

Dalia Handelman: [00:00:06] So first I wanna say please feel free to stop the interview if you want to at any point. The purpose of this interview is just to, I mean, we've been told already just to get an oral history and a background on your life and, you know, and hear your incredible experiences and stories with all with the Jewish angle basically. So I'm just going to start by stating, "This is Dalia Handelman interviewing- how to pronounce your name. I just want to pronounce it right Connie Kreshtool. interviewing Connie [00:00:36] Kreshtool on Tuesday, June 25th." So just to start, can you please state your name date of birth and location of birth?

Connie Kreshtool: This is Connie Kreshtool. I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts [00:01:07] on May 15, 1927 one of twins. My sister was named Rosalie.

Dalia Handelman: Can you tell me about, about what you remember from your childhood and growing up?

Connie Kreshtool: Oh, my goodness. [00:01:37] Well, since you want the Jewish angle I'll try to give it to you, but it's other things, too. My first recollection, and probably I was two, maybe, I'm not sure, I was three. We lived in apartment in a three-apartment building, [00:02:07] very common buildings in, in Massachusetts, three deckers, they called it. And my grandmother lived on one on one floor, and we lived on another floor apartment. And on the first floor were people who rented [00:02:37] from my grandmother and grandfather [Hyman Lederman] who owned the building. And they had a crystal set and it fascinated me and I remember going into their apartment to hear the crystal set. Do you know what a crystal set is?

Dalia Handelman: I don't actually.

Connie Kreshtool: That would be the first radio were called crystal sets [00:03:13] so I do remember that very early on. I can remember, I was probably, we had moved from there, probably was two or three or something. My grandfather owned the building but in, the in the Depression and the Crash, he lost that house. So we moved, and we moved to the other side of town, and, I must of been [00:03:43] five years old by that time. And I can remember being, hanging out with the kids in the neighborhood, which we did at that time, even at age 5 we, you know were on the corner. I can remember standing on the corner and some kid, big kid, he was really only 6 or 7 said [00:04:14] said that I killed Christ. That was the first thing I remember about that, that anti-Semitic statement coming out of this kid and it stayed with me. I can still see the

corner and it made a real impression on me. It must have, because I still remember I don't remember a lot of other things. [00:04:46] so that was uh... But other than that, so my yeah, my childhood was, was pretty ordinary. My sister and I did very well in school and when we were nine years old my mother had my other sister. Her name is Nancy, and she was very different from Rosalie and me. [00:05:17] She's cute, beautiful little baby we, got used to her as a play thing. We are very active in, in Girl Scouts and in the Scouting movement [00:05:48] and, and we were, and we took first piano lessons and then we— I took the why I took the flute. My sister took the clarinet, and that began with an affiliation with the school band and school orchestra— other the musical combinations.

Dalia Handelman: [00:06:29] So was, it was it all your siblings were your, it was your twin sister and then the other one. Were you the only, like, Jews in your neighborhood?

Connie Kreshtool: I'll tell you the truth, probably in the in the neighborhood, we were. There was a very large Catholic Church [00:06:59] on a hill, that we could see and I think, that probably, and it was a Lithuanian. These were people from Lithuania. Somehow, I got the idea that a lot of them lived in the neighborhood, close to the church. I'm trying to think. [00:07:33] My cousin and aunt and uncle lived kind of around the corner. So there were Jews. There were Jews in the neighborhood. But Worcester was never like Baltimore, for instance, where all the Jews lived in one neighborhood. Worcester wasn't like that. [00:08:03] It was more integrated. It has a strong Jewish community, but it was integrated into the, in general into the, the whole city.

Dalia Handelman: Where, were your parents born in Massachusetts?

Connie Kreshtool: No. My father, my father came to United States, probably, probably somewhere around [00:08:33] 1910, 1912, something like that. He was about, he was born in 1901, so he was somewhere about 10, 11, 12 when he when he came to this country from a town, I guess it was a shtetl and [00:09:05] close to Grodno. He was, which is in Poland, there near, on the border, close to Lithuania. I digress by telling you how I, I always wanted to find out, on a map where it was, by this time he was no longer with us, so [00:09:36] everywhere I went, whether it was in Israel, or other places, I would try to find the town that he called "Osha". [Orša] I was in Poland and we were in Krakow and they had an exhibit a photographs of Jewish cemeteries. This is post-war images [00:10:07] and they were going to make a book of them and the book wasn't

