

*What is your name?*

Rona Finkelstein.

*And what was your name prior to marriage?*

It was Rona Dorothy Glassman.

*And you were born...*

I was born in Rochester, NY in 1927 and lived there until after marriage, when we moved away in 1964.

*I assume all of your education was in Rochester.*

Yes, except for college. Then I came back for graduate school at the University of Rochester.

*Ok. Well, first, let's start... your parents, your parents' names.*

My parents were Sadie and Aaron Glassman and they ran a typewriter store. And my mother and father were both in the business.

*Were they immigrants?*

My father was, at about the age of 10. But I never knew that until I started getting interested in genealogy. I believe he may have told me that he was not, but it's very clear that he was.

*What was the country from which he emigrated?*

He came with his father and brothers from Ukraine, and I believe that they then lived in Ekaterinaslav, but the place they were born was Chernigov.

*Ok, how do you spell that?*

C-H-E-R-N-I-G-O-V

*And is that in the Ukraine now?*

Yes, it's a little northeast of Kiev.

*OK. So he came and how did he get to Rochester?*

Well, I really don't know. Because his father was a carpenter, and I really don't know. I know that HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, tried to direct people to place where they could find employment, and Rochester was the center of the clothing industry but that doesn't explain why my grandfather went there. And I never inquired or found out about that, but it would be interesting to know.

*And your mother's family? How did they get to Rochester?*

Well they were all tailors, or married to tailors, and so they were all directed to Rochester because it was a center of the men's clothing industry, and they all set up little shops in their home where they employed others, maybe up to 15 or 20 others, and...

*So they did subcontract labor...*

They subcontracted to the larger companies, like Hicky-Freeman and Bond and various other companies.

*And so you had one brother...*

Yes, I had one brother, who was five and a half years older than I was, and my mother died when was almost 14, and my father remarried in about a year and my stepmother had two boys. One was the same age as my brother and he had the same name as my brother, Stanley, which was very amusing, we thought. And the younger brother was three years younger than I was. His name was Melvin. And Stanley, by then, this was in the middle of the Second World War, so the, both older brothers were in the Army and away from home, so really I spent my adolescent years with my younger brother, Melvin.

*And did you get along with you mother-in-law, your stepmother?*

Yes. I did. I was determined to get along with her and she certainly did a very fine job of getting along with me. I owe her a great deal and I finally got to tell her that.

*And what kind of Jewish education?*

Well, it was totally lacking. My parents, I think, being so busy with the business of the store, really neglected to bother about it. They themselves only went to the synagogue on the High Holidays and as a result, I got the feeling that it wasn't very important. I know my mother always lit Shabbat candles, but she never made a point of it, and I never knew when she was going to do it, or any of it. I didn't know there was a prayer said over it. I never saw her do it, actually. And so it wasn't at all instructive to me. I realized later how much I had missed, not going to Sunday school, for all those years. Maybe not from the school itself because all the kids had a not very high opinion of the Sunday school, but simply being part of the Jewish social group that grew up in that Sunday school.

*So you were not a part of it?*

No.

*Where did you go to college?*

I went to college at Connecticut College.

*And was that Connecticut College for Women?*

Yes, it was at that time. You didn't ask about High School.

*Oh, tell about that.*

I just wanted to mention that at high school, the Jewish kids who went, especially the Jewish girls, who palled around with each other, I'm not sure about the boys, really felt separate. We were in a suburb and we were not a large minority, either, and there were really only about 8 of us, in this school, and I can't tell you how many were in our class, but we tented to have lunch in the cafeteria together and we were not invited to join a sorority, so we were in a Jewish sorority that was, that took in all the city and suburban schools, but it wasn't the same because didn't feel really a part of our high school. But I thought that's interesting because I think it could be fairly typical of the times, depending on where people lived.

*Yes, I think Jewish sororities and non-Jewish sororities were separate, at this time.*

I graduated in 1945, so it would have been between '41 and '45, that that was still in Brighton High School.

