Ruth Fein Transcript

Sylvia Greene: This is June 12, 1992. This is Sylvia Greene, and I'm interviewing Ruth Fein. Tell me, Ruth, where were you born?

Ruth Fein: I was born in New York City in 1927, where I lived for the first eleven months of my life.

SG: Why were you in New York, and where did you move?

RF: Right. I was there because my father was still in rabbinical school, and we moved when he graduated and took [inaudible] in Waterbury, Connecticut, where I lived for six years. At that point, we were in the heart of the Depression; my father had not been paid for two years, and the family had a conference and decided they had to raise some money and put him in business, which sentiment my mother totally concurred. I remember this story. They raised five hundred dollars from various sundry uncles, older brothers, and sisters, and we moved to Washington, DC, and my father opened a decorative fabric store, for which there was some

knowledge in the family. Washington was selected because this was the Depression, and the government worker got paid every two (weeks?). In fact, it was a wise decision. The business flourished and is still very much alive today and very much (enlarged?) today.

SG: That's wonderful. Tell me something about – your father came to this country when he was how old?

RF: He was nine. He came in 1906.

SG: Where did he come from? Can you tell me something about his background?

RF: He came from a place [inaudible] called [inaudible], which means he was – we are Litvak; he was a Lithuanian Jew. We would go in the summer frequently to

Canada, and it would delight him. We would go one year, and they would say, “Where were you born?” We never had to show a passport to go to Canada [inaudible], and they would ask him at the time, and he would say, “Lithuanian.” And when he really got angry at them for having to ask him such questions, he would say, “Russian.” And then they would scurry around and try to figure out whether this was a spy because obviously that part of Lithuania [inaudible].

SG: Changed hands a few times. Tell me something about his background

there.

RF: We know a great deal about how the family lived and what they did because they talked a great deal about it. My father and his uncles and aunts, I can remember, after the war, after the Second World War, a number of books called remembrance books were published by survivors of towns all over Eastern Europe. We got the book in [inaudible], and in it, there was a picture of the town square, and my father and my aunt looked at this book, and they would show us, “You see? The big house in the corner, the biggest one, that’s the one we lived in. The one diagonally across, you see?” It was very clear. “And this is where I walked to go to cheder, and this is where [inaudible] (Schneider?) lived.” They then began to romanticize that shtetl.

SG: Your family had some remembrances of life over there?

RF: Yes. Many, many. We know the kind of business that my grandfather was in. We know that he was a lumber merchant, which meant that he rented large tracts of forest

from the Duke, the Count, or whatever he was–

SG: The absentee owner.

RF: Yes, the absentee owner. And harvested that timber and sent it down the river, once or twice a year, whenever it was. We know that he also had what my aunt would call a department store, clearly some kind of little dry goods store, which was not an unusual business for a Jew to be in. We know that my grandfather had [inaudible] and would come in. The family at least

considered him – and according to the family, the world considered him to be a great scholar and learned man and sort of a natural leader of the community. That's the way the story got told to us.

SG: How many children?

RF: There were twelve children. I think, as I count, nine of them born in Europe before we came to this country.

SG: Do you know why they came to this country?

RF: They came because times were very bad. Simon Kuznets did a fascinating

study on Jewish migration from Eastern Europe and shows very clearly that the migrations are more closely allied to economic times, general economic depression than they are to periods of persecution and that those migrations went first from the plain shtetl to the bigger cities, the bigger towns to the cities, and finally the more adventuresome began moving overseas. Those reasons for moving in those periods were when economic times were really very, very bad. And my aunt would apologize, and with shame tell us that her father snuck away because he didn't want people in town to know he was going because the learned men, the scholars, the pious people, didn't

leave; it was always those ne'er do wells or those less fortunate who came to America. But he came with his two older sons, and a couple of years later, brought the rest of the family. Plus, all of my grandmother's extended sisters and brothers and children and cousins and uncles and aunts and eventually, huge numbers of them.

SG: What type of businesses were they in, in this country?

RF: The first business that my grandfather and [inaudible] brothers [inaudible] and his two older sons, probably [inaudible] Holyoke, Massachusetts. They sold wood and coal stoves. We have a wonderful picture of them standing outside their "(Breslau?) Brothers Stove Company." Then in various [members] of the family went into the furniture business, where they were quite successful, and others into the fabric business. And the next generation, of course, were the professionals.

SG: That's how the pattern goes, yes. And your mother was –?

RF: My mother was born on the East Side. Everybody liked to make things better. Her family did something that was very interesting. She said, "We owned the first condominium in New York City" – or "We were the first Jews to own a condominium," because they bought a building in Brownsville, which was way out in the country in Brooklyn at that time. "They" being my grandparents and all of my grandmothers' brothers and sisters, and they each had an apartment

there. There was one uncle who couldn't seem to make a living, and he became the super. He had an apartment in the basement, I presume; that's where the super is supposed to live. So she grew up in Brownsville, and she went to girls' high school in Brooklyn through her junior year, and then my grandfather moved the family to Locust Valley Long Island, which is Oyster Bay. So they lived by the Roosevelts in Oyster Bay. My grandfather opened what my mother in her later years called a "club," but it was a saloon. My grandmother would cook blue plate specials, and for five cents, you got a fish

meal, which was a piece of fish and a bowl of potatoes and a carrot and a Schnapps.

SG: When was that?

RF: That was before Prohibition, because [during] Prohibition, my grandfather smashed every bottle he had, in spite of the fact that all of the gangsters and criminals were coming around trying to buy up everything; he would have nothing to do with it. He had the first deal on the first car in Locust Valley [inaudible], remember that. He drove it only once when he smashed it into the

window of a shoe store. After that, he had a driver.

SG: That sounds wonderful. It sounds like he was very prosperous.

RF: No, not really. He was adventuresome. He came from a town in Poland where everybody was a hatter; they manufactured hats, and that's what the family did when they came to the country on the East Side and eventually in Brooklyn. They were both the owners and the workers.

SG: And that was before 1900.

RF: Yes, and into the early years. My mother remembered as a child getting on the trolley with my grandfather's lunch pail, going from Brooklyn on the trolley to the East Side to bring him his lunch.

SG: Tell me about growing up in – you basically remember mostly Washington, DC.

RF: Washington, DC.

SG: Tell me something about growing up there. Where did you go to school?