ready. If you signed up they will pay for. I guess they would send us the book. So I did sign up for it. I thought my daughter-in-law's parents came from Czestochowa in Poland might [00:10:37] like to have a copy. And so one day after I came home. Quite a few months after I came home. Actually. I got an email from the photographer that the book was now ready was I interested at this time I wasn't and it was expensive. So [00:11:07] but so but I had he and he said he was traveling around photographing areas that will once a heart of Jewish neighborhood. Yeah, and so I wrote them on and I said I've been looking for a place that my father's called Osha I don't know how it's spelled. I don't know what [00:11:37] I don't know where it is except that. He said it was near Grodno was the big city near well, I got it like a return email, he said and he gave me Osha was a Yiddish name for the town and he gave me the Russian name and the Polish names of the town and he knew where was [00:12:08] I can't give you either one of those foreign names. I have a written. Okay, and, and I looked it up either the Russian or Polish name, Polish probably, and, and found out about the town and in 1926 was long after my father family left. [00:12:40] A lot of people went to South Africa I think but ... And also I was in Paris and they had an exhibit of the synagogues of Europe many of them since destroyed and there was one from that town. I really like that. [00:13:10] Yeah. So anyways, that's where he came from and my mother. they came in 1908. She was five I have a picture of them taken in in Europe and she came from "kamenetz Podulsh" and that you you can find if you look it up. it's with a K- then [00:13:41]

Dalia Handelman: where is- is that a?

Connie Kreshtool: It's today in Ukraine my mother called it Bessarabia. It's also close [00:14:11] to the border of Moldova that but you can find it on any map if you look it up. The other one was a little town. But this ones bigger.

Dalia Handelman: And do you know why like was there a specific reason that your father and mother's families decided to come to America?

Connie Kreshtool: well, I don't I don't know [00:14:41] the exact reason I do know this they came to Worcester because my grandfather's, my grandfather who had a first wife that died and married my grandmother after that but his the [00:15:11] I think the brother of his what's a relation of his first wife that settled in Worcester. I think the I think that it is nothing more Then economic situation in Europe at that time, which was very very bad. They're all so close [00:15:41]

with a lot of anti-Semitism and they heard from people who have gone before them. You know, how wonderful it was now my mother's family. I have no idea what prompted them to come, but I do know. know that my grandfather You know had a brother-in-law so to speak was [00:16:11] in Worcester, but I also know that he had a brother and the Brothers family went to England and we did visit some of them when we were in London. So, you know, everybody was leaving. you see [00:16:49] fiddler on the roof, people were leaving, the economy was very bad. It was just getting worse I think so that's how they came So whether they- I do know that my mother's father was no my father's father. Was here before the family came, but my I think you that I think is the same things true. of my mothers family because theres a picture of my grandmother with her childenre and we all agreed that was the picture that must have been made and sent to her husband that was already working and living in Worcester, so

Dalia Handelman: [00:17:42] Wow that's really fascinating, Do you remember how like holidays were celebrated as a child like, you know growing up, if they were celebrated?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I can remember that. But first I I must say that the social life. Of the family was a big part of our [00:18:12] lives and the families lives. I mean, that's what you did on a a Sunday like today if it was this kind of weather or whatever. We would all get together, have a picnic or something. We had a one of my Uncle's had a um business connection [00:18:42] to a man who had a lot of property on a lake every Sunday the family in the summertime. We would all assemble there and spend the whole day with bring lunch and bring dinner and and and it was private. there was nobody else there and we would swim in the lake and and have a wonderful [00:19:12] time and that was all during the Depression, you know, so that it was a it was a way to entertain ourselves without spending any money. And so that's one thing. and celebrations [00:19:42] we celebrated with the Jewish holidays and I think early in my life. My mother have it kosher kosher kitchen, but it's during the war she gave up on that it's hard to get certain things and it was expensive. so, but we were falling Jews. [00:20:12] born to the temple. I went to Hebrew school religious school and even through high school. I went to classes at the Temple I think [00:20:42] We would go to one of my aunt at the seders mostly by the time my mother had seders I was already out of the house. I probably had my own even even so when I was He is. I have a cousin in Wilmington and she [00:21:12] had the seders but But she her husband moved back to Massachusetts. I took over and and had the seders but as a kid we did celebrate them we

had not not celebrated the way [00:21:42] or observe the way it is today we would get A little something and light the candles that that was it. Yeah. No, no, no one for each Candle and all that other and of course Rosh Hashana. Well, we belonged to a reform congregation that congregation [00:22:12] did two days of Rosh Hashana, so I can remember going to days and we would have a family lunch after the first day. I think that was it a family always got together. That's always how socialization was. ya because everybody lived you know in the area [00:22:42] you didn't have people halfway or you know, yeah cross the country or California or that they're all in the neighborhoods

Dalia Handelman: So you mentioned you went to Hebrew school through like your entire life. Childhood wise

Connie Kreshtool: No, Hebrew itself, no, I guess I must've gone. [00:23:15] I think through eighth grade. That's you know, I think that's as long as I did Hebrew. The religious school went on through high school.

Dalia Handelman: Okay, got it your parents spoke to you in English?

