INTERVIEW WITH FRANCES GOLDBERG

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INT: This is Barbara Trainin Blank interviewing Frances Goldberg in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on July 6, 1998, with the written consent of the interviewee. Let’s talk a little bit about your family background and where and when you were born, family of origin.

FRANCES: It’s always a surprise when I tell people that I’m from Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, a small coal mining town between Harrisburg and Scranton, just about in the middle. I was born there on April 25, 1927. I was the sixth child of what eventually became eight children.

INT: Tell me a little about your parents, where they were born.

FRANCES: Neither of my parents was born in the United States. Unfortunately, we really did not talk so much about their life, where they lived. They did not meet until they came to the United States. My mother was born in Kiev. Her name was Rebecca Karll. I knew my grandfather and grandmother, her parents, and they came here together. I know a little about what my mother did when she came here. Once she told us about working in New York in a factory: How her family came to Pennsylvania and how my grandparents established some kind of business or contact in Hazelton in what my older sisters and brothers told me was a big, lovely house—they knew the house in Hazelton, which is between Shenandoah and Scranton. It was something I never knew. I do believe there were struggles and health problems in the family.

My father was born in Smolensk, as I understand it, and he and his brother came here to Shenandoah, to landsmen, as people call them. My father was a very fine, ethical gentleman in business, and what my mother or her younger sister would say to us is that my mother’s parents, who were observant, thought that my father—who was thirteen years older than my mother—was a good match for her. My mother used to tease us and say he told me he was only twelve years older, but then I found it was thirteen years older. So that’s how I come to remember and know that figure. My father was in business. I think he came as a peddler, and then he opened his own junk shop—now it’s called recycled. It has a more elegant name. He opened a furniture store and was extremely successful with his small furniture store in Shenandoah—or a large furniture store by their standards.

I can remember growing up behind the store. It was a very large store. I remember on the second floor there were these huge rugs that used to be on these long runners on the ceiling. Maybe they weren’t really so large but they seemed large to me. My family was in the furniture business and we lived behind the store. We had a dining room and a kitchen behind the store, and I think an office, and then upstairs were bedrooms and one bathroom. We did have an indoor bathroom in those days. My mother helped in the store with my father and then the Depression came. From what I understand, my parents had a lot of money out on credit, and the people whom they had it out on credit to were people who were Slavic and Polish and Russian. I do remember my parents speaking to the customers in other languages. But when the Depression
came, that depressed our family. There was no retrieving any of that money—maybe a little bit now and then.

My parents would speak to us in Yiddish and we would answer in English, and they would eventually learn English but they were uncomfortable. My dad was an absolutely sweet, wonderful man. Would kiss women’s hands as the European custom. After the Depression, or as the Depression progressed, they opened a secondhand stove business and went back into the junk business, but I remember this store. Now, I’m thinking that we are in the mid-Thirties, and I was sent to public school, of course. I was five in April and so I started school in September. Then I skipped first grade or second grade. I had older brothers and sisters who helped me to learn. I think I was probably a fast learner, though I’m a slow talker!

INT: That’s okay.

FRANCES: Is it okay?

INT: Yes. While we’re on your brothers and sisters, tell me a little bit about how many you had of each.

FRANCES: My older brother was David. Next was Reuben. Next was Sylvia and then Mildred, and they were only maybe two years apart. And then Milton and Frances, that is I, and Sherwin and Ruth, my youngest sister. I must say that when, in 1933, my mother was pregnant with Ruthie, we didn’t even know it until one day a baby was there in our house! It’s not like it is today. We now talk about and notice so much. The lack of information then—and we never talked about sex in our house. We didn’t ask a lot of questions. I was three years younger than my brother Milton. My older brothers worked in the business with my dad, which then was the junk business.

I’d have to think about the year that I’m talking about when Milton was thirteen—he was born in 1924, so when he was thirteen it might have been 1937, with the war a bit distant. We only had radios, of course. When he was thirteen he was given a bicycle by the family or my older brothers, and this was an important event in our life, because the bar mitzvah celebration was just going to shul and his having an aliyah, in this small, wonderful, vital Jewish community. He was riding his bicycle. He fell off the bicycle trying to avoid hitting someone on the street and broke his arm. I recall his being taken to the hospital. His arm was set. He came home and I recall his sitting—these are just a few vivid memories—sitting up all night saying, “It hurts, it hurts.” He had his casted arm on a pillow. I think the next day they took him back to the doctor, and I don’t know if he did anything immediately or waited another day, whatever it was, waited too long. When they finally opened the cast it was gangrenous. The alternative in those days, before penicillin or any other antibiotics, was to amputate the arm. I guess for Jewish people that’s one of the worst.

INT: It’s the arm of the tefillin, I guess.
FRANCES: It was his right arm, not necessarily that. In order to save his arm they took him to Philadelphia and he was in the Philadelphia Temple University Hospital for nine months. That absolutely was the focal point of our entire family.

INT: Obviously you’re very close knit.

FRANCES: Oh yes, we were all very close. Different people, but nevertheless very close. I think that that had one of the greatest impacts on how our family not only related but what happened. All the money was spent. I do recall hearing that the doctor said, “Don’t pay me, just be sure to pay the hospital.” It took many years for my parents to do that. It changed my brother’s life more than it changed anyone else’s. He was the college material guy, the one who was going to go to college, but when he got out of the hospital—and by this time his arm was stiff and only grew from above the elbow as his body grew. The rest of his arm, the lower part below the elbow, stayed small and stiff. Instead of going to college, he somehow finished his high school and came to work in the junk yard. Now we’re talking about days when people were working towards lend-lease and war, the war in Europe, and I recall the junk business was booming. When my family was earning money they were paying off the bills. My brother never went to college, never married, and my younger brother never married. They continued to work in the business, and my father retired. He had asthma. He had been smoking. He stopped smoking and lived to be eighty-seven, and that was when, come to think of it, they moved and reopened this little secondhand stove shop, because now the family had moved from that big warehouse-like house to a smaller one. I recall growing up there in my teenage years, and working in the family business. It’s interesting. In Shenandoah, the high school—I remember Lowell Thomas had reported that there was a subsidence in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania and the whole town caved in. It didn’t really! Well, as it happened, some of the buildings were condemned, school buildings, and therefore my schooling became from eight to twelve thirty in the morning, and then in the afternoon I would go to the junk shop and be the secretary. I learned to drive on a pickup truck that had no door on the driver’s side. You climbed in and out. These days it would be unheard of, of course. I would run errands from the junk shop.