*And then, when you went to college, did you find the same situation existed?*

Well, I was prepared for it, I mean, because that's what I had experienced. And I did feel different. And I was in a small house to begin with, because I had wanted to be in a French-speaking house, and we had a French, sort of a mother figure in the house, who was a French professor, and ...but to my sorrow, we didn't really speak French in the house. It was such a waste, because all the people in it, maybe there were 20 of us, at most, we could all speak French, but since it wasn't a rule, we ended up not doing it. A big waste. But anyhow, there were two of us out of this group who were Jewish and they had put us together as roommates. And we got along very well, and understood why we had been put together and I mean it was the sort of thing you didn't even question. And certainly there was no discrimination within that house. It was very nice and we all got along very well, but... I think we both definitely felt different, because of it we only went out with Jewish boys, and although, when we got there, there was a Coast Guard Academy nearby and we were taking what we could get. But I must admit, I never felt comfortable with a non-Jewish boy. One was maybe Nebraska, and his background was so totally different from mine that I just sort of marveled that there could be two such different people in the world.

*What was your major?*

I was an art major. I always thought that I was meant to be an artist, because my older brother had been very artistic and I tended to copy what he was doing and we would draw together and I enjoyed that. And I had gotten fairly good just because I was doing it a lot, but then I went through as an art major and did very well. But I must say, that I had one Philosophy course that intrigued me very much. And I liked it a lot and did very well in that, but it didn't deter me. And after I got out of college, I got a job in a place where they needed commercial artists and even though I had no really practical training, because I was a fine arts major, they said they could teach me what I needed to know. And so I was sort of put under the tutelage of one of their artists, who showed me what to do...

*Where was this....*

This was in Rochester (garbled) I was living at home and the pay was very small. I can't remember what, but I felt lucky to have any kind of a job, so I worked there and learned the techniques of commercial art, but I can't say I was very good. And actually, after about a year and a half, I think they let me go because they just didn't need me and probably I didn't have the skills that they needed. And I think it was shortly after that that my future husband came to town. No actually, I guess he came to town while I was still working there, and he had a list of Jewish girls in town, and he came from the Boston area, and ...

*And his name...*

And his name -- Nisson A. Finkelstein. And he was a, well he had really finished his graduate work, he was about to receive his Ph.D.

*From...*

From MIT, he had gone to Harvard for four years and then MIT and the war started and I think he was doing some research in connection with...

*And was that why he came to Rochester?*

No, it was after the war that he came. And he came to work for a year, he thought, at Bausch and Lomb Optical Company there. His specialty was optical physics and his goal, really, was to teach in a university, and he dressed like a university professor, at that time...

*Did that impress you?*

...but he had, well, he had been talked to by his favorite professor at MIT, who was a consultant at Bausch and Lomb and this professor knew that they needed somebody with Nisson's skills and persuaded Nisson just to try it for a year, and if he didn't like it he could go back into academia, and so, Nisson came, truly not believing he would like it, but he grew to like it very much. In fact, he loved it. And so he stayed in Rochester. But we met shortly after he came, and there was an instant attraction. And I think we met, something like April or May and we were married in September.

*Wow! And so, after you married you stayed in...*

Yes, we found an apartment in Rochester, and stayed there and then moved to a larger apartment after a couple years.

*You had your first child there?*

No, we didn't. We moved into a house not too long after.

*In Rochester?*

I'm sorry. We moved into his one-room apartment, and then found a larger apartment and then moved into a house. Well, we actually had the house built. Nisson felt strongly that he wanted to do that, so we found an architect who made us an economical design and we found a piece of land out in what was then sort of the country and really loved it. Had a gorgeous view. And we took part in the building of the house. Well, I mean we didn't actually build, but we were very much involved in it. WE didn't have any children. We did add a dog at that time, I think, or shortly after maybe we moved into the house. And I think was five years... we were married in 1950 and five years after we had our first child, '55, a boy and then three years after that our second child, another boy. And, and we had to get rid of the dog because, by then we had neighbors and this was a German Shepherd, who unfortunately was very protective of each of us but not at all friendly to anybody else. And at that time he was running free, and he menaced one of the neighbor's children and grazed his nose with his teeth and at that point we just felt we couldn't keep him anymore.

*So you had small children in Rochester? And you did not continue your education.*

At that time, no. And I had done some free-lance art work while we were living in the apartments in Rochester, and sold some drawings to newspapers, actually, and to a journal of optical physics of the people attending the conference and, and that was a lot of fun, covering those events, and doing those drawings. It was great for me to see my work in print.