Connie Kreshtool: English. They only used Yiddish when they didn't want us to know what they were saying and that wasn't very often they were English-speaking [00:23:45] and interestingly, My grandmother's. Spoke English they all sorts, of course spoke Yiddish and when my sister married a man from Germany so he would Converse in Yiddish with my grandma My grandmother and they love that they were the only one around who could really talk to them using that

Dalia Handelman: growing up were you close to your twin sister

Connie Kreshtool: Yes, we were very close. So close [00:24:45] that I never use the word "I" always use the word "we" and that to the reason why we went to different colleges to find our own identification.

Dalia Handelman: were you identical?

Connie Kreshtool: Identical.

Dalia Handelman: Oh wow. [00:25:19] So you you were you guys belong to reform synagogue you like particularly involved in the synagogue aside from high holidays, or was it just

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I went every week for the religious school. I can remember we had we had during the week and then we went on Saturdays for um services we had to go [00:25:49] from Third grade to sixth grade you had to go to services and I can remember even then sitting there during services and and it was always these two little old ladies who come every Saturday not too many others and this is 70 80 years ago so it isn't new they're having trouble bringing people in and now [00:26:19] I Every time I go I say to myself, I'm one of those little old ladies. well we were very much involved my mother my dad not too much again, not too much. But my mother was [00:26:49] she sang in the they have a choir and congregation class,

Dalia Handelman: Did you enjoy going to Hebrew School, religious school or like not really?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I can't think of it. I don't you know, it's one of those things that we [00:27:19] had to do so we did it, right. Yeah, we weren't we weren't rebellious children, I wish I knew more and actually the the the Hebrew that we will learning was uh we used to book the [00:27:49] used in the public schools in New York that taught Hebrew. So it was taught as a language like you'd learn French or something and which I guess is good. If you want to speak Hebrew, but the different way that it didn't connect with the any of the text the Jewish texts.

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, it's very [00:28:19] different Hebrew. You mentioned that that one story of you know, almost like one of your first Recollections of that the big kid on your street being like you killed Christ facing your first acts of anti semitism, growing up specifically like in your childhood or even early early adulthood. Do you remember [00:28:49] any like other did you face any other anti-semitism?

Connie Kreshtool: Well the only of the only other thing I remember is that. You know I don't know weather it it has to do with some facilities [00:29:20] hotel room facilities or whatever in some of the vacation spots in New England It was certain places you couldn't go : they didn't want to Jews

Dalia Handelman: during World War Two was there I mean you were in America but was there any up tick of anti-Semitism in America that you can remember?

Connie Kreshtool: [00:29:52] I don't. I do remember that. I think I told you that we went to we went to Services every Shabbat Saturday. And the what we would do is we would have a quarter That's all it took and walked a few blocks and leave the downtown and [00:30:22] there was a like

a tea room that you could get Soup and a sandwich for a quarter and then we have another dime or two and we would go to the Five and Dime Store and we buy something with the dime that we have all we would go to a movie. This is all you know kids 12 years old doing all this which I don't think kids [00:30:52] today do. And we were told not to buy anything made in Germany so that so that was something that I'm talking in the 30s and that definitely was something we knew that life for Jews was not good in Germany and we began to get the German the refugees from Germany [00:31:23] who came to to our Community

Dalia Handelman: so you met refugees from Germany?

Connie Kreshtool: Yeah. Who got out of Germany. This was before the war in the 30s [00:32:13]

Dalia Handelman: Did you interact with any of them? or just knew they were in your town?

Connie Kreshtool: No I wanted there was a boy, gosh I can't remember his name I thought I would... Ralph his name was Ralph Mission, he was in my grade in school And there were others, my mother was very active in the National Council of Jewish Women and they did immigration work. They they actually have a paid person and an office if you wanted to have proof of your citizenship, are you wanted to take out papers, etc, etc. She and a whole host of volunteers did the work for that office [00:32:50] And my father my father over the course of this year. He manufactures girls coats. They called you your sizes five seven nine whatever and he always had a place for someone who's looking for a job and over the years [00:33:21] long after the second world war all the time. Jews came to the United States from Cuba, Romania, Russia. He would just be able to give them something to do.

Dalia Handelman: So, what was your connection to Israel growing [00:33:51]up if any?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I'm going to tell you that I went to a reform congregation right with a wonderful Rabbi, but Israel was not on their agenda and I remember for kindergarten. We went to a community Hebrew school something and there they sang Hatikivah [00:34:21] but I don't remember singing it at Temple Emmanuel. It just was not in the not on their agenda it that was you know, that was before the war. That's you know, it was during the war was it Israel didn't come into being so real that was Palestine, right? Oh, man. It was really a lot of talk about Palestine [00:34:51] and but we did was not we did not concentrate on Palestine. I don't tell just trying to think did we have t anything like a JNF box, You know the conservative congregation in

town was more [00:35:22] Palestine focused but but certainly after the the formation of the state. I thought it was a It was practically [00:35:52] a miracle because we had grown up with the idea that it was like I high in the sky. You know, I'm probably wrong about that about not knowing anything about it. I think we did because I was very much aware of the white paper and that came out in the 30s. Where did I hear that, it must have been [00:36:22] it at hebrew school. So we did have you know, what was happening in the Jewish world, but it wasn't the The center of our curriculum, I [00:36:53] definitely remember the white paper that came out that said Jews were gonna get Palestine

Dalia Handelman: Can you explain what the White paper is?

