

Sara Dalkowitz Kaplan Transcript

RB: Hi this is Roz Bornstein and I am meeting with Sara Kaplan at the Kline Galland Home in Seattle, Washington. And the date today is December 4, 2002, and Sara and I are meeting to gather her oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project of the Jewish Women's Archive. And Sara, do I have your permission to interview and tape you?

SK: Sure.

RB: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here with you today. I wondered if we could start with where and when you were born.

SK: I was born in Pearsall, Texas in 1926.

RB: And could you tell us a little bit about your family at that time? Who were your parents and a little bit —

SK: Well, my mother was Evelyn Dalkowitz and my husband was Harry — my [laughter] — my daddy was Harry Dalkowitz.

RB: And how did they end up in Pearsall, Texas?

SK: Well my — my mother was born in Pearsall. Not in Pearsall, Texas, but she was born in Texas. And my daddy got there when he was in the Army. And he met her when he was in the Army.

RB: I see. And was there a Jewish community that they lived in in Pearsall?

SK: There wasn't — I was the only Jewish girl in Pearsall, Texas. There is a couple of Jewish people now, but when I was living there, there wasn't anybody that was Jewish.

RB: So just your family.

SK: Uh huh. And we went to Sunday School in San Antonio.

RB: And how did they manage that? What — how did they make those arrangements?

SK: Well my daddy would go to San Antonio and buy clothes and my mother would take me to Sunday School [laughter]. But she wouldn't go in.

RB: So your family, although you were the only Jewish family —

SK: Yeah.

RB: — they felt very Jewish, their Jewish identity was strong? Is that —

SK: Yeah. And they wanted me to go to Sunday School. So they took me to Sunday School. And I loved it.

RB: What did you love about it?

SK: Well I loved my friends. And meeting people and stuff like that. And I was — and I would go back to Pearsall, Texas. In the evening, I'd go to church. [laughter]

RB: Can you tell us about that? What were you going to church for?

SK: Well I was going to church because everybody else was. And I didn't have any friends that weren't going. So I would go to one church or another. And I would hold my hands so I wouldn't get up and join it. [laughter]

RB: And so this was as a teenager or as a youngster?

SK: As a youngster and a teenager.

RB: And how — did your parents — how did they feel about that? Was that okay with them or —

SK: That was okay with them. They knew I was Jewish.

RB: So —

SK: And the only Jewish child in the town. So they knew I was Jewish.

RB: And how did they observe Judaism within the home?

SK: Well I don't know.

RB: What do you remember about religion as a young child?

SK: Well I remember going to San Antonio and my parents went to San Antonio for the holidays. So they went with me at the holidays.

RB: I see. So it sounds like your social life in Pearsall was mixed with a lot of kids who were religious and whose social activities involved church meetings or church activities.

SK: And would get — my friends would be baptized in the church. So I'd attend.

RB: That's great. Do you have any fun stories that you remember about, you know, your childhood years in Pearsall?

SK: Well I remember a lot about my childhood years in Pearsall and about — I went to church, I mean I went to — I debated.

RB: When did you start debating?

SK: I started debating in high school and my friends started debating too and we went debate trips, but it really wasn't popular in Pearsall. It was just — we did it. And I loved

doing it. I love debating.

RB: How did this come about?

SK: Well I guess — a lot of things about my high school and I wanted to do things in my high school. So, my teacher, when I graduated, gave me a book. And I was so proud of it. [laughter]

RB: Do you remember the book?

SK: Yeah. Could you stop —

[break in tape]

SK: Edna St. Vincent Millay.

RB: Edna St. Vincent Millay, okay....

SK: And that was something, I liked so well and I didn't have it.

RB: What did you like about it?

SK: Well I liked her — the way she wrote.

RB: You liked her writing style.

SK: And she wrote literature. A lot of verses.

RB: I see so you liked her [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]

SK: My candle burns at both ends. It will not last the night. But oh my friends and ah my foes, it gives a lovely light. There.

RB: Beautiful.

SK: I still remember it.

RB: That's beautiful. Edna St. Vincent Millay, okay.

SK: And so she's dead now.

RB: Yeah. And one of your teachers gave this book to you.

SK: Yeah.

RB: And it was very important to you.

SK: Yeah.

RB: So in high school you wanted to do a lot of things. And how —

SK: Yeah, I did a lot of things. I worked on the newspaper, and I was a president and all that kind of stuff.

RB: How did this come about that you became an active person in high school? When did these interests start for you?

SK: Well I think they were always there.

RB: From day one you think? As a baby? As a teenager?

SK: Well, I had a lot — I had a lot of books but they were Bobby Twins books. My mother always brought me Bobby Twins books. And I don't know but I just — I had to take part in my class because I didn't have anything else to do. And I was smart. So I was too smart for just being in school so I had a lot of things to do.

RB: That's great. And so you started the debate team in high school or —

SK: I started debating in high school.

RB: In high school. And do you remember your debate teacher?

SK: Well she gave me the book, but I don't remember her name. I used to know it well.

RB: Yeah.

SK: And I have it in my book and my son has the book in — where he lives — Spokane. And I want him to bring it to me so I can read it again.

RB: So when you were debating in high school, what was that like for you? What did you get out of it?

SK: Well it was wonderful for me because I could do things. And I don't know, but we were a winning team. It's San Antonio and other teams like that were — won more things than we did. But we would get third in the team and stuff like that and it was just wonderful for me. And I was with my friend — and she was graduated. And then I was with other people, friends of mine, that came on. Because I had to have somebody debate with me.

RB: It's a very social —

SK: Yeah, it was wonderful. I enjoy debating so much. I debated in college too.

RB: At the University of Texas?

