi and the Sunday School and that whole business, so that these women educated their kids. And then they sent them into Chicago for confirmation. That was the big thing you did. But

until then, you did it locally, usually through the Council of Jewish Women. My mother, as I think about it, brought the concept of Hadassah to the community. They didn't want to bring too many things that would in some way dilute the leadership, you know, and the ability. So, they just had a representative of Hadassah, for instance. And she would report, at each meeting, about Hadassah and then collect every year to go the annual luncheon and to help build the hospital in Israel and that kind of—

Q: So the mothers had a central role in—

MS: The women in this community had an extremely central role. And the interesting thing is that financial success was not looked at with the same kind of admiration as leadership and education. I mean, that was not one of the big things. And that was most unusual, I think, as I've met people in other communities, where financial success was a big thing in their childhood. So this, I think, was kind of unusual.

Q: Yeah. Do you need to stop and take a drink or anything?

MS: Oh!

Q: Sounds like you're getting a little hoarse. [laughs]

MS: Yeah, I am. I've been having a little problem here. I'm going to take a drink.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Feel free, anytime, to take a break. Just let me know.

MS: Yeah, I've had a little respiratory monkey business.

Q: Oh, no.

MS: Anyway. In this community, young people were nurtured—I mean, to give book reviews and to have committees and things like that, you know. And the Jews held a very admired role in the town itself. You know, they were members of the bank board.

And that's back, you know, ninety years ago. And the Board of Education and things like that. And it was an unusual group of people, I think.

Q: And so, what was your family's class status?

MS: What was my—?

Q: Your family's class status as you grew up. You said they were business people.

MS: They were business people, yeah.

Q: Mmm hmm. And would you say middle class, as you grew up?

MS: I think that probably it depends what time. The Depression, I remember very vividly. But I think they were probably upper middle class.

Q: Upper middle class. And during the Depression, did—?

MS: During the Depression, things were very tough. My mother didn't want to give up any of the privileges that we had, so she went and opened her own store and sold hats. She didn't know a hat from a cup of tea, and she simply opened a millinery store. And in those days, you bought a hat for $1.88. And she ran it for ten years. I remember, as a nine-year-old, going in on Saturday and making sure that nobody walked out with hats. [laughs]

MS: So, yeah, she was a very competent woman. I mean, this was at a time when the banks closed. And my father was on the bank board. It was double indemnity, in those days. You had to pay twice back. And it was before Roosevelt and all the new things. And so, she simply went and opened a business, about a block down. And she could keep the little housekeeper and she could keep the dancing lessons and everything. And she did this all on her own.

Q: Wow! So, do you have a sense of having sacrificed anything during the Depression?

MS: No.

Q: No. Wow.

MS: No.

Q: And it was really your mother, that her new business brought—

MS: I think so. I mean, my father was always available. He would be there at the front door and so forth and so on. But it was a very troubled time for him. And so, he held his own. But she went out and augmented it. I remember, when the banks closed, her taking him around and saying, "Julius, we have each other and the kids are well and everything is fine," and kind of encouraging him to maintain himself. She was a very, very strong woman.

Q: And can you tell me what schools you attended? Did you go to the public schools?

MS: I went to the public school in Chicago Heights. And then there was a junior high. And then there was a high school called Bloom Township High School. And in those days, you know, they put you ahead, which they don't do any more, which seems wise. But I started the university when I was still sixteen—fairly young. And it was a very big thing for me. I commuted the first year, and then moved onto campus and so forth. I studied very hard, is all I can remember. I mean, really very hard. And I wasn't part of the social community, as far as I remember—You know, as far as fraternities and all that. We didn't have sororities. But we had clubs. And that was the first time I ever encountered antisemitism, was at the university, or else that I recognized it. You know, we had the coffee shop. And I don't know if you still eat in the coffee shop. And I don't know if it was self-imposed. But the Jewish kids kind of sat in one area and the non-Jews sat in another area. [laughs] And I married, a romance from the university. And he

got his BA and his Master's in business administration. And that was during the war, 1943.

Q: Uh huh. And do you have children?

MS: And I have three children.

Q: Three children?