RF: I went to the public schools in the segregated city of Washington, DC. We lived on the west side of the park, which was where, presumably, the better schools were, and the finer people lived, though most of the Jewish community lived on the other side of the city. It was interesting; all the major congregations, including the major German reform congregations, were on the East Side, too. But the German Jews had begun moving to the west side of the city, and a number of Jews who came from all over the country to work for the government during the New Deal chose to rent or buy or build on the west side of the city. My elementary school was sort of the progressive model school of the city.

SG: All white, though?

RF: All white. Totally white. Its student body was composed, though – other than the fact that it was all white, it was quite multicultural because there were children of lower echelon diplomats in school.

SG: From foreign countries?

RF: From foreign countries. They were Army and Navy brats who had lived all over the world. It's an interesting experience because kids talk to each other about what they know. You learn a lot that way, whether you're really aware of it as a kid or not. There were a lot of people whose parents were in interesting jobs in government. We talked politics in elementary school.

SG: That's interesting.

RF: I remember that whatever Roosevelt election it would have been when I was in elementary school – it was his second, I guess. It was his second term. Yeah. [Alf] Landon ran against him in his second term. We were kids. We would fight bitterly between the Republicans and the Democrats. I can hear kids saying,

"Well, of course, you're for Roosevelt," because the Jews were for Roosevelt. Everybody knew that.

SG: That's interesting. Were there many Jews versus non-Jews in your classes?

RF: There was a small Jewish population in each class. There were maybe – I don't know – four or five Jewish kids in any class of twenty, twenty-five. It was interesting because there was clearly anti-Semitism. The attitudes of the children, which reflected their parents' attitudes, in many cases, were antisemitic. But it didn't really make much difference. It didn't make us feel insecure or left out. We felt very secure because we were bright, and we had great times, and we still played with all of the kids.

SG: Did you stick together, or you interacted with them?

RF: No, there weren't enough of us to stick together. I always knew that the world was filled with people who didn't like the Jews; they were anti-Semites.

SG: Was it overt?

RF: In some cases. I can still remember in junior high school; Walter O'Connor, whose father was on the school board, which was an appointed school board in Washington; we didn't elect anything or anyone in those days. But Walter O'Connor once called me a dirty Jew, and I hit him in the nose with my fist. I'd never used my fist before.

SG: That's unusual.

RF: The teacher had the two of us before the classroom. We had a whole discussion about it, and Walter and I were dang good friends.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: He used to come over with his best friend, who was one of the boys my mother would not let me date because he wasn't Jewish, but he came over to the house frequently with this other friend. The attitude was, you were not demeaned or diminished by it.

SG: By what's different.

RF: It's there. You accept it. There was always a sense that as you got older, these kids would probably not be your friend anymore. It was just an awareness, but not anything that made – at least, it didn't make me feel in any way that I had less opportunity in class. Of course, when I applied for colleges, I was totally aware of quotas and did not get into Wellesley. I know the one Jewish girl from Washington who did; her mother and my mother were friends. Her mother succeeded my mother as president of Hadassah, and she got in. Once I heard

that she got in, I knew I wasn't going to get in because I knew they take –

SG: They would only take one.

RF: – one Jewish girl from Washington. That was that.

SG: I guess there was the percentage of the class that they would take, how

they would [inaudible].

RF: Oh, yes. They would try to disperse it geographically, too.

SG: What about high school? What were your relationships and your interactions with non-Jews?

RF: Do you want to know who one of my best friends was? I have two famous friends. One was a good friend whose name was George Grizzard; he's a well-known actor today. He was president, and I was secretary – or I may have it reversed – of the Dramatic Society. I acted with him.

SG: Oh my goodness.

RF: We rehearsed a play for two years, but we never produced it. [laughter] I remember. Another classmate and friend was Roger Mudd. During the school week, our friends were all the friends in class, and they were Jewish or not Jewish, depending on who you walked between classes with. You shared all kinds of things with them, and they were buddies and good friends, and you called on the telephone and talked half the night. But on the weekends, you had your Jewish friends. That was very clear.

SG: That's interesting. So then, tell me about college.

RF: [inaudible] Goucher. As a matter of fact, the reason I ended up going to Goucher and not – I wanted to go to [inaudible] school, and I was going to go to Connecticut College for women. But my father was overseas, and my mother got pneumonia. In August, it was decided that she was sick, and my brother wasn't home, and I couldn't go so far away. They went over to Goucher and made a special appeal, so I got in. My aunt, who lived in Baltimore, and another

aunt from New York who was a college guidance counselor in the New York school system – it was arranged; nobody asked me. [laughter] So I went to Goucher, which I ended up liking very, very much.

SG: And you graduated from there?

RF: Yes.

SG: And after graduation?

RF: Next, we got married, and that September, I started graduate school at Johns Hopkins.

SG: And Rashi was at school–?

RF: Rashi was already a graduate student there.

SG: After that, did you get to Boston?

RF: Well, we went from there to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where we lived, more or less, for eleven years. We had, during those eleven years, three years in Washington at different times.

SG: What were you doing in Washington those times?

RF: The first time we went to Washington was in 1957; one of our kids was born in Washington that year. Rashi came to ask our university to go to the Bureau of the Census in order to determine whether brand-new, first-time computer, which the Census still had to have installed [inaudible] applications [inaudible]. Very momentous. In 1957, they were still debating or just beginning to learn.

SG: And then you went back?

RF: And then we went back to Chapel Hill. And then we came back to Washington when President [John F.] Kennedy became President. Rashi decided – got very excited, and said he wanted to come to Washington [inaudible] "Find out where I can serve. I'll come. I'll come." Then the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers called and invited him to come up, and they began to talk salary. They asked him what he was making in Chapel Hill. Rashi told them, "Less than he was making [inaudible]." He was afraid he wouldn't get to come because they couldn't pay him that much in Washington.

The world has changed considerably since those days. But we had some good years in Washington. We had really exciting years in the Washington capital. Three more years or five more years, Rashi [inaudible] Potomoc fever [inaudible] Brookings Institution, and then Rashi was invited to come to Harvard.

SG: When was that?

RF: That was 1968.

SG: Now, you have children. How many children?

RF: We had four kids.

SG: Where were they born?

RF: [inaudible]

SG: One in Washington.