Connie Kreshtool: It was a commission or something and whether it was whether it was a British commission or whether it was a arab or something we'll have to look it up. Yeah, [00:37:24] but it it was it was an effort to try to satisfy the arabs and uh, it closed off. I'm thinking it closed off at any immigration into Palestine by The Jews. I think that's what it was. [00:37:55]

Dalia Handelman: We can look it up. Yeah, I just I didn't realize it was I wasn't sure if it was something like that just your community had or it was always a big thing. I should definitely know what that was then

Connie Kreshtool: No no ya it was I think it came out of England, British, [00:38:28] **Dalia**

Handelman: Do you remember anything about the day Israel was Esahblished?

Connie Kreshtool: I was in college when I was at University of Illinois in Champaign Urbana, and I'm sure there was something there in the Hillel that I can remember. It was some celebration somehow I can see us not in the Hillel house or whatever we [00:38:58] had there, but they were in the auditorium on campus someplace. Yeah,

Dalia Handelman: so you went to the University of Illinois right was any from what you've been explaining? You know you went to He went to elementary school high school along with religious school in Hebrew school was education like with it always like a given in your household and priority?

Connie Kreshtool: [00:39:29] Well, it was the Lola. Yeah, it was far as my sister and I were concerned. Yeah, probably all the friends went to college it was it was a given somehow that we would go to college and and all my friends went

Dalia Handelman: It's really [00:39:59] interesting because it's not it's not necessarily like such a given like from like the time period that you would have been going to college, especially for women.

Connie Kreshtool: Yeah. Well, I think that's true, but it was it was changing and you know

Dalia Handelman: this is going back a little bit. Did you have a bat Mitzvah?

Connie Kreshtool: No, [00:40:31] we did not have bat mitzvahs we had confirmations, and that we had when we were 16 but we were younger then that I guess a year or two after the 8th grade

Dalia Handelman: okay. Can you so I guess moving up a little bit in your life. [00:41:01] Can you describe to me your first work experience?

Connie Kreshtool: My first work experience [00:41:38] my uncle had a dress shop I can go remember going into the shop on the weekend and playing records, you know, so that the music in the in the store fish if it was for sale or something and my sister and I would take turns putting on the racket turntable, you know, yeah, but I also. [00:42:11] This is during the war. I worked in a hosiery store where the only hosiery you could get was rayon, you know before the war we wore Silk Stockings. and silk was very sheer and neither [00:42:41] dancing you go right through but rayon was what was available during the war and that's what we sold my made 25 cents an hour That was the first experience that I remember.

Dalia Handelman: and how old were you

Connie Kreshtool: I was about 15.

Dalia Handelman: So you were about you were a teenager when the war was going on. [00:43:11]

Connie Kreshtool: Yes, I graduated in the class of 45 so from 41 to 45 and it's during the war and by the end of the war before the end the last year I remember this specifically. During that during that time 41 to 45 [00:43:41] during the war kids could boys usually boys ya could finish their high school before being drafted by the end of the war the last year the minute they got to be 18. they were pulled up and sent off that up. so that I remember [00:44:11] and and I was in high school.

on December 7th. I heard the president's speech and it's cool. Remember that. **Dalia Handelman:** Did you have any friend like any friends getting drafted?

Connie Kreshtool: I don't think friends I don't think any but classmates and neighbours

Dalia Handelman: was the main like difference between before the war and after the war like I'm [00:45:11] especially during the war was the main thing that you were experiencing was like a lack of materials or was there while we're like the big shifts in life?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, we had we had stamps for sugar, gasoline, butter and I can remember and they would most of the schools we use to distribute those [00:45:41] who had to go and get a book of the book of stamps that in order to buy any of those products.

Dalia Handelman: So aside from lack of materials.

Connie Kreshtool: We have a victory garden.

Dalia Handelman: aside from lack of materials Is there anything else that you remember during the world?

Connie Kreshtool: We had a victory. We have a victory garden, you know, we have a guard who my room my [00:46:11] mother raised vegetables and that was something we never did before the war we didn't do it after either then there were the blackouts that to cover your windows so that

Dalia Handelman: What do you mean by blackouts?

Connie Kreshtool: Like [00:46:41] well if in general is it so that you wouldn't be a target

Dalia Handelman: Oh, wow.

Connie Kreshtool: we were 40 miles from the ocean. I don't know, Delaware had submarines right on the shores [00:47:30]

Dalia Handelman: you mentioned the Victory Garden what is that?