MS: My son Michael lives in Chicago. He went to Berkeley in the sixties. And my—

Q: He must have stories too. [laughs]

MS: Well, no, that was my doing. Because I felt that he was raised kind of—He went to the Flossmoor School District—we lived in Olympia Fields. Are you familiar with that?

Q: No.

MS: Well, it's south.

Q: OK.

MS: Do you know where Park Forest is?

Q: No. I don't know Chicago too well.

MS: Oh.

Q: This is—

MS: Well, it's the south suburbs.

Q: Oh, OK.

MS: But it was a school that had no Blacks and it was kind of an upper class public school. And so I felt that he really had a limited exposure to what really went on in the world, so I encouraged him to go to Berkeley, I guess knowing he was awfully straight.

[laughter]

MS: And so, he was there for five years and got his architectural degree. And then he went and got a Master's in city planning at the University of Pennsylvania. And now he's in Chicago and has two children.

Q: Oh, that's nice. You have grandchildren nearby. [laughs]

MS: Michael's two children live in Chicago, but one of them's graduating Wesleyan next June, and the other one graduated Tufts two years ago and is working in Chicago. And I have a daughter, H. Deborah, who lives in Chicago. She got her BA at Cornell, in New York, and then she went to Harvard Law School. She's a lawyer in Chicago, and she was two children, and her oldest son graduated Williams last June and is working in Washington. Her second child is a son, who is a sophomore at Columbia, in New York. He's interested in theater and things like that. And then I have a daughter who lives in New York, who got her master's at the Art Institute in Chicago. She's an artist and a lay analyst, in New York. She has a son, Jonah, who is thirteen. So that's my children.

Q: That's great. They have varied interests, very varied interests.

MS: Yeah. Well, that's one thing they always say: I allowed them to go their own way. [laughs] They're very different! All three of them are quite different.

Q: So, let's move to your Jewish identity, if that's OK. You mentioned that your family attended celebrations and, but it was more cultural than religious.

MS: Well, I mean, the religious holidays were always very important. My first husband, my late husband came from a much more traditional family, so that when we started a small congregation in Chicago Heights, we would get a Rabbi, once a month, and my husband would lead the services for the other three Friday nights. So, the children had that influence, you know. And the building of a temple, being the founding members of a temple, and so forth and so on. And then the National Council of Jewish Women ran a Sunday school, until we had enough of a temple going to have it in the temple. And so the children had that kind of religious experience. When I say cultural, I don't know. Maybe I'm not talking so much about the spiritual or the religious part of it, more this feeling comfortable about being Jewish, and really admiring being Jewish and feeling a good sense of self about, because Jews enjoyed a good reputation. And there were so few Jewish kids in the schools when I grew up, that we interacted with non-Jewish kids very easily, and it was very accepted. So, we didn't really experience any anti- feelings that we were aware of. I don't know what happened in the families when they got home and so forth. However, I think our parents were very determined that we know that we're Jewish and that we eventually will end up marrying Jewish mates. So, I think they played that role. I didn't participate in this, but my sister did; they would have the Jewish families in the various suburban communities get together. There was a town of Hammond and Calumet City. These were all small little groups that maybe had two or three Jewish families. So, they would get them together to meet each other and have socials and stuff like that.

Q: Right. And what affiliation was the synagogue that your late husband founded?

MS: It’s called Anshe Sholom. And it's in Olympia Fields.

Q: OK. And how do you spell that?

MS: Oh, A-N-S-H-E S-H-O-L-O-M.

Q: Great.

MS: And so, the children are more involved in raising their children with a Jewish identity than I was. But they live in Chicago and that may make a difference.

Q: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm. That's true.

MS: And they sent the kids to Israel, and they went, for the bar mitzvahs, to Israel. They've done a lot of more traditional things than I did.

Q: Right. Have you visited Israel?

MS: Yes.

Q: Yeah?

MS: Yes—

Q: You want to—

MS: —[inaudible] times.

Q: Tell me about that for a second?