*And then, how long did you, when did you leave Rochester?*

Well, before we left, I grew disillusioned with my ability in art and realized that my basic interest was really in philosophy and religion, although I wouldn't have said religion at the time, but it was in the bigger questions about the purpose of life and whether there was a Supreme Being. And if there was this Supreme Being, why should we be

moral. That kind of thing. So I started with an introductory Philosophy course at the U of R and

*University of Rochester?*

Right. And was so entranced with it that I continued with one course at a time while I was pregnant and having the children and then increased it to go full-time in order to get my Ph.D. First I got an MA, going just one course at a time and wrote a dissertation for my M.A., and I wrote a bigger dissertation for my Ph.D. And

*What was your dissertation?*

Well, the MA dissertation was,... I can't remember the name of it. But it was about the question, the basis of morality, if it wasn't religious, what was it? And the one for the Ph.D. was the empirical identity theory of mind and body. Which was big question at the time. And I must say I enjoyed writing both of them. And, of course, I had an advisor for each one of them and the whole experience of graduate school was a simply wonderful one.

*It probably helped counterbalance taking care of little children. 'Cause you had mind and body.*

Well, it's true. I, I really needed that outlet.

*Stimulation...*

Yes. And Nisson was very understanding and supportive of the whole thing. He couldn't quite understand, I think, my interest in abstract philosophy because he felt it was important to do things that had a practical application, to make life better for people and, I couldn't always tell him how the empirical identity theory of mind was going to make life better for people, if I could explain it and ... but nevertheless, it was just so attractive to me that I just kept on with it and I felt it was truly much more to my abilities than the art had been.

*And what was, where were you and where was Nisson vis a vis your being Jewish?*

Well...

*When you were living in Rochester?*

Nisson had had a wonderful basic Jewish education and Hebrew training and reading of the Bible in Hebrew. But when he went to Harvard, he sort of... I think he even, at one time was considering going to Rabbinical college, but, at Harvard he was interested in languages, literature, physics and little by little it went into physics. And that's what he ended up doing, but he just threw over, well, just ignored, let's say, his Jewish heritage. But it was really just buried for the moment, because, well, after we were married, of course, we, we had a Jewish wedding, and my parents gave us a very lovely one. But, we really didn't do anything to observe any of the holidays, and it wasn't until we had our first child, that Nisson came home, or came to the hospital, the day after, and told me that he had gone to the synagogue in the morning and they had given him an Aliyah. And I could see the glow in his face, that it meant so much to him. And I think that was the beginning of his return.

*But, I can't... but how about you? It didn't have an effect upon you.*

Well, no.

*At that time...*

No, it didn't and he, I must say, didn't start going to the synagogue regularly or anything, but it awakened something in him. But, really, there was not much to awaken in me.

*Ok. And how long did you live in Rochester?*

Well, we lived in Rochester 'til 1964, actually, he had left the company that he was with, but he decided not to leave until I finished getting my dissertation done and got my Ph.D. at the University of Rochester, so that, there were several months that he waited for me and I could see that it was in that, not a pleasant period for him but he was you know, determined, that I should finish.

*And where did you go? And what was the progression?*

Well, he got a wonderful offer to run a company in Dover, Delaware, that was going to be an off-shoot of International Latex Corporation. And, at the time, I'm not sure that it even had a name. It was named the division. But he had never run a company. He had been a vice-president of research at Stromberg, at Bausch and Lomb and then at Stromberg Carlson and this offer of actually running a company was very appealing to him.

*And how did you feel about leaving your home?*

Well, I, I didn't resist. I mean, at first I wasn't excited about it, but I could see that he was tremendously excited about it, and well, we discussed it and he said, you know, this is the natural progression, that people have to leave home and they can't always find jobs in the cities that their families live in, and he had already left his home to go to school and work. So to him it wasn't a big thing. And I remember my father being very sad about it. He didn't try to dissuade us, but he was sad, and I, I really didn't feel sad.

*Excited?*

Well, I was apprehensive, but I, I guess I was struck by his sadness and I began to realize there was more to being a parent, and...

*And so then you moved to Dover, Delaware.*

To Dover, Delaware and found a very nice, and much bigger house than we had had, and

*And how old were your children?*

Um, let's see that was '64, so the older one, Jesse, was 10, just before 10 and the younger one was just before 7.