Connie Kreshtool: This is like a garden but well, it was a garden that we've raised food vegetables and things because it's a shortage. So you specifically do that during yeah, you know the shortage number one. The government was buying up huge amounts for the guy for the Army. Secondly. There was no one to work the Big Gardens, you know, [00:48:00] so So that they were shortages, heat, butter, gasoline was the big thing I think they had a b and c I think a was if you needed to work, B was also something related to [00:48:30] work the rest of us, you know had two gallons

Dalia Handelman: you mentioned that your mother participated in the choir your synagogue and that you worked at a music I music store for doing the records. Was music a big part of your life?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I think it was ya music was [00:49:15] music was a big thing

Dalia Handelman: Growing up, would you would you identify do you remember if you would identify yourself as you know, was your identity more focused on being an American or was it was there a big focus on the fact that you were Jewish or was it really-?

Connie Kreshtool: There was definitely a focus that we were Jewish. I mean, you know, [00:49:50] and ya I thought of myself as an American Jew. Or Jewish American

Dalia Handelman: there's always a big big debate on that one whether or not you identify as you said you identify as an American Jew where you did at least.

I haven't thought about it much I'm not sure which I would choose actually. I was part of the American scene, but Judaism was an important part of my life. Jewish community, institutions, was pretty much part of all that

Connie Kreshtool: So going back to your the work experience stuff after you know the first few jobs as you were growing up. What was your you know your first work experience in your professional field?

Dalia Handelman: Well, I graduated with a master's degree from Cornell in organic chemistry and I came to work for the Dupont company in Delaware and that's what brought me here

Connie Kreshtool: [00:52:22] so undergraduate you enter University of Illinois, and then you went to Cornell?

Dalia Handelman: Yes and what kind of company is Dupont?

Connie Kreshtool: [00:52:59] Dupont was a very very strong and Global a global Community today? If it was in textile fibers it develops nylon and and became a very rich company, but they also produce pace for pot hole wheels [00:53:29] and one time was connected to General Motors. They did allon which is another fiber, Dacron, which is another fiver Teflon, which is the covering of pots pans that and also Telflon [00:53:59] and then they did things like tide back which is the construction or they didn't- have many different products and a lot of lot of research.

Dalia Handelman: What did you do for that?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I [00:54:30] was in some years. I was in the textile fibers Department pioneering research that was basic research related to polymers and textile fibers. Then I was transferred to the patented division of textile fibers and there I did abstract and indexing [00:55:01] of the various reports produced in the textile fibers department. They had research being done in Wilmington research and all of their textile plants and it was a way to have a central Clearinghouse It was all done before computers. But of course now with all the [00:55:31] computers

Dalia Handelman: How did your family feel about you leaving, Massachusetts?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I never asked them you know didn't no anybody in Wilmington. [00:56:13] I was excited to see how it worked what it was all about

Dalia Handelman: Did your sister care

Connie Kreshtool: my sister well she she started off at with a she had an atomic energy fellowship at Radcliffe, part of and many times. In the mean time She she became engaged and [00:56:43] somehow or another she did not continue with that program ended up working for the booster foundation for experimental biology actually where I had spent a couple of Summer's doing and doing training like you are they develop the birth control pill [00:57:14] and she work there. And then years later when her kids were in school high school she went back and got a PHD in social planning for the elderly and did some very special work on elder abuse [00:57:44] wrote a couple of books, etc, etc So she did end up she was in biochemical chemistry. But left she went to the University of Wisconsin. [00:58:44] She left there and went to harvard, she left there I guess she didn't like it she was going back and forth from Boston and Worcester so it was too much I guess

Dalia Handelman: did you stay close you and your sister?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I think we stayed as close as we could, you know, it's a kind of a touchy question because we would never- we were brought up. With the time when you used [00:59:14] to telephone only in emergency. I mean, you know, so none of us would telephone and while in her later years my mother didn't get daily calls from us, she said all my friends Kids are calling

[00:59:44] it all the time. Well, neither Rosalie and I called my mother that often and it probably was a mistake.

Dalia Handelman: Did I mean did your job connect you to Judaism at all? Like connect you to like make you feel [01:00:14] any were there other Jews in Dupont?

Connie Kreshtool: There were other Jews Dupont expanded greatly after the war. And in that expansion brought many Jews to Wilmington. Okay, first of all, probably very bright people and still looking for the best. And while the company had [01:00:44] had was tainted with anti-Semitism. The war was over these all these guys have been in the Army and you know, you couldn't pull that kind of stuff anymore. you know make this sacrifice so That many Jews came to Wilmington [01:01:17] And eventually one became president of the company that was Irving Shapiro. He was not a scientist. He was a lawyer and he uh and that was a quite a breakthrough. Because company like that damn Jewish head was charting new territory. [01:01:47] I must say now It's all around us. At that time you didn't see Jews in corporate America. It's interesting. I've observed in my years that generation [01:02:18] all those guys who came and started working to DuPont and by the way most of them work for 35, 40 years because nobody does that in a job anymore but that those, few girls they they work that time but I noticed [01:02:49] that their children elected not to go into Corporate America most of the most of the friends and acquaintances that I had to ponder's their children became lawyers doctors or dentists too but they [01:03:19] maybe saw that corporate America wasn't Such a big deal after all. You're on the outside looking in you want to be there

Dalia Handelman: When you say [01:03:51] DuPont was tainted by anti semitism, what'd you mean by that?