I was sixteen when I graduated high school, and I was third in my class. I was kind of proud of that. I had somehow skipped a year along the way. I wanted to go to college, and my family was committed to that, but they said they needed me in the business for a while. So I started college when most people do, at the age of eighteen, February of 1945, at Penn State.

INT: Let me take us back a step on this. What kind of Jewish...did you get a Jewish education at all? What was Jewish life like in your family?

FRANCES: Our family was probably typical of most in Shenandoah. The men worked on Saturday and my mother lit Shabbos candles—absolutely kosher—we never ate out. If we did, if we were on some trip to New York to visit the family, we had hard boiled eggs or lettuce and tomatoes or fruit or something if we stopped. There was no question that our household was Jewish. There was no question it was Shabbat. My mother did not work on Shabbat. It was a
completely different day. Maybe we would walk around uptown. Maybe we would stop in and have ice cream on a Saturday afternoon. That’s about as much as we did on Shabbat. The town itself was highly motivated Jewishly. What happened with me is at my age, when the Depression came, even though all of my older brothers and sisters had a good Jewish education from a hired teacher, who was a full-time teacher, after school, of course. I only had six months in Hebrew school. The town also had a kosher butcher, a chazan, a rabbi and a Shammas. I remember his name was Holdhaber. I thought it was such an interesting name. And I vaguely remember these people.

INT: And the synagogue was orthodox at that time?

FRANCES: The synagogue was orthodox. It had an upstairs. And in fact, what is interesting and maybe really most interesting for those who are hearing about this, is that that synagogue was recently renovated by my brothers, who made sure that they supplied some of the work, and I’m talking about within the last ten, fifteen and twenty years. There were devoted people to the synagogue. Earlier, my family always had people stopping—we called them meshulachim. They ate at our house and they were befriended at our house, and my family was always close to the rabbi, even growing up as brothers and sisters. And I can remember some of them. When it came time for me to go to Hebrew school, I had six months of Hebrew school and then they had to let the teacher go because there was no more money in the community to pay for the teacher. I only knew aleph-bet. We did not observe prayers except kiddush for Shabbos, because there were so many in the family and because of the uproar and the business that demanded so much time, and because we were not sitting and questioning or sitting on people’s knees during the time that I can remember. There was not all that questioning about where did you come from and what was it like. I think my parents, perhaps like others, were more interested in becoming American, and I think that that, as I now understand it, was part of everyone’s life, trying to become American and make a living and make a go of it. We had extra problema and some other health issues in the family that created difficulties, as I recall.

I often look back and think that I came through not unscathed, but perhaps more worldly. I don’t know if that’s the word. Maybe more psychologically able to cope. I have a coping mechanism, I think, that I seem to have learned. I remember that my younger brother, who was three years younger than I, whom as I look back now was very precocious and was always mischievous in school, probably not learning nearly enough. My mother would send me to school to talk to the teachers about accepting him back in school. And my younger sister was looked after by everyone. We’re still very close. The four elder have died, and the four younger are left and we’re all intact. My brothers Milton and Sherwin are in Shenandoah, still running this business. Most people would be millionaires. For some reason, they just didn’t make it. They didn’t even make thousanders. They just work very hard and they’re both single, and they help to employ people and run that wonderful community at large. That synagogue even has a mikvah that was cleaned and prepared for view, because my brother has this idea that the house he lives in now, next door to the synagogue, (which my brother, Reuben, and his wife used to live in years ago.) When Reuben died, my sister-in-law, Hilda, sold it to my brother Milton. We know
and we knew and we now are told that that house is going to belong to the synagogue someday, and the caretaker is going to live there. That’s a very important part of my brother’s life, his devotion to the community, even the general community. Milton wants the synagogue to be a Jewish landmark in Shenandoah.

INT: What is the name of the synagogue?

FRANCES: Kehillat Israel. As I said, it has a second floor, which is still intact. We were home a few months ago. In fact, they still, once in a while, have people’s children come home to have their bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah there. It’s just interesting. It’s functioning...they have a minyan there almost every Sunday morning. Sometimes they trade with Mahanoy City and Frockville. I’ll bet there aren’t more than ten people left in Shenandoah, and a few others. But these elders still meet as a minyan and have a kiddush afterwards on Sunday morning. They hire a cantor from Washington, whose name happens to be Goldberg, who comes to Shenandoah every year for the High Holy Days, and they do have this service for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur every year. My brothers have Passover Seder. They buy their food in Baltimore. They won’t come to me. They have Passover Seder at home in Shenandoah, and invite some of the stray men—it’s usually stray men, not any women—to their Seder. But it’s becoming less. I think last Passover, this past Passover, they had five people. I remember them having eight and ten over the years. People are passing on, of course. That’s why.

INT: Let me take you back then to college. So you went to Penn State. Was it unusual for a woman at that point to go to college in this area?

FRANCES: I think it was unusual, but I guess I was maybe considered bright. Once I think my parents received a letter that I can’t seem to find, because now I want to show it to my grandchildren. The letter said something about: We wanted to tell you that your daughter received the highest mark of the grade-school children in the intelligence test that was given, and we’re telling you this so that you will consider her future education. Basically, that’s what the letter said. That may have either motivated me, because all the neighbors, Jewish mostly, would pat me on the back and tell me how smart I was, encourage me. Maybe it’s very hard for you to believe that I was a quiet, shy little girl. I was. And when I went off to college, it was 1945, the war was winding down. I particularly remember when President Roosevelt died and I was crying. Someone, somebody non-Jewish in the suite where we lived in Atherton Hall walked in and said that she doesn’t know what we’re crying about, and made some other remarks that I don’t even recall. I just recall that incident, thinking, “How could there be someone who doesn’t want him?” And of course, since then, I’m caught up with history and understand some of the problems of President Roosevelt related to the Holocaust.

INT: She wasn’t Jewish. It may have been another objection.

FRANCES: I am sure that it was also another objection. I’m sure it was political.
INT: Did you face any problems at college as far as being Jewish that you recall?