*Tell me about your life in Dover.*

Well, it was very nice. Dover is a nice town and we made friends with our neighbors and we particularly liked our neighbors across the street. We became good friends with them and saw each other a lot and met all the Jewish people in town very quickly. We met a lot of non-Jewish people, too, because in Dover they really intermingled more freely. I think because it was then a small town and you just gravitated to the people that you liked, and it wasn't enough just to stay within your cultural tradition, and I felt it was a little bit constraining because of the size of it. There was, for instance, only one movie theater, and, at that point, when we came, in 1964, blacks had to sit up in the balcony and that was new to me. But I must say I just didn't

think about it very much because I was so busy adapting to all the other things, but the one movie theater, naturally, would play family-friendly films and we never got any of the art films that were interesting. And there really wasn't much else in the way of outside cultural life. And so there was a big business of people cooking and inviting friends in and we used to joke that the conversation at these things were all about the food, because these people were very good cooks, and what the recipes were, and hunting. Because frequently it involved cooking things that you hunted.

*Had you ever been with hunters before?*

No, and it struck us both very funny, that hunting was such a big thing, and at least one of our neighbors was involved in it and he was Jewish. And it's just because Dover was different area, and Jews and non-Jews were mingling so freely. And so they took on a lot of the attributes on non-Jews. But, you know, the conversation wasn't stimulating to us because those were two subjects that were not high on our list.

*It was definitely a cultural...*

A cultural separation there.

*And then you went to work.*

Yes, well...

*And what, what brought it about?*

Well, I was immediately hired by Delaware State College when I went and told them I had a Ph.D., they practically leaped out of their seats, because at Delaware State College, they, it was a predominantly black college, by far, and they did not have a high number of Ph.D.s and this was very appealing to them, I guess, to add to their faculty. And, and so I was added to the department of Philosophy which had only one other member. He had been giving all the philosophy courses, and I was, I guess, put in over his head, which was a little uncomfortable for him. But we had courses divided between us because philosophy was one of the courses that could satisfy a requirement and so, many students took it. Many more than really should have taken it, but I guess they didn't find that out until they were in it. And...

*Why do you say, "Many took it even though maybe they should not have taken it?"*

Well, I think they really didn't know what philosophy entailed and the kind of reading and thinking that would be helpful to have and they just weren't used to that level of reading and that kind of abstract thinking. So it was an education for me, and a good deal of my time was taken up in thinking how to teach to students who didn't seem to be really prepared as well as they should have been.

*Did you find a technique to help you transmit this to them?*

Well, actually, I wrote a paper that was published in one of the Philosophy journals about how to teach, how to introduce philosophy, to, I'm not sure, exactly what the title was, but it was how to make it interesting. And, and I got one written response to it, by somebody who was excited about it.

*And, and did it work? When you...what was the technique?*

Well, the technique was to take a philosophical problem and try to bring it into contemporary life so that something that was going on, say in the courts, or some kind of a dispute or argument would mirror what this problem was, so that you'd get a

concrete example of it. And if you could find a newspaper and make a \_\_\_ article about it, so much the better, and you'd start with the article and then you'd take it back with questions, back to its philosophical basis. And it took me quite a while, really, to figure this out, and to get examples was not easy. But I think it was, it was working. But by the time I came to it, I didn't have too many more years of teaching there. I was there just seven years in all, because we then moved to, to Wilmington.

*So you lived in Dover, and what was your Jewish connection, I mean, were you Jewishly involved?*

Yes, well really, our oldest child, Jesse, was the one who got us Jewishly involved while we were still in the Rochester area. We lived in Pennfield, by then. That's where we'd built our house. And he came home one day and asked about Sunday school and some Jewish friend or friends were going to go to Sunday school, and were going to Sunday school, and he asked about it. And we immediately realized that we were delinquent and we enrolled him in Sunday school and he started. And that's when we started getting involved and looked around for... Well, we looked around first for a synagogue that would be appropriate and that's where we enrolled him. And it was, I think a conservative synagogue - possibly reformed - I'm not sure, where we started out. I can't remember.

*But that was in the Rochester area?*

Right.

*But then, when you moved to Dover...*

When we moved to Dover there was one synagogue that tried to be all things to all people, because it just wasn't big enough to support more than the one. And we joined that one and the boys continued their education. At that point, I guess, Loren began Hebrew school. Jesse was, already had been into Hebrew school and Jesse and Loren both had their Bar Mitzvahs in Dover. It was very nice, because it's just a smaller place and the pressures there were not as great.