Connie Kreshtool: Well the one or two of the Dupont family, the Leaders of the family, the elders were involved with anti-Semetic organizations , they also didn't hire Jews in fact I was at Cornell [01:04:22] and I did a research project under my thesis Professor was Greek extraction and when he heard that I was coming down to Wilmington for an interview. he said to me you bet you otgha know that [01:04:53] that Dupont is an anti-Semitic company they so that's my professor was telling me who wasn't even Jewish but I came anyways I mean I had not really been affected by anti-Semitism I did not think. I have applied to [01:05:23] Cornell as an undergraduate didn't get

in. But I didn't one of my high school classmates did get in. But then I found out her uncle was the president so I came down. The if [01:05:53] the information they sought application did not ask me my religion.

But there was something else I forgot now what it was that ask me something that related so that they knew I was Jewish. I mean whatever they asked about. I don't know whatever [01:06:24] I can't think of what it was, but it was something about me that would show I was Jewish anyways I never felt anti-Semitism

Dalia Handelman: did you meet your husband [01:06:54] in like where did you meet your husband?

Connie Kreshtool: I said I didn't really know anyone who lived in town I didn't but my father who had died and he was a Salesman and he had developed [01:07:25] relationships with the buyers in the big stores in New York and across the country and when I was in New York from weekend he was there also I had come down from Ithaca, New York and he was there and he was he had was taking out a woman who had a buyer [01:07:55] at LS airs in Indianapolis so remember her name and I went to dinner with him and was her and it turns out she had a brother in Wilmington and he had a Store on Market Street the dress shop and so when I first came to town I went [01:08:25] into the shop and introduced myself because she told me to do that and and in the shop I also met the manager because the brother, he was the owner but he had a manager and the manager said something about, and I would go in there occasionally and is one day said to me something about his neighbor had a brother visiting, he just got out of dental school and would I like to meet him so I said sure why not [01:09:25] and so it was burning and I have gotten the idea that he was visiting a sister from out of town not always visiting his sister, but he actually lived in Wilmington and he he had just That he had just gotten more you just graduated and then in Delaware dentist have to complete [01:09:55] a year of internship and he was doing an internship at that time at the Delaware state hospital. So that's how I met him by the only connection I had

Dalia Handelman: when you were thinking about moving. your job did like like whether or not it had a Jewish Community affect your decision?

Connie Kreshtool: I don't think so

Dalia Handelman: What was the Jewish community at that time?

Connie Kreshtool: Well they had a very an active Jewish community, [01:10:26] what was they had a federation and a family service I think, they had a man who ran both of them [01:10:56] But you know, there was a lot of organizing here. I came right after the war So, you know, it was it was all Israel centred and I think they organized a became involved with the Federation.

[01:11:26] They organized a young adult division. Mostly, these are the young young the 20 year olds that came back from the war 20 to 30, 35, whatever it was. It was the young adult division of his cold and after a few years I ended up being the president or whatever they called it of the young adult position, that put me on the board of the federation at that time [01:12:07]

Dalia Handelman: How old are you at that point? **Connie Kreshtool:** I was probably about 23, 24

Dalia Handelman: So you move to Delaware around that age you you know how your job at Dupont and you were getting involved with the Jewish Federation and this becoming president of the young adult division of that right? just to clarify

Connie Kreshtool: Right, right

Dalia Handelman: [01:12:37] Were you mainly involved in that within the Jewish Community were involved in your conversation here once you got here or was that?

Connie Kreshtool: Well I didn't I didn't join the congregation till I got it was married did go to Services before it turned out that the person who owned the dress shop was president of the temple [01:13:07] so I went to services with them I remember well I did other things, I became involved with girl scouting and had a scout troop Troop then eventually a brownie true what else did I do I was involved with the Federation whatever [01:13:37] it was doing fundraising mostly yeah

Dalia Handelman: What did the Young adult division do? was it like connecting young adults

Connie Kreshtool: Well no it was actually Fund Raising [01:14:15] and most of it of course was Israel.

Dalia Handelman: So did your connection to Israel shift at all

Connie Kreshtool: Well ya I think so, once the state was established responsibility to do what we could to make it succeed and I've spent the rest of my life working for [01:14:46] the state of Israel, the Federation or in through the reform movement and they're and they're Israel program.

Dalia Handelman: So is it was once a got once in 1948 [01:15:16] Israel was truly established-

Connie Kreshtool: I mean, I think realize that and that began a whole you know the whole fundraising thing and then the whole lesson to try to have our government supported [01:15:46] Israel part of social action

Dalia Handelman: have you visited I think you mentioned?