MS: Well, I'm trying to think back to the first time that I went. This was the second marriage for me, and my husband, at this time, had always been very active in Jewish affairs in Chicago. And the last time we went, we went on a—no, I can't remember the name of it. But anyway, it was affiliated with a JUF thing that was called, I believe, The President's Mission or something like that. So, we went on that mission. Originally, I went simply on a trip, with my first husband, to Israel, because we were interested. That was before '72. That must have been in the sixties. And so, I've been there, I think four times.

Q: Oh, wow. And was your family Zionist, growing up, that you know of?

MS: No—

Q: No.

MS: —I don't think so. No, although we always gave. I can't remember. It was a little blue box that we always had. I don't think that they were great Zionists, as I recall. But they were great supporters of Israel. But I don't remember, in our community, if we had a strong Zionist organization. I don't think so.

Q: Right. And who in your family was bar or bat mitzvahed?

MS: Well, my son was bar mitzvahed, and my grandchildren have all been bar mitzvahed, the girls and the boys.

Q: But you weren't—?

MS: I was not. I was confirmed, at Sinai, in Chicago. I think my sister was confirmed maybe at Temple Isaiah in Chicago.

Q: Do you know about your parents, whether they were?

MS: You know, I don't know. I don't know, in Russia. Did they bar mitzvah?

Q: Yeah.

MS: My father was fourteen when he came.

Q: Right, right. Maybe they both left too early, actually.

MS: Well, I know my mother wasn't.

Q: Mmm hmm. OK.

MS: But I don't know about my father. No.

Q: And how has your relationship to Judaism changed over time? Or would you say that it's changed over time?

MS: Growing up in a small town, where there weren't so many Jews, I don't think I found it that necessary to understand more, although I was always very involved in the biblical stories and all that kind of business. But I wasn't involved in young Jewish organizations like they have in Chicago, for teenagers, and things like that. So that, the Jewish identity business, I think that probably the Holocaust and that whole Second World War and so forth really solidified my deep feeling of concern and connection and made me dip back more into my beginnings and so forth. I think I had never had any question about being anything but Jewish. And I didn't question it until the Holocaust, when all these terrible things were happening. And then I probably became more aware, from reading about it and so forth and so on. I'm trying to think back about my parents' siblings coming and so forth, and not being part of the Chicago community, where so many Jewish people lived in groups. I remember going into the area in Chicago—which is the West Side, and smelling corned beef and all that and thinking, "Ugh, it's so awful." I'd never had that. And then I realized how marvelous it is, [laughter] and enjoyed all that, kind of, ethnic quality. So, I just don't know quite how to answer that. I'd have to think about this. One of my first jobs after social work school was working for the Jewish Children's Bureau. That was about 1942. And Mary Lawrence, in those days, was a kind of a household name. She was head of it, and she was an excellent administrator and so forth. So that that was when I had just gotten out of college. But then, when I went back to live in the suburbs after I was married, after the war, and I became a school social worker in Park Forest. It was a very special community that Phillip Klutznick started for returning war veterans, and housing and so forth. And so, I did that for about ten years, and it was very good, because it was the same hours as my kids—and summer vacations and so forth and so on. And I was always active in the temple that was being built. It seems to

me that, from that point of view—but you asked me a question of how it's changed.

Q: Right. Or we could rephrase it. We could say, what is your relationship with Judaism today? Does it inform your activism?

MS: Well, I'm extremely involved in reading and talking and discussing and so forth things that are going on in Israel. I'm extremely concerned about what role the United States can play. I've always been very supportive of Israel. In fact, I had a terrible accident in Israel—I was mugged—which is most unusual. And I ended up at Hadassah Hospital, for ten days and so forth, with some broken bones. But anyway, I feel extremely concerned and I do whatever we can do financially. My one grandchild, my only granddaughter, went and spent her junior year in college in Israel, at Hebrew University. I always prayed she'd come home, and she did. She has a great affinity for Israel, may some day go back. My grandchildren all went for their bar mitzvahs to Israel.

Q: Oh, wow!