*That was more intimate...*

Yes, now, and Jesse's, for instance, the sister who had at the synagogue, contracted to do the dinner, or the, it was a luncheon after the service. And it was wonderful because the whole thing was in the synagogue and I thought that was nice. And we weren't able to do that with Loren, because by then the sisterhood had gotten tired of it. But we went out to a local hotel for luncheon.

*Well, that sounds lovely. And then, and then, at that time, you left Dover?*

Yes. We left Dover in '71 and in '72 I was offered a position with what would become the Delaware Humanities Forum.

*Before we do that. You moved from Dover to Wilmington. And why?*

Nisson (garbled). Let's see, Nisson's company had become, which was ILC Industries, had become part of a larger company, whose name escapes me at the moment. I can look this up...

*That's alright.*

Ok.



*But Nisson had to move?*  
General Dynamics.

*Oh, General Dynamics. So, Nisson had to move.*  
Yes.

*And he left because he left the company.*  
Well he left the running of ILC Industries. He became a vice-president of General Dynamics.

*And being at General Dynamics gave him the opportunity to live in Wilmington?*  
Yes. He had an office there and he traveled frequently to New York and to other parts of the... things that the company owned and ran.

*And your children were teenagers at the time?*  
Yes.

*And then, you started to tell me, you had an offer...*  
Right. I had an offer.

*Who, who submitted the offer? Where did it come from?*  
Well, I was called by a professor from the Philosophy department of University of Delaware by the name of Frank Delly, whom I knew, who had come down to visit Delaware State College at my invitation to speak to the students on the topic. And he was, I think, chair of the department, at the time that he talked to me. And told me that he was representing a small committee that the National Endowment for the Humanities...represented the National Endowment for the Humanities that was setting up state-run programs in every state. And they weren't all yet in commission, but Delaware was, I think, in the second tier of states where they were starting programs, and they needed somebody to take charge of the formation of the program, and be the director of this period before they actually started. And the program was going to bring the Humanities to the adult public essentially, in programs that would be about issues that the public was interested in. And people in the Humanities, that would be history, philosophy, literature, languages, history of art, etc. they would be invited to speak on these issues, either as lecturers or discussion groups, or panel discussions, in various ways and bring the insights of the humanities to the general public that otherwise would be in no position to get at that kind of discussion. And that it would be good for public discussion of the issues and would add insights otherwise they wouldn't get. So this was very appealing to me. And, and I started with it. And there was a small group that was in this committee and they were very helpful to me and making suggestions and ...

*Did you appoint them? How...*  
No. They had been...

*They had already been...*  
They had been invited by the Endowment for the Humanities. So they were, I think, just four people.

*Who were they? Do you remember?*

Yes, they were Jack Murray, who was head of continuing education and he would become the first Chairperson of the Delaware Humanities Council and Frank Delly, and

*Well, that's alright.*

David S...Tuesdays are a

*That's alright.*

Schultz, Dave Schultz in Sociology and there may have been one more, whom I'm forgetting.

*And so they acted as a forerunner to help this program get off the ground...*

Right. And

*And you were it's chair?*

.(unintelligible) to do was to get the one who would direct it. Well, I was not the chair of the committee. I mean, the committee really oversaw what I was doing.

*But they, you were relegated to the chair of the Delaware...*

No. No. I was...

*And the Executive...*

Right. I was the executive who...

*Of the Delaware...*

Really it was like an interim executive and my job was to pull the thing together. And they were very helpful in opening avenues for me and making suggestions.

*And how long did it take you to get it up and running?*

Well, actually, I guess we started in '72. Well. I think we started in '71, pulling it together. Because we started, I think in June '72, as the Delaware Humanities Forum, and by then we had expanded this original committee of really, board of directors, to, I think we had about 12, by that time. And I tried to make it representative of the various parts of the state, and various different groups, and they then were the board of directors and there was to be an executive under them, who would report to them, but an executive and whatever other staff was needed to run the program. And they then invited me to be the executive director and I was so involved, and so really in love with the program that I was delighted to accept.

*And how long did you stay, as the executive director?*

I, I was there until 1980, so it was eight years.

