Ruth Finkelstein Transcript

Marcie Cohen Ferris: Now, I wear these things so that I can hear that it's being taped.

Ruth Finkelstein: What? I can't hear.

MC: Can you hear me?

RF: Yes.

MC: Okay. You tell me if you can't, and I'll speak up. All right. So I'm going to make an announcement for the tape so that we know who I'm recording. Today is August 30th, 2001. My name is Marcie Cohen Ferris. I'm with Dr. Ruth Finkelstein, right? And we are at her daughter's home. And we are about to begin an interview. And her daughter is Emily Greenberg, and we're in her home today. And today, we're going to talk about the doctor's background, her family life, growing up Jewish and female in Baltimore, about challenges of family and career, all those kinds of things. And we'll just go as long as you're comfortable, and we'll stop whenever you're ready. Okay? So, Dr. Ruth, I thought if you could start by saying your name and your date of birth and where you were born, that would be a good way to start.

RF: Okay. Are you ready?

MC: Yeah.

RF: I was born March 29th, 1909, in New York City.

MC: Tell me about your parents, their names.

RF: Israel and Augusta Bloom. My mother's maiden name was Bloom. My maiden name is Finkelstein.

MC: Right. And what do you know about their backgrounds, their country of origin, and how they came to New York City?

RF: Well, my father was born in New York City. My mother came from what she called Russ Poland.

Emily Greenberg: And we know the name of the town. She called it Gryvee [phonetic], but it was Grejevo, G-R-E-J-E-V-O [inaudible].

RF: Oh, I don't know, Em.

MC: That's the name of the town–

EG: Yes.

MC: – in Poland?

RF: In Poland, yeah.

MC: Do you think your father's family were Polish also?

RF: I think they came from the same background, yes.

MC: Oh, okay, okay. Do you know when they came, generally?

RF: But he was born in New York City.

MC: Yeah.

RF: They couldn't have been here too long before that because I remember my grandmother.

EG: And didn't you say that your mother came from the same town that his family came from? Didn't you tell me that one time?

RF: Well, I don't know if it was the same town. It was the general area, yes. Because he found her on the Lower East Side of New York, where all the immigrants were.

MC: That's where he met Augusta?

RF: Yes.

MC: What was she doing? Was she working?

RF: No, no. She never worked.

MC: Do you know what her family did for a living?

EG: She was divorced. It was very unusual for–

RF: What, dear?

EG: I think it was unusual for a woman to be divorced in 1904. But she had a son from a previous marriage when she met your father.

RF: Yes, yes.

EG: And your father was significantly younger than Gussie.

RF: Yes.

EG: The accounts differ as to how much younger –

RF: I don't know.

EG: – because he was trying to cover up, I think, that he was about ten years younger than she.

MC: Emily, do you have any idea when he came? At the beginning of the century – or at the beginning of the 20th Century or –?

EG: Well, I know that he tried, but he was really way too young to get into the – when was the Spanish American War? I can check all of that. There's a –

MC: Late 1890s, yeah.

EG: There's a war – yeah, that I think that he was, you know, thirteen, fourteen, and tried to convince them that he was old enough to serve in the war. So he must have – well, you said he was born here, so his parents had to have come before the 1880s, right?

RF: That's right, yes.

EG: We have this wonderful photograph of his grandparents, (Razel?) and (Mendel?), which I think is absolutely lovely. They're just teeny and adorable.

MC: That's a beautiful photograph. That's his parents or his–

EG: His grandparents–

MC: And what are their names?

EG: – so it's my grandparents' grandparents. And on the back in his handwriting, it says that they're his grandparents.

MC: Why don't you give us their names for the recording?

EG: I think it says (Razel?) and (Mendel?).

RF: [laughter]

EG: I love them. I keep them in the dining room. [reading from back of photo—note written by Israel Finkelstein.] “These are my grandparents, maternal (Razel and Mendel Grossman.)” This photo was taken either in Grejevo or Stuchen in the early 1900s.

MC: Let me see how he spelled –

RF: My father's handwriting? He had a Spenserian hand, yes.

MC: Yes, it's beautiful.

EG: Even though he didn't finish much school.

RF: I don't know how much school he finished.

EG: He wanted very badly to be a lawyer, but he had to go to work.

RF: Yeah. But he made sure I got an education.

EG: Yes, he did.

MC: Well, so they met somewhere on the East Side, like the Lower East Side, your parents. And then how did they make their –? Do you know anything about what year they married?

RF: [When] my parents were married?

MC: Yes.

RF: Yes.

EG: What year?

MC: What year were they married?

RF: Well, I was born in 1909.

EG: And she was divorced in 1904. So it must have been somewhere between those two years.

MC: Okay. And they called her Gussie?

RF: Gussie Bloom, yes.

MC: So, how did they make their way to Baltimore from New York City?

RF: Oh, me?

MC: Did they?

RF: No, no. You see –

MC: So you grew up in New York?

RF: I went to the Jacobi School in New York City. After I graduated from the Jacobi School, I came down here as a pre-med at Johns Hopkins. “Only the best” my father –

MC: Now, go back for a little bit for me and tell me about your memories of growing up in New York.

RF: I was the eldest of five children. I was the light of my father's life. He gave me his all, even though he couldn't afford private school and the rest of it.

EG: And he –

RF: He borrowed money to send me to Jacobi and to Johns Hopkins–

EG: And there was a boy.

MC: And what, dear?

EG: There was a boy. I didn't mean to interrupt you. But what I was saying –

RF: Oh, yes. I was the eldest of five children. I have a brother and three sisters.

EG: My point was that typical of that era, he would have showered the attention and the private school and the aspirations for a medical career on the son. And what fascinates me is that he picked you.

RF: Well, I was his first-born.

EG: Right, but there was obviously more to it than that.

MC: Tell me your sibling's names?

RF: My brother's name is Philip, and then there's –

EG: Beatrice is next.

RF: No, no. Wait a minute. After Phil – yes, after Phil, comes Beatrice and Ethel and Grace.

MC: So three girls –

RF: Four girls and a boy.

MC: Four girls and a boy.

RF: Right.

MC: So, what part of New York City did you grow up in?

RF: The Bronx.

MC: What are your memories of the neighborhood? What was it like?

RF: I don't remember. I was a kid growing up. I don't remember fraternizing too much. I remember girlfriends. I don't remember.

MC: All Jewish?

RF: Oh, no. We weren't Jewish-oriented.

MC: I mean, was it a Jewish neighborhood that you lived in, a lot of Jewish people, or was it mixed?

RF: It was mixed, yes.

MC: And what was your father doing for a living?

RF: He was a customs officer.

MC: Where at?

RF: New York, in the Port of New York. [Note: Israel Finkelstein did not work on Ellis Island. Port of New York was Lower Manhattan.]

EG: In the days when no one flew, everybody came in and out of that port on boats.

RF: From Ellis Island, yes, of course.

MC: Yeah. Your mother, did she work?

RF: No. My father was very protective of her.

MC: So he thought it was important for her to be at home?

RF: And take care of the house and the family, yes

MC: So that's what her day –

RF: Yes.

MC: – was involved in?

RF: Yes.

MC: And did she have help at home, too?

RF: No.

MC: No help at all?

RF: Except us kids and – no, no. No help the way we have help today.

MC: Right. Did you live in one house for a long time?

RF: We were in an apartment.

MC: An apartment?

RF: Yes.

MC: Do you have any memories of the apartment, what it was like? What kind of building? Did you walk upstairs?

RF: Yes, we walked upstairs. No elevators.

MC: Right. Do you know anything about that place?

EG: Nothing. All the stories begin with college.

MC: Really?

EG: Yes.

MC: Okay. Is it okay to try to get a few more memories about this time?

EG: Sure. Anything is okay.

MC: So, walk upstairs to an apartment. Do you remember how many rooms or kitchen?

RF: Five rooms, I think.

MC: And a kitchen?

RF: Yes, yes.

MC: What was the kitchen like?

RF: My mother's kitchen was immaculate.

MC: Really?

RF: Yes. And we had a living room.

MC: Where did you eat, in a dining room or in the kitchen?

RF: In the kitchen primarily.

MC: What kind of cook was your mother?

RF: Wonderful, look at me. [laughter]

EG: [laughter]

MC: She was a great cook.

RF: Yes.

MC: What do you remember about her cooking? What kind of things did she make that you liked?

RF: Blintzes. [laughter] Oh, cabbage soup. That was my favorite.

EG: Is that the–

RF: She was a good cook. What, dear?

EG: Is that the kraut?

RF: Yeah, kraut was a cabbage.

MC: What kind of things would she fix kind of for every day during the week? What would you have for supper or for –?

RF: A bowl of cabbage soup. [laughter]

MC: Soups?

RF: Yes.

MC: A lot of soups?

RF: Yes.

MC: What about meats, like chicken or beef?

RF: Well, the cabbage soup had brisket in it. And she did roast chickens.

MC: Did the family do anything to mark Friday night or Shabbat? Didn't do Jewish things at all?

RF: No.

MC: No temple?

RF: No.

MC: Synagogue?

RF: No.

MC: No organized religious life?

RF: No.

MC: What about on holidays like Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur?

RF: Oh, my grandparents – we went to my grandmother's house, yes.

MC: In New York?

RF: Yes.

MC: In the city?

RF: Yes.

MC: What was her name?

RF: Bessie.