Connie Kreshtool: at least 18 times

Dalia Handelman: did you ever think of living there?

Connie Kreshtool: No, last few years I haven't gone [01:16:18] I'd like to go don't know if I can do it

Dalia Handelman: so you mentioned for you as an adult the your connection with the Federation was like the main Jewish institution you were involved in.

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I was president of Jewish Community Center [01:16:48] at one time and I was present at the congregation Beth Emmett.

Dalia Handelman: Oh my God, okay,

Connie Kreshtool: And, and, I I served as the Federation headed the social action committee I also [01:17:18] served as vice president under two different presidents of the Federation and was chairman of the committee fundraising year. Oh, I represented [01:17:48] Delaware on the that time was called the Jewish National Jewish Community Jewish community relations advisory Council now, it's something to Jewish policy something or other but it was the national.

National [01:18:18] Organization of the Federation of community relations committee And then of course

Dalia Handelman: Wow

Connie Kreshtool: and then of course , you asked about my childhood, but I have had a you know, a whole lifetime of involving the Jewish Community. [01:18:48] Not only locally, but nationally I served as the president of the women of the reform Judaism and with that with that position I I was on the board of trustees in the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion that's all one [01:19:19] and the world Union for Progressive Judaism which is a global global progressive

movement in any country's and the Union for Reform [01:19:49] Judaism, which is the National Organization of reform congregations in United States and Canada. So I've had a lifetime of involved in Judaism and Jewish institutions [01:20:19] have always been a very big part of it.

Dalia Handelman: So how did you get, so I mean, it's incredible, you were, you were unbelievably involved in various, um, very influential Jewish institutions in both this area, but also, I mean, globally, how did you, like, what drove you to get so involved in [01:20:49] those institutions?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, first of all, I supported the work they were doing and I also feel that Jewish institutions [01:21:19] especially the synagogue is an ancient institution that keeps Jews together and I just feel that that's very important [01:21:51] Also, I think that Judaism has a lot to say to people about how to live, what's important. And I like to share that. So [01:22:22] I guess that's it.

Dalia Handelman: So, in terms of all of these positions which one do you think was the most meaningful?

Connie Kreshtool: Well that's hard to say you know being president of the Jewish Community Center [01:22:53] is all in all about governance, budget and program. I think the congregation is about the nuts and bolts about being Jewish and [01:23:26] I think the experiences I had as a as one of the heads of the movement in the reform movements in this country and abroad is the one that perhaps is the most interesting because that brought me all over the place [01:24:01] and you get a real feel for what to Judaism is when you see it. Everywhere across the globe. That was the most interesting and challenging.

Dalia Handelman: so you said yeah you [01:24:31] you saw Judaism across the world what is like this is such a hard question but what do you think is like a main difference between American Judaism and Judaism you saw in other places

Connie Kreshtool: well I remember once being in Europe and and we doing something about Israel [01:25:03] and Israeli dancing I can't remember what it was and I don't know what this is I can't remember what it was but I got that feeling it was such a spirit such a Ruach that I felt I never quite saw it in America and I always felt that it was because for the Jews of Europe and this is post-war. But even today, [01:25:34] that, that Israel just is just represents for them really a refuge which American Jews don't really have or up to now that we need it I mean there was just

felt that I felt it there

Dalia Handelman: [01:26:10] where did you say you were when you felt that?

Connie Kreshtool: in Europe someplace you know may have been in Prague Budapest and someplace, I just felt it

Dalia Handelman: did you want you know getting to [01:26:40] all these I mean you were in like very important positions and all of these institutions do you ever faced discrimination getting to those positions for being a woman obviously you weren't going to face Jewish religious discrimination because they were all Jewish institutions

Connie Kreshtool: right I don't think so but I can remember this that after I became the president of the temple [01:27:10] and I was the first woman they had somebody came up to me and said so forth and so on voted against you because you were a woman and I kind of tossed it off so in general I don't see that you know when you work for volunteer organization [01:27:41] you're not really measured like you work for a company nobody tells them this is what's wrong with you if you correct it it would be nice they're happy to get volunteers I never felt it I never felt [01:28:11] it am I didn't really ever feel as a woman that I was passed over no I don't think so I guess if I felt it I would remember it but I don't

Dalia Handelman:[01:28:41] is the Jewish community in was or is that you're involved in close like connection-wise is it a close Community?

Connie Kreshtool: well was ya that you know I [01:29:13] and we will all involved every one of us had that was a leader in in this synagogue or in the other agency's and we had similar interests yeah my circle of friends [01:29:43] were Jewish centered, we called it a study group because we usually study something every month

Dalia Handelman:your group of friends?

Connie Kreshtool: yeah couple of us we have [01:30:13] read books that just that about Judaism or something rather might be an article in a magazine went to see Jewish play involving Jews and went to see it

Dalia Handelman:So were you working in Dupont when you got so involved in the Jewish community?