*Eight years.*

And by then I, I really was burned out, because I never have known how to do anything from 9 to 5, but it just overlaps, and I, I found I was working weekends and nights. Because many of the programs were being held at night and weekends, and... we, at first we were trying to do the evaluations ourselves -- the staff members and then we began to try to get members of the board of directors to help us evaluate and little by little we actually got outside evaluators. But that took years to get to that point. I mean there was an awful lot to do at first. And then annual reports to the National Endowment

for the Humanities and we had monthly meetings and we got a system of proposals that would be submitted at certain times of the year. And the board would overlook them and discuss them and decide which ones to accept that we would then fund and we would get an annual budget from the National Endowment for the Humanities which we had to match, not in cash, but in contributed services, of various kinds that the organizations that made these proposals would specify how, how they would contribute various things to their project to make up for what was being given to them.

*Can you give me one or two of your most successful programs, that you remember?*

Well, could you give me some time?

*Well, that's alright. If you think of it. If you think of it just something that just surprised you, but meanwhile, at the same time, you're living in this Jewish community and your husband had become very involved in the community.*

Yes.

*And how did you, you were raising two children, and you were fully involved, did you have a Jewish life at this time? When did it start?*

Well, I didn't have much of a Jewish life at that time, although we were attending synagogue pretty regularly, because, I think, I felt it was important for the kids and I don't think I got much out of it but, Nissan did and the boys, I'm sure, did. Even 'though they may not have thought.

## SIDE B

*Question is, begin to be, you seem to have gotten some inspiration, from being Jewish.*

Well, yes. Well, it started slowly. After I had retired from the Humanities Forum, because I really was burned out... I, I loved the job but I just felt I couldn't continue and I had a great desire to study history. I started taking history courses, mostly advanced at the University of Pennsylvania and some where intellectual history and I noticed that after awhile, what I really enjoyed those courses, they never seemed to discuss what was happening with the Jews at those times and I thought, well, this would be good. I could work, because I was only taking one course at a time, and I could study and find out at the time of the history that I was studying what was happening to the Jews at the same time. And so I started trying to supplement each course that way. And I think at the same time, I had become interested in family history through talking with an aunt of mine, a great aunt, and finding how fascinating her story was. And I think this was beginning to show me a connection of her life and through the life of our family, to Jewish history and the greater currents of history that were going on at the same time. And they were supplementing each other until, I think, my interest in genealogy was ...

*Came first...*

Well, I'm not sure. The history interest had, had propelled me into the history, and that into the Jewish and, and well, the genealogy, I'm not sure what came first.

*But your...the genealogy certainly spurred you. Your family's history...*

Oh, yes. It definitely did.

*And so what did you do in terms of delving into your own family?*

Well, I first started reading books about how to go about it and one of the books, very helpfully said, before you start scouring the archives, find out who are the oldest people in your family and go and interview them because they may not be around much longer. And, so that really appealed to me. It seemed so sensible. And I did that, and I started focusing on one side of my family where most of the relatives were still living. And started visiting the oldest ones. When I could do that. Usually I would work that in with family visits because my family still lived in Rochester, New York, and that's where a lot of these relatives were, so it would work in. Nisson was not too interested in this, and so it held me back a bit, because I didn't want to subject him to these kinds of conversations all the time. And so sometimes I would excuse myself and go off on my own to interview somebody, but I very much enjoyed that. Getting the stories from these older people and they very much enjoyed giving the stories to me. So it was a mutually satisfying experience. And I just really enjoyed it. And I guess that this really stimulated my identification with Judaism and as well as the studies I was doing. And then, having read about the way the Yeshiva students, boys, studied Talmud, it occurred to me that would be really interesting to try to study it in that way and some, a good friend of mine, named Yetta Chaiken, felt that would be a wonderful idea, too. And we quickly recruited a couple of others who were of like interests and formed a little group and started searching about how to go about it. And Nisson advised us a little and I'm not sure how we found our first rabbi, but we asked him if we could study with him and started I believed with Talmud, which we soon discovered was something much too difficult for us, at least at the start. And I think it was Nisson, who said, said we would probably do much better if we started with Mishna, so that's what we did, and we became the Mishna class. That was the beginning of it and I think it was around 1985. And we started with one rabbi and went to him...