FRANCES: No. At Penn State in those days we wore these green beanies and signs in front of us and we were hazed, but I really quickly connected to Hillel. Let me take you back to Shenandoah. For young people, we also had in Shenandoah what was called the Jewish Community Center. A half a block down from the synagogue there was a corner building, two stories high, with an auditorium and a lower auditorium, meaning on the first floor, a small one, and upstairs a larger one. And this was the practice in our area—I don’t know about other areas—B’nai B’rith was very visible as a B’nai B’rith men’s organization and a B’nai B’rith youth organization. There were dances in the region. They might be in Hazelton. They might have been in Shenandoah. But there was a lot of social life that encouraged young Jewish people to get together and be together, and there was a lot of dating from Shenandoah even to Reading and Pottsville. There was a lot of dating. Not interdating. A lot of dating of Jewish people. And these organizations and social events were very often sponsored and encouraged by the elders, so that young people could meet one another, and indeed, my brother met his wife in Pottsville. I know so-and-so met his wife in Reading and Hazelton and Wilkes-Barre. That was very, very typical. So there was a strong Jewish community in Shenandoah, more so than in the other smaller towns. I mentioned, Mahanoy City or Ashland, but they did all get together. I thought that was very helpful in strengthening Jewish life from that area. There were quite a few people who moved and live now in Harrisburg who are from Shenandoah. That’s also interesting. Of course they live everywhere else now too, and some of them became well known.

INT: Okay. So you’re back in college. So you didn’t experience any particular discomfort at being Jewish there?

FRANCES: I guess I almost immediately started to go to Hillel, because I was oriented to looking for the Jewish connection, absolutely oriented. But I must say I did go to the school dances in Shenandoah, and I danced the polka with one particular non-Jewish fellow, but there was no question that I would never go out with him. When my non-Jewish friends in Shenandoah, girl friends, would have parties, they knew not to invite me. They did not invite me, because they did not really expect me to come and I would not have gone. But I did go to the dances, school dances, and to the USI dances at Indiantown Gap—highly chaperoned—wearing my Magen Dovid, looking for Jewish soldiers!

INT: Was that just less threatening in a sense or more distant?

FRANCES: I think so, because they didn’t happen so often, and I guess my parents realized that I already had instilled in me not going out with anyone who was not Jewish. I think they knew that. I think they were very firm. Of course today we worry more, with good reason. I think then there were very few who married out, and as you all know, when they did marry out, they lived on the periphery of the Jewish community, as different from today.

INT: I think Arthur enters the picture at some point here.
FRANCES: He entered almost very quickly when I arrived in college. We started to go out. We were really drawn to each other.

INT: He was at Penn State too?

FRANCES: He was at Penn State. He graduated high school also in ’43, although he’s four days less than a year older than I am, but I had skipped. He was at Penn State for a year and a half when I arrived, and we were drawn to each other. And then he was eighteen and he wasn’t ROTC, but he was drafted. He tried to enlist, and he, to this day, tells our grandsons especially—especially the ones in Israel—about coming home and saying, “Hey mom, I enlisted. Here are my papers. All I need is your signature,” and this is before he’s eighteen. And she said, “Oh, did you? Let me see the papers.” And she took the papers and without another thing just ripped them up right in front of his eyes, and that was the end of that. But when he was eighteen, within a year later, he was drafted. And we were engaged before he left for the army. He was in Japan for a year and came back. He did graduate college after seven semesters. College was different then. We were on the accelerated program. Summers were full semesters. I was on the accelerated program then, also that second summer. I recall that I was taking his papers to the registrar’s office and the graduation office to get his certificate for the test that he took, and I’m not completely sure where he took the test but he was granted the graduation then.

The only other thing I want to say is about Hillel and being involved Jewishly. We had a Rabbi Benjamin Kahn, whom I believe then became the national Hillel director. I do remember him as being the Hillel Rabbi of Penn State. I remember others like Martin Cohen from Hazelton, who became president of the Jewish Publication Society, or chairman of the board. (End of tape 1, side 1) Others from our home area who really have progressed in life, and I guess the one most significant one that I think about so much is Dr. Martin Abeloff, who became the head of oncology at Johns Hopkins Hospital within the past few years. Oncology not only at Johns Hopkins but head of oncology across the United States. That does not speak for the good schools in Shenandoah necessarily. It speaks for the good student—because as I look back, I really think that I did not get a great education there. When I think about how and what children are taught today—and I’m not talking about computers and such—when I went to my principal and said that I was going to college and I didn’t know quite what area I should study, is it possible to take a guidance test of some kind that would help me, and his answer to me was, “Oh, you’re so good in everything. You would probably come out good and you still wouldn’t know anything more after the test.” So that was the end of that. So it was really a laissez-faire kind of thing.

INT: You actually led me to another question that I wanted to ask you. Did you, at the point when you started college, have any idea what you wanted to do with it professionally?

FRANCES: I guess I was comfortable because I had been in the business world, and I was continuing to pursue that, but in those days it was called Business Administration, and it wasn’t anything like today. I took a few accounting courses and I recall taking a course in insurance and business law and such. But to tell you the truth, my main focus turned out to be my soon-to-be
husband, who had been a member of a Jewish Fraternity, Beto-Sigma Rho. I joined a Jewish sorority, Phi Sigma Sigma, and became president of that, supporting Kidney Research through the national office. Through our local sorority, I initiated the support of a child through a national organization seeking help after the war.

I want to talk a little bit more about Hillel at Penn State. I do recall that I became co-chairman of UJA at the time, the UJA appeal among students. I had a roommate who was very wealthy and I recall that her mother would send her designer clothes in boxes, huge boxes, like maybe five in the box, and then she would put the box under the bed. She wasn’t my size or anything. And her mother would send shoes from Bergdoff Goodman that would be navy blue with nailheads platform, which was the style, and black, two pairs, two different colors, and I recall that it absolutely never bothered me. I was very low on money and was very dependent on my family just for paying the bills. I don’t know if it’s the lack of money or the fact that the affluence surrounding me really never bothered me. It still does not today, which is interesting. I’m certainly comfortable in my life, but it was very tight for many years for us. We worked very hard, were very, very short on money. I just wanted to mention that. But the Hillel UJA, I think I encountered then what I encounter now sometimes, where some people with the most money have the least ability to think that they can give some of it away. I encountered it then with my roommate, whom I had to badger to give me a contribution of some small amount.