Connie Kreshtool: No by that time I had 3 boys so [01:31:00] I retired, I retired then I did go back to work for the Federation after my husband died and I work there about eight years I think I did development for federation legacy program and such

Dalia Handelman: so just to clarify you [01:31:31] after Cornell you you worked for Dupont for a number of years you married you had your three boys and then and then that that's at the point in your life when you were you know started to become like all the incredibly connected and involved?

Connie Kreshtool: Ya ya

Dalia Handelman: [01:32:10] So how do you feel about the current political climate and its potential effects on Jews

Connie Kreshtool: I am absolutely I guess I should say horrified by President Trump and his [01:32:40] his racist ideology he has set a tone that has brought out all

Dalia Handelman: The, the far right groups and with it the anti-Semites and

I [01:33:12] it's something I think that we have to be guarded against but I'm not worried that it will turn into another Germany and maybe I'm Pollyanna about

that but the last the last 50 60 years ago whatever [01:33:43] from WW2 brought a time of really acceptance of Jews you can see it everywhere in no matter what kind of a company or academic institution that centers that you Jews of all come to the top

[01:34:13] and its been refreshing to say the least I would hate to think Trump cause us to backslide on that I also think there's been so much inter-marriage, a lot of non-Jews connected to Jews I mean even in the building here there are a few Jews [01:34:43] and but it turns out this one's got a Jewish daughter-in-law and that ones got a Jewish son-in-law I mean she's you know she said [01:35:14] I'm going to my grandson's bar mitzvah, but you're Italian. So I think that'll help I hope,

Dalia Handelman: So how do you feel about intermarriage?

Connie Kreshtool: Oh i'm really against it but uh I don't know what's going to happen with the third generation that I have my two granddaughters twin granddaughters married they both very n

ice Jewish boys but I'm not sure about the rest of them

Dalia Handelman: So yours sons all married Jewish girls and was that requirement in your house?

Connie Kreshtool: it was [01:35:44] it was something that I wanted them to I guess one of my sons would say it was a requirement but I still think that a good idea

Dalia Handelman: Was that a common, like, I mean, you said how nowadays you see how, how, much intermarriage is happening. I'm [01:36:14] growing up in, you know, the Jewish community.

Connie Kreshtool: Well I when I was growing up it was something that was never expressed but you always knew somehow or other you knew you should marry the Jewish. Nowadays it doesn't happen very [01:36:44] much. People go to different school. I was surprised to see that seven confirming this year each one of them went to a different High School, seven high schools represented by those seven kids so you see there's no, you know, they just, [01:37:14] you know, association at one time and this was before, before, my time here in Wilmington. All the Jewish kids went to one high school and so everybody knew everybody else and the leader there, the leader in the school who was Jewish and head of the Jewish group was also effective in the Jewish Community [01:37:44] Center and everything else. But that's not the way it is now and therefore chances kids meeting other Jews it's not as easy yeah that's what it is

Dalia Handelman: It's not it's not as easy [01:38:14] to meet other Jews but you you would say tthats still as important to yeah but-

Connie Kreshtool: Ya still as important but I wouldn't dare mention it to my grandchildren. [01:38:55] Well I, they know I usually ask if they have a girlfriend if she's Jewish. If it isn't, I'm very unhappy.

Dalia Handelman: So what do you think the biggest threat to Jews is today?

Connie Kreshtool: Well I uh I think it's obvious they're not connected and they don't feel the need t o be connected and in many cases they're really ignorant [01:39:26] to what Judaism is all about t hey think you know eating bagels that's been taken over so yeah and also it needs making the effort and people like to go to a college that they know doesn't have very many Jews they're just setting themselves up to fail [01:39:57] although I must say that nowadays kids not in such a rush to get married other opportunities although it's not so easy easy as I see it I read the marriage

reports in the New York Times and some of [01:40:27] the most gifted and knowledgeable people that they're writing up you know they do this and they do that end up meeting somebody on the internet something else that's put together I mean and this is New York City you know and I have heard that from people who say it's hard to meet people you know and n o [01:40:57] matter what so you got to make an effort you go where the Jews are

Dalia Handelman: This is a very philosophical question based off of everything you've experienced what would one piece of advice you would give to the Jewish people of modern-day be?

Connie Kreshtool: Well, I think my advice is that's it it's not going to be easy [01:41:27] but it is the it's a way of life that can enrich your life and death and to discard it is is really a crime

Dalia Handelman: is there [01:41:57] anything else you want to mention?

Connie Kreshtool: No except that judaism is a way of life, is an active, you have to do things and so that we said sometimes good deeds [01:42:27] whatever but it is takes some effort but it's worth the preserving and strengthening

Dalia Handelman: Yeah, well thank you so [01:42:57] much

Connie Kreshtool: Oh you're welcome