*Rabbi in West Chester...*

Yes. Rabbi Portal, and then we continued with him in Wilmington, because he was giving a course at Albert Einstein or Gratz. I'm not sure but we were able to meet with him in Wilmington. But first we did go to West Chester. In that early group was Terry Dannemann from Dover, and Ruth Siegel and I think, I'm not sure who else there was.

*At any rate, Nisson also taught us...*

Well, that was, was that was after Portel,

*After Portel. Because were searching...*

Searching around further, and I think we actually invited Mrs. Gewirtz to lead us, because we thought maybe it would be interesting to have not a rabbi, but someone very knowledgeable and she declined.

*But she was teaching at \_\_\_\_\_.*

Yes. Right she was teaching at the university and probably at Gratz, too. So, I guess, that's when we started to Nisson. He agreed and, and he turned out to be a wonderful leader.

*Wonderful teacher.*

Yes. And he allowed us to do it in the way that we wanted to do it. He was in full agreement with that. That we wanted to be able to discuss it, without being told how to interpret it. We wanted to read the Mishna and discuss why they had reasoned the way they had reasoned and what the possible ramifications would have been and he helped us if we missed something he thought he would ask a question to lead us in the right direction. But he didn't lecture and it was very good and I guess he continued as long as he could, which was until the year that he died, which was 1989.

*How...I wanted to step back a minute, back to your genealogy. Your genealogy made you, you said, interested in Jewish history. But you also took some trips with the genealogy society.*

Well, I did do that. But before that, Nisson and I had been going every year somewhere. And it occurred to us that we should really start looking for the particularly Jewish things, that were in the areas that we're going, we were going to. Which were by then, almost all in Europe. Greece and Italy and Israel. And so, we did, start doing that, and that was fascinating. Nisson was by then writing articles for The Jewish Voice and when we came back he would write one or more articles about what we found Jewishly interesting about the trip. And I must say that Nisson was a huge influence on my becoming interested in Judaism because we would frequently discuss something at the dinner table, or elsewhere, that would be of Jewish interest, or even philosophically interesting about Judaism and or other religions and so we had a lot of discussions about Judaism and I had become more and more interested and was very influenced by him because his obvious erudition and interest in it and I felt there was an awful lot I didn't know and should have had before but that maybe I could catch up a little.

*Your genealogy also took you on trips, with the Genealogy Society, that...*

Well, there was really only one.

*Oh, one. You went where?*

I went with Miriam Weiner on a wonderful trip that seemed to be tailor-made for me.

*She was president of the...*

No, she was a free-lance Jewish genealogist. And she had offered such trips to genealogists in the past who were researching their family history. And I knew that her tours were highly regarded. I guess she's gone maybe.

I took this trip with Miriam as the leader, and it was a wonderful trip and I think I was the luckiest person among us. I think there were about 24 people and I was the only one who really found a relative, in Ukraine in Chernigov. The trip took us to Ukraine and to Poland, which were the two sites of my genealogical interest. My father being from the Ukraine and my mother from Poland. And that was really a big thing, for me, too, to have found this really a first cousin of my father's. She was much younger and she had never known him. But it was an amazing circumstance and that, too, did a lot to cement my interest in the family and in history, because I really knew very little about Russian Jewish history. And so that was a new area of research.

*And all of this culminated in what?*

Well, it ended up by my writing a book about my mother's family. Which was the Poland family. From near Warsaw, about which I had the most information. That trip was a wonderful trip but it didn't yield too much information about the Polish branch of the family, unfortunately. Although I was able to visit the home sites. But I ended up having so many tapes of these interviews that I had taken and they were so wonderful, when I played them back, that I would be laughing and almost crying. They were just so moving to hear the original voices, many of whom had since died. That I thought, "What a wonderful thing it could be if only the other living relatives could hear these." And I couldn't figure any way to do that, so I thought, well, I could transcribe them, and at least put them down in a book. And so it occurred to me that that would be the book that I would try to put together to somehow stitch together the narrative that had to do with my mother's family that had originated in Poland. It was my great-grandmother and grandfather who had first come over in 1881. And so there was a good deal of information available because they were buried near Rochester. So I had the names of their parents, their first names, of course. And, and it enabled me to do a lot of research on them and this book was really a pleasure to write because...