RF: Yeah. Our one child was born in Washington in 1957 when we lived there. The others [inaudible] Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to which they still hold [inaudible].

SG: When you came back to the Boston area [inaudible]?

RF: I can remember we organized our lives stupidly. Rashi [inaudible] every weekend [inaudible] every weekend [inaudible] fly out to [inaudible] fly up again to look at more houses. But we ended up [inaudible] Cambridge [inaudible]. We moved out [inaudible] because [inaudible].

SG: Tell me about your perception of the Jewish community in moving to the Boston area. [inaudible]

RF: Very different, very different. [inaudible] it's changing [inaudible] become so [inaudible] Jewish community. I was involved in an area of the community which [inaudible] important to us. It's taken a long time. I could not get over the fact that the Jewish community was so [inaudible] in Boston. In Washington, [inaudible].

SG: What makes you think that they are?

RF: I think it's [inaudible]. It's taken years to get [inaudible] Federation to get interested in – or understand that they have a faith [inaudible]. Getting them to understand they ought to be – [inaudible] they should know and be involved and understand the legislation.

SG: You mean lobbying?

RF: Lobbying is an ultimate piece of it. But well before that, just having an awareness that the government plays a role and that politics play a role. We used to try and [inaudible] particular program; there was little interest in the political figures compared to the world we knew. It's true. [inaudible]

SG: [inaudible]

RF: Yeah. We used to say you can measure a community by its dinner table conversations, and our kids, raised in Washington, were about as street smart and politically savvy as kids could be.

SG: When they [inaudible]?

RF: Yeah. They'd [inaudible] a naiveté from their perspective on all these issues [inaudible] crucial to them – they still are. They're still very [inaudible] five and seven

years in Washington. They're all very politically active people [inaudible], a different kind of [inaudible]. Here, around the dinner table in the Boston area – we used to compare notes with my brother-in-law with his kids, who have much – who are just as bright as our kids [inaudible], but their dinner table conversation was of a different nature. They didn't talk politics at the table.

SG: Was it social?

RF: Yes. Well, more intellectual, maybe.

SG: But not political?

RF: But not political. Yeah. It really shapes your children's lives. Seven years in Washington made them totally aware – not [inaudible] Jewish community reflects that. What our kids used to say, in our early years in Boston, to me – ask me, "Mom, how come you're so much [inaudible]? How come you're more Jewish here than you were in Washington?" They meant that everything they saw me do here in those years was Jewish in spite of the fact that I was a volunteer

librarian at Angier Elementary School and all those things. The big issue – the people who came to the house to have meetings were always for Jewish groups.

SG: Why is that?

RF: Because it is very hard to become a part of anything but Jewish groups in Boston. Part of it is because we lived in Newton, which was a much more homogenous community than we were accustomed to. The kids, I remember, the

first year we were there, there were a few [inaudible] kids in Angier Elementary School, where our daughters were. One day, going up the stairs, a Black kid fell, and there was a thought that he had been pushed by another person. It hadn't happened that way. The

kid had fallen. They quickly called an assembly, and they talked about love and brotherhood and all these nice and wonderful things. Our kids, both our girls – one was in the second grade, and one was in the fourth

grade, I think – came home hysterical. “You won’t believe what went on,” they said. “They think that’s an incident. They don’t know.” These were two little girls.

SG: That’s amazing at that age.

RF: They were still aware of this overreaction to something, and they knew what really what the real world was all about, they thought.

SG: Well, they had been to school in Washington, where it was more mixed.

RF: Yes. Much more mixed, and where you had –

SG: Because, by that time, it was desegregated in Washington.

RF: Our kids only knew desegregated schools in Washington. As a matter of fact, in Chapel Hill, they only knew desegregated schools. I think I’m right. Wait a minute. Yes, that’s right. By the time Alan started school in Chapel Hill, it was desegregated.

SG: And what percentage of the class was Black versus white in Washington at that time?

RF: It ranged. It was both kids who lived in the neighborhood who were Black, and we had busing into the better schools, the so-called better schools. The school system itself was, by that time, already seventy-five percent Black and growing blacker almost daily.

SG: That was in the –?

RF: That was in the sixties.

SG: – early ‘60s.

RF: Through from ‘62 to ‘68. Yeah, something like that.

SG: You were very active in organizations in Washington other than Jewish organizations.

RF: Yes. One of the first things, through the PTA [Parent Teacher Association], which was an involvement that’s automatic in those years, as you well know – but in Washington, the PTA was a very vital and real and important activity. Through that, I got involved in something called DC Citizens for Better Public Education, which was working to improve the schools in Washington and get better funding. To do that, you had to work not just with the district governor but with Congress, who controls the budget for DC. So it was a very painful and difficult and awkward –

SG: Political?

RF: – political kind of thing. I became coordinator of volunteer librarians for the elementary schools in Washington, which was a totally volunteer effort because there were no paid librarians. We finally did get paid librarians in the end, but we were putting volunteer librarians in all the elementary schools.

SG: Were you involved in Jewish [inaudible] activities also?

RF: Oh, yes.

SG: What did you do there?

RF: I began with two or three major developments. One was Hadassah, which I’d always sort of – kind of a heritage, and I became president of a Hadassah group. Another was the Federation. The third was our synagogue, where I was both – how did this work? I was both president of the PTA, and I taught there. [laughter]

SG: That's quite a combination. And then, when you came to Newton, what activities did you start?

RF: We joined Temple Reyim, and so we became active there, and I eventually then became chairman of the school committee there and volunteered in the library there.

SG: At Temple Reyim?

RF: At Temple Reyim, and then volunteering in the library also at Angier's School, because by then, I really – I've lost it all, but I was a librarian. I was going to learn through the apprentice system [inaudible] any courses. I really felt like a librarian. And now – gone. I don't know anything about it.

SG: So most of your activities then were volunteer activities.

RF: Yes.

SG: You didn't get [inaudible] in the working world.

RF: No, I didn't teach in Boston at all, I don't think. No.

SG: What Jewish organizations did you join besides the temple?

RF: Hadassah, again. We're very fortunate because Hadassah does a better job than the Federations of transferring you. Many people in Washington called many of their friends in Boston, so Hadassah found me right away. I got involved in organizing new groups because that's what I had been doing in Washington. We started two groups in Newton, one that has provided a lot of – started [inaudible] very young people, but now it's sort of a leadership. But fortunately for me, I began a study group. Fortunately, because I, all of a sudden, developed a slipped disc and was on my back for four months. I lay on my back in our family room with all these women sitting around, and I lectured. [laughter] It was a study group that lasted for however many years – eleven,

ten, twelve? I forget that we lived in Newton with an interesting group of women with whom I'm still friendly.