INT: Was that your first solicitation?

FRANCES: Probably my first solicitation. It was incomprehensible to me at the time, because I was very soulful and concerned about the Jewish people, and I think that came from my parents. I always knew that education was important and today we call it family values. I was learning those values without even knowing it. Okay. I just needed to tell you that that was an important experience in my life.

INT: Back to Arthur. So he was away in Japan for a year and then when he came back...he came back at the war’s end?

FRANCES: He was gone from ’46 to ’47, and in August of ’47 we were married, and then I went back to college for one semester in September. He had applied to Dickinson Law School and was not admitted, and then was admitted for February. So we only saw each other on weekends that first semester, but I was committed to graduating and he was committed to working. So he really worked with my family in their business, got to know my family real well. They loved him.

INT: He was living where when you met?

FRANCES: He was at college. His home was in Harrisburg. His parents were kosher butchers. His father was a kosher butcher and his mother helped in the store. They led a kosher butcher’s life. As he told me-I didn’t know him then-when he was growing up and the Depression had hit
him hard also, but he said he went to shul every Friday night and Saturday morning and went to
the Chassidish shul, and after his bar mitzvah, I think he joined Rabbi Silver’s class and that’s
how he became close to Rabbi Silver, and that has lasted ever since. We were married in
Harrisburg, and Rabbi Silver married us.

INT: I think we should probably mention for the listeners that we’re referring to Rabbi David
Silver, who was, for fifty years, the rabbi of the main orthodox synagogue in Harrisburg. He was
also the founder of the yeshiva here.

FRANCES: And still a stately gentleman.

INT: Yes, at ninety-one. Okay, so you finished college then.

FRANCES: And a week later we moved to Carlisle. Don’t forget, this is post war, no building
going on, no places to live, very difficult to find. We found two rooms on the third floor with a
bathroom on the second floor. No kitchen. I remember putting the milk and the orange juice on
the window sill. Although we did eat out, we tried to do some food service at home. Our landlady
was so upset because she knew we weren’t comfortable, but it was a place to live. Arthur was
committed to law school. And then we found another place. But I have to tell you about my job
in Carlisle, which I think has an interesting commentary about those days.

The day after we moved into our two rooms, and Arthur was starting law school-he was
on the GI Bill of Rights, so that helped us. I must say our parents would have helped us and given
us money but we were always very resistant and tried to do it on our own. I recall that if we come
in for...I kept kosher-when we finally got into a little apartment, I kept kosher and we would
come, of course, to my father-in-law for an order and we wanted to pay for it and he allowed us
to pay for it but not the full amount. And then when we would take the bag home we’d find lots
of extra things tucked into the bag. And do you know that I was angry? That’s so terrible, to have
been angry. And now, I understand more about maybe why I should have been more gracious
about it. I don’t say that I showed my anger to them, but I really wished that I didn’t have to take
it at the time and that we could have been more self-sufficient.

Back to Carlisle. When Arthur started law school, I immediately went to the employment
agency to look for a job. So I was looking for office work. The person there-it was the
Pennsylvania State Employment Agency-said, “I think I have just the job for you.” We drove to
the Carlisle Barracks Officers Club in Carlisle. It was not the Army War College then. The
medical field service school had just moved, and it became...I’m not even sure of the name, if it
was Army War College-probably it started just then. He took me to the officers club, and I was
interviewed by Colonel Tuttle, who was the commanding officer. And there was a general, a
General McGaw, but Colonel Tuttle interviewed me and the judge advocate interviewed me and
lo and behold I got the job. And I kept the job for two-and-a-half years, until Arthur graduated,
and maybe a little beyond that. When I was resigning and we were moving to Harrisburg, things
were very tight. We needed my money and the GI Bill, but we managed to get through. I recall
when I was leaving, the Colonel called—after I had given my notice and trained someone else—and said he wanted me to come up so they could take a picture and he wanted to award a certificate and such, which he did. And that was all very nice. And then he sat me down and he said, “Mrs. Goldberg, I must tell you a story. Everybody on this base knows the story, but I don’t think you do.” He said, “When we had the woman who preceded you, this young woman who preceded you, all she wanted to do was flirt with the officers, and she was flirting with the officers and not getting her work done. I was stomping around in the General’s office and I said, ‘Damn it, what we need in that office is a Jewish girl, somebody by the name of Goldberg, somebody who we know isn’t going to flirt with the officers.’” As it happened, I was a Mrs. Goldberg! On the other hand, it was a statement of the times. It was for the most part a true statement of the times. And of course, it shows the culture change today. That wouldn’t, of course, be the case today necessarily. But it was then. And as I think back and get further away from that, I think it’s a vivid statement of the times. It was pretty funny, then!

INT: So you moved to Harrisburg. What year was that?

FRANCES: 1950. We moved into the garden apartments that were owned by Hollinger, on the hill, called Hillcrest, across from John Harris High School. It’s interesting. My mother-in-law was a little upset that we moved so far. She should only know what far is. But we lived there for two years.

INT: And Arthur opened a law practice at that point?

FRANCES: Arthur opened his own little office, $37.50 a month, and I started working for him. But you know what? The phone would ring and it would be his mother, and he would spend his time at the courthouse doing free legal service, because if somebody didn’t have a lawyer then he would offer to represent them, and he got a lot of practice, free practice, and made a little bit of money but it was really my salary—because I almost immediately went to work for an insurance company—and I worked for several years. And then I became pregnant with Robin—she was born in September, 1952. We left the apartment and a year later, with a little bit of money that Arthur had made in one particular case, just a little bit, we were able to buy an old house on Green Street, and we lived at 2229 Green Street, and three more children were born there.

INT: Tell me the names of those and maybe what their ages are now.

FRANCES: Our children? Robin was born in ’52 so she’s going to be—it’s hard to believe—forty-six. Karen, who lives in Israel, is a year and a half younger. She was born in February of ’54. Ellen was born in October of ’56. So it’s ’52, ’54, ’56. My mother-in-law, Ethel, died in the spring of ’55—a devastating blow to all of us. She was only fifty-two. The next year, Ellen was born and named for her. Andy was born five years later in 1961. In the meantime, my mother had died after Ellen was a year old, which was a great shock to us. My father was so much older, and in the course of things we had expected otherwise. My mother had died after surgery. It was very traumatic. Very. In fact, still is. And then when Andy was born—and we really felt we were going
to have another girl-it didn’t matter, and it wasn’t a mistake. He was there to be named for my mother. I recall speaking to my aunt, my mother’s younger sister who lived in New York and continued to live an observant life with her father, my grandfather, after my grandmother died. That was a very observant family. When we visited them, we were observant. I can remember Shabbat and all of my aunt’s husband’s family. He was a cantor who died because of the flu, and she was left with two young children and we were very close to them. They are all still very observant today and that’s a whole other family story.