MS: And so I have a great feeling. I'm not a one-issue person. And I'm quite worried about the Jewish situation now, with people worrying about Mr. Bush in Israel and saying, "Well, he's for Israel, therefore I'm for Mr. Bush." I'm not a one-issue person. In fact, it upsets me very much. But I'd have to think about the Jewish thing before I could really say anything terribly significant about it. Because I don't think it's changed. If anything, it simply keeps getting redefined and perhaps even more committed. As I get older, I'm a little more committed to many things. I'm trying to think, in my work experience. I was president of the National Council of Jewish Women in the south suburbs.

Q: And when was that?

MS: That was in the 1960s. And we had a speakers' bureau, and it was a very active organization. We used to send boxes of clothes and all that kind of business to Israel. Typical National Council of Jewish Women activities were involved. I think other than

that, I was busy marching against Vietnam and doing some other things too. So, I'm afraid I have to tell you that I can't remember anything that significant as a change in my Jewish—

Q: I think what you said is sufficient. I mean, you said that it's strengthened and—

MS: Yes.

Q: —became more defined as you get older. So that's—

MS: You know, I'm very critical of certain things that are going on there and very worried about them but very supportive and very concerned that perhaps, living here, we really don't have a sense of what it means to live there, under the terror and the dangers. You know what I mean?

Q: Yeah.

MS: So, I'm afraid to be too critical. But I am extremely worried about Mr. Sharon's policies, and the settlements, so that's where I am with that.

Q: Mmm. So, we'll get a little bit into your activism in a couple minutes but, before we go there, you mentioned being brought up in a town where the segregation was very clear between Blacks and Whites in the town and that was influential. But what about your parents' kind of direct activities? Did they lead you into a life of activism?

MS: Yes. My mother and father were both very involved in community activities. And so I think that that was just an assumption, that I would have a responsibility in the community.

Q: Mmm hmm. And were they political? I mean, did they take part in voting, and did they belong to a party?

MS: They weren't active in the local politics, but they were very active in the elections, and being informed and so forth and so on. But they were great devotees of Roosevelt, in those days. I was born in 1920, before the war. I don't know if they were any more active in civic things you're talking about.

Q: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm. I think both. You know, both are interesting.

MS: I think they were very aware. We would have discussions at the table about political issues and they'd [inaudible]—

Q: Did they lead you to certain ways of analyzing current events?

MS: Well, we used to, unfortunately, sit around the table and talk about—I remember there was a Father Coughlin, who turned out to be really a terrible man.

Q: Oh, right.

MS: And they would listen, on Sunday morning, to what he talked about and then we would talk about it at the table. And unfortunately, that wasn't very successful.

Q: [laughs]

MS: But yeah—

Q: I've read about him.

MS: Yeah, terrible man. Anyway, so, yeah, I think that my parents were very anxious to be up and aware of what was going on, particularly as immigrants. You know, it wasn't easy for them to understand everything. And so that they looked to us, sometimes, coming home from school, to discuss certain things. And they wanted always to learn. So, they would ask questions and so forth. And so, we did discuss political things. And I think we discussed a lot of things about equality and inequality, I should say, and poverty

and the injustice in the world. I came away with a great sense of what that injustice is all about. And I've always felt very strongly about it and wanted to do something about it. And that's why I used to get involved in so many things, I suppose, although I didn't realize it until I went over it, the things that I was involved in. And so, I used to volunteer at a hospital in Manteno, which was a state insane asylum, and we did things like that. I was active in the International Visitors' Center, so that we would place foreign guests and we'd bring them out to our home in Chicago Heights, and a kind of added dimension. I don't know if that's not very helpful.

Q: No, no. That's good. [laughs]

MS: But at this point, that's about where we are. I'm trying to think of anything else that would be enlightening.

Q: Now we can move on to your work and activism and your work life in general. If you want to give me kind of an overview, because I haven't seen any bio written up of you. I had one of one of the honorees—

MS: Oh.

Q: —but unfortunately, I didn't receive anything about you. Did you send anything to the archive? No. OK.

MS: No, I haven't.

Q: And is there anything written up yet on you?

MS: No—

Q: No. OK.

MS: —I don't think so.

Q: OK.

MS: No.

Q: It's always helpful. But that's OK. So, if you could just kind of give me an overview of your work, that would be great.