SG: What was the study group about?

RF: Each year, we would vote on what we wanted to do, following a series of debates and discussions. One year we did –

SG: This is a Hadassah group?

RF: It is a Hadassah study group, yes. American Jewish history. We did world Jewish history. We did ancient history. We did Jewish literature.

SG: How often did you meet?

RF: I don't remember. [inaudible]

SG: I was just curious. I didn't realize that they had intellectual-type groups. I thought it was more –

RF: Oh, yes. It was very successful. As a matter of fact, for a while, there were two separate groups. Then we combined because it seemed silly. But they always met – we had a huge family room in our house, in Waban, and we always met there, in the morning. It must have been twice a month; I don't remember. It was good. It was high-level. People read and studied to the point where, I still remember one woman, who you know, in June, asking me for a reading list because they were going away for the summer, and she wanted to have a series of good books to read. People really were following a particular course of study, and people took it seriously.

SG: There you go.

RF: We had a good time doing that. I also did a couple of those for young women's divisions in the Federation over the years.

SG: Now, tell me about social life here. Can you contrast that?

RF: Yes. Even the academic is different, I think, in Chapel Hill, but that's obviously still [inaudible] factor, in Chapel Hill. We had two worlds: the local Jewish community and the academic community. The academic community was both Jewish and non-Jewish, together, and it was all mixed. Here, whether it is an accident or for real, most of our academic friends are Jewish, and most social associations are Jewish.

SG: Are there other members of the faculty that are not Jewish that you believe that there's some sort of a separation?

RF: Well, it's another difference between Boston and everywhere else we've lived, and we've been in academic communities in three places. Boston is the least friendly place we've come to, and there is less sense of sharing and being part of a group, in a sense, which seems to contrast with what I said earlier about–

SG: In terms of the academic community, [inaudible] –?

RF: In the academic community. Part of it is geography, I guess, too, because we all lived in so many different places. You are less likely to have all your social contacts in the academic community than you are in other places. In Chapel Hill, we pushed to be part of the Jewish community. We were perceived by the Jewish community as part of the academic community because we had our whole life there and had some nice Jewish friends also. But it was not customary – the town and gown schtick.

SG: You had to make an effort to be part of the local Jewish community.

RF: Yes.

SG: Whereas here –?

RF: Here, we're much more part of the local Jewish community. The academic community – there are lots of little cliques or enclaves, but it's very different.

SG: Probably, the academic community is larger.

RF: Much larger. It's a number of universities. Our friends in the academic community tend to be – one, if they're economists, they tend to be Jewish. [laughter] If they're in the medical side, they also tend to be Jewish [inaudible].

SG: There seem to be a lot of Jewish doctors and a lot of Jewish economists.

RF: Sometimes, we sort of desperately search for some non-Jews to include at a particular dinner party, where it seems to make sense, and it's hard to find, though we don't consciously restrict ourselves to Jewish friends. It's a different world.

SG: So, do you find that more of your social contacts are outside of the academic world?

RF: It's a mix. It's like traveling in two worlds, almost because occasionally, we bring people together, but they're not part of the same world. They enjoy each other's company when they're together, and they know each other, either because they belong to the same synagogue, or some of the academics are involved in CJP [Combined Jewish Philanthropies], or whatever. But the so-called – I don't know how you define a little social world, but those are sort of separate. [Tape paused.]

SG: Now, I'd like to go more into Jewish observance. Your father had been trained as a rabbi. Can you tell me something about – in your growing up years, what types of Jewish observances and rituals [inaudible]?

RF: Though my father was a Reform rabbi, he was trained at the Jewish Institute of Religion with Stephen Weisz in New York. He was, in his practice, a traditional and

observant Jew. Though the first six years of my life, when he was a practicing Rabbi, we practiced the Reform religion in the synagogue. At home, we observed [inaudible] days, and at home, we kept kosher, and at home on Shabbos, there were things I could not do, like ride my bicycle and stuff like that – or tricycle [inaudible]. When we moved to Washington, we joined an Orthodox shul. Our home and our observance at home was much more traditional. So we drove to that shul every Shabbos morning. My father was not – that, he did.

SG: You have brothers and sisters?

RF: I have a younger brother.

SG: What about celebration of holidays?

RF: Well, Joel and I were the only kids in class that stayed out two days for every [inaudible] – maybe not the only ones – practically the only. Holidays in our house were observed in a most traditional way.

SG: You were faithful and observant.

RF: Oh, yes.

SG: What about with you and Rashi and your children? Can you tell me about the religious [inaudible] in the family?

RF: It's very interesting to me anyway because Rashi was brought up in a very, very Jewish home. His father was a Jewish scholar, always taught in Jewish schools, wrote in Jewish periodicals, initially in Yiddish and later years, in Hebrew, both the teaching and the writing. But it was a totally non-religious home, and it was part of that Eastern European tradition of secular Judaism. Rashi knew a tremendous amount of Jewish history because that was important to teach him and to be a part of, and his Jewish

education, in essence, was tremendous, but he had not had religious training [inaudible]. However, from the very beginning, we were always part of a Conservative synagogue. Initially, when we were graduates, we were [inaudible]. Rashi's attendance was limited to Holy Days.

SG: Can you explain a little bit about the difference between the religious education that you had and secular [inaudible]?

RF: Right. Actually, it's interesting because, in terms of formal Jewish education, I also had – there were then, as we were growing up –

SG: In Washington, DC?

RF: No, in general, in the United States, there were the vestiges of three streams of Jewish education, really, for children. One was the traditional cheder – Talmud Torah, either connected with a synagogue or connected with some community structure. That was sort of religious Jewish education. You learned Chumash. You learned the Bible in Hebrew, and you learned prayers. You learned how to the siddurs. As a matter of fact, you had contests to see who could read a particular prayer the fastest.

SG: Was this instead of public school?

RF: No, no.

SG: Or in addition?