Back to Andy. I recall calling my aunt, telling her we had a baby boy and I was going to name him after her father, my grandfather, and his name was Nathan Carl. And I said, “So we’re thinking of naming him Nathan.” She said, “But Frances, the Hebrew name is Avraham Nissan,” and I said, “I never knew that.” And then I realized if we named him Nathan Andrew, NAG would be his initials, and I would not give him those initials, so we did name him Andrew Nathan Goldberg, so we reversed it because she told us to use the A. When Rabbi Silver said to us, “Andrew, what kind of name is that?” I said, “Rabbi, with Andrew Goldberg he won’t get lost to the Jewish people.” We just liked the name. It almost was going to be Avery, and when I said something about Avrohom, the rabbi said something Biblical about Avrohom not being the original name. I don’t quite understand that.

**INT:** His original name was Avram and then G-d changed it to Avraham, took part of the “hey” from G-d’s name.

**FRANCES:** Say that again please.

**INT:** His name was Avram, alef, bet, raish, mem. And then when G-d changed his name, he made it Avraham because “hey” is one of the letters of G-d’s name, so He added this to his name.

**FRANCES:** Okay. Whatever it was, I was not going to name him Abraham, because I knew someone named Abraham when I was growing up and I didn’t like him. Of course, I like the original Abraham whom we now know! But that was just an interesting commentary. I had said something to the rabbi that we were trying to find an R to begin with, and then when the rabbi said to me that there’s no name in the family for my mother’s father and that there will be time for naming for my mother, and that we would be doing my mother great honor by naming this boy for her father. Rabbi was right! Since then, there are those named for my mother, whose name was Rebecca, including our own granddaughter. So I did take that advice and that happened when I called my aunt and we worked on her father’s name.

**INT:** I’m wondering, since it’s three o’clock, whether we should pause at this point.

**FRANCES:** I think it’s a good time, because we really have talked about…I don’t know that there’s anything more in my background.

**INT:** We’re going to talk about Jewish identity issues and roles and things like that. So we’ll
FRANCES: Concerning the Jewish element in my life—I always loved being Jewish! I feel special, I feel enriched, and I have often felt obligated to take action in order to be helpful, as if the finger of G-d is pointing at me. Growing up in our household in Shenandoah and visiting extended family in Brooklyn taught me Jewish values, but since I grew up during the Depression, as I told you, our Jewish community could no longer employ a Hebrew school teacher, and therefore I had very little formal education. Whatever I have learned, I have learned as an adult, either in college, at study sessions at my synagogue, at Hadassah, through lectures and reading, and with my children through their years at Yeshiva Academy in Harrisburg, our Hebrew day school.

When we moved to Harrisburg in 1950 and Arthur started to practice law, I worked, and the first few years were very lean. Our three daughters and son were born to us in 1952, '54, '56 and '61. We lived in a big old house, our children went to Yeshiva, we carpooled, we joined Rabbi Silver's orthodox synagogue, Kesher Israel. I joined the Sisterhood, Hadassah and the PTA and became a “professional” volunteer with much more ahead of me in our Harrisburg community and beyond. Arthur always encouraged me and respected what I did. He shares my sense of responsibility and has been lauded for it in his own right.

I became president of the Sisterhood, Yeshiva PTA, Hadassah and the Dauphin County Association of Lawyers Wives—also, a board member of Jewish Family Service, the Jewish Home and the United Jewish Community, and chairman of UJA Women’s Division during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. A local radio and TV station asked me to become a Spectrum Commentator for two minutes every other week, and I did that for 3½ years, on subjects of my choice—often social issues, Jewish issues and women’s issues. I also featured in a national educational TV program representing Judaism on the Public Broadcasting System, “Like the Wind,” in 1978.

In 1972, after a devastating flood in June in Harrisburg, I founded the Kosher Meals on Wheels Program through Hadassah and Jewish Family Service. It is still heavily relied upon by our Jewish community and I’m very proud of the initiative and hard work on the part of many to accomplish this.

In the general community, I served on the United Way and became a member of the board of the Community General Osteopathic Hospital and served for fifteen years. Health care meant a lot to me, and Arthur and I became chairmen of the Heart Fund for the area.

I was urged several times by Rabbi Silver to become president of the Yeshiva Academy Board of Directors, and I finally served as one of the first women in the country to become a president of a Torah Umesorah Day School from 1975 to 1979-reluctant to begin with, but it was a phenomenon I loved!

During these years of our children growing up and Arthur progressing in his profession,
my work in Hadassah continued, and although I was asked several times to be president of the Eastern Pennsylvania Region, I finally did accept the honor in 1984 and continued until 1987. This effort encompassed much traveling and speaking through our region. I was on several mission to Israel, one especially in 1985 where we greeted the newly arrived Ethiopians then, and I held a newborn baby just born in Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem—a thrilling moment! I was then appointed and elected to the National Board for these past fifteen years, which have turned out to be a great challenge and highlight in my volunteer life. On one occasion especially, I remember Arthur and our son, Andrew, attending the dedication of the Mother and Child Center at Hadassah Hospital. Since Andrew is a surgeon, I was especially proud to show off our hospital!

I realize, as I think about it, that my personal Zionism and sustained efforts in behalf of our Jewish people, efforts in behalf of medical care, youth rescue and education, have culminated in a sense of gratification I feel privileged to enjoy. I even became a delegate to the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in December, 1987, with six hundred delegates from thirty-five countries. I recall that in the committee that I was assigned to, the Settlement Committee, I was able to cause a direction in their thinking which they quoted in their summation!

Perhaps it shouldn’t be a wonder then that our daughters, Karen and Ellen, moved to Israel between 1979 and 1981, married sabras and we now have five grandsons and one granddaughter living in Israel. Between Hadassah and my personal travel, I have been to Israel thirty times, including the time of the scud attacks during the Gulf War in January, 1991! I experienced the “safe room” in each of their households during the two weeks I was there!

You asked me, Barbara, about the Russian Resettlement Program in Harrisburg through Jewish Family Service. It was interesting to me because it was started in about 1975, I guess, when the influx started. I think I was very proud of Harrisburg because Jewish Family Service was bringing in Russians through HIAS, and it was a prescribed program. I do recall that the program started in 1975—am I correct about that?

INT: About. Maybe ’74, I’m not sure.

FRANCES: I became a chairman in 1976, and I was chosen because someone at Ohev Sholom, a reform temple, was chairman and somebody at Beth El, and I was at Kesher Israel so I was chosen. I think I might have just gone out of office as president, and I was asked. I felt it was my responsibility and I did participate and met the Russian families, but way beyond that. We as a family participated in many facets of their life, and one of the interesting aspects I found was that they did not completely trust the Jewish community, didn’t completely understand why we would do this as a volunteer. Volunteerism was not in their psyche. There were many instances of not only mistrust but anger. They didn’t know my parents who came here and had no help. They seemed to expect this help. I’m not sure that they have given back to the community what they should. In retrospect—maybe it’s not the Jewish way—I think in retrospect I might have thought that they should sign up an intent to return to the community to the best of their ability. Maybe that’s
not the Jewish way, but there really was no way to make any of them feel that future generations of immigrants could be taken care of by their help also. That’s just an aside. Whether that could ever be taken on as some kind of obligation that is understood or something-maybe they’re too vulnerable when they arrive. Whatever. I just needed to make that comment, because that is something that I have missed and mind very much, knowing how much energy and combined community effort went into this, and when they would ask me why I’m doing this I would say, “Well, when you’re Jewish you help other Jewish people.” That was not something they really understood. But I do have pictures and wonderful memories of some of the families, and I must say that that was an important part of my volunteer work.

INT: Your job essentially was to match volunteers with families that they were helping?

FRANCES: At the time I became chairman, I was chairman attached to a particular family. There weren’t so many families coming. Then it was later that many, many more came and it grew. The program grew and there were many people in the community who were helpful-getting furniture, setting up apartments, making sure the apartment was clean, making sure there were bedclothes and furniture and everything in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom-everything that a family would need, presuming that they came with very little. Even food being in the refrigerator that day. So we did all of that when the families arrived-the apartment and place for them to live was made ready.

INT: You went to the airport.

FRANCES: We went to the airport to meet families. In a particular case, one family’s apartment wasn’t ready. They were at the motel and made a home in the motel. I made sure a portable refrigerator was brought in and food there so that they could function. We did the chauffeuring and driving and assigning people to drive them to doctors. The doctors in the community did not charge these people. We made sure that we signed them up for health tests and immunization, if it was necessary. Treated them free, delivered their babies free. Lots of services. And I have no idea if it is above and beyond what other communities did. I know that we tried very hard to do what we could in order to make them comfortable-find them jobs, give them a start and so on. Many of the families have done very well. Some have stayed close to the community. Some have moved away for better jobs. Others maybe are not doing quite so well but lately, there has been not so many, I understand, who have come because the politics has changed. The immigration laws have changed. For reunification of families is the only thing that’s permitted. But that was a very proud time in my life, and I’m still friendly with some of the families. We have helped them in their education, helped them get scholarships, connect them with the right places and hopefully give them good advice. So many of them-

INT: It’s a big mitzvah.

FRANCES: I certainly understand that. Many of them, or most of them, have sent their children to the yeshiva. Maybe not continuing completely, but the Yeshiva Academy has been also open
and available to their enrollment at no charge to them. In many cases, I’m sure, that even meals were provided without payment. I don’t know—I guess.

INT: Tutoring and special services when necessary.

FRANCES: And you know that because you’re more current within the parent body than I am.

INT: Keep going, and then I’ll interrupt you at some point.

FRANCES: Barbara, another something that I was involved in, almost by accident, was an advisory committee for a special conference that took place in Washington, and it was called the Conference of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. They established what was called, in 1984, Faith in Humankind, Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust, and the chairman was Elie Weisel, and the coordinator of the program, Elie Weisel’s right hand, was Dr. Carol Rittner, who is Sister of Mercy from Harrisburg. We happened to have met her at Hadassah, in front of the lobby, looking at a Harrisburg name, and she appeared and said, “I’m Carol Rittner from Harrisburg. Are you from Harrisburg?” And my husband happened to mention that probably her father is one of his fellow Masons, and from then on we became friends. She was the one who called and asked me to be on her committee in Harrisburg. That was a very, very exciting time.

INT: And the purpose was to locate and honor those who had rescued Jews?

FRANCES: Yes. To honor the rescuers. Secretary of State George Schultz, Helen Hayes, Ted Koppel—so many other great and grand people were part of the one evening, in addition to the conference, that was in the auditorium at Kennedy Center in Washington, where these people were honored, each by name. They stood up and they were honored. It was an absolutely magnificent event. You could imagine—well-orchestrated, under the aegis of the State Department, and a lot of the meetings were held there, on many of the topics. I particularly remember one where the Polish government or the Polish people—but it was Polish, were castigated for their unseemly role in this whole episode, and how one of them refuted what was said and the back and forth, and all of this, of course, is recorded. What came out of the conference, written, I’m sure are volumes, but the one piece I’m familiar with is what Dr. Carol Rittner wrote with Sondra Meyers from Scranton, who were friends. They put together a book called “Courage to Care,” and some were excerpts from the conference, absolute excerpts of people who were honored at the conference, and then from that came a documentary film, also from the conference, and the documentary film was one of five nominated for an Academy Award. It didn’t win but just being one of five nominated was a tremendous honor. My part in being there and witnessing some of this was a great highlight in my life. I just needed to mention it. And it was a lot of volunteer work in addition to being there. I guess touching famous people, in and of itself, is not nearly so important to me as what I gain from it in what we do when we are together. So it was Elie Weisel and Dr. Carol Rittner—it was what I accomplished that I loved. It didn’t matter that I was standing next to Elie Weisel, even though I met him in the airport one day and he was at the fountain pen desk buying a fountain pen, and I went over to him and I said,
"Oh, Mr. Weisel. Let me see the fountain pen you’re buying. Maybe if I buy one I will learn to write as you do.” And we kibbitzed a little bit and he was adorable in his response. And he had spoken in Harrisburg the year before, so that was kind of fun. But actually being with the notables—it’s more important what I learn and achieve with them and through them.

I guess the other notable I want to mention is Wolf Blitzer. Because I was on the Community Relations Council of the United Jewish Community, in 1988 I started what we call the Israel Forum Series. I don’t think they’ve continued, but I’m still working on that committee and maybe it’s not called that now. We always have an Israel connection at some point during the years of planning. This particular one—we ran like a conference-workshop, from seven o’clock in the evening until ten at night. At the time, the settlements in Israel were an extremely hot issue on the table. We brought Wolf Blitzer—had a lot of work that we accomplished before he came.

INT: At that point in his career, where was he?

FRANCES: He was in Washington. Maybe not quite the visible person that he is now, but he had just come to Washington from his post on the Jerusalem Post, because he had written for them. Then he came to Washington and we decided to bring him here and there was some funding. We raised some money in order to make that possible. He was wonderful in helping us plan. Our committee was wonderful. I felt energized by the people who were on the committee, who not only were knowledgeable about Israel but knowledgeable about the particular issues involved, and we divided into workshops. First we had Wolf Blitzer speak. I had the honor of introducing him. We had him speak and then they broke up into workshops, and then came back and each workshop had its presentation. He responded to each of them and then he had a closing. That was very, very exciting. I have all of my notes and cannot find the video. I am upset. You think you’re upset about not finding something—I’m upset, because that video was, in my mind, confiscated by somebody.

INT: You might have lent it to somebody.

FRANCES: I might have. However, one aside which is like G-d working, His doings anonymously, His coincidences anonymously. Several months before Mr. Blitzer was coming, he was engaged and planned to come, I happened to be on a speakers’ tour for Hadassah in Buffalo, and Wolf Blitzer’s parents live in Buffalo. I was taken to see them for a Hadassah reason, and while I was there, realizing who they were, I talked to them about Wolf coming to Harrisburg, and his mother said, “Come look at this picture.” Although my mind is a little hazy about the details, she showed me a picture of Wolf Blitzer with Anwar Sadat, and told me that Wolf had said to Sadat, “Why don’t you come to Jerusalem?” and whether that was the very first time that Jerusalem was mentioned to Sadat or whether it was part of this whole encouragement, it was after that that Sadat did come, and Mrs. Blitzer was sure that Wolf was part of the reason for him to come. That kind of stuck in my mind, so that when I was introducing Wolf Blitzer I mentioned that I had been in his parents’ house. He perhaps didn’t know it, so he found that out for the first time and that was a very exciting moment for me. But that conference was absolutely wonderful.
I was so proud of how it turned out to be. There’s no doubt it was with the help of a lot of the conference-workshop people. That was another long, arduous volunteer event that took a lot of time. Hundreds and hundreds of people were in that room, who separated into workshops. It was an amazing accomplishment. I was thrilled.

INT: Were there other specifics you wanted to mention—otherwise I was kind of going to take you a little bit more into a philosophical round at this point.

FRANCES: Maybe two more things that I think are somewhat worldly. One was that in Harrisburg, in 1990, I was approached by somebody in the Baltimore-Washington area, through a connection in Hadassah, and asked if I would run a blood testing for bone marrow donor in Harrisburg. Even though it was something I had never done, I just felt obligated to do it because it was lifesaving. This young woman by the name of Allison Atlas, who became world famous because of her search, who raised people’s consciousness about this potential lifesaving possibility for everyone, most everyone. I did do that blood testing, and someone said to me, “You won’t even get twenty-five people to come.” I said, “I don’t know—whatever I get, that can’t stop me from trying.” It turned out that we had 200 people come, which was remarkable. From what I understand, there was—not for the woman we were searching for, but because these people could get their blood test on to an international computer test, that someone’s, I’m sure, life was saved as a result of that testing. The following summer, in July of 1990, I was asked to do it for National Hadassah at the New York Hilton, and we did it there and we did 300 in the New York Hilton, and Hadassah has done that several times since. But I was able to do that in 1990. I was thrilled with that opportunity. And through that program became very much involved with Dr. Shimon Slavin, who is an international specialist in performing bone marrow transplants. That liaison has meant a great deal to me.

INT: And he’s at Hadassah?

FRANCES: He’s at Hadassah in Jerusalem but he also has licenses in the United States and he travels in the United States teaching. He travels around the world teaching and doing, and he’s just a very wonderful man. Several people from Harrisburg have been in touch with him for personal problems they have had, and he has always tried to be helpful, and sometimes has been helpful but not necessarily able to cure, because we’ve all got to cure this cancer that occurs, and that’s an important part of Hadassah, to me. My oldest four siblings—each of them died of a different kind of cancer. That means a lot to me to try to find a cure.

INT: Parenthetically, I have a cousin who’s at Weitzman Institute. He’s working on cancer.

FRANCES: Absolutely. We need everybody’s effort, because it’s not only one bit of research that’s going to do it.

INT: Then you said—
FRANCES: Maybe one more story. In 1994, in May of '94, my daughter Robin was participating on a high level at Project Kesher, an international conference of Jewish women that was being held in Kiev, in the Ukraine, and she asked me a number of times to go with her, and I said, “I can’t, I can’t.” And one day my husband got tired of my saying this and said, “Tomorrow is your birthday. For Heaven’s sake, will you go?” And within a month we made the arrangements and I went, and that was an incredible experience. Meeting people from all over the world who came to this conference and meeting people from the former Soviet Union, who came to the conference in Ukraine, some from Siberia, some from very far away, maybe only one or two who came from so many far away parts but who have now carried back to their communities the idea that women can be in charge of their lives and in charge of community efforts, in charge of Volunteerism. A lot of that has evolved from this one particular conference. One episode I remember is someone at our workshop that discussed anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, and after she discussed...and there were interpreters, so that when people spoke in Russian, it was translated, and also if they spoke in English, it was translated. So it was a little bit slow going, but very intense and very workable. The workshops were wonderful. And she was talking about anti-Semitism, their variety, and it was just after...This was May, and it was just after an April episode in Harrisburg, when someone came to speak—and now I can’t even remember his name—came to speak here and gave a very anti-Semitic talk, and it was on the evening of Passover, which was so devastating. Do you remember that?

INT: I remember it after the fact that a lot of people didn’t know he was speaking.

FRANCES: Correct. And after the fact there was a lot of response that came forth, and there might have even been meetings of people to try to white it and to come to understand it. But when I sat at the workshop and explained this whole event to the Soviet women, to everybody who was there, and explained our event and our Harrisburg encounter with anti-Semitism, it was unbelievable to me that they had a hard time believing me or accepting the fact that anti-Semitism does exist somewhere else. So that was one of the moments that I remember about the Project Kesher.

INT: Who sponsored this? Do you know?

FRANCES: It was sponsored by a new organization at that time that was created in Chicago, Illinois, by a woman named Sally Gratch, who traveled to Moscow on a walk, wore a Jewish star-walking for peace with her husband—and somebody walked up to her, Svetlana, and saw her Jewish star and started talking to her, and two years later they had created this international conference, because somehow they met eye-to-eye and they dreamed up this wonderful Jewish women’s conference that could have an impact. And now we’re talking about 1994, and four years later I’m receiving this wonderful information brochures. They have an executive director, and that Project Kesher has a great impact in the Soviet Union, all over, because women are going back to their communities and taking from their workshops and learning and having these smaller workshops involving their communities. And I guess any movement, if they take on a task, can do it. It’s creativity and effort that can bring progress and change about.
INT: I think that actually goes pretty well into...because what I wanted to ask you next was how do you feel, or do you feel, that women’s roles in the Jewish community have changed since you were a young woman.

FRANCES: Oh, they absolutely have changed. I think that women today are feeling that they have impact—I don’t know if the word is power. They certainly have monetary power. Barbara, there are women who are working, sometimes making very handsome salaries, and able to travel and fund that which is important to them, whether they are married or not. There are certainly many more single women than the Jewish community would like. We certainly know all about assimilation and such. But I feel that the more that women become empowered and involved in leadership roles or participation in the Jewish community—they don’t have to sit on the sidelines anymore, and if people are involved and for themselves can feel that they are contributing—not only monetarily, but with their intellect and with their energy and with time that is useful—not licking envelopes and pasting stamps, that if the time is useful, that they can feel not only part of the Jewish community but to feel empowered to take leading roles. And I think that men are realizing that women could be listened to.

I grew up and remember my mother saying to me, because I guess I was kind of bright maybe, but I was quiet. Can you believe it? But I can remember my mother once saying to me, “If you’re smart, you’ll be dumb.” I think that says a lot about maybe how we were told to take our place in society. My mother was from Europe and worked at a garment factory in New York, but she was a very bright, wise woman. She was bringing up eight children in those days, being a young immigrant and marrying my father. They worked very hard. Life was different then. Maybe she envisioned what could be, because she encouraged me to go off to college.

INT: And I’m sure you’ve never given your daughters or your granddaughters that advice.

FRANCES: Never. No, no. I remember my mother, as a wedding gift or as an engagement gift, giving to me—this just came to mind—giving to me sterling silver flatware for the table, and saying to me—because she always bought silver plate for others, and gave me sterling silver and said to me, “I know you’ll always have nice company at your house.”

INT: Obviously, we talked about the national leadership project that Hadassah has, but that’s a very ambitious kind of project. How do you think Jewish organizations or Jewish women’s organizations in particular are going to recoup though as women become more—they go out more and more in the working world and the professional world and just have less time and less energy, to some degree probably more children than the traditional community anyway—how will they recoup then that loss. There won’t be probably women like yourself or very few women like yourself who will be full-time professional volunteers, so to speak.

FRANCES: Maybe that’s true, but a lot of my volunteer effort, Barbara, was what I said, pasting envelopes and licking stamps. That doesn’t have to be...that can be done in some other way or by some other people. I think that there is potential. When I told you about National Leadership
Academy, which is the official title, I didn’t tell you that my phone call to Baltimore yesterday was to piggyback on what they’re doing, and I’m hoping to do. This is a hope. I hope that we are going to duplicate to some extent a six month program. I haven’t gotten it started because of personal reasons, but perhaps October or November, after the holidays, until next May. We can establish some leadership for Hadassah. I particularly have Hadassah in mind, but I also know that the United Jewish Community in Harrisburg is embarking on a leadership group related to Zionism, Judaism. It sounds very much like Hadassah’s National Academy within the community, and both of those were created independently in Harrisburg, because I had talked about this in July. National Hadassah had worked through its National Academy. I had thought what a wonderful possibility for Harrisburg.

So in response to your question, how are we going to recoup, I think we need to empower women and tell them that within their time frame, that they can educate themselves to what is needed, that Hadassah and leadership in the Jewish community can respond to their particular avenues of concern and maybe expertise, and if it’s advocacy, they can fit into an advocacy government American affairs program that benefits Jewish women, and I’m sure women in general. Talking about all the issues that are related to women’s work and the impact that women can make on health care, on social issues—all of the issues—church and state. All of these are issues that not everybody agrees on. Even Jewish people don’t agree on them, and we certainly know that. I think that we are going to have to do that purposely, not by the way. This is what happens, you become a leader, as perhaps some of what I was doing, but a purposeful effort to say, “We need your expertise. We want you to help us to make this a better Jewish community.” Part of that is education. (End of tape 2, side 1)

The community of the world, of the United States, says that you must pay school taxes because better education for children is for the benefit of the community, and whether you have children, send your children to public school or whatever you do, you must participate and pay taxes in our public school system. I suggest that the Jewish community has to do the same thing and say, “Whether you believe in Jewish education, have children for Jewish education, don’t send your children to Jewish schools—whatever you do, you must believe that as a Jew, the community benefits from better Jewish education, and we need you to pay your taxes.” Obviously, it has to be a voluntary effort, but if we could get that psyche into the minds of people, to understand that Jewish education of everyone, especially young children, growing children, is to the benefit of the Jewish community and you have to pay for it as a Jew, that would be wonderful. How do we do it?

INT: That’s another project for you.

FRANCES: Yes, that’s another project!

INT: I want to thank you very much. I’m supposed to ask you whether you’re willing to revisit this interview at a later point, if that’s required.
FRANCES: I think I’ve said so much, I can’t imagine that. I can’t imagine there’s anything left. Of course I will. Barbara, you’ve been lovely and wonderful.

INT: Thank you. (End of interview)