SK: University of Texas. And we debated there, but other women didn't. I had a partner, but other women didn't debate. But we did. [laughter]

RB: What was that like to be the only women debaters?

SK: Well it was wonderful. We knew men debaters. We could get along with men debaters.

RB: Do you feel that you were treated any differently because you were women or do you feel like —

SK: Oh well, we were treated a lot differently because we were women, because the University wasn't active with other than men.

RB: So how did you feel treated differently? What was the —

SK: Well men were on the debate team. I'll tell you something funny. When I was a junior in college, and our men went to debate, I mean went to law school. And it happened, and very few women were in law school. But my cousin was in law school, and she was an Dalkowitz and her name was there that she was grading and everybody called me on Monday morning and then I went to the — have some coffee and stuff and in the restaurant and everybody came in to see me because they thought I was teaching there.

RB: Really?

SK: Well it said Alkowitz. [laughter] And I laughed a lot about it. I told them I couldn't grade them because I wasn't teaching there. And it was fun. I had a lot of coffee that morning. Well, I didn't really drink coffee. I had a lot of tea and donuts.

RB: Now what topics particularly sparked a fire in you?

SK: Well I majored in history and then I majored — and then economics took over. And I went to economics school in Columbia.

RB: At Columbia in New York.

SK: In New York.

RB: Wow.

SK: And that's when I discovered that there was a Columbia and there was a New York. Well I had a wonderful time in New York.

RB: Is that right? How so?

SK: And I lived at International House. And a lot of people lived in International House. A lot of foreigners lived in International House. And I just had a wonderful time in New York and then I went to the University of — of —

RB: Was it Ohio?

SK: Yeah, Ohio. University of Ohio. And worked for the Anti-Defamation league.

RB: Is that right?

SK: Yeah.

RB: I knew that you were working as Assistant Director of Hillel in Ohio. Did you also work for the Anti-Defamation League there?

SK: Well I think I just worked for Hillel and I don't know why I said — I think my husband was working for the Anti-Defamation League and I got mixed up.

RB: Okay.

SK: But I worked for Hillel.

RB: Now that reminds me that you became very active in Hillel in college. Is that right? At the University of Texas?

SK: Yeah.

RB: And how did that come about?

SK: Well, there was a Hillel in the University of Texas, and I loved it because — I wasn't — In my hometown, there wasn't anybody Jewish. I could go there and have a great time. So I was President.

RB: Is that right?

SK: Yeah.

RB: For the course of your time there — how long were you President of Hillel?

SK: I don't know. I don't remember. One year or two years, I think two years.

RB: Do you —

SK: And then I went and worked for the Hillel Foundation in Columbus.

RB: So you kept your ties to Hillel, even after you left Texas.

SK: Yeah. A friend of mine had been invited to go to work there because she was living there. And so she told me and so I went there and they hired me. [laughter]

RB: What kinds of work did you do for them?

SK: I did all kind of work.

RB: Do you remember any specific functions?

SK: Well I worked with a lot of students there. And my best friend, because she was President of the Hillel Foundation. And my husband proposed to me one Saturday afternoon, and then he was going to a meeting with her in Cleveland. And so he picked her up that morning, and they went to have breakfast because he hadn't had any because he had stayed up all night with me. [laughter] So he told her and she was so delighted because she was going to the house — her house — god I forget what it was

but it was a — university, a college —

RB: Like a sorority or a —

SK: Yeah, a sorority. Thank you very much. It was a sorority. And she brought me pins and all kinds of things to wear when I was going out with him. So she was delighted.

RB: Can you tell us the circumstances of your meeting and courtship?

SK: Well, we met. Oh, well, okay. I can tell you some things. I was having dinner with the rabbi and his wife because we were going to Temple, not in our place but in the temple there.

RB: In Columbus.

SK: In Columbus.

RB: Okay.

SK: And she made me wear a hat. [laughter] I didn't wear a hat and she made me wear a hat. And I met my husband and I was so lucky to have on a hat because he wouldn't have come and spoken to me if I didn't have on a hat. He thought you were supposed to wear hats. And he came over and met me there. And a lot of women who had daughters had him over because they wanted him to marry their daughters. But he married me instead. And we married in the church. I mean, in the temple there.

RB: In Columbus.

SK: In Columbus.

RB: How romantic. So what qualities attracted you to him?

SK: Well I just loved him. Well he was — doing the kind of things I did.

RB: What were those? What were you guys doing?

SK: Well I liked — well we had a minister who walked my mother down the aisle, and he was from the Baptist church. And we just had friends.

RB: You had a lot of friends in common.

SK: Yeah I had a lot of friends and I had a lot of friends that were non-Jewish.

RB: This was growing up. But even later, it sounds like.

SK: Even later I had a lot of friends and then later I had Jewish friends. And he was a minister and — where I was working there. And it was nice. And my daddy didn't mind. He had to take it anyhow.

RB: What do you mean?

SK: Well, my father and mother didn't have any Jewish friends because — no, I mean they didn't have any black friends.

RB: Okay.

SK: We did laundry in the Black neighborhood and he would go in the house and carry the package out, but most people didn't even go in the house. My father did, but other people didn't. They had him bring the laundry out. It was a different world then.

RB: And how did that impact you?

SK: Well, I was always, I don't know why, but I always liked other people. I think maybe it was because of where I lived. So I liked other people all the time. And certainly when I went to Columbia, Ohio — no, went to Columbia University, I liked blacks as well as whites. And actually I had a friend — why don't you look in my door.

[break in tape]

SK: I'm going to show you. [inaudible]

[break in tape]

SK: Okay, this is Roscoe Lee Brown.

RB: Tell me about Roscoe Lee Brown.