RF: This was, in this case – so day school did not exist really in this country until after the Second World War. They really were very hardly any at all. Another [inaudible], which was decreasing in importance and significance and was practically in Washington minimal by the time I came along, but which did exist certainly in New York City and many cities across the United States, were Yiddish [inaudible], which were secular

Jewish schools whose language of instruction was the Yiddish, whose purpose was to teach Yiddish culture and literature and Jewish history, and whose orientation was either Bundist, strictly Socialist, or Socialist Zionist, or whatever, but not religious. Then there was a third kind of Jewish education, and that was Zionist Jewish education, which meant teaching modern Hebrew, and that's where you first – those are the first schools in which Hebrew was taught with the pronunciation that [inaudible] Sephardic pronunciation, and those schools really – though they taught Chumash and other traditional subjects – [Tape paused.]

SG: These schools were in addition to the regular public school?

RF: Yes. They were afternoon Hebrew schools. Though many of the – in some parts of the country and in Canada, the Yiddish [inaudible] – especially in Canada, I guess, though in the United States, too – work in lieu of public schools. I don't know the definition of [inaudible] school is.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: But they were secular, so it's kind of hard to [inaudible].

SG: Yeah, I suppose. Were you bat mitzvahed?

RF: No, hadn't been invented yet.

SG: Confirmed?

RF: I was confirmed in the Conservative synagogue, where the music – as we marched in, all of us in our white long dresses, was the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers."

SG: [laughter]

RF: The [inaudible] didn't know that tune had been used for [inaudible]. He just knew it as some classical tune. [laughter]

SG: What about your brother?

RF: We both were the products of this independent Zionist Hebrew School, which eventually when you can't go any longer, kind of faded away, and so then I went onto school at the Conservative synagogue, to which we did not belong, but that is the school [inaudible]. My brother went back to Orthodox shul to which we belonged, and from that shul, he became bar mitzvahed.

SG: Was Yiddish spoken in your home or within any [inaudible]?

RF: Oh, yeah. My parents both spoke Yiddish very well and used it – we used to say, as every other person my age said when they didn't want children to know what they were talking about. They used Yiddish, and my grandparents were around, and they spoke Yiddish. I grew up always knowing some Yiddish. My Yiddish really got perfected after I married Rashi, and his grandmother spoke only Yiddish.

SG: Your grandparents then spoke both English and Yiddish.

RF: English and Yiddish, yeah.

SG: What were your parent's attitudes towards assimilation?

RF: They were [inaudible]. [laughter] Assimilation was [inaudible].

SG: [inaudible]

RF: Yes. [inaudible] It's a word that we don't use anymore, which I think is very interesting. We used to use assimilation [inaudible] since. But assimilation meant changing your name and trying to be 110% American, we used to say, and [inaudible]

un-Jewish [inaudible] integration into community [inaudible] very much a part of [inaudible] involved in [inaudible] with schools and when [inaudible] activity [inaudible] relationships [inaudible] became integrated with the society. [inaudible]

SG: I see. I think that this term [inaudible] industries and professions were [inaudible] when you were in your school years [inaudible] and after [inaudible]?

RF: [inaudible] and my reason was [inaudible] it was totally selfish [inaudible] serve mankind in any way, shape, or form. [inaudible] I remember that [inaudible].

SG: Did anyone else inform your decision as to what you were [inaudible]?

RF: No. [inaudible] My mother had been a teacher, and I never wanted to be a teacher. [inaudible] but I really [inaudible] towards a [inaudible].

SG: Did your parents have any influence on your [inaudible]?

RF: I don't think so. [inaudible] influence on the kind of stuff [inaudible] interested in. [inaudible] history was really – I can remember – my interest in the social sciences, in general, and [inaudible] whether it was sociology, anthropology, history [inaudible] there were a lot of them. The books that had the most impact on me as a child [inaudible].

SG: [inaudible]

RF: [inaudible] African folklore. Rashi read those books cover to cover many times. Also, another [inaudible] as a (muckraker?). I thought that was really cool.

SG: Did being Jewish affect your career?

RF: No. It's interesting because I was thinking back in terms of the woman who wanted to interview me about anti-Semitism at that time. The big hurdle was getting into college. For me, since I was not choosing – [inaudible] choose a field that was any of the

sciences – [inaudible] was my major. The area in which I was interested, there was not the kind of barrier, and I never felt it. Really didn't. A later barrier to my career was the fact that in my day, it was still considered a hangover from the Depression – most universities would not hire husbands and wives because of in the Depression, there was enough to give work to one member of the family and pass a few jobs around to someone else.

SG: Now, we're going to get back to lifestyle to compare your life growing up [inaudible] with your children.

RF: Interesting. I used to observe that comparison for the years that we lived in Washington and our children growing up there and because that, for me, was the only – those seven years were the only period of time when I was living in the same place – where my children were living in the same place where I had grown up. Our [inaudible] similar, excepting that mine was totally white. I think I spoke about this one opportunity I had to work to be part of a teenage group with Black children. But other than that, my experience was totally white, and theirs were not. But our involvement and interest in the city of Washington, all the way from the Washington Redskins to visits to the Lincoln Memorial, were really very similar. The kinds of things we did, whether it was sort of recreational activities or cultural activities, it was really very much the same, which is interesting, I guess.

SG: Your friends that were different on weekends from the ones that were in school, how about [inaudible]?

RF: No, that is different. That there was a difference in Washington. Because in Washington, that whole group of mixed friendships prevailed always, seven days a week. This is mainly for the boys who were older at that point.

SG: You have how many children?

RF: Four kids?

SG: They are?

RF: Two boys and two girls.

SG: The two boys are older?

RF: The two boys are the older. Their social relationships were totally free and open, and mixed. That mixture included Michael's Greek friend, whose mother said to me, "I need to talk to you. How is it you get your kids to go to Hebrew School? We're trying to get (Photios?) to go to afternoon preschool, and he resists." So we then discussed the similarities about trying to preserve an independent, separate culture within the larger culture, what problems that faced. I discovered that the Greek community in Washington had similar kinds of issues – Asian kids, Black kids, Jewish kids, all kinds. Their experiences with friendships was much broader even than mine, and even the Washington that I grew up in. So that was great. When we moved to Newton, their experiences became much more limited than mine had been. I sometimes think that Jewishly we didn't do our kids a favor by moving to Newton.

SG: In what way?