*Called...*

Oh, called, *Where We Came From*. Because it enabled me to put together all these narratives and make some sense of them and they did fit together and gave me a much better picture.

*And so all of this led you into becoming a, a ... head great, Jewish Great Books.*

Oh, yes. Nisson and I were asked to lead the celebration of Jewish Book ...Week...Jewish Book Month, I think it was. And so it was going to be a really big celebration and I'm not sure why so big that year, but Nisson and I worked on it and headed a wonderful big committee together that had plotted out all the different aspects of it. And one of the things that we thought would be a good outgrowth of it, that we could start that month, would be a Jewish Book Group, which we thought we would name, Jewish Great Books. And I must say, it has been going since 1985 and ...

*It has legs of its own...*

Yes.

*But you keep it going...*

Well, I started off leading it and my idea was that it would be taken over by others but I think, except for one year, when one person did it... That was a wonderful year for me! But, I have been leading it, not leading it, but organizing it. We have more competent leaders. Sara Gross has been our leader for almost all the time, and she's very experienced and an excellent leader. But many of the groups members also volunteer.

*So all of these activities seem to have funnelled your interest into Jewish philanthropy.*

Well, yes, into especially education. Because I guess I felt the lack of it in my own life and how much I regretted that and I think education is so important for getting a Jewish identity which I definitely lacked, at the time Nisson and I were married, but little by little I came to have it.

*So what really gives you the greatest pleasure, at this point, in terms of having worked through the Jewish community and with the Jewish community and thinking in terms of the next generation?*

Well, the greatest pleasure... that's hard. But I guess the fact that Jewish Great Books has continued for so long. It makes me think that there's a, still a great interest in it and I mean, we're reading nine Jewish books a year as a result of that, the members of that. And the fact that Albert Einstein Academy has...

*Which has been one of your, pet loves.*

Yes. And it was one of Nisson's. He was very influential in that, and keeping it going, when it was foundering. And I guess he was, I don't know, president of it for one or two years. And I know that he felt very strongly that it was a necessary component on a Jewish community and I think he was able to help it and now it has become very strong. And that really pleases me enormously. And Gratz, Gratz

*And how about though the son? Yeah, Gratz. And...*

And Jesse did attend, because we felt that his education in Dover had been lacking and so when we moved up we recommended strongly to him, that he attend Gratz for a year. Which he did. And ...

*And Loren is now teaching...your son.*

Yes. That gives me enormous pleasure. I'm glad you mentioned that, because he, well, actually, is doing what Nisson did for one period after we moved to Wilmington. Nisson started giving sessions once a week to the part of the week for some other thing that we discuss and the boys and I could enter the discussion of it and it would be about an hour on Friday night and I think they got a lot out of it and now I see that Loren especially got a lot out of it, because he started to establish it with his two daughters, my granddaughters, and as a result has been learning himself so much because he has to set the parameters of what they'll discuss each week. So he does a lot of research and at the time he started it he was between jobs and he had more time. But he's kept it up even though now he has a full-time job and I must say, he's impressive and we have long discussions on the phone about various Jewish questions and research things. So, so that's a great source of pleasure to me.

*Yes. Well, he's made a full circle. So, as they say, "May you go from strength to strength."*

Oh, thank you.

*Rhona, I neglected to ask you about your work with the career women.*

Ok. Well that came after I became involved in fundraising for the Jewish Federation. And I must say that that experience of fundraising and the preparatory talks that were given to us by Rabbis and other people were very influential, too. Toward making me appreciate the value of Judaism and the importance of supporting the various aspects of it and institutions of it, and at one point, somehow it was suggested that there be a career women's division, and that women could be induced to give separately from their husbands and that it would positively effect the total outcome. And then, it seemed to me to be valuable. And I was, at the time, working at the Delaware Humanities Forum, and so I was a career woman, and Margaret May also was interested in a career women's division and we agreed to co-chair it. And I, I think it was for a year, possibly two. And we had various little events at our homes where we included people that we thought could be pivotal in getting the thing going and those that were interested stayed on to help and I, I think we had a successful drive. And it was a very interesting experience. I think, it was my first experience in organized Jewish philanthropy and being part of it. And then I also served on a committee of the Federation overseeing the Kutz Home and I think that's about it, as far as my organized activities.

*Thank you. Thank you.*