MS: Well, during the war, I was in Colorado. And my first job was—I volunteered to meet trains that came in to the Second Air Force was stationed in Colorado Springs. They were sent oversees in the B-29s in those days, and many families would come out on the train because you couldn't fly, of course. By the time they came out, their loved ones were gone. So, I would meet the trains and try to reorganize and set them up somewhere and so forth. And then I taught in a little Mexican school. I taught fifth grade. And the children were all part of the immigrant workers that came up to pick the sugar beets. I did that for a few years. And then, when I came back to Chicago, and came back and lived in the south suburbs, I became a school social worker in the Park Forest school system, and I worked there for about ten years. And then I had a small counseling service for psychological testing and helping children that needed special education to find placement in special schools. And I had a small private practice of psychiatric social work. And I organized the first nursery school when my son was four years old. We didn't have a nursery school in the community, so I organized one. And it went for about ten years. And as I said, I was president of the National Council of Jewish Women. This all kind of went together. And then I moved to Chicago in 1972. My husband died in 1972. And my children were off in college. And so, I moved to Chicago. I went to work at Michael Reese. P&PI was the psychiatric institute. And Dr. Roy Grinker was head of it, and I was a member of his research team for eight years. The research was on the role of environment and heredity in schizophrenia. So, I did that for eight years.

Q: I would love to hear about that, another time. [laughs]

MS: Yeah, right. That was a very interesting study; somewhat flawed, but interesting. And I was a member of the Chicago Architectural Foundation because I was very interested in architecture and had built a very unusual house in the south suburbs.

Q: Oh, yeah?

MS: It was the first all-glass house, with a glass atrium. And so I was a member of that. And I also served on the Council on Foreign Relations board.

Q: I'm sorry, the what?

MS: The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

Q: Oh.

MS: And then I started to come to Palm Springs. I was very interested in art, and so I was on the board of the Desert Museum here. California had no money for art education in the schools, so for four years I chaired their Education Committee and we tried to do the same thing as the tutoring in Chicago, except this was to introduce an art program with volunteers in the Coachella Valley, which is where Palm Springs, for third and fourth graders. We trained volunteers to give a six-week course in the visual arts. We would take in pictures and talk about them and so forth and then take the children by bus to the museum. And so, it involved training volunteers. Their final trip was a trip to the museum. But then, after a few years, California started to refinance art in the schools. So, we don't have that anymore. And I was on the board of the Palm Springs Desert Philharmonic, because I'm interested in music. But as I look back, it was a lot of living, in those three years.

Q: [laughs]

MS: But otherwise, I don't know if there's anything from a Jewish standpoint, out here.

Q: So, but now—

MS: Yeah.

Q: —you're living in Chicago most of the time.

MS: I'm living in Chicago but this year, I'll spend four and a half months—

Q: I see.

MS: —in Palm Springs. And every winter for the last, oh, quite a few years now I've spent quite a few months. And that's why I really couldn't continue working at Michael Reese and so forth.

Q: I see.

MS: And the nature of the work just didn't allow me to get up and leave for a couple of months. So, I come out here.

Q: Right. That's great.

MS: And that's where I am.

Q: Everybody should be able to leave Chicago for California [laughs] during the winter.

MS: Well, when you're older you will.

Q: Yeah. No, I probably won't stay here long-term. [laughs]

MS: Where are you from?

Q: Originally from Connecticut.

MS: Oh, I—

Q: —which is actually much warmer than Chicago, I would say. I mean, we don't have the cold winds.

MS: Yeah, I think this winter's been kind of unique but otherwise I think you're right.

Q: Yeah, this winter, I've heard, New England had it pretty hard.

MS: Yeah. Well, I have a grandson at Wesleyan, in Connecticut. So, he told me it was pretty cold.

Q: Mmm.

MS: Yeah. Anyway, what else can I offer?

Q: Let's see. Actually, one of our other honorees, Joanne Alter, had mentioned your name. She was telling me about her organization, or the organization she's involved with, tutoring children.

MS: Right. Well, that's one that Joanne and I do together.

Q: Mmm hmm. So, you're a cofounder of that?

MS: Yes.

Q: And it's called WITS?

MS: It's called WITS, which is Working in the Schools.