RF: And sending them to Newton South High School, especially the high school (inaudible) – I would experience this with all four of them, where they were exposed to a totally different kind of – I please would like this to come out sounding right. I don't want to say it, so it sounds wrong, but I'm sure we will. No, we'll leave it on because I think I need to – I think I'm saying something. I've had many, many good friends, and many of their friends [inaudible]. They had many wonderful friends, many of whom were Jewish and were great kids. But there was a whole group of Jewish children that they had never been exposed to before – a kind of child, a kind of young person totally indulged by their parents whom my kids assumed must be much, much richer than we were because of

the material things they had, whether it was the cars, or the clothes, or whatever. What seems to be to our kids already a different set of values –

SG: This is the high school years?

RF: High school years. Until we moved to Newton, they didn't know that there were many different kinds of Jews. They thought that all Jews were wonderful liberal people, to begin with, great sense of values, that their Jewishness was expressed through observance and some sort of genuineness about that observance, and that they were important members of the community, a larger community of which they were part. When we came to Newton, they discovered that yes, there are those kinds of Jews [inaudible] I don't want to suggest that they're not, but they also, for the first time, discovered – they began saying negative things about Jews because that was part of their new experience. [inaudible]

SG: They began saying negative things about certain Jews.

RF: Yeah. And beginning to generalize a little. That was my concern, always fighting that generalization in a sense.

SG: Now, were their friends in Newton – what was the experience of their friendships?

RF: They selected the most interesting group of kids. Someday, it would be fun to write about who my kids chose as friends because I think they are some really, very interesting kids. What I found – first, the boys grew up in very tumultuous times in the United States and were very much caught up in the Vietnam and immediate post-Vietnam period. Almost all of those very close friends came from multi-degreed families, and highly either academic, or [Route] 128 high-tech families, but all of the kids – it was as though [they] had a rebellion of their own, our kids included, and that rebellion was toward the arts and away from the strict adherence to academic rigor, in a sense. I don't mean in terms of school. They all do well in school. That's a separate thing. But the things that we're

interested in were very creative kinds of things, the things they did. The one whose father was a doctor who became a caterer –

SG: Became a what?

RF: A caterer. Or the one whose father was a PhD, physical engineer from Raytheon, who is a carpenter – all of them having gone to college, and one of them at least making Phi Beta in college. Or our son who became an artist and a photographer, whose father was a professor. There were too many to say it was just by chance, and I found it very interesting.

SG: That is interesting. I have encountered that also. [inaudible] I don't want to generalize, but men seem to want to reject the formal professions –

RF: Yeah, exactly. That's a good way of saying it.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: None of them became doctors – well, one did become a lawyer and regretted it ever since. But all the rest of that whole crew – and the only one who became a doctor is a psychiatrist.

SG: Do you have any ideas as to what to attribute that to?

RF: Well, I do, in a way. I go back to myself. I can remember in college, these long nights, full sessions, where some of the girls in the dorm, who have just discovered Marxism, or some other much more liberal social system than what they were used to. That became their rebellion against their very right-wing parents. Thinking to myself, "It's no fair. I can't rebel and do these things. These are the guys which I was raised." Well, I think our kids couldn't rebel. Our attitudes toward Vietnam were exactly the same as theirs. So they couldn't rebel in that way. You have to rebel. You got to do

something.

SG: Each generation needs to have something –

RF: Yeah, absolutely. They found their something in the arts, in creative thinking, and whatever.

SG: This is another social question [inaudible]. From your experience, is condominium or private home living in Boston bringing us closer back to the neighborliness of the tenants that quote, "[inaudible] neighbor" and the block party.

RF: That's really very interesting because I comment every once in a while because I'm very aware of it; I see more of my neighbors when I walk out on the street here than I ever did in Waban. In Waban, we might wave from car windows, but we weren't walking over to the corner together. Here, we're always out on the street walking, and I bump into neighbors all the time. In our building, we have a very nice, friendly, really kind of old-fashioned relationship. We help each other out all the time if we need it. When someone's having a party, we all knock ourselves out to move our cars to the streets, so they can use our parking spaces. We take in mail for each other. We have a neighbor who gets up very early in the morning and puts everybody's paper on the elevators. Seven o'clock, I can push the elevator button and take my newspapers off the elevator. That's terrific. We're much closer together, obviously. But beyond that, and I think some of the condominium concept – you have to have a meeting twice a year by our bylaws, therefore –

SG: You get to know each other.

RF: We get to know each other.

SG: You participate in the management and ownership. What about the religious makeup of your building?

RF: Our building, I think we may just be tipping because some people just moved out, and they sold their apartment to a Jewish family. That may be that we're no longer five and five; we may be six – I think we're going to be six and four. But it's been a nice mix.

SG: Six Jewish versus four –?

RF: Yes. It's been almost – though there's been a lot of turnover in the twelve years we've been here – people have been transferred elsewhere – but it's always been a mix, and it's a very carefree mix, and we're very much a part of everybody else's world, in a sense. We joke about it, talk about it.

SG: Have you run into anti-Semitism in finding a place to live ever, in all of your experiences?

RF: It's interesting. No. But we had an experience when we were first married. Before we were married, we were looking for an apartment in Baltimore. Baltimore, like Boston – it didn't have the same rigidly defined neighborhoods as Boston does, but there were areas. In Baltimore, there were areas where Jews were not allowed to live, and everybody knew that, and it was tested.

SG: When was that?

RF: This was in the late '40s? Well, it was through the early '50s. Yeah, it was through the early '50s or into the '50s. A very, very prominent professor who became a Nobel Laureate and who came to Johns Hopkins to Harvard and spent his last years here, when he came to Hopkins, wanted to buy a house near the university in a very lovely area called Roland Park, and was told by the agent, "I don't think you would be very happy because you won't find people like yourself here." He went to the president of the university, assuming he would get his support, and the president told him, "Well, you can't live there. You have to go over to Forest Park," whatever the Jewish neighborhood was. That was Baltimore.

SG: When was that about?