MC: Now, was that your –?

RF: My father's mother.

MC: Father's mother was Bessie?

RF: Yes. My mother left all of her family behind in Poland.

MF: Okay.

EG: And we have a piece of cross-stitch that she did on the boat coming over.

MC: Wow.

RF: My mother was a great needlewoman.

EG: She was fifteen or something on the boat?

RF: Yeah.

MC: So Bessie did some needlework on the boat, a cross-stitch?

RF: No, my mother, not Bessie. My mother was a great needle – that's how we got our start on needlepoint.

EG: And crochet.

RF: And crochet and knitting, yes.

MC: So you both continued those traditions.

EG: Oh, yes.

MC: That's wonderful.

RF: Where's your needlepoint, Em?

EG: Oh, I have a lot of needlepoint, but we're not talking about me.

MC: I see this –

EG: Your mother made this.

MC: – beautiful pocketbook over here.

RF: Yeah, yes.

EG: My mom made that pocketbook.

MC: It's beautiful. So what would–

EG: And I –

MC: – what were holidays like at Bessie's house? Would you do a holiday dinner?

RF: Formal, oh, yes.

MC: Formal?

RF: Yes, yes.

MC: Describe what a Rosh Hashanah dinner would be like. What would she have, and how did the table look? Can you remember any of that?

RF: It was all formal.

MC: What made it formal?

RF: It was neat, clean, precise. But my father was a precise person too.

MC: Did she use linen, a tablecloth?

RF: Oh, sure.

MC: And when you went there for Rosh Hashanah dinner, did they do the prayers or –?

RF: My father did, yes. Yes, he did.

MC: So that was really the one time of year –

RF: Yes.

MC: – he said those Jewish –

RF: Well, I think he did it for his mother's sake.

MC: Yeah.

RF: Yes.

MC: Yeah, it was important to her.

RF: That's right.

MC: Did she keep a kosher home? Can you remember?

RF: I think she did. There were no ham sandwiches in that house, no.

MC: Right. Now, when you were growing up in your house, did you all eat ham?

RF: Sure.

MC: And treyfe in the house?

RF: Sure.

MC: So it didn't matter –?

RF: Bacon and eggs, sure.

MC: So, would you have bacon and eggs for breakfast?

RF: Yes.

MC: And then what about –

RF: We were Americans.

MC: Yeah. I'm trying to think of other holidays. So dinners at – for the Rosh Hashanah dinner, what would she make for a typical Rosh Hashanah dinner?

RF: I don't remember.

MC: Matzo ball soup?

RF: Oh, of course.

MC: Gefilte fish?

RF: Gefilte fish. Oh, we went there for Passover, because we hid the matzo – what did we hide?

MC: Afikoman?

RF: Yes.

MC: Was it a lot of people for Seder?

RF: No – there were a lot of us. [laughter] It was just family.

MC: And you'd have the meal and did the whole Seder. And so the Jacobi School, that was in New York City? And tell me about that. What is that?

RF: A private – it was a girl's school. It was Jacobi School for Girls. My father wouldn't let a boy come near me.

EG: [laughter]

MC: What age did you go there?

RF: I started in the first grade, and I went through high school. It was after I graduated from Jacobi that I came down here to do pre-med at Hopkins.

MC: A couple of other quick questions about Jacobi. Did your sisters go there?

RF: No. He couldn't afford to send me, no less them.

MC: How did he make a decision to send just you?

RF: I was the apple of his eye. He gave me his all.

MC: How come?

RF: I was first-born.

MC: And what did your sisters do? Where did they go to school?

RF: Public school.

MC: Wow, what a difference.

EG: [inaudible]

MC: Yeah.

EG: Tell Marcie about the picture you have of your class. They had all had their hair bobbed in the fashion of the ‘20s, and you had long sausage curls.

RF: Oh, my father wouldn't let me bob my hair, no. I couldn't bob my hair. I had long curls.

EG: And they all had – they all came from more comfortable families, more well-to-do families. They all had nice clothes. What did your mother say when she gave you – when you were wearing the same dress all the time that your mother had made?

RF: And what?

EG: You wanted to wear clothes like the other girls in the school.

RF: Yes.

EG: And she said, “It's clean, isn't it?”

RF: Oh, yes. My mother kept saying that, “It's clean, isn't it?” I'm still saying it. [laughter]

MC: So, it was kind of tough circumstances financially?

RF: Oh, sure. He was on a salary. There were five of us.

EG: But somehow, it was so important to him to send Ruth to private school. That's what's fascinating to me. It just is so uncharacteristic.

MC: Yeah. And what about Phillip? Where did he go to school?

RF: Public school. Phillip went to New York University, yeah.

MC: And to NYU?

RF: Yes.

MC: And your sisters, what did they end up doing after –?

RF: Oh, everybody ended up doing something. My father–

EG: They all had Ph.Ds.

MC: Well, tell me about your siblings. What did they go on to do?

RF: Phil is an engineer – was an engineer. Bib was a dietitian. She made the food for the astronauts.

MC: Where did she go to school?

RF: Hunter College.

MC: And they all got Ph.Ds.?

EG: I think so.

RF: Yes.

EG: Ethel doesn't have a Ph.D.

RF: No, no. Ethel – where did Ethel go to school?

EG: I don't know.

RF: I don't know either.

EG: But she worked at the Pentagon. They all had significant careers.

MC: So Ethel was at the Pentagon?

RF: Yes. Ethel, yes. Ethel worked in the Pentagon.

MC: And what about Grace? What kind of work did she do – career?

RF: Grace and Seymour had a family.

EG: But wasn't she mostly in his lab? She worked with him.

RF: In where?

EG: In her husband's lab. Didn't she work [inaudible] –?

RF: Oh, she was a biology – oh, yes. She was biology, yes.

EG: She has a Ph.D.

RF: Yes.

MC: From where, do you remember? Too hard to remember all that.

RF: Well, where did Seymour go to college? I don't know. I don't remember any of this.

MC: But why do you think –? How were his expectations different for you than maybe from your brother or from the other children?

RF: Well, my father's expectations, not mine – I did what he wanted me to do, not what I wanted to do.

MC: Right. So they were really his expectations?

RF: Yes, yes.

MC: Why was he so driven for the first child?

RF: I don't know. I don't know.

MC: He must have seen something in you.

RF: Whatever.

MC: And what about your mother? Did she also drive you in that way?

RF: She didn't drive me at all. She just took care of me physically, dressed me, and cleaned me.

MC: Do you think that she had different expectations for what you would do? Did she aspire for you to become–

RF: No, no. She thought I was wonderful, too, to the end.

MC: Yeah.

RF: They came down here to die because I was here.

MC: Yeah, that's important.

RF: Yes.

MC: Do you think that your parents had different expectations for boys and girls?

RF: I don't think so. There was just that one boy. Why he became an engineer, I don't know. Whether it was my father's idea or not, I don't know.

MC: Tell me about the Jacobi School, what that was like, what the teachers were like, and how that –

RF: It was wonderful. I had a dear friend who lived on Riverside Drive. That, to me, was the ultimate.

EG: Was that Selma?

RF: Selma, yes.

MC: Why was it the ultimate?

RF: It was affluent and beautiful.

MC: Would you visit her there after school?

RF: Oh, sure, sure. Yes, we practically lived together, yes.

MC: Did you spend the night? Would you spend the night over there or just visit?

RF: I don't think I spent the night, no.

MC: Yeah, yeah.

RF: My father wouldn't have permitted me away at night.

MC: Right, right. How did you get over to where she lived?

RF: The school was around the corner. They were on Riverside Drive, and the school was on 92nd Street near Riverside Drive.

EG: How did you get to school?

RF: What, dear?

EG: How did you get to school?

RF: Walk.

EG: I thought you lived in the Bronx.

RF: Oh, oh. I came on a subway every day. I thought, how did I get to Selma's.

EG: Oh, no.

MC: Took the subway to school?

RF: Yes.

MC: Did your parents accompany you when you were little? Did your father take you to school when you were little?

RF: Sure. My father took me to school, yes.

MC: On the subway?

RF: Yes.

MC: Was it only the subway or were there trolley cars? Were there trolley cars or always subway?

RF: I only remember the subway to 92nd Street, from the Bronx to Jacobi. That's all I remember, the subway.

MC: And then would you eat at school–

RF: Yes.

MC: – lunch?

RF: Yes.

MC: Did you bring lunch?

RF: No. I don't remember bringing lunch.

MC: They served lunch?

RF: Yes.

MC: And was it mainly Jewish kids at this school? Was it specifically for Jewish children?

RF: No, no.

MC: So, what teachers do you remember? Did you have one or two that you particularly admired?

RF: I don't remember them – science teacher–

MC: You went from first grade all the way through?

RF: Yes. [Note: she started in a higher grade but doesn't remember which grade.]

MC: And what about social activities in school? Were there parties or dances?

RF: It was all girls. It was a girls' school.

MC: But would they plan things with boys from another school?

RF: No, no. That was forbidden.

MC: So, how did you meet boys?

RF: I didn't.

MC: Until?

RF: I got to Baltimore. [laughter]

MC: That was a good move.

RF: Yeah. [laughter

EG: [laughter] Getting away from Dad.

RF: Well, also pre-med.

MC: When did you know that you wanted to do medicine?

RF: I think my father knew.

MC: He did?

RF: Yes. That's why he let me come to Baltimore.

MC: Okay. So after Jacobi – is it Jacobi? Am I pronouncing it right?

RF: Yes.

MC: You came down to Johns Hopkins?

RF: Yes.

MC: What was that process? Did you have to apply?

RF: Oh, sure.

MC: And so, did you fill out – what happened? How did you do that?

RF: We went to Homewood, to the undergraduate school, because I had just gotten out of high school. What was Peggy's last name? God, I can't remember anything.

EG: Well, you're remembering very well. Peggy –

MC: Was Homewood in New York or in Baltimore?

EG: That's the main Johns Hopkins campus.

MC: Okay. That's the main Johns Hopkins campus, Homewood?

RF: Yes. The undergraduate school at Johns Hopkins.

MC: Okay. How old were you when you started?

RF: I must have been close to eighteen after high school, yes.

MC: Do you remember the trip down, your first trip when you came?

RF: My father – oh, when my father settled me, that's important. My father brought me down here. And Mary Levin was the admitting officer at Johns Hopkins. We had to find some place for me to live. I couldn't stay in the dormitory. There were boys in the dormitories. [laughter]

EG: [laughter]

RF: So they took – my father took me to Rose and Julius Baker, who lived on West 35th Street.

EG: In Hampden.

RF: In Hampden. It wasn't Hampden then.

MC: How do you spell Hampden?

RF: H-a-m-p-d-e-n.

MC: What did you say the address was? She remembered the address, didn't she?

EG: Yes, she did.

MC: It's all right.

RF: 843 West 35th Street, something like that.

MC: And how did he know the Bakers?

RF: Mary Levin sent us there.

MC: Okay.

RF: She was the admitting officer at Hopkins.

MC: And the Bakers boarded you?

RF: Yes. I lived there for years. Actually, I lived there until I went to medical school.

MC: So you lived there during your undergraduate years?

RF: Yes.

EG: Well, wasn't it unusual for women to be undergraduates at Hopkins?

RF: What, dear?

EG: Why were women in the undergraduate school at Hopkins?

RF: Why were there?

MC: Yeah.

RF: Teachers.

MC: There were only women in the teachers' college.

RF: I don't know. I took pre-med at Hopkins. You know that I was the first woman admitted from the undergraduate school to the medical school. Do you have that information?

EG: I left it all at your house, but I have it.

MC: Do you know what year she began at Hopkins? Do we have that written down somewhere?

EG: 1926.

EG: Is that right?

RF: Approximately, yeah.

MC: Undergraduate?

RF: Yes.

MC: Began your undergraduate in 1926.

EG: Directly after graduating from high school.

MC: Now, the other women that you met in your undergraduate years, what were they doing at Hopkins? What were they studying to be?

RF: Just teachers.

MC: Teachers pretty much solely?

RF: Yes.

MC: Where did they live?

RF: At home, mostly.

EG: I don't get the pre-med thing. I don't get how they let a woman do that.

MC: Yeah. We'll have to find out about that. So other girls were studying to be teachers. And your father dropped you off, waved goodbye after he got you all settled at

the Baker's?

RF: Yes.

MC: And then how would you get to classes?

RF: I walked through Wyman Park. I walked from 36th Street to Hopkins every day.

MC: What park did you say?

RF: Wyman, W-Y-M-A-N.

MC: And what was that first year like? What are your memories of it? Was it exciting or difficult or frightening? Can you remember how you felt as a freshman? Did they have activities for students to meet one another other than in the classes?

RF: I don't remember that either.

MC: So, Doctor, when you began in that undergraduate program, that was pre-med?

RF: Yes.

MC: You knew that's what you were – so what were your classes like? Were you taking –?

RF: Sciences.

EG: Were you the only woman in those classes?

RF: In many of them, yes.

MC: Now, what did that feel like? What kind of experience was that to be the only woman in those classes?

RF: I don't remember having any special feeling about it.

MC: Was it challenging, or did you feel–

RF: Oh, sure. Some of it was impossible – physics.

MC: Did you ever feel any kind of prejudice or problems from the faculty or other male students? Did they seem fairly welcoming about having a girl in the classroom?

RF: Yes. I don't remember any difficulty at all. My best friend was Peggy Cowles, and she was the daughter of the dean.

MC: Did any of the men question why you wanted to go into pre-med?

RF: No. I didn't have any trouble.

MC: No trouble.

RF: Yes.

MC: I bet that's because you worked so hard.

RF: Whatever. [laughter]

MC: Yeah.

RF: I couldn't disappoint my father.

MC: So how often did you see your parents when you–

RF: I went home for the holidays.

MC: Which holidays?

RF: Christmas, Thanksgiving.

MC: Did you celebrate Christmas at home?

RF: You mean, did we exchange gifts? No.

MC: Or have a tree –

RF: No.

MC: – or any of that kind of stuff?

RF: Oh, no. No, no.

MC: Just went home for the holidays.

RF: Yes, because the school was closed.

MC: Did you take the train?

RF: Yes, sure.

MC: Right. So what happened in the summer times when you were an undergraduate?

RF: Well, I don't remember when this happened, but I was admitted to Woods Hole, the biological laboratories at Woods Hole. And I spent my summers at Woods Hole.

MC: What was that like?

RF: That was good.

MC: Can you remember anything about Woods Hole, or what kind of experience that was? Why did you want to go to Woods Hole?

RF: Something to do for the summer. I don't know how I got to Woods Hole. Maybe Dr. Cowles sent me to Woods Hole. Yes, because I went there for several summers.

MC: Do you think you did that undergrad or–

RF: Yes.

MC: Wow, what an exciting place to go to.

RF: Yes.

MC: It's really beautiful, isn't it?

RF: Gorgeous, wonderful.

MC: Because the lab is right on the water.

RF: Right.

MC: How did you get to Woods Hole, also by train or –?

RF: Oh, sure. You mean from Massachusetts to New York?

MC: Yeah.

RF: Sure, by train.

MC: Right. It's a long trip.

RF: Yeah.

MC: And then you applied to medical school at Johns Hopkins? Well, how did you go from pre-med into Johns Hopkins?

RF: I applied, and they admitted me.

MC: And you were the very first woman?

RF: From the undergraduate school. Hopkins had long since admitted women. One of the – Mary Elizabeth Garrett? Yeah, she funded Johns Hopkins Medical School with the proviso that women be accepted on the same basis as men. But nobody from the – no woman from the undergraduate school went to Hopkins Medical School.

MC: Wow. So what year did you begin in medical school?

RF: ’31, because I graduated in ’35.

MC: So, who was paying for your college education?

RF: My father, on borrowed money.

EG: We have amazing letters written from her to home about how they're going to pay for the microscope. We had the receipts for the time payments of a couple of dollars at a time for the microscope that she had to have.

MC: Oh, those are wonderful. Are you putting together those papers now?

EG: Yes.

MC: Because those will be really important as part of this project.

EG: Yeah.

MC: So it was right after the Depression. So this must have been a really tough time to be trying to make it?

RF: Yes.

MC: Was there ever a possibility that you couldn't stay in school, or your father was –?

RF: Somebody was helping my father, somebody in the Customs Service. A friend of his, I'm sure, was helping him.

MC: Really?

RF: Yes.

MC: Wow.

RF: He couldn't have done this all by himself with five children.

MC: No.

RF: And school wasn't then what it is today.

MC: You mean, financially, the cost?

RF: Yes.

MC: What do you remember about those Depression years? Do you have memories about –

RF: Well, I was always in a depression. I didn't have any free change.

MC: It didn't get that – if you start at the bottom, it's kind of hard for it to get much worse, right? Yeah, yeah. So any stories that you want to share about your experience at Johns Hopkins? What was actual medical school like, the challenges of that? Can you remember what you liked or didn't like, or classes –?

RF: It was tough. It was tough going.

EG: You used to tell me that you had to do better than the men, that there was pressure on you because you were a woman. Years ago, you told stories of getting sick and being nervous because you had to excel. You couldn't just be a woman medical student.

RF: I don't remember, Em.

MC: I bet that's true, Ruth, that there were even strong – higher expectations for you because of your gender.

RF: Yes.

MC: That you had to – do you remember feeling like you had to work harder to prove yourself as a girl?

RF: I don't remember that particularly. There were girls in the class. Ten percent of us were women in the medical school. While I was a medical student, I worked in the post-partum clinic with Dr. Bessie Moses, and she was a Hopkins graduate. And that was my introduction to birth control.

MC: Ever, first time?

RF: Yes.

MC: And was that an area that you became interested in?

RF: Yes, the rest of my life, Planned Parenthood.

MC: Tell me about how you chose a specialty area.

RF: Oh, I think it was Bessie, not me.

EG: But how did you get to her?

RF: She was on the faculty of Johns Hopkins, and she worked in the Post-Partum Clinic, and I was her assistant. I was a medical student. And that's how I got interested in birth control.

MC: When was birth control–

RF: Margaret Sanger?

MC: – yeah, first developed?

RF: Oh, well, there was always some kind of birth control. There were condoms since the beginning of man.

EG: Well … [laughter]

MC: Margaret Sanger's clinics and her work began in what years? In the '20s, right?

EG: I think so.

MC: Yeah, in the 1920s, I think.

RF: I don't remember.

MC: So what did you find interesting about the post-partum work and the birth control? Why was that exciting to you, interesting?

RF: These women had just had a baby. And the way to prevent another baby coming on immediately thereafter was to give them some birth control. So birth control became part of the [Hopkins] Post-Partum Clinic.

EG: Now, when did you live above the Bureau of Contraceptive Advice? Was that when you were in medical school?

RF: Oh, no. That came after I interned. After medical school, I interned at Sinai Hospital.

MC: Here?

RF: Yes. And while I was there, I started an Adolescent Clinic for Sexually Active Girls.

EG: I'm talking about much, much earlier. You told me that there was an address on Broadway which you actually ¬–

RF: Well, wait a minute, dear.

EG: Oh, I'm sorry.

RF: Then after Sinai, Bessie Moses opened the Bureau for Contraceptive Advice on Broadway.

MC: Where, here?

RF: 1028 North Broadway.

EG: Near Hopkins Hospital.

RF: I lived on the third floor. And I worked in the Contraceptive Clinic.

MC: So you lived above the Bureau for Contraceptive Advice? It's a great name.

RF: Isn't it? Nobody knew what the hell we were talking about.

EG: [laughter]

MC: So what were the early contraceptives? What kind of things –?

RF: Diaphragm. Diaphragm and jelly.

EG: In this 1982 Sun Papers article, it said that you wanted to do surgery in obstetrics and gynecology, and they wouldn't let you. When was that?

RF: Oh, oh, well, I did my internship at Sinai, and I couldn't get any surgical – after the internship, I couldn't get any surgical training. Who ever heard of a woman surgeon in those days?

EG: They told her there was no place for you to sleep or no place to go to the bathroom or something, so they didn't have to admit you to the program?

RF: I don't –

EG: That's what it says in this ’82 article.

RF: Oh, well, I couldn't get any surgical training, so I continued with the birth control.

EG: But your theory used to be that they wouldn't let you have the surgical training because you were a woman?

RF: That's right.

MC: They just didn't consider it appropriate for women –

RF: That's right.

MC: – to be involved in surgery?

RF: In surgery, that's right.

MC: Do you know why?

RF: It was a man's world.

MC: Right, right. And so you continued to work with Dr. Moses?

RF: Yes.

MC: And what kind of work were you doing with the girls, with young women?

RF: I was doing sex education in the schools.

MC: Now, was this something that people generally approved of, or did you–

RF: Some did, and some didn't. [laughter]

MC: Well, tell me about that. What was that like?

RF: I don't know.

MC: I mean, how did you know that people didn't approve of your work? How did you know that they did approve of your work? Was there protesting? Did people just talk badly about you or about the clinic?

RF: No, no. Not about me, no. I never had any difficulty. I don't remember.

MC: Do you remember any stories about that, Emily?

EG: No. The only thing – about the clinic?

MC: Yeah. About issues with the clinic, of people disapproving of the –

RF: Oh, the bell rang all the time. People wanted abortions. They thought we were doing abortions, not birth control.

EG: Where did you send them? Did you send them away, or did you send them –?

RF: Well, sure. Abortion was against the law.

EG: I understand that. But later on, you facilitated abortions even when they were illegal. In those days, did you just send them away, or did you send them to somebody you knew would give them an abortion? The statute of limitations, I'm sure, has run.

MC: How did you feel about abortions?

RF: If it was an unwanted pregnancy, right on. Every child a wanted child. And I told you I started the Adolescent Clinic for Sexually Active Girls at Sinai.

EG: But wasn't that later, much later?

RF: No. Because my chief at Sinai took me on as his associate. He was an obstetrician.

EG: This says, “The Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics allowed me to spend two years with him as an apprentice, but the Chief of Surgery would not permit me to learn gynecological surgery.”

RF: Yeah, that's right. But I had to move to Eutaw Place. His office was on Eutaw Place.

EG: What was his name?

RF: (Meyer Aaronson?).

MC: And who was he, again?

RF: He was Chief of Obstetrics at Sinai Hospital.

MC: How do you spell his name? Is it in there?

RF: Double A – R-O-N-S-O-N.

MC: He was Chief of Obstetrics?

RF: At Sinai.

EG: Sinai Hospital.

MC: Now, what did you do with him when you were apprenticing with him? What were you learning?

RF: I delivered his babies.

MC: Yeah.

RF: That's how I delivered my– we went to – Dr. Pollock to an eye doctor not so long ago. He said, “You delivered my wife sixty-four years ago” (Laughs).

EG: Your eye doctor.

RF: Well, my eye doctor, yeah.

EG: His wife is over sixty, and Mom delivered her.

MC: Wow. So you were doing a lot of his work while he was –

RF: Uh-huh. Well, you can only deliver one baby at a time, too.

MC: Right.

RF: Yeah. And then, when I lived on Eutaw Place – not Eutaw – yes, Eutaw Place, I met my husband.

MC: I want to just ask you one thing before you talk about him. What was your – do you have a memory of your very first delivery?

RF: Oh, I was a medical student, and I was doing home deliveries. It was very exciting, very exciting.

MC: Did you go out with one of these doctors?

RF: Sure.

EG: You told me you went out with a nurse. The best stories are the ones where you and a nurse went into these bad neighborhoods to deliver babies.

RF: I don't remember that, Em.

EG: Oh, you don't –

RF: Yes, yes, I'm sure we did. Very few doctors did home deliveries.

EG: But you went with a nurse and often into poor neighborhoods.

RF: Yes.

EG: And one expectant father said, “Dead baby, dead doctor.”

RF: Oh, yeah. [laughter] That was the joke of the day. “Dead baby, dead doctor.”

MC: What did they mean by that?

RF: That I better give him a live baby.

MC: What were the challenges of doing a home delivery?

RF: That was one of the – aseptic conditions. Some of the slum homes were little less than operating rooms.

MC: Would they pay you for the deliveries or were they free?

RF: I don't remember that. I think we got paid. Oh, when I worked for the city, yes, yes, the city paid for some of them. I don't remember now how that worked.

MC: Well, that's okay. So you met your husband when you were living on Eutaw Place? And what's his name?

RF: Harry Greenberg.

MC: And how did you meet?

RF: Well, Dr. Aaronson's office was at 1706 Eutaw Place. And his landlady introduced me to (Reba and Ben Feinstein?). Ben was a blind pianist. And he had many friends who came to visit him. And it was one of those friends who was Harry Greenberg.

MC: And so do remember how you met Harry, what was – what happened?

RF: We met at the (Feinsteins?). He invited me to the movies. He...

MC: Now, had you dated any before this, Ruth?

RF: Not seriously, no. I was too busy.

MC: Were you already out of med school, and you were now interning?

RF: Yes.

MC: Is that what you were doing?

RF: No, it was after internship.

MC: So, internship was at?

RF: Sinai.

MC: Sinai. And then you did what?

RF: Then Dr. Aaronson took me in.

MC: To the clinic, or to his–

RF: To his practice.

MC: – his practice.

RF: Right.

MC: And then you met Harry.

RF: Yes. And how long–

RF: He decided that I should – oh, I was working for Dr. Aaronson for $1,000 a year. And Harry decided that I was out of my mind. I can hear him saying, “You're out of your mind.” [laughter]

MC: Yeah.

RF: And he rented an office in the Medical Arts Building for me.

MC: Harry did?

RF: Yes. And I stayed in the Medical Arts Building for fifty years.

MC: And what was Harry doing for a living?

RF: He was a factory representative for fans and wind blowers.

MC: So what was he like when you met him?

RF: Tall, dark, and handsome. [laughter]

MC: Really?

RF: What about his family? What do you remember about his family, his mother and father and –

RF: Oh, well, she didn't – he was an only child, and she didn't approve of me.

MC: Why?

RF: Thank you, dear.

EG: You're welcome.

RF: But then I went on to have two children.

MC: Why do you think she didn't approve of you?

RF: I was not one of the girls. I wasn't especially Jewish or – and I was busy. I couldn't play with her.

MC: With your mother-in-law?

RF: Yes.

MC: What was her name?

RF: Rose, Rose Greenberg.

MC: Was she religious?

RF: Since I was not at all, yes, I guess she was.

MC: Did they go to Temple in Baltimore, or do you remember?

RF: I didn't.

MC: Did they? Did Rose?

RF: Oh, yes. I think she went to some shul.

MC: What was Harry's father's name?

RF: David.

MC: Do you know what he did for a living, his father, David?

RF: He was dead when we were married. Oh, he fell down the elevator shaft, yes.

EG: And did he own that building? Did he own that building that–

RF: I don't remember, Em.

EG: He went to inspect –

RF: Labor Day.

EG: – a building on a holiday.

RF: Labor Day weekend, he fell down the elevator shaft, and he died.

MC: So tell me about your wedding.

RF: Oh, my wedding. My father didn't approve of my choice of husband.

EG: We have the hat here for the [inaudible] –

RF: So my mother and my sister came to Baltimore.

EG: Which sister?

RF: Beatrice, I think. And we were married in – Rabbi Lazeron married us.

EG: In Hortie and Leonard Greenberg's living room?

RF: Yes. But they weren't related to our Greenbergs.

MC: Which rabbi married you?

RF: Lazeron, L-A-Z-E-R–

EG: I think L-A-Z-A-R-O-N.

MC: And where?

EG: Her friends were Hortense and Leonard Greenberg. They're both gone now.

RF: Yes.

EG: And they got married in their living room. Who else was there?

MC: So how did you feel about this issue with your father, Ruth? That must have been so hard.

RF: Yes, but I had another man, and a doting man. He idolized me.

MC: It sounds like you knew it was time to make the break.

RF: Yes, sure.

MC: Is that right?

RF: Sure.

MC: But that was tough because his mother didn't approve; your father didn't approve.

RF: Didn't approve.

MC: There's a lot of [inaudible] –

RF: But I had a good husband.

MC: Really?

RF: Yes.

MC: Describe him a little bit more besides the tall, dark, and handsome. [laughter]

RF: [laughter] Handsome.

MC: [laughter] Well, what did you like about him? What kind of person was he?

RF: Well, he adored me. He was bright. I don't know what to –

MC: What kind of things did he enjoy doing? Did you all spend time with friends? Did you like to spend times outdoors? Did you travel?

RF: We traveled together, yes.

MC: Did you spend time with friends quite often, or what kind of social life did you have?

RF: Well, I had some nurse friends that we socialized with. And I didn't do too much socializing, I was busy.

MC: You were working so hard.

RF: Yeah.

MC: Well, tell me, what was a typical day like after you became a young bride? What did you do in the morning, and then, what time did you get to work?

RF: Oh, I had a full-time maid. You see, I was earning $1,000 a year. [laughter]

MC: Whoa.

RF: Yeah. And Harry was earning a living.

MC: So would you get up in the morning bright and early, real early? Can you remember?

RF: Sure.

MC: Would you cook breakfast?

RF: Sure.

MC: For both of you?

RF: Yes.

MC: And then what time would you get to Dr. Aaronson's?

RF: Oh, well, by the time we were married, I left Dr. Aaronson, because I had an office in the Medical Arts Building.

MC: Right.

RF: I was on my own.

MC: So you had your own practice.

RF: Yes.

MC: How did you get clients, Ruth?

RF: Well, by that time, I had made a reputation.

MC: Okay.

EG: We also have all the letters from all the physicians in the area congratulating her on the opening of her office.

MC: That's great. What year did you marry?

RF: ’42.

MC: So is that the same year you opened your own practice, about then?

RF: About then. It was early – it was ’40s, yes.

MC: Okay. How did you manage being on your own like that, in your own practice? Did you have any office assistants?

RF: I had a – yes.

MC: What did you have?

RF: A Black secretary.

MC: Wow.

RF: Yes. In those days, that was unusual.

MC: It really was.

RF: Yes.

MC: How did that happen?

RF: Oh, Bessie Moses died. Bessie Moses was in the Medical Arts Building. And she, of course, was still my friend. And so I inherited her secretary.

EG: Georgine Edgerton.

RF: Georgine Edgerton, who calls me to this day.

MC: Can you all spell her name for me?

EG: G-E-O-R-G ¬–

RF: – I-N-E.

EG: -I-N-E, E-D-G-E-R-T-O-N.

RF: I don't think there's a "D" in it.

EG: I think you're right.

RF: There is? Okay.

EG: No. I think you're right, I said. I think there's no "d."

MC: Was she raised in Baltimore, Ruth?

EG: She's a very important person in her community. She just had a big fundraising celebration for her seventy-fifth birthday.

MC: Wow. How was she trained to become a secretary, do you know?

RF: Bessie Moses probably trained her because–

MC: Bessie trained her?

EG: She was an elevator operator.

RF: Oh, I didn't know that.

EG: Yeah, you did know that. You told it to me. You forgot it. And Bessie got her from the elevator, you told me.

RF: Oh, I didn't remember that.

EG: Well, this says there's a "D" in there, but I don't know.

MC: Did you have other assistants in the office or just Georgine?

RF: Just Georgine.

MC: So what were the challenges of those early years of starting a practice? What were the difficult parts?

RF: Only money.

MC: Just making it?

RF: Yes.

EG: And you had trouble at the very, very beginning, accepting it, you told me. The first few patients, you didn't want to take their money.

RF: “Oh, don't be silly,” I used to say, yeah. [laughter] I wouldn't take their money.

EG: Okay. You're doing fine.

MC: You're doing great. And you had full-time help at home?

RF: Yes.

MC: Was that an African-American lady?

RF: Yes.

MC: Did you have the same person for a long time or –

RF: Yes.

MC: Do you remember her name?

RF: (Guerny?). I don't even know how she spelled – G-U-E-R.

EG: And she came long before we were born?

RF: Before you were –

EG: You hired her before we were born?

RF: Oh, sure, sure.

MC: And what would she do? What kind of work?

RF: Breakfast and dinner – not breakfast, dinner.

MC: At night?

RF: Yes.

MC: Dinner at night?

RF: Yes.

MC: Was she a good cook?

RF: Yes.

MC: What kind of things did she cook? What did you have for supper at night? Was she a southern cook? Did she make southern things, do you think, like fried chicken and vegetables, or did she cook in a different way?

RF: I don't remember.

MC: Can you remember any of those foods? Did you all eat much seafood, being in Baltimore?

RF: Oh, yes, yes. Shrimp was a favorite.

MC: What about crabs?

RF: No. I still can't crack a crab.

EG: [laughter]

MC: It's so hard.

EG: Well, you're a newcomer to Baltimore. You've only been here since 1926.

RF: [laughter]

MC: Are you good at it, Emily?

EG: [laughter]

MC: Are you good at it?

EG: Yes.

MC: We have – my husband and I are both like, “Forget it. There's too little meat here. It's not worth it.”

EG: That's what Mom always says. Give me a crab cake.

RF: Yeah. That's what I drink, bourbon and a crab cake. Did you see the –?

MC: Yeah.

RF: Emmy made them.

MC: They're beautiful.

EG: No, I didn't make those. I just like them.

MC: They're beautiful. So (Guerny?) would do the cooking. What time would you get home at the end of the day?

RF: Oh, I'd come home in time for dinner. I didn't do obstetrics after I got married.

EG: That's not what you told me. What you told me and what you told this newspaper person in 1982 is that you stopped when your children were born, which was at least five years after you got married. And your husband didn't want to take care of the children while you got out in the middle of the night –

RF: Night, yeah.

EG: – and got into a taxi to deliver a baby.

MC: When did you have your first child?

RF: I lost my first pregnancy. I had an intrauterine death at term. That was terrible.

MC: Who was your doctor?

RF: Alan Guttmacher.

MC: Guttmacher?

RF: G-U-T-T-M-A-C-H-E-R.

MC: So that was terrible.

RF: Yes, that was awful. But then after that, I had Ms. Emily over here.

MC: What's your date of birth, Emily?

RF: '48.

EG: 7-9-48.

MC: And what kind of birth was that for you?

RF: Normal.

MC: Who was the doctor?

RF: Guttmacher.

EG: Now, you told me that you took me out before I was cooked.

RF: Well, because I had an intrauterine death at term. So before term, he got you out.

MC: So she was a preemie?

RF: So she was still okay.

MC: Was she a preemie?

RF: No. No, not that much premature.

MC: No. What was your pregnancy like, Emily's pregnancy? Was that a good –

RF: Yes, very good.

MC: – experience?

RF: Because I was happy to be pregnant again –

MC: Yeah.

RF: – having lost that first baby.

MC: Oh, oh, yeah.

EG: Were you fearful?

RF: Fearful? Sure.

EG: I mean, you were older. It was very unusual in those days to be thirty-nine and pregnant.

RF: Yes. [laughter]

EG: Much, much more unusual than now.

RF: Yes.

MC: Did people disapprove of you having her so late?

RF: Oh, sure.

MC: What would they say?

RF: Well, David – when I was pregnant with David, I was forty-two years old. He said to me, “You're out of your mind.”

EG: Who said?

RF: David. [laughter]

EG: I don't understand.

RF: When David was having his family – this is my son – I said to him, “I was forty-two when you were born.” He said, “You were out of your mind.” [laughter]

MC: So, what was his date of birth?

RF: August 25th, 1951.

MC: So after you had the two children – is it just the two siblings –?

EG: Yes.

MC: Then you decided to stop the obstetrics, is that right?

RF: Oh, I had stopped the obstetrics.

EG: There are people who tell stories of Mom delivering their babies while she was pregnant, while she, Mom, was pregnant. In other words, a pregnant woman was delivering a baby, which must have been cool.

RF: Well, I gave up obstetrics before you were born.

MC: Why did you do that, Ruth?

RF: I needed – I wanted to take care of Emmy.

EG: And I think daddies didn't have the same role that they do now. Dad wasn't going to get up in the middle of the night – according to you – and take care of me while you went to deliver somebody else's baby.

RF: No, he used to poke me and say, “The baby is crying.”

EG: [laughter]

RF: [laughter]

EG: But that's what men did. I don't think that was peculiar to him.

RF: Yeah. [laughter]

MC: But then, did you continue to work? Were you continuing in the medical practice?

RF: Yes.

MC: But you weren't delivering babies.

RF: No. Office gynecology.

MC: Oh, okay.

RF: Until '91.

EG: Yes.

MC: So, did you all have pretty traditional roles as far as what Harry did and what you did in the home?

RF: Sure, sure. He was a good father. He was a good person. I miss him very much.

MC: Yeah. When did he pass away?

RF: '63.

MC: Was that an illness or –?

RF: Cancer. He was a cigarette smoker. He had–

EG: It was [inaudible] –

RF: – back of – nasopharyngeal – I call it a brain tumor. It was a malignancy, whatever.

MC: So, how did you balance motherhood and running a full-time gynecological practice?

RF: I had a full-time maid. She did the laundry. She did the cooking.

MC: Yeah.

RF: I couldn't have done it without her.

MC: And then what about in the evenings after you got home, what would you do, and how would you spend your evenings?

RF: Well, I had a husband.

MC: And two children.

RF: Well, yeah. I told you, David was born in ’42 – in ’58 –

EG: In ’51.

MC: ’51.

RF: ’51.

MC: So, would you spend time with the kids in the evening after supper?

RF: Yes.

MC: It was a long day. I bet you were exhausted most of the time.

RF: I don't remember being exhausted. So long as my husband was alive, it was fine.

MC: Yeah.

RF: Yes.

MC: So it was a good family life?

RF: Oh, very good, very good. And David is a good boy.

MC: Yeah.

RF: A very good boy.

MC: What does David do?

RF: He's a researcher for the government.

MC: Where did David and Emily go to school?

RF: Park School. By that time, we were making money.

MC: Is that a private school, elementary, what?

EG: Yes, both.

MC: And then where did they go to university or to college?

RF: Emmy went to Brandeis, and David went to Franconia. David now has two children of his own. So I'm a grandma.

MC: That's great. How old are your grandchildren?

RF: Jordan is seventeen. And how old is Ellen?

EG: Fourteen.

MC: Jordan?

RF: Jordan and Ellen Greenberg.

MC: Emily, do you have – you don't have kids, do you?

EG: No.

MC: Are you on your own?

EG: Am I on my own?

MC: Yeah. Do you have a husband?

EG: I have a wonderful husband.

MC: What's his name?

EG: John Sondheim.

MC: How do you spell his last name?

EG: S-O-N-D-H-E-I-M.

MC: Tell me about John and Emily's wedding. What do you remember about it?

RF: Rabbi Silver? Was it Rabbi Silver – what was his name, Em?

EG: I can't remember.

RF: You can't remember, and you expect me to?

MC: [laughter] How did they meet?

EG: Berlin. Did Don Berlin do it? Don Berlin. Rabbi Berlin.

RF: Berlin, that's – oh, Rabbi Berlin.

MC: How did John and Emily meet?

RF: Ask her.

EG: [laughter]

MC: Okay. Scoot over here so that we can hear you a little bit better.

EG: Oh, it's too long and boring a story. Mom's friend, Edith Furstenberg introduced us at a Planned Parenthood meeting.

[CD ONE/TWO ENDS. CD TWO/TWO BEGINS]

RF: David and Patty, and their two children, and Emmy, and that's the story of my life.

EG: What about Mr. John?

RF: And John – Emmy and John.

MC: Well, I want to hear a little bit more – before we talk about that – about Planned Parenthood.

RF: I couldn't remember all the offices I held. By that time, we were Planned Parenthood. But I never lost my interest in contraception. I introduced birth control into the Health Department. I worked at the Planned Parenthood Clinic Medical Advisory Board until –

EG: And you were on the National Board for a little while.

RF: Oh, I forgot about that.

EG: You used to take the train to New York to be on the National Board.

RF: Yeah, I was on the National Board of Planned Parenthood. But that was because of Alan Guttmacher, I guess.

MC: Well, when did you begin your involvement with Planned Parenthood as an organization?

RF: When did I what?

MC: Begin getting involved with Planned Parenthood, the organization?

RF: With Bessie Moses when I was a medical student. Are you talking about planned – birth control or Planned Parenthood?

MC: Planned Parenthood.

RF: Oh. Well, after the Bureau for Contraceptive Advice, we decided that wasn't a go, and we moved to Charles Street and called ourselves a birth control clinic. And then somebody gave Bessie the idea that we should call it Planned Parenthood. So we moved to Howard Street. And we're still there, as the Planned Parenthood Clinic of Baltimore.

MC: So when was that founded? What year would that have been? Can you remember generally just what period of time that was?

RF: Planned Parenthood?

MC: On Howard Street?

RF: Yes.

MC: What years? Do you have any clue about the timing at all?

EG: No. We'd have to look it up.

MC: Is this like the '50s, the 60s?

EG: No. Before – I think before the '60s. (Nayna Henderson?) has been trying to get Mom to do what you accomplished, so we could ask her. She's trying to –

RF: Who?

EG: (Nayna Henderson?) is doing a similar effort about Planned Parenthood.

RF: Oh, Laurie Zabin. You did Laurie Zabin, didn't you?

EG: Somebody else –

MC: Somebody else did, I bet.

RF: Oh.

MC: Not me. Do you think the Planned Parenthood office probably opened in the 1940s or the 1950s? Was it way after the war, like World War II?

RF: I don't remember.

MC: But you all came up with that name yourselves, right, Planned Parenthood?

RF: No. A judge. I meant to look that up for you, too. Bessie Moses was the Medical Director on Howard Street.

MC: Okay.

RF: And somebody suggested – I think it was a judge out west somewhere, who suggested we change "birth control" to "Planned Parenthood."

MC: I get it. And then that actually became a national –

RF: Yes.

MC: – organization.

RF: Yes, it did.

MC: So, was this the seed for the national –

EG: No, I don't think so.

MC: No.

RF: No, no. Margaret Sanger.

EG: Margaret Sanger.

RF: Margaret Sanger was in–

MC: Okay. But then you became very involved in the National Organization, too.

RF: Yes. I served on the National Board of Planned Parenthood.

MC: Wow. That must have been very exciting.

RF: Yes, it was. By that time, I think my children were grown up. I don't remember. I don't remember what I had for breakfast.

EG: [laughter] Yes, you do.

MC: You do, too. Dr. Ruth, what about – once you had your own family, you had Emily and David, and you had a practice – now, were you all still doing some Jewish holidays and things as a family? Did you spend those together? Did you like still have a Seder or –?

RF: Yes. You did.

EG: Well, when we were children, the family had Seders with our neighbors, the Lobes, and with other people?

RF: Who?

EG: The Lobes.

RF: Oh, yes. I remember them.

MC: Did you do the Seder yourself?

RF: Did I do the cooking? No.

MC: How did you do it?

RF: I had a maid.

MC: She cooked for the Seder?

RF: Yes.

MC: How did she learn how to do the Jewish things?

RF: Oh, I'm sure I supervised.

MC: What about other holidays, other Jewish holidays? Did the kids go to Temple?

RF: No.

MC: Not at all, Emily? You all didn't go to –?

EG: Yes, we most certainly did. I went all the way through Sunday school until confirmation at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.

RF: You did?

EG: I did.

RF: I don't remember that.

EG: From second grade until we were confirmed in tenth grade.

RF: But David never did.

EG: David did some, but not as much.

MC: So tell me about that. You went to Baltimore Hebrew.

EG: Yes.

MC: And that's the Reform?

EG: Yeah.

MC: That's Reform, right?

EG: Yeah.

MC: And you went to Sunday school or after school.

EG: Yes, Sunday school. I have the yearbook.

MC: When did you start Sunday school?

EG: I think it was second grade.

MC: And then were you – what about bar mitzvah or any – bat mitzvah, any of those things?

EG: No. I don't think bat mitzvah was at all common with –

MC: No.

EG: – Reform Jews in those ancient times.

RF: What was this?

EG: bat mitzvah.

RF: Oh, no.

EG: Nobody I knew had a bat mitzvah.

RF: No.

MC: And what are your memories about holidays, like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and Passover? What would you all do for the holidays?

EG: I'm like her. I don't remember very much. I remember observing. I remember not having a lot of religious connotation but trying to be observant and respectful. You didn't

want to go –

RF: We had matzo for Passover. [laughter]

EG: Yeah.

RF: I don't know, we just growed [phonetic].

EG: Uh-huh.

MC: Was the food part very important in your family?

RF: Was what?

EG: Food. I think food certainly has become very important.

RF: Yes.

EG: And I've been very interested in cooking for a long time. But I don't have any of that kind of memory from my childhood. Mom had certain things that she made. I remember cowboy stew because you got the recipe from somebody at the Park School, from Mrs. (Dowdy? at Park School.

RF: Oh, yes.

EG: Meat and potatoes.

RF: Yes.

MC: So that was something that your mom would make?

EG: Yes. And I remember not really wanting much food as a child. And I remember jelly sandwiches, grape jelly on white bread, for lunch.

RF: [laughter]

MC: What kind of food did (Guerny?) make for you?

EG: I have no idea.

MC: You can't remember?

EG: My favorite (Guerny?) story was Mom calling from work to see how I was doing when I was just learning to talk and asking me how I was doing. And I said, “I'm fixin’ to eat my lunch.” [laughter] I was learning to speak English from (Guerny?)

MC: Yeah. That's so great. That's great. What about any other Jewish foods growing up? Anybody prepare kugels or tzimmes or those kinds of things?

EG: Well, I certainly have since my adulthood. I don't remember much about what we ate as children. Aunt Grace always made those foods, Mom's youngest sister. And I have blintzes in my freezer now, which my cousin Naomi brought from Seattle a few weeks ago from Aunt Grace.

MC: That's so wonderful. And so how many – are there a lot of siblings your age, or family –?

EG: Everybody is very spread out, and we're not close. And we're very different kinds of people. Aunt Grace, the youngest sibling, has three daughters. And Phil –

RF: Bib and Phil are dead.

EG: Bib and Phil are dead, but Phil and Verna had two children, (Anne?) and Dan, and we're in touch with both of them. And email has made a big difference. We had a cousin reunion in California. My brother and his family didn't go, but everybody else was there. I don't know how many years ago, in the last three or four years. That was great

because we got to really relate to each other as adults, and we hadn't really known each other very well. And I discovered how wonderful Dan is. And we started emailing each other. And because we're all descended from Finkelsteins, we named our informal network Finknet.

MC: That's great.

RF: [laughter]

MC: I love that, Finknet.

EG: And Dan and (Anne?) both have children. So Grace has grandchildren, and Phil had grandchildren. Bib had no husband or children. And Ethel, whom we see, and who lives in Virginia, had a husband for many years, but no children.

RF: Whom she met in the Pentagon, Col. (Conlisk?).

MC: And do you have – do the holidays now for family?

EG: In the last few years, the three of us have been hanging out together at holiday time. My brother sees his nuclear family as being his wife and children. And when I invited him a couple of times, he said, “No, we're going to spend it with the family.” So I shouldn't be saying that into a tape recorder because he'll hear it. But he just has a different idea of family than I do.

MC: So you and John and Dr. Ruth spend the holidays here.

MC: That's great.

EG: For a while, we were going to other people. Other people would invite us, and the three of us would go. But now I think we mainly –

RF: The three of us.

EG: – yeah, stick together here.

MC: That's great. That's great. What was it like having a mom as a doctor when you were little?

EG: My main memory is there was nothing unusual about it to me, but it was unusual to everybody else.

MC: How so?

EG: And people wouldn't understand. They would say, are you sure you don't mean to say that your mother is a nurse?

RF: Yeah. [laughter]

EG: They had never heard of a woman being a physician. And I had a great experience which I told Mom about. I just went to my 35th high school reunion in June and had a wonderful dinner with a small group of people. And two or three women were telling me what it meant to them to know her because their mothers didn't work. One woman at the table, her mother was – I think Field's Pharmacy. But the other women – and another friend of mine who wasn't there mentions the same thing: This was not unheard of, but it was inspiring to them. And one woman told me that she was impressed at the time that Mom always managed to come get us after school. And she does that. She thinks of my mother. She's a therapist of some kind, this girl from high school. And she makes sure that she picks up her daughter after school because you did.

MC: So Dr. Ruth, how would you do that? Would you take off time from work?

RF: I quit my office hours at – in time to get to school.

MC: And then would you come back, or you were done for the day?

RF: No. I was done for the day because I was just doing office gynecology then.

EG: But then you also bought me a used car as soon as I could drive. Because what I remember is you going off to the clinic at Sinai and some of the health department clinics, and I would take David home from school, and we would go get pizza or something –

RF: Yes.

EG: – because you had evening commitments.

RF: Yes.

EG: And it was a freeing thing for you when I was able to drive.

MC: How did your father react to your mother's career?

EG: Oh, well, I was, what, fifteen or fourteen when he died, so I have very little memory. But what I know from family lore is that he couldn't have been prouder and that there was no indication of any kind of threat or competition or anything. He just was extremely proud of her. He was extremely proud of all the other aspects of her, too, her amazing accomplishments in the arts and crafts area. She was a very accomplished weaver. Dad was very, very proud of all those things.

RF: But he was a good guy.

MC: Ruth, tell me a little bit about your leisure activities. What were the things that you enjoyed doing outside of your work?

RF: Pottery, weaving. I loved to weave.

MC: How did you learn to weave?

EG: You learned a lot of those things at the Recreation Department or something. You used to talk about going down to Patterson Park and learning all different –

RF: I know. Department of Recreation.

EG: But there was a big floor loom in the basement when we were kids.

RF: Yes.

EG: And I have gorgeous fabrics that Mom wove. Real weaving, not like what you see today with fat yarn and amateurish. She wove beautiful fabric.

MC: When would you do that, Ruth? When did you have time to do that?

RF: Oh, it was after they were gone that I did –

EG: No, it wasn't. No, it wasn't. The weaving was all when we – either before we were born or when we were very, very young. The weaving was all done by the time we were small children.

MC: Can you remember sitting at the loom and –?

RF: Sure. And taking lessons, going to the Weaver's Guild.

MC: Oh. Here in Baltimore?

EG: Yes.

MC: So you enjoyed weaving, pottery. Any other types of crafts?

RF: Knitting and crocheting.

EG: It probably ought to –

RF: Needlepoint, needlepoint.

EG: A lot of needlepoint.

RF: A lot of needlepoint.

MC: Was that an opportunity for you to be with other women?

RF: Well, to occupy myself because I'm still doing it. I'm still doing anacrostic puzzles and reading.

EG: This is completely out of order, but I just found it in Margaret Sanger's biography. It says, “Indeed, in 1942, committing itself to child spacing rather than absolute limitation, the organization, through a membership referendum engineered by Rose” – I don't know who Rose was – “officially changed its name to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.” So it had to have been in the '40s that all of that started happening.

RF: I don't remember.

MC: What was it like after Harry passed away? How did you manage raising your kids and still working? What was that –?

RF: That's how. That's how. And gardening. Look what I did with that garden.

EG: But you didn't work forty hours a week when we were children.

RF: No, no.

MC: Did you cut back on work after Harry died, or were you keeping the same schedule?

RF: Oh, I had to earning a living. Yes, I kept on working. But after I retired, what did I do besides anacrostics?

EG: Well, you used to read a lot more.

RF: Yes.

EG: And almost all of your traveling was later in your life –

RF: Yes.

EG: – in your seventies.

RF: Yeah.

MC: When did you retire, what year?

RF: '91, Em?

EG: I think it was 1990, and you were eighty-one years old.

RF: Yeah.

MC: And what kind of travel have you done? What kind of places?

EG: Egypt.

RF: I have wonderful pictures of me in the pyramids.

EG: Mexico.

RF: Mexico.

MC: Was this with Harry or on your own?

RF: Oh, he was gone.

MC: With friends? Did you travel with friends?

RF: Yes.

EG: Where did you go?

RF: With a travel agency. And I can't remember her name.

EG: Where did you go with the Strausses?

RF: I didn't travel with them.

EG: No?

RF: No.

EG: Whom did you go to Sanibel Island with?

RF: I don't remember, Em.

EG: Well, that's all right.

MC: Ruth, one thing I wondered about was like your women friendships, your friendships during your life. Have women been real important to you as friends? Have you had close relationships?

EG: Lily –

RF: I've outlived them all. I don't remember. What, dear?

EG: May I prod you a little?

RF: What, dear?

EG: Lily was a good friend.

RF: Well, she was a Sinai nurse.

EG: Right. But she remained your lifelong friend.

RF: Yes, she did, until she died. Everybody died on me.

EG: Sadie Ginsberg was your very good friend.

RF: Yes.

EG: She was an important woman in her own right.

RF: Yes.

MC: What did she do?

EG: Early childhood education.

RF: Early childhood education.

EG: And you and Sadie – after we were grown and gone, you and Sadie hung out, and you and Sadie had cocktails at her house after work. You used to go there after work.

RF: Yes.

MC: And what about Edith Furstenberg?

RF: Well, she was associated with Planned Parenthood.

MC: Okay.

RF: Well, she and her husband and I were good friends. We didn't do anything special together.

EG: But you've known her for a long time.

RF: I've known her for a long time, yes.

EG: And a few years ago, we found her childhood friend, Selma Gintsler, from the Jacobi School –

RF: School.

EG: – now called the Jacobi Calhoun School. I found her on the Internet. And she was still alive, and I guess they were both ninety at the time. And we went to Washington and had a visit.

RF: Reunion.

MC: How do you spell her last name?

EG: G-I-N-S-L-E-R?

RF: No, G-I-N-T-S-L-E-R.

EG: And her married name was Klineberg. She was married to a prominent scholar named Otto K-L-I-N-E-B-E-R-G. She just died not long ago.

MC: A childhood friend from Jacobi?

EG: Yes. That was kind of fun.

MC: Yeah.

RF: Yes.

EG: The idea that she was still alive and that she was right down the street in Washington –

MC: Yeah.

EG: – was so strange.

MC: It's wonderful. What's it been like being a grandma?

RF: I love them. They're sweet kids. But they have parents.

MC: So you try not to be too –

RF: I can't.

MC: – judgmental?

RF: No, I can't be. But my son – I see my son – my son and my daughter take good care of me.

MC: Do you spend a lot of time with them?

RF: Emmy sees me every – one or the other sees me every day. Emmy takes very good care of me. Here I am.

EG: [laughter]

MC: It's great that you live so close together and that you can see them.

RF: Well, we did that deliberately, didn't we?

EG: Yeah, yeah.

MC: And have you been very involved in doing some things with your grandchildren? Do you spend much time with them?

RF: They're too busy with their own lives.

MC: David's wife is Patty, is that right?

RF: She was Patricia Sweetman, yes. And they go to Park School, the grandchildren.

MC: Does Patty work?

RF: Yes. Patty works for the – what's it called –?

EG: Battel.

RF: Battel. That's a government agency, isn't it?

EG: I think they contract for the government, but I don't really understand what they do.

MC: What do you think are kind of the – what are the rewards of being a grandma? What's the pleasurable part?

RF: I can't verbalize that. I don't know how to –

MC: Is it more of a feeling? I guess what I'm asking is that you've gotten to see your children become parents.

RF: Yes.

MC: And then these young people begin to do very different things than what were allowed when you were a little girl.

RF: I can't put that into words.

EG: But it makes you happy to see them. I know it does.

RF: Oh, of course. I love them.

MC: One thing I didn't ask you, Ruth. When you were growing up, were there other family members that were around besides your mother and father, that lived with the family?

RF: You mean after we were adults?

MC: No, when you were growing up in New York City, were there other family members in the home besides your mom and dad and–

RF: And the kids.

MC: It was just very small?

EG: But you used to go visit. Didn't you used to go visit Tante Genendel and –

RF: Oh, my mother's family, yes.

EG: Where did they live?

RF: Brooklyn, yes.

EG: But you didn't like that.

RF: I had nothing in common with them.

MC: How do you think your family felt about you being involved – your father and mother, about you being involved in the birth control and the Planned Parenthood piece?

RF: I don't know that they had any opinion.

EG: I think they were both pretty progressive politically. I remember you talking about your mother reading Anna Karenina. Had she been born in a different era, she would have been very different. I think they were very proud.

RF: Yeah.

EG: My impression is they were very proud of you and not at all disapproving.

RF: Yeah.

MC: Did they kind of come around with Harry? Did your dad?

RF: Oh, sure, sure.

MC: After a while–

RF: Yes.

MC: – he got to like him?

RF: Yes.

MC: And you got along pretty well with your mother-in-law too?

RF: Yes.

MC: Maybe just one – not so well with the mother-in-law?

EG: [laughter]

MC: Was that kind of a tough relationship with your mother-in-law?

RF: Well, I don't think she understood me.

MC: Yeah.

RF: And I didn't spend too much time with her.

MC: Right. One thing I wondered, maybe this will be the last thing, is what has Jewishness, or what has your Jewish identity meant to you in your life?

RF: Not much until you came along.

EG: [laughter]

MC: [laughter]

RF: I never thought about it, really, until Baltimore Hebrew, the Associated Jewish Charities –

MC: Do you think it shaped some of your values, the types of things that you believed in or not?

RF: I wasn't that much of a Jew.

MC: Well, you don't have to practice –

RF: No.

MC: – to be a Jew?

RF: No, I don't.

EG: You certainly self-identify as a Jew. You always have.

RF: I never changed my name.

MC: Right.

EG: And you've got a core of how you look at the world that's very Jewish, whether you call it Jewish or not.

RF: For instance?

EG: What's right and what's wrong, and how awful it is for people to be poor and for people to have to bring babies –

RF: Well, is that Jewish, or is that Christian?

EG: [laughter] That's a good question.

RF: That's just being –

MC: But I think your sense of service, and giving back to the community, that those are values that you got from your parents –

RF: Yes.

MC: – and from Jewish life–

RF: Well–

MC: – no matter–

RF: How I got it, there it is.

MC: That's right.

RF: But I don't think about it particularly.

MC: The ritual part, the religion part, wasn't important. It was really just –

EG: But somehow, it was important to you for me to get a religious education, such as it was in a Reform synagogue. It was something that was important to you for me to have. I mean, I see you without them hearing, obviously, you sometimes – not ridicule, but mock or – when we walk past the ultra-Orthodox, it's something that you don't relate to. But obviously, it was important to you on some level for me to understand something about my Jewish heritage, or you wouldn't have schlepped me to Sunday school every Sunday?

RF: Yes.

MC: Don't you think that's true, Ruth?

RF: Sure. Well, I still feel Jewish. As I say, I never changed my name. Finkelstein didn't do me any good in those early years, but I never did anything about it.

EG: It seems to me it must have been a double whammy at Hopkins to be a woman and to be a woman–

RF: A Jew, yeah.

EG: – named Finkelstein.

RF: Oh, well, sic transit.

MC: What did you say?

RF: That's all under the bridge.

MC: Yeah. How did you decide on Brandeis?

EG: I think at the time, it seemed like it would be an environment that wasn't a rude shock because I came from Park School. The headmaster wanted me to go to University of Michigan, and it didn't seem like something that I could handle. In retrospect, it

probably would have been better for me to go to someplace with more diversity because I already had that, primarily Jews around me. Although a couple of my closest friends at Brandeis were not Jewish, were some of the few non-Jews that were there at the time.

MC: What did you do after Brandeis?

EG: I went to graduate school. I got a Master's in Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. Then I went to work in the Medical School at Rutgers. And at the same time, got a Master's in Library Science. Then I came back to Baltimore for one year. That was in 1974, and I never left. And while working at the University of Baltimore, got a law degree there. So, a lot of school.

MC: Amazing.

RF: So she's a JD.

MC: What's John do?

EG: John is a librarian at the Pratt Library, and he's called Planning – oh, boy – something of planning – king [laughter] of planning. I don't know what his title is, but he does –

MC: Development?

EG: He's working on the –

RF: Building?

EG: – building plans for the renovation and expansion of the main library and also the new regional libraries that they're planning, branch libraries.

MC: Can you think of anything that I haven't asked your mom about that is really – that you'd hate to be missed?

EG: Not off the top of my head. There are more funny stories, but they only get remembered in a certain context, with certain triggers.

RF: [laughter]

EG: And I don't remember any of them this minute. But I think you've got the main highlights. Oh, the one thing that I think is really maybe important to talk about – and if you don't want to, we don't have to – but at a time when it was really not okay to be helping people find an abortion, it was against the law, it was clear to you that it was very important to do, that people's lives would be ruined if they had to have children – babies that they didn't want.

RF: Yes.

EG: And you had a system with leaving names in the mailboxes, some mystery man would come – I mean, you had a drop-off and pickup system of referral with an illegal abortionist for many years before –

RF: I don't remember that.

EG: – abortion was legalized. It made a big impression on me. It's very surprising to me that you don't remember it. You're probably getting tired. But as a teenager, it made a big impression on me because it seemed to me to embody important principles.

MC: So you remembered that going on?

EG: Yes.

MC: Did your mom – how did you know about that?

EG: I don't know. An occasional telephone call or something. I mean, the only exposure I had to Mom's practice was hearing her in the house at her end of a phone call, being

good to patients, and caring about them. Subsequently, lots and lots of people telling me how much they adored her and what she did for them, and "Your mother was my first doctor when I was a teenager, and she was so sensitive and caring."

MC: So Emily, how did she tell you the facts of life and prepare you?

EG: Oh, well, that was easy. That happened in every – the sex lecture in Girl Scouts was Dr. Finkelstein; the sex lecture in Sunday school was Dr. Finkelstein; the sex lecture in Park School was Dr. Finkelstein. [laughter]

RF: One parent said, "Enough already."

EG: [laughter] So actually, it's funny because I do not remember having those mother/daughter conversations. I only remember mom and the plastic model showing up everywhere.

MC: That's great, great.

RF: Oh, well. I did my best.

EG: Well, as I told you before, I don't think she completely acknowledges what a major contribution she made.

MC: Well, are you ready to – should we stop for a while? Should we stop for a while? Okay.

RF: I want you to read that article, though.

MC: I will.

RF: Because I think that's a pretty comprehensive article. You don't?

EG: Well, it's about six people. It only has a little bit about you. But I do have an awful lot of stuff. I have a lot of stuff. I just didn't make the time to pull it all together.

MC: Can I look at it just for a second?

EG: Sure.

MC: Maybe you can make a copy of this for me.

EG: Yeah, I'd be happy to. I have all kinds of neat things to copy if you want them. She's at the very beginning, and then she appears again later. A staff meeting –

MC: So your first office was on Druid Hill Avenue, is that right? Is that where the Medical Arts –?

EG: No. The first office was on Eutaw Place.

MC: Okay.

RF: Yes.

MC: So that's not quite correct. Okay.

EG: But we have a lot of cool stuff. The best one is the letter –

RF: Is what, dear?

EG: The letter on your twenty-first birthday: “Dear Ma and Pa, I am the happiest girl in the world” – because the day before she had been accepted to medical school.

MC: Wow.

EG: I have also a clipping from the undergraduate newspaper that says, “Eleven undergraduate men accepted to the medical school.” And it has the last names in alphabetical order, only the last names. And then, at the end of the alphabet, it says, Ms. Finkelstein. She wasn't even allowed into their alphabet. [laughter]

EG: [laughter]

MC: Well, those things, you know, get them together.

EG: Yeah, yeah.

MC: Or make a list.

EG: I'm working on that.

MC: And be sure and let me know, because I think there probably will be some kind of an exhibit or program–

EG: That would be great because–

MC: – that will develop from this, so those materials will be important to know about. And copies can be made, and those kinds of things.

EG: And I'm buying acid-free covers and things –

MC: Good, that's great.

EG: – so we can preserve them.

MC: That's great. All right. I think we probably should get your mom to sign this. Can I get your signature, which is on a release form, to allow us to use the taped material? I just need it right there.

RF: Finkelstein? [laughter]

MC: Right.

EG: I already told – what's Hettleman's first name?

MC: Shelly.

EG: She had in the stuff for the party or for something, she had Ruth Finkelstein Greenberg, but there is no such person.

MC: Right.

EG: It's either/or.

MC: Right, okay.

RF: Here, they have it right.

MC: Yeah, that's what I put. Okay. I'm going to get you to sign this one, and then you all can keep that copy. Same thing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]