Q: Mmm hmm. That's great.

MS: And Joanne lives in the same building that I do. And so that one day, she was going down the elevator—

Q: [laughs]

MS: —and I got on the elevator and I said, "Well, where are you going?" And she said, "Well, you know, I met a teacher who said that she could use me as a tutor, in Cabrini-Green," which you're probably not familiar with either—

Q: Nnn nnn.

MS: —which is, you know, a dreadful housing project, which is being refurbished now and changed. But it was quite an eyesore, and almost was within walking distance of our very luxurious living. And so I said, "Oh, Joanne, do you mind? I'm going to go with you. It would be something I'd be interested in." She had gone once. And then the two of us went off. And it was the beginning of a wonderful project, which is now in, I think, the thirteenth year, or the fourteenth year. And the two of us had been a great team. And so, we started with the two of us. The teachers were very skeptical, and the principal was extremely worried, because they were thinking of these two fancy ladies coming into—These were all inner city Black children, in a real slum. And the teachers didn't need the added burden of two critical ladies listening to them maybe yell or, you know, whatever it is.

Q: Right. Right.

MS: So that they were not that excited about accepting us. And so, we did it for a year. And lo and behold, at the end of the school year they gave us this huge party in appreciation, and they asked us if maybe we could get a few more, so the next year I think there were eight of us. And then, as it grew, we realized that for safety and security we needed bussing. And this whole project has grown to have 1,300 volunteers. And it's been simply a wonderful, wonderful experience. You know, I was seventy and you hear people say, "Well, I've done that. Now let other people do it," and so forth and it's not true. I mean, if you're able and capable, you have a responsibility to do what you can. And this has been one of the best experiences of my life. And Joanne and I have worked together very well, bringing different things to it. And so that's the reason for this honor,

actually.

Q: That's really inspiring.

MS: Well, you know, you don't realize it until you look back. At the time, people would say, "Well, aren't you frightened?" and so forth and so on. Well, you know, if the need is great, you don't start worrying about the other stuff. I don't see it. And the thing was, it became so important, because the community was exposed to what was going on in these schools. And then eventually we brought in the corporations—these are the young people that work in the corporations. They live out in the suburbs, where they don't see what's going on in the inner city. And when you can make them aware of it—it had a twofold purpose.

Q: Yeah, exactly.

MS: —[inaudible] exciting.

Q: Exactly.

MS: And we would find that the library had become a stockroom, because there were no librarians. So, we started to train the teachers to take over the library. And there were just so many things. And we had book parties, so that we could stock classrooms with books and the libraries. And it just lent itself to so many possibilities.

Q: Wow! And so now how many schools are involved?

MS: Well, now I think there must be thirty-five schools. At the time, we only had the five schools in this Cabrini-Green project. But now it's citywide. And we did a lot of training of volunteers, which was very important. It was a wonderful, just a fabulous challenge.

Q: Yeah. And did your training in social work prepare you for this? Or were there—

MS: A lot.

Q: —unexpected—?

MS: No. I mean, it was interesting, because, you know, not being trained as a teacher but trained as a social worker, I brought in a little dimension that was very appreciated in the school and the teachers and so forth. And also, it added a dimension to the interrelationship, even, between the tutors. And things would occur and people would get very upset and the staff would be upset and so forth. So, some of the techniques of being a social worker were very helpful.

Q: Yeah. You knew how to deal with it.

MS: Well, I wasn't always successful, but I really had some techniques that ordinarily you wouldn't have. So, I think that was extremely important. And we tried very hard to get to the families, which is always very difficult. And some of the social work techniques worked for that. And so, it was exciting. Unfortunately, I'm not there in the winter now, when most of it's being done but I'm still very active when I'm home.

Q: I imagine, with the renewed emphasis on summer schooling, that there would be great need for tutors.

MS: Yes. I would do the summer school. And I still am available in the summer school, although summer schools have been spotty right now.

Q: Oh, really? Mm.