RF: And that was even after – that was about five years after we first looked at an apartment. The apartment we liked was in a new complex, brand-new apartment development, but it was in a neighborhood, which had been no Jews. We went to look at the apartment, and we liked it. My father-in-law said, "You can't live there. I'm going to go and talk to [inaudible] because you [inaudible]." My father-in-law – the three of us drove over to look at the apartment. He said to the agent, "I want to tell you something." He said, "You know, my son is circumcised. Does that makes a difference?" The agent says, "Well, so am I?" We lived there, and there was no problem, but we had been told by a Jewish real estate agent, who was a good friend of our family, that we shouldn't look there because Jews weren't allowed there. There was a time lag between what was reality and what had been reality and what was now only perception. But other than that, we never had a problem. But you're careful. Always, wherever you live, in those days, you didn't look for places where you didn't think you'd be welcome. My parents, when we moved to Washington, and we rented for the first few years, and when they were looking to buy the house, they bought a house in a neighborhood that was right on the fringe of Wesley Heights. Wesley Heights was a neighborhood in Washington that until – when President [Richard] Nixon owned a house there before he was President, he had a covenant in his deed, which said you can't sell to a Jew. That neighborhood was still restricted in those years. My parents knew they couldn't – they were daring to buy a house that abutted that neighborhood.

SG: That was when you were growing up?

RF: When I was growing up.

SG: When you moved to Boston, were you aware of any areas in Boston?

RF: Yes. Not areas where Jews were not allowed, but we knew that there were areas where Jews didn't live. We were not interested in living in a neighborhood or in a community that didn't have synagogues, that didn't have Jewish children for our kids.

SG: So you were self-selective.

RF: We were self-selective, sure. As a matter of fact, our concern was that it might be – we were also concerned at the other end that it would be too Jewish. We looked at a house in Newton Centre, and Rashi discovered that a woman who was going to be a colleague of his lived next door. So he decided to call her and see what she thought and what she could – we had some questions about the neighborhood and how far I'd walk to school. One of the things he said to ask her was, "(Mary Lee?), we're living in Cleveland Park now in Washington. It's a very heterogeneous neighborhood, and we like that, and we like our kids to be raised in [inaudible] heterogeneous environments." She said, "Oh, this street is very heterogeneous. We have radiologists. We have psychiatrists." [laughter] So we didn't buy that house, but not because of that. I would have loved to have bought that house.

SG: That's funny. Who or what were important influences on your life in Boston?

RF: In Boston. Let's see. Well, that's a hard – coming to Boston at the age which we did, it's hard. You don't think of people as influences in the same way as you do when they come upon you at a younger time in your life.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: It really doesn't.

SG: Probably not appropriate [inaudible]

RF: There were some people in my work at CJP whom I really looked up and in Hadassah, but not in the same way [inaudible]. I can't stand the word role model. Not in that sense.

SG: How much have you participated in a cultural life? Or how much has cultural life contributed to your life?

RF: Tremendously.

SG: In Boston.

RF: In the Boston area, it's one of the pluses [inaudible]. But the interesting thing is that when we came, we're coming from – in the years we lived in Washington, you couldn't get season tickets to the National Symphony Orchestra, or to the Philadelphia Symphony, which had six concerts in Washington a season, because they stayed in families for generations. One of the conditions Rashi thought he had to negotiate with Harvard was season tickets –

SG: To Boston Symphony?

RF: – to BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra], which we got, but I guess we could have gotten them anyway. This is the whole big deal. After a couple of seasons, we decided we didn't like the BSO that much, and we started concentrating on other fun musical opportunities.

SG: How about theater?

RF: A lot of theater, a lot of music.

SG: Art?

RF: Art. Especially living here in town, as you well know.

SG: Yeah. It's wonderful. Now, these are on Jewish identity. How do you define being Jewish? That's a tough question.

RF: It is a tough question. It's the kind of question – in our younger years, we used to sit around and debate, and you said, "Being Jewish is like a wheel, and the wheel has many spokes. A wheel will continue to go around, even if it doesn't have all of its spokes. But the more folks it has, the better it is that was, for some reason, the metaphor. And the more spokes it has, the better it is." That was, for some reason, the metaphor. Those spokes were primarily – or maybe the whole wheel itself was a sense of heritage and the history of being Jewish and a shared memory and background, not immediate background, but the shared culture and history. A big piece of it is the Jewish religion. A bit piece of it is – a part of it, separate from that, a Jewish value system. That value system includes things which one could find in another value system, in someone else's religion or people or whatever. But for us, we've learned through being Jewish. That's significant for us.

SG: Do you celebrate the Jewish holidays?

RF: Yes.

SG: How about your own observance within your own family, your children?

RF: Holidays, Shabbat – it has been a tradition in our family that Friday night is sacred, in both the literal and the metaphoric sense. Rashi and I have never accepted social invitations on Friday night, ever – or maybe I should say since the children were born, but I really don't remember. But always have as much of the family around us Friday night for dinner as are around, always can come. Everyone in the extended family in the Boston area knows that I cook on Friday, and so people call and say, "Can I come [inaudible]?" That includes kids who are in school here –

SG: That's lovely.

RF: – and our children, of course. I just had a serious phone call with my [inaudible] – felt guilty because she had to make an arrangement with someone else for Friday night, and she felt badly about it. But kids come Friday night. Sometimes, nobody can come, but still, it's Friday night, and we still have a – it's my one [inaudible] Friday, I cook. It's my one time a real housewife [inaudible].

SG: [inaudible]

RF: We also observe holidays [inaudible] try to also do the same thing.

SG: Did your children go through –? What type of religious school [inaudible]?

RF: They all went to afternoon Hebrew school. All of them, through high school, whatever was available. None of them went to day school.

SG: Are they married now?

RF: Our boys are married.

SG: And did they marry someone Jewish?

RF: Yes. [laughter] My mother used to get angry when someone would say to her, "How lucky you are; your children married such nice Jewish spouses from such nice Jewish families." She would say, "It was not luck at all." But she was wrong; it's luck. [laughter]

SG: Do you think it's easy to be a Jew in Boston?

RF: Yes, I think so.

SG: Why?

RF: Because the critical mass is there. That's number one. There really have to be enough Jews to make it easy to be a Jew. And that means that there are sufficient

institutions of Jewish life. That means that it's easy to be whatever kind of Jew you want to be. I firmly believe in that. If synagogues are the main focus of your Jewish experience, you've got a real choice. If [inaudible] organizations, if other kinds of institutions are, there's just many, many ways of expressing being Jewish.

SG: Do you think that you would maintain your Jewish identity as easily in any other area of the US as you do in Boston? For instance, if you live in a rural or isolated area.