SK: Well, he was my friend at International House and he wanted to come to Texas, but we couldn't bring him to Texas because he couldn't get along in Texas. They'd put him in jail or something. And this was my boyfriend. I can't remember his name. [His name was Banke.]

[break in tape]

SK: This is the man that was from —

RB: This is in front of International House.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Okay.

SK: He was from Sweden. And I was going to go to Sweden to marry him. But I met my husband when I was working in Columbus. Yeah.

RB: Wow. Were you both students together in classes together?

SK: Yeah. Well no, we weren't in classes together, but we were students together. And he visited me in Texas and we went to Mexico, with my mother, and he got his — thing, his —

RB: His hand? His — diploma?

SK: His book.

RB: His book.

SK: No his — his — he got a thing to go back. He got a —

RB: His papers? His visa?

SK: He got a paper in Texas, that he was going to not get in New York.

RB: Oh no. He was being deported?

SK: Hm?

RB: Deported, huh? To go back to Sweden?

SK: No he didn't have to go back. He got a paper saying that he didn't have to go back. He got an entry.

RB: Oh okay.

SK: And so this was a wonderful idea.

RB: What kinds of activities were you involved in at International House?

SK: I can't really remember, but activities that were real vital to working with people.

RB: That's marvelous.

SK: Yeah, and we worked with people in — well, at the university here and here and then at the university. So I thought this was quite wonderful.

RB: It is wonderful. It is wonderful. So you — one of the quotes I have about you here is that you've spent your life fighting for justice.

SK: Yes. And — this person lives here now. And her husband was a dentist. We went to him because she lived in New York, worked in New York, at the University. And so she lives here now and so we — she doesn't live in this place but —

RB: She lives in Seattle?

SK: She lives here. Yeah. Her — she lived in Seattle. She moved to Seattle and her husband moved to Seattle before we moved here. So she lived here long ago. And this is dinner at Kline Galland Home.

RB: Nice, very nice. What a coincidence —

SK: Yeah, what a coincidence.

RB: Now you moved to Seattle in 1955 with your husband.

SK: Yes. We lived in — okay, I married him in Columbus, Ohio. And we lived there, I think, three years. And then he was transferred to —

RB: Omaha?

SK: Omaha, Nebraska. Well Omaha was a miserable place for me.

RB: How come?

SK: Well because I had a lot of Democrats there — no, a few Democrats and a lot of Republicans. And I didn't really enjoy it. So we moved here because Shirley Tanzer told us that there was an opening here and so he — my husband — called and applied here because I didn't like it in Omaha, Nebraska. It was too Republican. [laughter]

RB: And your husband began to work for the Anti-Defamation league?

SK: Well, he already worked for the Anti-Defamation league.

RB: Right, and was transferred.

SK: And my daughter — My son was also born in Omaha, Nebraska. And when he was eighteen months old, I had a daughter. And she was born. And three weeks before — three weeks after she was born, we moved here.

RB: Wow.

SK: Yeah, wow. [laughter]

RB: Oh my gosh. And how did you find the political climate here, as opposed to Omaha?

SK: Better.

RB: In what way?

SK: It wasn't as republican. You could work here for the democrats and not be mad about it.

RB: And did you start working for the Democratic Party here in Seattle?

SK: Yeah, and my son did too. When he was four years old.

RB: Tell me about it.

SK: Well, when he was four years old I used to take him to the Democratic Party, when the meeting was here. And — not regularly, but when the meeting was here. And it was here every year. And when he was four years old, he wound up selling Coke and coffee to them. Because he would walk down the hall and sell it and then he would go behind

the stage and tell us who was winning. It was wonderful. And when he was 11 years old, I took him to Spokane for a meeting and he slept with a [laughter] — with a man that was running for office.

RB: Were they sharing a hotel room or —

SK: Yeah, they just shared a hotel room.

RB: Yeah, that's great.

SK: Because I thought maybe I shouldn't room with him, since he was 11 years old.
[laughter]

RB: So he became active as well.

SK: And he's still active and he's on the State Board now. From Spokane, he's on the State Board.

RB: That's marvelous. So when did you first become active in the Democratic Party?

SK: I think when I was in college, but really my father ran for office. He ran for office a long time in Texas — Pearsall, Texas. Until the boys came back from the war and then they ran against him. [laughter] And he was glad to get out so —

RB: Did he ever — what positions did he hold in Pearsall?

SK: It was just in the Parties.

RB: Oh I see.

SK: There really weren't any positions in Pearsall. But he worked for the Democratic Party.

RB: I see, so as you were growing up —

SK: I worked too.

RB: So you saw — your father, was he a role model to you?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Do you consider him a role model?

SK: Yeah, he was a really a role model. I loved him.

RB: In what way? How so?

SK: Well I still walk like he does. And my feet are like this.

RB: And what beliefs or values did he share with you?

SK: All of them, I guess.

RB: What are the most important ones that have stayed with you over time?

SK: Well I'm still a republican.

RB: You mean, a democrat.

SK: I'm a democrat. God. [laughter] I don't think as well as I used to. Yeah, I'm still a democrat.

RB: So there were certain —

SK: And I'm now a democrat that's been elected to the Party, I ran for office here. And I've been elected.

RB: That's great.

SK: So I've been a democrat all my life I guess.

RB: That's fantastic. And was your mother involved in politics?

SK: No.

RB: No.

SK: No, she just vote like my daddy wanted her to. And well, the women weren't voting then, you know. Women didn't vote until, I forget the year —

RB: A little later.

SK: Yeah, until much later.

RB: Wow. So you started as you were growing up, watching your father —

SK: Yeah.

RB: Were there any historical events that really shaped you and your ideas?

SK: I think that I always believed that blacks should vote. And then they couldn't in Texas, not until later.