MS: Yeah. I think it's thirteen years now. Or we had a tenth anniversary. Maybe it's twelve years. There's so much that occurred that I can't talk about. Some of it is too much. But Mayor Daley's been our chairman now, and we get some funding from the city schools. And Joanne has been just a marvelous person to work for, because she's

always ready to do whatever. And, you know, if there's a need, she's ready to jump in and do it. So between us—I mean, I think we've influenced each other.

Q: And does she do this now full-time?

MS: No.

Q: No. OK.

MS: In fact, she's away this winter also.

Q: Oh, that's true. Right.

MS: Yeah, we are—

Q: Right, she's in [inaudible].

MS: —getting older. [laughter] Anyway. So is that about enough, do you think?

Q: Yeah, I think that's good. I don't want to keep you much longer. If I could just ask you a couple quick questions, just to finish up.

MS: Yeah. By the way, I must say the support of husbands has been very important—

Q: Yeah, that's—

MS: —in this whole picture. I mean, you can't do this kind of thing unless you have husbands that are agreeable, supportive, and available, and encouraging.

Q: Yeah, and that reminds me. I wanted to ask you, what about the role of being a mother and being very active in a career? Did you ever find that there were tensions between the two, that you were pulled in two directions?

MS: Well, I was on the brink. It was kind of unusual, in my day and age, for women to work. But I also have the feeling that I had really had a good education, and that should be used. But I always chose work that enabled me to be available when the children weren't in school. And when I did private practice, I could be home. I mean, it is true I was active in the community, and the evenings sometimes were taken up. But a lot of the stuff took place right in our home. We had a big house, and we'd have lectures in the house. When Eleanor Roosevelt came to speak, she came to speak in the house. And we would set up the house for that, and so forth. So that the kids really participated in that. So I did not feel the tension that my daughter felt, now, when she started in law school and had children. Law practice is so demanding. She always had guilt and was always pressured. She felt she had to prove herself, because she was that small group that started. You know, that's twenty-seven years ago. But I think the kids always—Although my youngest may have felt I wasn't available enough. And I think she has mentioned that she felt I wasn't available enough. And perhaps by then I wasn't. But for the first two, I think they always felt kind of proud and excited about things. And I always had really very good support and help in the house, which made a difference. So we always had dinner together at night. And so, no, I don't think that there was that tension. But I'm afraid my jobs were never that demanding—

Q: Well [laughs]—

MS: —time-wise.

Q: Oh, time-wise. OK.

MS: Yeah, right. It may have been demanding thought-wise, but not time-wise. And unfortunately, you know, being a social worker, you're always so aware of the needs of children, that perhaps I bent over backwards, at times, to make sure I was fulfilling everything. But I think, in general, there was time for everything, and I don't think that that was an issue. Perhaps my youngest. She has said things about our taking trips and

being away, you know. But that was when I was older and went away. So, no, I don't think I felt that, or they did.

Q: And were there any other leadership roles that you haven't mentioned that you want to bring up, that you've taken on?

MS: Well, I don't know. But if I think of something else, can I—

Q: Yeah. You can call me.

MS: —get back to you?

Q: Absolutely.

MS: Because I've thought about as much, right now.

Q: Yeah. Oh, OK. [laughs]

MS: I don't know. What time is it?

Q: Oh—

MS: How long have we—?

Q: It's been about an hour and six minutes, according to the timer here.

MS: Oh, it seems much longer.

Q: [laughs]

MS: But now, what areas—

Q: You're tired. We'll stop here.

MS: —are you particularly interested in that haven't been covered that I could give some thought to and call you back?

Q: Oh, OK. Well, basically just leadership roles, you know, if you have anything. I mean, the other thing is I could write up a bio and I could even call you and read it to you.

MS: Oh.

Q: And when you hear it, maybe you'll think of extra things you want me to add to it or anything like that.

MS: But I think you're mainly interested in leadership roles, right?

Q: Yeah, leadership roles and any other activist causes that you were involved in. Or really anything else that was influential in your life.

MS: But, yeah, I think you feel particularly interested in things Jewish. Right?

Q: Really, both. Because we have women who are in the secular community who are chosen.

MS: Oh.

Q: You know, so it’s who may or may not be actively practicing religion. You know, so really both are of interest. So anything that comes to mind, you can just give me a call—

MS: OK.