RF: Yes. It's interesting. There are two other kinds of Jewish communities, I guess, and I think about it a lot. Or – no, that's an exaggeration. I do think about it. Frequently, the American Jewish Historical Society has its national conference in a small town, Middle America, Omaha, Nebraska, or Kansas City, or Denver, Colorado; these are much smaller Jewish communities than Boston. However, every time we meet in one of those communities, we are overwhelmed by the reception, by the welcome, by what those communities do for us, and with what pride they show us. They put us on a bus to show us every little – I shouldn't say "every little" – every Jewish institution that they have, tell us the history of every bubbe and zayde who came from wherever they came. You really get a sense –

SG: How large is this group that meets at this place?

RF: A few hundred, a couple hundred. I really get a sense that it's possible that the optimal place in which to raise a Jewish family is a community that is big enough to have maintained institutions of Jewish life, but small enough so that everyone feels they have to be a part, that they have this sense of responsibility that we really can't survive without them.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: You find the activity in the synagogues, in their Hadassah groups, and their sisterhoods, and their Federations and everything, and with a great deal of intensity that

people participate. People take initiative and do things that you can't get them to do in a big city, where there's another Jew who will take care of that. You don't have to worry about it. So I sometimes think that that's – and then again, I think that in Chapel Hill, there were sometimes where there was a very tiny Jewish population, and where a lot of the academic Jewish population was busy trying not to be Jews. Then there were also the cases that we would discover – it became a retirement community. People would come down from Westchester County, choosing Chapel Hill because they thought, "Thank God, here we don't have to be Jewish." Then, their rabbi from Westchester would write to our Hillel rabbi, "I've got a wonderful couple for you." The [inaudible] and I would go and visit these people, and they would be so upset to see us. In that community, it was a good place to raise Jewish kids because, boy, you had to work at it. We had a group whose homes we rotated for Friday night dinner, and we were all very active in Hillel and participated. We had a huge [inaudible] campaign.

SG: You worked hard at it.

RF: You worked hard at it, and your kids had a sense of some specialness and uniqueness about themselves with a piece of separation, but a healthy kind of separation from the [inaudible]. But there are advantages to all three kinds of communities, I think.

SG: What do you consider Jewish values? Philanthropy, morality, etc.?

RF: All the good things are Jewish values. It's hard to talk about them as Jewish values because they're clearly, in a sense, not universal values but shared by every fellow –

SG: They should be universal.

RF: They should be. They're values which, for example, in terms of charity, which all my fellow board members of the United Way share with me, no matter what their backgrounds are. Everybody believes that their religious teachings teach them the good values, and if you believe it's so – because you have [inaudible], believe in [inaudible].

That's just fine. We got taught them by Jews and by our tradition. They're our kinds of values. So, I think, to be a little narrower – everybody takes care of their own, in a sense, but there is a sense of absolutely total responsibility that Jews feel for their fellow Jews, which I think goes beyond what is [inaudible].

SG: Let me be unique.

RF: I think it is unique. I do. That's a value which is terribly important. I think moving further inward from that value, there's a family value that – now, everybody loves their families, but I do think there is a sense of concentric family, various circles, one inside the other, down to the nuclear, which is a particular Jewish value. [inaudible]

SG: [inaudible] Do you think there's a Jewish (vote?) in Boston?

RF: Sure, there's a Jewish (vote?), in spite of the fact that I have many friends who are Republicans; I believe there's a Jewish vote.

SG: I think there certainly tends to be a preponderance.

RF: We know. The data tell us there are.

SG: Democrats, Liberal. But on the other hand, I do know –

RF: I know some very nice Republicans who are Jewish. But by and large, they know they're a minority. The amazing thing is not that there are Republican Jews, but that there are many Jews in the socioeconomic level who should be Republicans, who are Democrats.

SG: If you think of the Republicans being [inaudible] the wealthy ones, who want to maintain status quo, I suppose. But that relates back to their Jewish values. How do you feel about the future of the Jewish politician in Boston? There haven't been very many.

RF: There haven't been very many at all. In the early days, there were more obviously; more Jews lived in Boston, but Jews don't live in Boston anymore. So it's kind of hard –

SG: Well, I think they're thinking of the metropolitan area.

RF: In the metropolitan area and as far as –

SG: [inaudible]

RF: It's interesting because I can list those significant Jewish politicians who have taken elective office in the state of Massachusetts over time and is tiny compared to many, many other states – to most other states. It's very interesting to try to figure out why that is. I'm not quite sure. But Jews have not gone into elected office and not chosen to run for political office in the numbers that they do in other places.

SG: You mentioned earlier that even the children [inaudible] –

RF: That's right. I think people are [inaudible]

SG: – Jewish people are not as politically-oriented than in some of the other areas. Why that is, I don't know.

RF: Jews have taken a more prominent role in [inaudible] pull the strings, or as an (Alan Leventhal?), who raises the funds. I'm just picking two names out of a hat. There are [inaudible] people like that. But other than historically – the first Jew elected to public office – as a matter of fact, he's [inaudible] built this building [inaudible] other half of this building [inaudible] was the first Jew elected to public office, and he was elected to the school committee in Boston.

SG: When was that?

RF: 1890-something. Very late 19th century, which I think is kind of early since [inaudible] come to this country until the 1850s [inaudible] 1840s probably.

SG: That's interesting. [inaudible]

RF: And [inaudible] Stone, who was a state legislator. He was very important. [inaudible] But there were a few of them that you could name them. It's crazy.

SG: I can't think of any at the moment.

RF: Well, we have some in the state legislature.

SG: [inaudible]

RF: We have David [inaudible] Republicans in Worcester [inaudible] smaller number. We do have [inaudible] Frank in Washington.

SG: Oh, that's right.

RF: Me, I come here for the [inaudible]. [laughter]

SG: Do you feel total acceptance by the general community, your peers, and on a personal level [inaudible]?

RF: Community of Jews?

SG: [inaudible] accepted by [inaudible]

RF: I don't know. I guess it's my mother's training. I never [inaudible] total acceptance in every situation [inaudible] I think there are limitations and hesitations [inaudible]

SG: Jewish?

RF: Yes. [inaudible] But I always have the feeling that there is [inaudible] into the social world [inaudible] I don’t know how much [inaudible]

SG: [inaudible] period of time that you’re aware [inaudible].

RF: [inaudible]

[END OF INTERVIEW]