RB: So that had a profound impact on you.

SK: Yeah. And I went to the University of Texas and I went to meetings. I went to meetings at the — my friend, who was male, and a democrat and his father was....

[break in tape]

SK: — something. But he — and I went there too.

RB: So the YWCA.

SK: Yeah. The University YWCA, because they were active in politics. Or some of them were active in politics. [laughter] And I still remember when I went there because my Rabbi was going there, to a political meeting. And we had a speaker from the church in a — in a — from a —

RB: In a county or another city or —

SK: It was a city and the black people had churches and we had a member come to us that was a black preacher. And I thought, my God, if I don't shake hands with this man, it will be — I just wanted to shake hands with him, he was so good. And I wasn't supposed to shake hands with black people. And I went up and did it. And I just had a lot of things like that happen to me.

RB: Over time.

SK: Uh huh.

RB: And this — you were in school in the early 40s, is that right? At University of Texas, yeah.

SK: '40 to '44. And then the war started, there weren't any boys there, but I was still active.

RB: And then you were at Columbia in 1948? Is that right?

SK: Yeah, I think so.

RB: You graduated.

SK: I was — and it was in Dallas, campaigning and working, but campaigning for the Democrats.

RB: That's marvelous. Did you use your speech — excuse me, your debate skills all the while?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Yeah. So what kinds of work did you do for them campaigning? Do you remember any specific events or —

SK: Well I just worked for people that were running for office. I remember going to — and this is something I hadn't been to. I'm going to go into the black community for a meeting. And I — I just went there because I stayed with my mother and she stayed with — her Aunt went to see her husband, because he was sick. So she stayed with her children. And I went there and then I came back and went to this thing, to this meeting, and I was the only white person there. My friends were going to come, but they didn't. And so I told people that I lived in the black neighborhood. And a man drove me home.

RB: How was that for you?

SK: It was pretty wonderful.

RB: How so?

SK: Well, I just got along with everybody because they thought I was black too because no whites were coming. And the man who drove me home knew that — well he didn't know me, and he drove me home and I thought he thought that I was going to go to the back of that yard because I was working for some white person. I was living in a white neighborhood. But it was — to me it was wonderful.

RB: You know, what strikes me is that you grew up in an area where you were the only Jewish kid but you had a lot of non-Jewish friends and you knew how to connect with them.

SK: That's them.

RB: Uh huh. That's a great picture on the wall that you're showing me.

SK: And that's when I was in the — they were in the 12th grade and I was in the 9th grade — in the 10th grade or something. And that's all my friends.

RB: So it was a fairly tolerant community in Pearsall, is that right? Did you have any trouble with antisemitism there?

SK: Well yeah, but not much trouble. Some people were antisemitic. Their son was antisemitic and stuff, but my mother went down and bawled him out.

RB: What happened?

SK: Well he made fun of me or something and she just went down and — and told him off. And I was — the worst thing that happened to me was when my dog died. I went up — it was Saturday. I went up and cried in my father's lot — he had a — well, he had a store with a woman's side and a man's side. And there was storage up there. And I walked up there and cried all day. My dog died.

RB: Oh. How old were you when your dog died?

SK: I don't remember, but I may have been like in the 7th grade or something.

RB: And —

SK: A neighbor killed it.

RB: What happened?

SK: He ate poisoned food.

RB: That's horrible.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Was that — was there an antisemitic —

SK: No.

RB: Just —

SK: Man just killed my dog because he didn't like him. He was two doors from me.

RB: That's horrible.

SK: Yeah.

RB: And you were an only child, is that right?

SK: Yes. My mother had another child before I was born and he died, she died, or something. And I didn't know that for a long time.

RB: So you felt mostly tolerance in your community as you were growing up. Is that right?

SK: Yeah.

RB: And so it sounds like you kind of used the skill of being the minority to then later on in life go out and be a part of other communities, like the black community in Dallas.

SK: Yeah

RB: Wow.

SK: I just lived my life. And loved it.

RB: What battles did you face that were most difficult in your political work?

SK: Well in the second city I went to and had my kids in —

RB: In Columbus.

SK: In Columbus. No, no.

RB: In Omaha?

SK: In Omaha. In Omaha, I had too many friends that were — not democratic. I gave a party one night and almost none of them were democrats. It was Election Day and [laughter] — oh my.

RB: That must have been hard, huh?

SK: Yeah, it was hard.

RB: Oh, did you know beforehand that they were not democratic or —

SK: Well, I knew some of them were not democratic but I didn't know the whole room wasn't. And they were celebrating because — I wanted to cry but I didn't. Oh my.

RB: That would be hard. So when you came to Seattle, what organizations did you work for here?

SK: Oh my. I can't remember.

RB: There's a lot of them. There's so many.

SK: Yeah, well I worked for B'nai Brith. Was President of B'nai Brith one year. Women. I worked for Council of Jewish Women. And I worked for Hadassah. And then the Democrats. I'm still working with the Democrats.

RB: How did you manage to find time to serve on all these different organizations?

SK: I just did. I don't know why but I just did.

RB: What issues were most critical to you or important to you in your work in Seattle?

SK: You know, I don't really remember, but I took the Council of Jewish Women two years to — and so I was not teaching school then. It was before I taught school so it must have been 1960 and '62 or something. And I took them to the legislature and they campaigned for things. And I'm trying to think what thing we stopped. But I can't remember it.

RB: Well there was many important things and one that comes to mind is the Good Friday.

SK: Yeah. They wanted to make Good Friday a holiday.

RB: Here in Washington State.

SK: Here in Washington State. And we managed to convince them and we worked with everybody, everybody who had a legislator, we worked with them trying to convince them that it wouldn't work. That we were Jewish and that shouldn't work for Jewish people. And we defeated it.

RB: That's great. Wow.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Boy. So —

SK: And I was only always active with the Democrats. As a matter of fact, this man who was — put it off —

[break in tape]

SK: — he was in the Legislature.

RB: You went to see Gary Locke? Yeah.

SK: When he was in the Legislature.

RB: And what issues did you want to talk to Gary Locke about then? What were you working on?

SK: Well probably some Jewish issues, but I don't remember what they were. And the thing about that bill.

RB: The Good Friday? The one that we were just talking about?

SK: Yeah, Good Friday and a lot of things. And we defeated some of them or some of them we can get out of the Legislature because we got them down on the committee. And that thing. And I loved doing that.

RB: Did you? What part of it did you love?

SK: Well I liked seeing the legislators and talking to legislators and talking about things that I didn't like or that I did like, that I wanted to pass or didn't want to pass. And I knew a lot then.

RB: Absolutely.

SK: I don't remember though.

RB: One of the things that I remember reading about, kind of looking through some notes here, that at a certain point in time, that you had some trouble with the Democratic party over the Palestinian, there were some —

SK: Oh yeah.

RB: Can you talk about that for us?

SK: Well, we got the ADL — and my husband was dead by then — to have signatures of people that were going to vote against that. And we told them why they should vote against that.

RB: Against — I'm sorry, against?

SK: Against the — it was that they were going to do something that we didn't like. They were going to pass legislation that we didn't want. And one time — I forget which time, but one time, we walked out of the convention so they couldn't do it so they had to cancel the convention.

RB: Wow.

SK: It was 4 o'clock or something like that or 2 o'clock or something and we just walked out. Everybody walked out on our side, and then they couldn't do anything.

RB: This was at a Washington State Democratic Party convention.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Wow.

SK: Washington State.

RB: Yeah. You also served at the national level, is that right? Some? Is that?

SK: I served one or two years and I went to the meeting. Oh, and I also served at a meeting of the — my — okay well I went to the teacher's convention and voted for a thing that was against the Jews. I didn't vote for it. I got it canceled.

RB: Wow. What, over the years, you know, how did you develop your sense of conviction and courage to speak out?

SK: I think I did that in high school.

RB: It started in high school, you think?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Was there one event? I remember a story about the gymnasium in high school? You wanted a gym?

SK: Oh we marched for a gym, but we didn't get it.

RB: What was the story? Tell us?

SK: Well we — we were having school and someone got up and rang the —

RB: Bell?

SK: The bell for us to get out. You know, like the school was burning?

RB: Oh the fire drill, okay.

SK: Yeah fire drill. And they rang that and so we all walked out and then we walked downtown.

RB: This was your strike?

SK: We wanted a gymnasium. So we walked and then we walked back to school. And went in. But everybody walked out.

RB: Were you one of the leaders of this?

SK: Yeah.

RB: So how did you get everybody to join you in this?

SK: I don't know, but they wanted to walk out of school anyhow, I guess.

RB: But it sounds like one of your talents over time has been to organize people.

SK: Yeah. I've always organized people. I don't know why, but I always did — when I was in college and everything else.

RB: Yeah. So where did you learn that talent?

SK: I guess I learned it from my daddy.

RB: Was he also an organizer?

SK: No.

RB: No?

SK: But he was — well he played dominoes across the street when he wasn't busy. And — well he could always talk to me.

RB: Do you remember any messages that he gave you? Any stories he told you that were very important to you?

SK: No. Except he read a magazine that I didn't like.

RB: What was that?

SK: And I can't remember the name. It was — everybody read it.

RB: Why didn't you like it?

SK: Because it wasn't Democratic.

RB: Oh. [laughter] So was it a Republican paper or a —

SK: Well I think it was a Republican, but it was — god I wish I could think of the name. It just didn't have good news in it.

RB: But he sold it in his store or —

SK: No, no, he read it.

RB: Okay. Oh I see.

SK: He read it in our home.

RB: I see, and so —

SK: And so he took it. I took it.

RB: I see, yeah. That's really something. How did you — how did you motivate yourself to do things that other women weren't doing, like debate?

SK: I don't know. And I was President of the Hillel Foundation and I don't know why I was doing that.

RB: That's fabulous, to use all your skills that you had.

SK: Yeah, I think I was two years President of that place. Well I had a lot of talent. And I wanted to do things. So I did them.

RB: What are you most proud of from your college years?

SK: Well, our President of the College, Homer Raney got fired. And we ran him governor. He didn't win, but we ran him for governor. And I think I'm proud of that than I

am of anything.

RB: You liked what he stood for?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Why was he fired? Do you remember what the circumstances were?

SK: Because other people didn't like what he stood for. And he stood for a lot of good. And they didn't like it so they fired him. And a lot of people were president of the — they fired him of our —

RB: The University?

SK: Yeah, our university. Now, can you turn this off?

[break in tape]

SK: — Bernard Rappaport. And my friend, my roommate, Audrey Rappaport, was President of the University of Texas. But he also was a fighter and he has a lot of things that he's done to fight for things. And I think I have his book of his but I don't have it here so —

RB: So you had a lot of friends that fought for justice with you.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Yeah, that were fighters.

SK: Yeah.

RB: Wow.

SK: I had a lot of friends that were fighters.

RB: Now, coming back to Seattle, you became a teacher as well?

SK: Yes.

RB: And what prompted you to go into teaching?

SK: Well, I took a few classes because I didn't have them. I graduated of course, but I didn't have those kind of classes. So I took a few teaching classes and went to be a teacher. And I don't know why. I think my children were in grade school and I could come home late in the afternoon, when they came home, and do my homework there. And I just became a teacher. In '60 something. '65 or something.

RB: And you taught debate?

SK: And I taught debate because I liked debate and I didn't have a class in debate, but I had one class, one year, and another class two years from there and I liked debate, so I just became a teacher of debate. And I had very interesting kids in my debate class. I had a kid who didn't enjoy school at all, but he could debate. So I had him debating. And then he took care of all the people that were mean to me, you know, people that would walk by your room and make noise or something. And he didn't let anybody disturb me. He was a great kid.

RB: That's great. So you taught at Franklin and also —

SK: I taught at Franklin later and I taught at Rainier Beach first.

RB: Okay, Rainier Beach first.

SK: Well I taught in —

RB: At Asa Mercer.

SK: Huh?

RB: At Mercer, is that right? That was your first —

SK: I don't know where I taught but I taught 6th grade or something and I didn't like it. I wanted to teach high school. So I taught high school. [She started at Asa Mercer Jr. High.]

RB: And this was during the 60s. A lot of —

SK: Well it was from the 60s to the 80s. It was 20 years. I taught school for 23 years.

RB: So you were referring to this one student that served as your protector at times, were there — was it a troubled or did the school have kids that were unsafe or created problems for teachers or what was the climate at your school?

SK: Well, I had good classes. Some people would walk around the hall. And make noise. But they wouldn't make noise when that man was in my class. So I liked that.

RB: And now Rainier Beach and Franklin. For those outside of Seattle, those schools are in the South End of Seattle. And at that time, what was the racial mix?

SK: I think it was everything. There were blacks and there were whites and then there were some kids that didn't speak English and —

RB: What were the rewards for this job?

SK: I don't know if there were any rewards. I just liked it.

RB: What parts of it did you like?

SK: Well I liked teaching kids what they didn't know. Or I liked teaching kids about black kids and white kids and Asian kids and stuff. I liked that kind of thing. And I liked having people in my class that knew something but didn't know, but — [brief interruption by outside person] — didn't know a lot of things. And so I would have — I had a man come

to my class when I was in the 7th grade, in the Franklin High School, and he came and he would talk about —

[break in tape]

RB: What were some of the challenges with teaching in the Seattle public schools?

SK: Oh. Well I think there were a lot of challenges. And when you couldn't get along with students, there were more challenges. But I managed to get along with people. And I managed to listen to kids that had problems and then I would say something to them, or whatever. But a lot of kids came with me that didn't like their parents or something. Or a lot of kids came that were out of school. I mean they were in school, but they were away from their families. And I just managed to be nice to them. And then they'd come every day. [laughter]

RB: So they really grew attached to you? Fond of you.

SK: I never was angry with any student that I had. I wouldn't like what he was doing, but I'd tell him so. And then maybe he would be nice to me. Or he wouldn't be nice to anybody and leave school. But I liked teaching. I really liked it.

RB: Were there any obstacles that — any lessons that you learned from in teaching students?

SK: Well they weren't obstacles but one day, I had kids who took my cards, they got in my purse. Took my cards — shopping cards — and went down to the Bon Marche and ate food there. And so somebody called me and I was going to take somebody to debate far away. And they came down and they came down and they called me and said some people were here using your cards. Did you give them to them? And then I knew that and I wouldn't take them back in my class. It was awful. And they brought some of them back because I was going out to get on debate.

And sometimes we won debates at universities. We wouldn't win first but we would win third or something. And I was just so proud of that. I was just so glad. I liked teaching debate. I wish I'd done it more, but I couldn't.

RB: Right.

SK: And I don't know if they have debate anymore.

RB: It's such an important class and skill to learn.

SK: I think it can be important, but I don't know if they have it. I haven't been back to school lately.

RB: Now I think I need to change the tape because we're almost out of time on this tape, so I'm going to stop for a minute, okay?

SK: Sure.

[break in tape]

END OF CD 1

RB: —2. And Sara and I are meeting to gather her oral history for the Weaving Women's Words project of the Jewish Women's Archive. And Sara, do I have your permission to continue interviewing and taping you?

SK: Sure.

RB: Thank you very much. You wanted to spend a little bit of time talking about your husband and your marriage.

SK: Okay. Well, I really loved Seymour Kaplan. I keep thinking about him all the time. And he was — I can't tell you what I want to tell you about him because [laughter] I've forgotten what he did, really — well he was an Anti-Defamation League Director and there's something that I guess I should tell you. A policeman came in and said that he had found the man that was opposed to him. And I just, you know, he just startled me very much. But he had a man that was after him. Because he was so good at his job, he could get anybody that was working against somebody and he did it all the time. He just did it. And he would drive the kids and I around when he would go look for people. My kids wouldn't know that he was doing that, but he was doing that. He was looking for people. [Seymour Kaplan kept watch on the Nazis in Seattle – that is what Sara Kaplan is referring to here.]

RB: Looking for people who —

SK: Who did bad things, or who were against the law, or something like that. And he had a — his office or his organization gave him a party one night and that's him and that's me and that's the party. [laughter] [The “party” was when Seymour Kaplan was named Washington State Man of the Year.]

RB: Wow, look at that.

SK: Yeah, that one.

RB: This is wonderful. That's wonderful. So I've heard that you were kindred spirits in many ways.

SK: Yes, yes I was.

RB: And what beliefs and values did you share that —

SK: Well we shared his work. And working with the Democrats and I guess everything. And he was very good to my children.

RB: What lessons or values did you teach your children?

SK: Well I guess —

RB: As parents. What did the two of you do?

SK: Well we taught them to be democrats. And my son was. He went to meetings all the time. And he's still going. And my daughter, she learned piano and instruments from her husband, from my husband, her father. And he would play a violin every now and then. He'd play the violin with — put it off —

[break in tape]

SK: Yeah, he played a violin with Leonard Bernstein, before Leonard Bernstein went to the orchestra.

RB: Isn't that something?

SK: And we had him here two times. One time when I was sick and my husband went to his party and one time when I was well and we took him to dinner. After the concert. He didn't eat before the concerts. [laughter]

RB: So he grew up with Leonard Bernstein?

SK: Yes, well he grew up when Leonard Bernstein was a man, before he was married.

RB: I see.

SK: And before Seymour was married too.

RB: And so they played music together.

SK: And they played music together.

RB: Was this in college?

SK: No, it was when he was working. Or it may have been when he was in college too because he went to war, my husband went to war, and then he went to school in — he went to school in Boston.

RB: Now, there's each of you have very important awards that —

SK: Yeah.

RB: — great to talk about.

SK: And I've forgotten what they were.

RB: Well one of them is you both worked to fight injustice all the time throughout your lives. And one of the awards was in 1995, the Sara Kaplan award.

SK: Oh yeah but it was from the Democratic Party.

RB: This was from the Council of Jewish Women.

SK: Okay — I had an award from the Council of the Jewish Women one year, and then I had an award from the Democratic Party, when I was in the hospital, and we went to it.

RB: Wow. So you were in the hospital, recovering?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Okay. And what were you there for?

SK: I don't know, but I just passed out when — when I was — three years ago. Three or four years ago, I just passed out. And I was in the hospital a lot of times. One hospital after another. And then they put me in the one way, way away. But it was a better hospital because I could get up for my food. And then I came here. [Sara Kaplan has had several major heart attacks.]

RB: So a few years ago, during this time, that's when you received this award.

SK: And that's why I've forgotten so much. I knew everything before then. [She had a stroke and lost some of her memory.]

RB: Of course. But you're doing fine now.

SK: Okay.

RB: Yeah. So you met and married Seymour —

SK: Is this on?

RB: In 1950.

SK: Yeah.

RB: And he was from Massachusetts.

SK: Yeah.

RB: And you were from Texas.

SK: Yes.

RB: Did you have similar religious backgrounds?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Was he also from a Reform background?

SK: He was from a Reform background too. And I met him at temple. When I didn't wear a hat. I didn't want to wear a hat and my — somebody made me wear one. And he probably wouldn't have talked to me if I didn't wear a hat.

RB: It must have been some hat.

SK: Well, it was a hat.

RB: And you have how many children?

SK: Two.

RB: What are their names?

SK: Okay. One is David Kaplan. And one is Miriam. Miriam Barnett.

RB: That's marvelous.

SK: Yeah, it is. And she's in Columbus now, Ohio. No, no, no, no, no. This place. Where am I living now? [laughter]

RB: In Seattle.

SK: Seattle. Well she's in — in Spokane.

RB: So both of your — oh one's in Spokane. Is David in Spokane also, or?

SK: Now wait a minute.

RB: And Miriam is —

SK: No David is — turn this off.

[break in tape]

RB: So you were saying your daughter lives in — it's Tacoma, is that right? And your son is in Spokane.

SK: Yeah.

RB: That's great. And how many grandchildren do you have?

SK: Okay. I have one by my son, Sydney. And she's a love and she's six years old. And I have two by my daughter. I have one in college, Miya. She's 21 years old. And her brother, Blake, is 14 years old.

RB: Very good.

SK: I can't remember how old he is either.

RB: Are any of them showing an interest in politics as well?

SK: Both of them.

RB: So it's really carried on from generation to generation — from your father taking you, to you taking your son —

SK: And I took my son from the time he was in 4th grade so —

RB: That's marvelous.

SK: It is. I think it's great.

RB: Shifting back to some of your activities in Seattle. You've done so much here in Seattle, it's unbelievable. You were active in so many organizations and I'm just going to

mention a couple of them to you and if any thoughts or stories come to mind, you let me know, okay? One of them is the Seattle Urban League.

SK: Yep. I've always been active in the Urban League, but I don't go anymore.

RB: And what kinds of activities were you involved with with them?

SK: Well I think it was involved with some things that were interracial.

RB: Interracial, okay. And the NAACP?

SK: And interracial in that. I'm not active in that anymore because I can't be active in that. I can't get around anymore, but I was always active in the NAACP. I was active in Columbus. I was active in the city I was in in Texas, and it was just something to do.

RB: Isn't that something. So interracial relations have always been important to you.

SK: Yes. Since — I think since I was in college. And I met the minister there that was — that had — he was speaking to us in the — well anyhow, where I was going. In the — how can I say it? In the —

RB: At the Hillel or the —

SK: No, but the Hillel man was speaking there too. He was saying a prayer. And —

RB: So there was a service that was being conducted.

SK: Well, there was a service or something that was being conducted. And then I heard this black man in his speech, and it was just wonderful. I still remember. I still remember him. I don't remember what he said anymore, but —

RB: Yeah. Are there any historical events that stand out in your mind as far as interracial relations go that really had an impact on you?

SK: Well I think — well there was somebody in my wedding and he worked for me. He worked at the Hillel, not at Hillel, but he worked when I was on the committee. And he was a minister. And I've never forgotten him. I still write to his wife because he's dead. It's too bad that he's dead.

RB: Who were your role models, besides your father, growing up?

SK: I didn't have any. I guess it was just my daddy. And my mother came to get me when I was going to eat lunch and everybody rode in our car. The rode on the —

RB: The windows and the —

SK: And the — you know, we had a thing here on the bumpers too. Everybody rode in my car. It was wonderful.

RB: Was this when you were married or when you went to —

SK: No, no when I was — because my kids didn't come home to eat. They ate at school.

RB: I see.

SK: Or they took their lunch. But when I was — when I was in grade school and high school. And I guess I enjoyed being in high school.

RB: Did you have any teachers that were special to you? Any role models that you remember?

SK: Well, I had the person who was my debate coach.

RB: Right, we've talked about her.

SK: But she only came one year. I mean she was only there one year when I was a senior. And she gave me that book.

RB: Right, the Edna St. Vincent Millay book. That's something.

SK: Yeah, Edna St. Vincent Millay. And I've got to get it back. I've got to get it back.

RB: So in your political work —

SK: I was for Senator Jackson.

RB: What do you remember about him?

SK: Well I remember he was very nice and he was very friendly. And we would support him. I don't remember anything else very much but —

RB: Do you remember what you worked with him on?

SK: I worked with him, but I — it was some things that he was doing, but I don't remember what.

RB: A lot of issues probably relating to Israel and —

SK: And also I campaigned for him a lot.

RB: Is that right?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Wow. He was a huge figure in Washington and national politics. And a huge supporter of Israel.

SK: Yeah.

RB: And speaking of Israel, we haven't talked about it much.

SK: Oh well I supported Israel since I was — I was active. And one day, when the Democrats were not supporting Israel, we had a man who was active here in the ADL, he was only active two years but he was active in the ADL, and he came to our convention and had a thing where people could sign up to be active in Israel, or support Israel or something. And he was at the convention all day long.

RB: So there was a time where the support for Israel was not strong in the Democratic party.

SK: No, there was a time when it was not strong.

RB: And what was that like for you?

SK: I was fighting. Well actually, we walked out of a political party. It was in Seattle, and we walked out of a political party when the anti —

RB: Israel —

SK: — Israel people came in. And so they didn't have anything. And I think it was mid-afternoon and we just walked out and they couldn't vote.

RB: What happened after?

SK: Well people — the anti-Israel people — still carried on and we carried on and —

RB: Separately huh?

SK: Yeah.

RB: Yeah, wow. Did you go to Israel?

SK: Yes. I've been to Israel twice. My husband took me once, and I took I think 14 kids to Israel when there was a convention. And I took them from different high schools. They

were — I took one from Seattle — I think I took two from my school and then took one from every school here. And we went to Israel and we went to the convention and then we went to where I was — a city where I had — we were related to that city.

RB: A sister city.

SK: And I took them there. And then they had a great time.

RB: What was the purpose of the tour? Of the trip?

SK: Well I just thought we ought to see Israel.

RB: What year was this? Do you remember?

SK: It was when I taught high school, I was in Rainier Beach. And I don't remember when it was.

RB: So sometime in the 60s.

SK: Yeah, yeah. Sometime in the 60s.

RB: And what impact did that trip have on you and the students?

SK: Oh I think it had a great impact on — because we both could relate to Israel and my kids couldn't really relate to them before that.

RB: Were they all Jewish students, or?

SK: There were no Jewish students. Or maybe one Jewish student.

RB: So there was a mix of kids.

SK: Yeah, mix of — and mix of religion. I took a couple of foreign students there. And it was very nice. I wish I could do it again.

RB: What was your favorite part about it?

SK: Well, hmm. I don't know. Because a lot of it was favorite. One of our kids, we had to keep out of the —

[break in tape]

SK: And we had to keep him out so some people that were in our party went and got him. And he would like to have gone there.

RB: He wanted to see other parts of Israel.

SK: Yeah, yeah.

RB: So who sponsored this tour that you liked?

SK: You know, and I don't know who sponsored it, but some Jewish group did. And we went with some Jewish group because nobody could afford to go there.

RB: What an opportunity.

SK: And I think we spent two weeks there. We spent a week with the lectures and stuff and then a week with — going to, seeing our town. And it was great.

RB: So you've been twice?

SK: Well I've been twice. I've been once with my husband and then with this group.

RB: What was it like for you before the state of Israel was created? What was it like to be a Jew before then?

SK: Well I was a Jew in a foreign city, you know, where none of my friends were Jewish except they went to my graduation. But so I don't know. But I think when the State of

Israel began, it was great. And I was in New York at the University when the State of Israel was formed. It was formed in — well a lot of people came to my room and told me. They had listened to the radio.

RB: Had you been involved in any Zionist organizations?

SK: Any what?

RB: Any Zionist organizations before —

SK: I think so. Yeah.

RB: So you remember it as being a very exciting moment for you.

SK: Oh yeah.

RB: Yeah.

SK: I was — at the University of Washington when — a great friend of mine and she was my friend when she moved to Columbia. And the place I lived in Columbia, International House. She was a black lady. And I wish I had her book. I got to get her book too.

RB: Now —

SK: Because I have it autographed.

RB: You know I don't think I asked you this yet, about International House, but what made you decide to live there?

SK: Well, I wanted to go to New York and I wanted to go to Columbia. And that was there. It was a couple of blocks or three blocks from Columbia. And so I just went there. I guess I knew it was a building and [laughter] — and there were a woman's side and a man's side. And then there was a space down below — cafe and stuff. And so I just

found friends there.

RB: And you obviously liked the international appeal to it.

SK: Yeah. Yeah, I thought it was a wonderful.

RB: That's great. Well, you know, our time is just about up for today and I wonder if you could — if you have any sort of closing thoughts for us, any words of wisdom.

SK: I've liked this very much because I got to think about a lot of things. And I thank you for coming because I loved thinking about the people that I knew and the things that I knew.

RB: You've had a very rich life.

SK: And it was different from my teaching. And I loved you coming.

RB: Thank you. It was wonderful spending time with you. Thank you so much.

SK: Well thank you very much. I enjoyed this.

[END OF INTERVIEW]