Q: —and we'll be able to add it to the list.

MS: All right.

Q: But it's been really wonderful. Thank you, so much, for staying up. [laughs]

MS: Well, thank you.

Q: And we will meet on the seventeenth.

MS: My memory is not always really that alert.

Q: No, I think you're—

MS: [inaudible]—

Q: —sharper than most colleagues of mine in grad school. [laughs]

MS: Oh, well [laughs] I doubt it. But, you know, you have a lot of experiences, and you forget so many things.

Q: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure.

MS: And I'm not home for any documentation or anything.

Q: Right.

MS: I don't have anything out here except my memory.

Q: Right.

MS: So I'll see what I can do.

Q: Yeah. And when you get back, if we could maybe talk one more time, just to get some archive, you know, sources that you might be able to collect from home, like newspaper clippings or anything, anything that you would want kind of on the Web—

MS: Oh.

Q: —to document your life. That would be great.

MS: All righty.

Q: Wonderful.

MS: All right.

Q: Well, thanks, so much.

MS: Yeah. Well, you're courageous to stay up this late.

Q: [laughs] I ju—

MS: I know you've had a long day.

Q: Yeah. No, that's OK.

MS: And I just wish you knew a little more about Chicago.

Q: I know.

MS: I think you really ought to talk to somebody about, for instance, Cabrini-Green.

Q: Mmm hmm. Mmm hmm.

MS: You know?

Q: Yeah.

MS: What it was.

Q: Right.

MS: And what they're doing with it. And, for instance, Joanne comes from a totally different background from mine. She's from the northern suburbs—

Q: Oh.

MS: —which are very different from the southern suburbs.

Q: Oh.

MS: And if you had a sense of that, I think it would be enriching—

Q: Right.

MS: —for what you're doing. I don't know how you can get it or who you—

Q: Yeah.

MS: But I think somebody ought to be able to tell you a little bit about the development of Chicago [inaudible].

Q: Right. I know a lot has been written, actually, on Chicago urban history. So you're right. I should, since I'm here—

MS: What field are you in?

Q: I'm in women's history, U.S. women's history. So I'm looking at gender mostly in nineteenth-century. But, of course, to become a historian you have to know all basic U.S history. So gender is just my specialty.

MS: I see.

Q: I'm doing—

MS: Now what year are you in? Are you—?

Q: This is my second year at the U of C.

MS: Oh, I see.

Q: Yeah.

MS: And you're from Connecticut.

Q: Right.

MS: And why did you choose the U of C?

Q: That's a good question. It was the program that—Well, first of all, the history department has a great reputation. Their record of getting students jobs in the academic market is really good, even in the tight market that it is these days. And certain professors I wanted to work with, who are really great in my field. And Chicago, as a city, was really not a place I envision myself ever ending up, actually, because of the cold winters, because of the reputation—

MS: But it's really a wonderful city in many ways.

Q: It is. And I need to spend more time getting to know it. Because I think that—You know, I mean, it's hard—

MS: It's a very [doable?] city, with a lot of cultural advantages.

Q: Yeah.

MS: The weather is a problem.

Q: Exactly. But as a student it's hard because, you know, you're just so busy studying. You don't have any time to explore the city. And over the summer, I lived in New York.

MS: Oh, that's exciting.

Q: Right, right. I'm going to spend this summer here, though. And my goal is to really get to know the city. [laughs]

MS: Well, one of my step-children did her women's studies thing at Vassar. And she's now living in Boston. But she's doing some work on abused women. She's always been focused on women's issues. She's been out of school now for five years. So I'm talking about nine or ten years ago, when she started Vassar. They had a very good program on women's issues. And, of course, you're in the history department. I don't remember what she was in. But she's very involved in Boston in women's issues.

Q: Oh, wow! That's great.

MS: Anyway, OK, dear.

Q: Well—

MS: Let me think, in terms of some leadership roles.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

MS: And I—

Q: Feel free to give me a call any time.

MS: I will.

Q: OK. Thanks a lot.

MS: Thank you, so much.

Q: Have a good night.

MS: Mmm hmm.

Q: Bye-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW]