INTERVIEW WITH JANE ZOLOT

Feinstein Center for American Jewish History
Temple University
117 South 17th Street-Suite 1010
Philadelphia, PA 19103
INTERVIEW WITH JANE ZOLOT

INT: Today is June 2, 1998 and my name is Sally Benson Alsher and I’m here with Jane Zolot in Merion, Pennsylvania. Jane, tell me where you were born and when.

JANE: I was born in Philadelphia on June 5, 1931. My birthday is this week.

INT: Let’s go back and start with your grandparents. Tell me what you remember about your grandparents.

JANE: Well, I have very rich, warm memories. My father’s parents, Jacob and Elka Heicklen, were people who lived in a very small town in upstate Pennsylvania. My grandfather had left Russia. They lived in a little village near Bobriosk, near Minsk, a village called Kradenov, where my grandfather had lived I guess a fairly, in those days, prosperous life. His family had a little farm which they were not permitted to own because Jews couldn’t own property so the title was in the name of a Christian family who lived nearby. Obviously, nice people. My grandfather used to tell us stories about when there was a harvest he would get on the wagon and ride through the town and call out “Hatofsky,” which is what the name was then, “Hatofsky needs help,” and people would climb on the wagon and come out to their farm and help harvest the crops. Zedie would talk about long tables and women who cooked for the fieldhands, and when he would come in from riding his horse there was somebody who worked on the farm who would take the horse from him. He said he lived like a prince. I’m not so sure it was a prince but was in his mind. He was in the cavalry, in the Russian cavalry. He had been in the service and then the Russo-Japanese War was about to break out and he did not want to go back into the Russian army so he left on a Sunday and my father was born on Wednesday.

I think about my grandmother very often because she was such a strong influence on my life. She was left with the two little boys, my father, Lewis Heicklen, and his brother Sam who was a year older than my father. She had decided that she would come to the United States. My father learned to walk on the ship. She came with two little boys nine months after my grandfather had left, and she brought with her her possessions. She carried her samovar, which is here in this room, with the date of 1881 on it and a perana, which was her quilt, which she had made, a feather quilt, and her Shabbos candlesticks and pillows that she had made. I have the pillows and she herself had plucked the feathers from the geese. She was a very talented woman. She was creative and made a very full life for herself. She described the departure from Russia and having to say goodbye to her father knowing she would never see him again, and she repeated the story over and over. It’s very clearly embedded in my mind. I regret that I never asked her stories about the trip. I’m sure that the journey must have been rather amazing.

My grandfather’s journey was recounted in detail, that he had left and was taken by wagon, covered with straw, to the border, and when they got to the border and they were finally out of Russia, they jumped out of the wagon and the moon was full and bright and they danced
because they were free. He then went to Antwerp. I don’t know how. I think there was a railroad but he got to Antwerp and went to board a ship. He described his caracul hat, which is fur, like broadtail, and a coat and when they saw the caracul hat the officials asked him if he wanted better accommodations—they thought he was a prosperous person—and he did have enough money so he didn’t have to go in the lower deck, steerage. He came to the United States and landed in Philadelphia where there was family. They brought him into a place to live with the family and a little store that they were going to set up for him and he said...in Yiddish there was an expression “like a dog in a box.” He couldn’t stand very close, constricted areas because he had been brought up in the country, and he also suffered from asthma. He had a brother who was a rabbi who had settled near Berwick, Pennsylvania, which is a small town near Wilkes-Barre, and my grandfather went to Berwick peddling and occasionally getting a ride in a wagon. He described what a demeaning experience it was for him to walk like a horse with a pack on his back and he describes sitting down one day in a barn where someone had given him the loft in which to sleep. He sat up in the loft and wept, thinking of having to walk like a beast of burden with a pack on his back.

INT: How old was he when he came?

JANE: He was twenty-eight. He peddled and eventually he would go from door to door selling household items, thread and needles, and sleeping in barns when people were nice enough to give him a place. Because he was kosher he was limited in what he could eat, so it was not an easy time, but he established himself in Berwick, Pennsylvania and opened a little store and became a very prosperous merchant. He eventually had a large store for that area and we used to love being in the store. My grandparents lived in a building that at one time had been a hotel. It seemed like a great big building to us; it had about eighteen rooms on the second floor and a large living area and big kitchen on the first floor and then two stores side by side with a huge basement where my grandmother’s preserves were always lined up. My grandfather sold men’s clothing, women’s clothing, shoes and the big thing up there was hunting deer. He would sell the Woolrich plaid shirts and pants, and at hunting season many people came in and spent a lot of money. This was a working class, blue collar area where he settled. His was the only place in the area with a telephone. So we have a lot of rich memories of the visits to Berwick. The American Car and Foundry Plant was in Berwick and they made trains for royalty. During World War II they started making tanks and we would be sleeping in this huge, heavy building and they would drive the tanks by to test them and the entire building would shake. I remember wondering what it must have been like for children our age—at that time I was about eleven or twelve years old—who were in war areas with tanks coming that were not being tested. That made quite an impression.

My grandmother was an extremely observant woman. She was the most observant of all of our relatives. She had a grape arbor out in the back of their house. They had a barnyard with some chickens and a cow and they were in a country area. The grape arbor became the sukkah. We just have wonderful memories. Shabbos was always an important part and havdalah—we always did havdalah at her house. She really was, I guess, one of the strong orthodox religious influences, but she did it all with such love. I was the oldest grandchild. She invested a lot of her
talents and teaching and interest in me. She did beautiful handwork and her trips to Philadelphia to John Wanamaker to get yarn were always a major excursion. She tried to teach me some of the knitting stitches that she did and even now, when I’m a much better knitter than I was then, I still can’t do the complex, really spider-webby looking patterns that she did. She wouldn’t ride on Shabbos or holidays, of course, and I remember when they came to Philadelphia for my confirmation she wouldn’t come to synagogue because she wouldn’t ride on the holiday. She was extremely observant and in her later years they could no longer walk to shul—there was a small shul and my grandfather was president of it for fifty years. When he died my Uncle Sam, who lived with them throughout their lives, never married—he stayed home and ran the business—then became president of this little shul. In order to get to shul on the High Holidays, Bubie and Zedie would move into the basement of an apartment within walking distance, and my grandmother would do all of her cooking and take all of her pots and pans and they would stay near the shul so they could go to services on High Holidays.

INT: What is her story coming over? You said she always told the story.

JANE: She told the story about leaving her father, how difficult it was to say goodbye to her father knowing she’d never see him again, and all I really know about the trip is that my father learned to walk on the ship. The other details I don’t remember. I’m not sure that she told them to us. We just didn’t know about the way stations until they got to the ship. I’ve studied since then, and there was a whole network of houses and places where people traveling would go, women with children to one place, married couples to another. But I never heard from her and I’ve always been curious. She did carry a Torah with her and the Torah was given to the synagogue in Strawberry Mansion and I’ve never been able to track it down. I did try. It was important to her to bring the Torah, the samovar, the Shabbos candlesticks. The first engagement gift that I got was from my grandparents and it was a pair of candlesticks for Shabbat, sterling silver, which I still use. They need a little repair but I still use them.

Their life was a very interesting one. My grandmother died before my grandfather and the synagogue auditorium was named the Heicklen Auditorium in his honor. This was a small synagogue, a beautiful synagogue, lovely oak benches and quite attractive, and the social room, the auditorium was on the below-ground level. The ground level was this lovely synagogue. There had been a fire in the synagogue and Zaidy was quite elderly at that point. He was eighty-four when he died so I guess he was about eighty-two when the fire took place. He insisted on being taken to the fire immediately and he found the firemen and gave them money to go in and save the Torahs and they did. Of course, that’s part of Jewish tradition. The Torahs must be preserved.

He was the head of the UJA and he was head of Israel Bonds. He ran everything in the town. In his later years he couldn’t walk steps because he had a heart condition so when he would go to solicit for UJA he would call up the steps to the office of the prospect and say, “You’ve got to come down the steps, Jake is here and I want to talk to you about your gift for UJA.” He was written up in the Scranton newspaper when he died because of his many activities
in the community. Not only the Jewish community but United Way, War Bonds, and the bank and countless other things. (Tape shuts) The auditorium was dedicated in June. As a matter of fact, it was this week-I think it was June 4th, and we all went up to the house.

INT: The house is still there?

JANE: Oh yes. He was still living there, and my father and mother and my father’s younger brother and his wife stayed in the house, and the grandchildren drove up for the ceremony of the dedication of the Heicklen auditorium when they burned the mortgage. My grandfather naturally had been involved both as a leader and financial supporter. They named the auditorium the Heicklen Auditorium in his honor, and the women in town cooked a lovely, lovely dinner and it was wonderful evening. It was the first time that my mother and father and my Aunt Lucille and Uncle Izzy, who lived in Allentown, had all stayed overnight in the house in many years. I can’t remember the last time because usually, if our family came up, the others would come another time. But this time everyone was together. During the night my grandfather called them together and said he thought his time had come and he died with his children around him, like a king, and it was as if he were holding on for that last event of his life, the dedication of the auditorium. So it was an interesting ending to a very, very amazing life. My grandfather never learned to read and write English, yet he was highly literate, read the Jewish Forward and the Der Tog. I used to go to buy the papers for them when they came to Atlantic City. He listened to the news constantly. He followed World War II on a map that he had in his house. He was very brilliant, very articulate. My grandmother told me that they chose not to learn English formally-they spoke English but they could not read and write it-because they wanted the boys to learn Yiddish and they knew if they spoke English in the house the boys wouldn’t know Yiddish, so they made a conscious decision to maintain Yiddish at home. Whenever a rabbi came to Berwick, and the rabbis were always coming through collecting money, they always knew they could get a kosher meal at Mrs. Heicklen’s. Bubie was active in Hadassah and the synagogue.

The Jewish education system there was sporadic. Itinerant rabbis would come for a few months and move on, so that my father’s Hebrew, and he’s really quite good at it, reflects many different accents. He does not have a pure Litvak or pure Galician accent. It depended on whichever rabbi happened to be coming through. But education was very important to my grandparents. They paid extra to have my father and his brothers go to school at the other side of town because their business was in the ethnic side of the city and they wanted the boys to have the advantage of a better education. When I look at my father’s diploma, which we have, and I see the courses that he had in high school, I was really amazed with what they learned. Very sophisticated subjects were taught in this little town up in the coal mining area. He really got a wonderful education. He went on to the University of Pennsylvania while living in Philadelphia with an aunt and uncle in Strawberry Mansion.

My mother’s family-her grandparents had been the immigrants. Her mother was born, I believe, in this country. Her father was born near Bialystock. He came to this country-my grandfather was Abraham Payes-he came to this country when he was eight years old, got a job
as a shoeshine boy, earned money and brought over his mother and his brothers. The eight year old boy went to work and did not have the advantage of any education here, but he had gone to cheder in Europe and he was a brilliant man. When I think of what he accomplished without a formal education, it really was quite something. He was a very sharp, intense, very caring person, and my grandmother was a very beautiful, very sweet, very gentle woman. Her name was Fanny Payes and together they had four children. The oldest, my uncle Samuel Payes, who I think we have already talked about but I’ll repeat it in case we haven’t—he died this morning and my mother was next and then my aunt Trudy Richman and my aunt Sylvia Donner. My grandfather was in the shoe business and they lived at Germantown and Lehigh.

My mother and her family, her brother and her sisters, went to the Montefiore Synagogue and they went every afternoon after schoo to Hebrew school. My mother always told the children about how she used to love to go to Hebrew school and that’s what they did every afternoon, and the children used to look at her with such pity that she had to endure the days and days of Hebrew school. But that’s where their world was, and many of the leading intellectual people in Philadelphia were friends of my mother’s. She was inspired by what she learned from them and I think they from some of the things they learned from her. The family then moved to 5700 Park Avenue, and my grandfather was quite successful. He had savings and loans and he retired at a very early age, and then came the crash. He went back into business and became a shoe wholesaler on 4th Street, 4th and Market, which was where all of the shoe people were located. When my mother and father, who were second cousins, became engaged and married, eventually my father went into business with my grandfather. My mother’s maternal grandfather and my father’s father were brothers. My father spent a lot of time with the family when he was in Philadelphia, when he was at Penn visiting his Aunt Fanny and Uncle Abe, who later became his mother-in-law and father-in-law.

My mother was a student at Beaver College. Her father did not see the need for a girl to go to college but her mother insisted. Bubby Payes was such a sweet, soft, gentle person but she had her beliefs and convictions. My mother was at Beaver College and my father was at Penn, at the Wharton School. He would court her-go up to Beaver College. We have wonderful stories about that. His uncle became ill—his uncle also was in the shoe business—so he left college and went to operate his uncle’s business until they could make some arrangement. He was in the class of ’26 and he left before completing his studies, but he did continue with some other formal education.

I should just go back a little bit. Zaidy Payes was one of the founders of Beth Sholom, so the synagogue and Jewish life were very important to my mother’s family. The Seders that my grandmother used to have were impressive. Their house on Park Avenue, which I referred to, was a very large, semi-detached house and there would be one huge table in the living room and another huge table in the dining room and the grandchildren would sit in the breakfast room. We have very large Seders here now and I have never put the children in a separate room. I may have to divide people up, but the children all sit in the main room. I never liked sitting in this breakfast room with the children. I was the oldest grandchild on both sides. I decided, when I had Seders,
children were not going to sit in a separate room, so we’ve managed that. But they were wonderful experiences and my grandparents were strong, strong leaders of the family, patriarch and matriarch. My grandmother was very involved in the Sisterhood. She was involved in the Logan Hadassah. I remember her sitting and making phone calls for the telephone squad, dialing the phone with her little finger. But they had a very lovely home and family and in the summertime they would all come to the seashore, which we talk about later. Both sets of grandparents would come and stay with my parents in whichever house we were living during that particular summer. Really wonderful, wonderful memories.

My mother and father got married and my father went into business with my grandfather in their jobbing house, the Payes Shoe Company, at 4th and Market. My father had other opportunities and my grandfather said to him, “Do what you can do and go as fast as you can go.” My father did that.

INT: What was he like, your father?

JANE: Still is amazing. We’re going to have lunch today. He’s ninety-three. He’s really an incredible person. He has a very analytical mind. He looks at a situation and sees all of the possibilities and he has the incredible ability of helping other people look at situations in the same way, a Socratic method of educating people. He never imposes his will, but in a very gentle way he will ask questions that enable you to come to certain decisions. We were really blessed with a wonderful, wonderful household. My parents had a beautiful marriage, really extremely beautiful. I have two sisters. My father was surrounded by women, my mother and three daughters, and he was always proud of what we did and encouraged us. Whatever our interests were became his interests, and even to this day, he has expanded his capacity to take in fields that his grandchildren are involved in. He’s a mentor and advisor to all of them. One of our sons is involved in the computer world and it’s amazing how much my father can talk to him about things that may not be technologically on the same level but certainly business oriented, and has become probably a best friend to our son, who’s in a different world.

My father made his world in New York. He commuted every day. His offices were in New York. He was a vice president of the GR Kinney company and part of the Kinney-Woolworth Executive Board. His offices were in the Empire State Building and the company with which he was associated hired very, very few Jews. So he took his Jewishness seriously, not only because of his tradition and his background, but because he was proud of being a Jew and he wanted the Christian people with whom he worked to respect him as a man, as an honest human being, and as a Jew. He really bent over backwards to make sure that his reputation was such that the Jewish piece of him would be a part of that, that they would see this Jewish person as a man of integrity. He later became president of Beth Sholom during the years that Frank Lloyd Wright designed the building, and his stories about the years with Frank Lloyd Wright are really remarkable. Several years ago, the Frank Lloyd Wright Society came to Beth Sholom. Every year they choose a different Frank Lloyd Wright building as the site where they will meet and they came to Philadelphia, to Beth Sholom, and my father hosted a luncheon for them. There
was a wonderful exhibit of memorabilia and archival material that Beth Sholom had maintained
during the years of the building. Rabbi Mortimer Cohen was the rabbi and he had the vision, but
my father was the president and he had to organize the committees that would raise the money
and oversee the construction. So it was an interesting time, and his memory for detail is
incredible. People who were part of this group coming to visit started asking him questions and
we were amazed, my sisters and I were there, to hear the multitude of detail that he remembered
and his really fond recollections of Frank Lloyd Wright. Since then we went out to Phoenix and
to Taliesin. They called from Taliesin to interview him by phone because they wanted to have
more documentation about Frank Lloyd Wright’s experiences. The only synagogue that he ever
designed was Beth Sholom in Elkins Park.

So we grew up in a very, very Jewish home. My mother was very involved in HIAS,
Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. During World War II, my parents sponsored several families.
There were two families in particular that I remember, and one of the families had a little girl my
age. Her name was Eva, and Eva had been sent to London, away from her parents, where she
lived a rather sad life I would say. Compared to what the other children in Germany were going
through, she was at least cared for, but she lived with some kind of a group setting. She and her
brother were eventually reunited with the parents and they came to America. Mr. Schwaby had
owned a department store in Germany and they had a house on a lake and I remember the stories
very well. He came here and became a piano tuner. He was a fine pianist and that was really all
that he could really do to make a living. He would always say to my father, “Enjoy what you
have. Don’t take it for granted.” They made quite an impact on me, and there was another family,
Betty Hope and her son, and he became quite successful. She was a lovely woman, and they lived
very modestly naturally, coming to this country as refugees. They had to live simply and she and
her son eventually saw success. He was a photographer and he developed a process that one of
the major—I think it might have been Kodak—purchased, but nevertheless, we had this exposure to
people who had come from the war, who were refugees, and who were part of our family, who
came for dinners and holidays. It was an experience that made quite an impact.

My mother was president of the Federation. It was then called the Federation of Jewish
Charities. She was president of the women’s division. She was also president of Hadassah in
Philadelphia, which was a very large chapter of about 8000 members. She was a very bright
woman, but she presented herself in a soft manner. I think she attracted people rather than
creating some kind of a barrier. Very lovely with people, concerned about music and family and
love and caring about the Jewish people. My mother was a Zionist when it was not fashionable.
As a matter of fact, she was sent one time to sit in on a meeting of the American Council for
Judaism, which was an anti-Zionist group. In KI there was a large group of them, and the Zionist
group sent my mother into one of their meetings because at that time she wasn’t very well-known
in the community. She was still quite young. She was active in junior Hadassah. She went in to
spy, as it were, on what was happening at this meeting and bring the report back to the Zionist
body. She always stood firm in her Zionist beliefs. She stood up to people at Federation who
were not as Zionist as she was, and there were some conflicts within Federation because she was
of Russian-Jewish descent. She was the first president of the Federation Women’s Division who
was of Russian-Jewish descent, and some of the German-Jewish women were not very happy about it. She was very, very clever. This may be a repetition of what was later in the tape, but she saw that they were not coming to the board meeting, so she sent out a postcard to everyone on the board who had not attended saying that she missed them, and then she scheduled a meeting at one of the agencies that was sponsored by the German-Jewish contingent. I believe it was the Rebecca Gratz Club. She scheduled a board meeting there and they were forced to come because it was their agency. I do believe that she garnered the respect, as well as the affection, of many of the women who at one time had prejudices against the Russian-Jewish community, a barrier which existed not only in Philadelphia but in other communities throughout the United States. So she managed to solve problems that way, without confrontation and without hard feelings, but in ways that were carefully thought out. Really sensitive to other people’s feelings, but still determined and interested in going forward.

She was wise enough to take me to some of the events that she enjoyed. I remember my parents went to New York when the hospital, Hadassah Hospital, Ein Kerem, was dedicated in 1981. There was a huge event at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, and I remember the balconies just filled with people. I don’t think I had ever been at a place that looked as jammed and crowded. The whole sense of the mammoth ballroom and then all of these elevations of balcony after balcony, with people leaning out of them, is a sight that’s still very vivid in my mind. And I suppose some of that inspired me to go even further with my Hadassah career.

JANE: My mother should have been a vice-president of Federation’s board of trustees. I don’t know if it happened because she was a woman and there were very few of them made vice-president in those years, or whether there was some other political agenda or some personal...but she certainly deserved to have been that. My mother started the oral history project at Federation. My mother started the women’s endowment program at Federation. She was very farsighted and she felt that women could participate in an endowment program and she was the first to have a Philadelphia Federation event in Florida for snow birds. They had a party on somebody’s yacht in the Palm Beach-Miami area and she chaired it and I remember we went shopping and she bought something that had red, white and blue on it, but she really was a very, very fine thinker who just made things happen. She drew people to her so they wanted to work with her. When she went out as president of the women’s leadership board I remember Don Horowitz, who was then the executive director, a man for whom she had great admiration and respect, described her as a “sugar-coated pill.” And when he said that I said, “How dare he say that about my mother.” I was furious. But he said that the outside is very sweet and very appealing. Inside is a very tough core that can accomplish all kinds of things. When she died, the director general of the Hadassah medical organization called us from Jerusalem on the phone just as were leaving the house to the funeral and he used a phrase “conundrum steel wrapped in velvet,” so you get a sense that this was a woman who wanted things to happen the right way, who had a strong commitment to Jewish survival and Israel. The only time I really, really remember seeing her cry—and she was not a weepy person. When her parents passed away or her sister, she didn’t cry; she filled up. But I remember so vividly. We were driving in town and it was during the ’67 war and we were going to a meeting together. And that was a great joy because I was on the Federation board and we
would go to meetings together and we would go to Hadassah meetings together. This occasion was during the '67 war and we were listening to the radio and she wept and she said, “We worked so hard and little will survive.” And then, of course, a few days later, things turned around but at that point...So I grew up in a house where being Jewish, being a Zionist, was just part of my breathing, my living, what I took for granted. There was no question.

INT: Where did the Zionism come from?

JANE: Zionism comes from Judaism. If you believe—if you take Judaism and understand it, the Jews were promised the land in Israel. Not that my mother believed that every inch had to be retained by the State of Israel but she grew up in the tradition of Jewish life. She was influenced by brilliant people. Eliezer Whartman was one of her teachers at Montefiore and he later went on to make Aliyah. Unfortunately he lost a son in one of the wars. She had wonderful teachers and Rabbi Mortimer Cohen was a Zionist. My mother was already a Zionist. After all, Hadassah is a Zionist organization.

INT: Did she ever want to live in Israel?

JANE: That never came up. I never heard it expressed. I believe that because our family, her family in particular, all lived in the Philadelphia area that that’s where she wanted to stay. Family was very important. My father’s offices were in New York and at one point they discussed the possibility of moving to New York because he commuted from New York every day on the train and they decided that if they had moved to New York they probably would have moved to Long Island or one of the places that would require his commuting and that would mean that my mother would be separated from the family and he felt that he was willing to ride the extra half hour a day and retain that family life which was so important to both of them.

INT: Tell me about your siblings.

JANE: I have two sisters. I’m the oldest. My sister Natalie is two years and four months younger than I am. She’s a very creative, artistic person. Her education was as an artist. She still paints. She works at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a volunteer. She sees the world through an entirely different spectrum, light and color and space and dimension, which I have learned from her but I certainly don’t have the eye. She taught me to look for certain things that I never would see myself. So her major interest has been in the art world. She belongs to Hadassah and she’s a generous donor. She goes to synagogue on the holidays. But most of her time, her volunteer time, is focused on the art world and she takes painting lessons still and she’s had exhibits. An interesting, much more dramatic, much more flair, than my younger sister or I. Her name is Natalie Bogash. She was married to a brilliant doctor, Dr. Morton Bogash, who died at an early age, so she’s been a widow since '82. She has two daughters. One lives in the Delaware area, Debra Schwartz, married to Michael, has the only grandchild, my sister’s only grandchild, whose name is Mason. Her other daughter is Laura Bogash and she’s living out in the Pottsville area. My youngest sister Sandy, Sandra Kohn, was very much involved in Hadassah and she was an
officer of the chapter and very active at the time that I was president of the chapter. Our interests really meshed very much. Sandy decided that she wanted to go into the professional world and became associated with the Jewish Family and Children’s Agency which she loves. It’s a wonderful agency. Wonderful people there. She’s been director of development there for about twelve years. She has four daughters, all beautiful, bright, accomplished. One living in New York, one is now in London for a year-top executive position in the world of banking. One works for Saks Fifth Avenue in New York in a top managerial position.

INT: Let’s talk about you.

JANE: Before we meet the family I just have to tell you about my mother’s sisters because they had quite an impact also on the Philadelphia community. My mother had two sisters. The older brother and then two sisters. The middle sister was the more dramatic, flamboyant one and she was always active in Hadassah. She did public relations for the Philadelphia chapter and they were very involved in Henrietta Szold group, which was a group within the Philadelphia chapter established for younger, married women. And she wrote a column for the Welcome Mat newspaper. She went to every opening in town, every performance. As a press person she was invited to everything and she always had the wanderlust. Aunt Trudy Richman would get on a train or a boat—she didn’t like planes very much—or a bus. She’d been to every state in the United States. She met her husband on a cruise. She was taking a cruise to Europe with a girlfriend and he was on a cruise with a gentleman and found her diary and she found him reading her diary. Aunt Trudy was really a very exciting personality. A lot of pizazz. A lot of drama. She did things in a fascinating way. And her husband, who was a lawyer, was a quiet, solid man who liked to read mystery books. He was supposed to become a judge but died shortly before that happened. He was part of the Republican party. But Aunt Trudy was quite an interesting personality on the local Philadelphia scene. Had many good friends in the world of arts and entertainment and made her own career but without being paid. This was the time when women volunteered.

Aunt Sylvia Donner, the youngest of the three sisters, was very active in Hadassah. She was a dynamic woman, a much more forceful personality than my mother, but she had some of the same characteristics, being warm and hospitable and loved to have a good time and laugh. There are two sons. She has passed away. They died in the reverse age order, the youngest one died first, then the middle, then my mother, and now the brother is still alive. Aunt Sylvia became president of the Philadelphia chapter of Hadassah. She was an outstanding fundraiser. She was an extraordinary leadership development trainer and she started the leadership training at Federation for the Women’s Leadership Board, which they eventually took over, but she trained people not only in the Philadelphia chapter of Hadassah but the Eastern Pennsylvania region and she would travel around the country doing leadership training. She became a national vice president of Hadassah and that was quite a nice thing for Philadelphia and for Aunt Sylvia and the family. She was someone who was one of my mentors and encouraged me and when I became a national vice president of Hadassah, it was the first time since Aunt Sylvia that Philadelphia had a national vice president of Hadassah. Judith Epstein, who was one of the great giants of the Zionist world used to accuse us of having a dynasty, so that was my mother’s family
and the influence on me.

INT: It seems like they were very close.

JANE: My mother and my Aunt Sylvia were extremely close and Aunt Trudy too, but because of their Hadassah activity, my mother and Aunt Sylvia...and we lived closer together. Aunt Sylvia lived in Elkins Park and we lived at 6240 North 12th Street, right above the College of Optometry, so that when I learned to drive, I would drive to Aunt Sylvia's. We were closer. Aunt Trudy lived on the Boulevard because Uncle Phil was part of a congressional district, where he had to remain. I think Aunt Trudy had the only house on the Boulevard that was decorated by Elizabeth Davidson. (Laughter)

INT: Is there anything else you want to talk about, about your early life, about the things that you remember in your experiences with your grandfather or your grandmother? Any more childhood experiences?

JANE: The memories are all very pleasant. They are memories of wonderful holidays and happy times together. They were people who didn't burden children with problems. We lived in kind of a fairy tale world, protected from the outside and surrounded by people who encouraged us and showed us great affection. We knew we were loved. My mother's father would take us to the movies. The Carmen Theater was the place where we'd go. It was at Germantown and Lehigh and we would travel in several trolley cars because he didn't drive. I remember one time not wanting to go because our cousins from my father's side were coming to visit, and my mother said, "No, no, no, you can't disappoint Zaidy. You'll see the cousins when you come back." And as we were dragging along off of the trolley into the movies, Zaidy said, "I feel so sick today but I didn't want to disappoint you children." So it's become sort of a family statement, the Carmen Theater, where one is doing for the other when the other one doesn't want to do it either but each is putting oneself out for the other. But those were the kind of people they were, that the children and the grandchildren came first.

My grandfather in Philadelphia was very much involved in the Jewish theater and he loved to imitate Menashe Skolnick. We grew up surrounded by Jewish culture, Jewish activity. My mother was always involved in something that was devoted to Jewish life, Israel Bonds, study groups.

INT: How about their friends?

JANE: Yes, they had friends who were not as involved in Jewish activity. I think they were exceptional. However, at the time, I took it for granted because this is what our house was. They had a wide circle of friends. Both of my parents were very friendly people and outgoing and pleasant to be with. I would say that my parents probably were extremely involved. My father had many friends who were very active at the synagogue. Their community friends were their social friends. They came to our weddings and to our celebrations, to our anniversary party. I
remember wonderful anniversary parties. I know we had a 50th wedding anniversary for my grandparents in Berwick. Bubby and Zaidy Heicklen, and that party was held in Allentown and naturally it was in the synagogue and everything had to be glatt kosher. But a joyous celebration. That grandmother had a family circle who all lived in New York, and they would come occasionally. They came to the 50th anniversary and I remember their coming to an event in Berwick where they stayed at my grandmother and grandfather’s house. They were a very fascinating group. They were the immigrant generation who came over, remained very orthodox. They were always washing their hands in the kitchen. They wouldn’t wash their hands in the bathroom, and checking the prayer books and the food. They were really an interesting group. The one uncle—we often talked about Uncle Boruch—lived the same life in Russia, in New York and later in Israel where he decided to make Aliyah. Whatever his life was in each place was identical. The work may have been a little different, but the observance was the same regardless of the community. They were called the Hantman family circle. That was my grandmother’s maiden name. They were working people when they arrived—one was a steamer in a clothing factory in New York—they worked hard. They pooled their resources so that the next generation all went to college, some of them to CCNY but every one of the next generation graduated from college because the Hantman family circle was determined to make that happen. So they were a very impressive group and their level of observance and davening and mincha and maariv...I mean they were Jewish, Jewish, Jewish day and night. We just were totally immersed in it, so it’s only natural that we were motivated to move in that path.

The seashore was an important part of our lives because we went to Ventnor until I went to Camp Akiba when I was twelve years old. Camp Akiba, in those years, was a kosher camp and had Shabbos services and you wore whites on Friday night and Saturday. You just knew you were Jewish in practically every level of your life.

**INT:** How about aunts and uncles?

**JANE:** I had many aunts and uncles. Aunt Sylvia Donner was one of the strongest ones, but they were all involved in the Jewish community. Uncle Sam, who just died today, was a student. He studied at the college level. He graduated from Penn but throughout his life he continued his studies, both Jewish and secular, and was an active member of Temple Sinai. It’s just part of something that we all took very much for granted.

**INT:** Jane, is there anything else before we conclude the interview that you would like to talk about at this point?

**JANE:** One of the areas of my involvement in Hadassah has been in the field of major gifts, major donors. I’ve had the privilege of serving, shall we say, as the shaliach, helping people who were extremely generous in finding meaningful places in Hadassah to support through their contributions. Three of the very largest donors in the Hadassah network are people with whom I was closely involved and whose lives touched me. One family was the Stein family, Bess and Louis Stein. Bess and Lou Stein—he was the head of FoodFare in Philadelphia—were my parents'
closest friends. They were philanthropists who supported a wide variety of charitable endeavors, both Jewish and secular. They became interested in Hadassah through my parents’ interest and established the first million dollar gift where three generations within the family had been part of our major gifts campaign. Our major gifts start at $5000 but the family had been generous at the $100,000 level and up. Their children, two of the three, had individually made gifts above that amount, the third at a lesser amount. So the Stein family really was a remarkable family in Hadassah because of the three generations of very generous giving. Lou Stein was extremely interested in the aged. He and his wife had moved to Florida and were influential in creating services at the Miami Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged, and he had a very global approach to things. He decided to start a geriatric task force at Hadassah, based on the recommendations of Professor Shmuel Penchas, who was our director-general. This initiated a level of care for the elderly in Israel that hadn’t existed before. And I was very much involved in carrying out some of their wishes, acting as the go-between, carrying messages up and back. Ruth Leventhal Nathanson and her sister Marilyn Bellet and their husbands are now in Israel at a conference that the Stein family endowed, where people in the Mediterranean area, who were formerly enemies, come together to discuss geriatric care. It’s taking place even as we meet today. So that’s been very exciting and I had referred to Ruth earlier as one of my very close friends.

Then there was Dr. Yetta Deitch Novotny. She had been president of one of the groups in the Philadelphia chapter, the Mid-City group, and was a very feisty, independent woman. A physician. Graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in the 1920’s, from the medical school, at a time when women were not accepted and Jewish women in particular were not accepted in medical school. She and I became friendly. My aunt Sylvia Donner had been her shaliach, and in later years, after my aunt died, I inherited that joyous task. She became one of our dearest friends. She loved Mickey, my husband. She used to call him her son. She never had children but she was so charitable. She lived an extremely Spartan existence on a large farm out in the Willow Grove area. Rarely indulged herself but gave away millions of dollars. She was very devoted to Hadassah, an avid Zionist, and provided many wonderful gifts for children. She really loved taking care of the helpless and the weak. She was someone who cared very much about animals because she felt they were so dependent on human beings. She provided a day care center-actually an outpatient day center, at our Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem. A day center is a same day hospitalization setup where children would come in early in the morning, get their treatment and go home at night. In our new mother and child center she has provided countless major gifts for services to help people in the field of opthamology, which was a concern of hers because her late husband had been blind and she eventually lost her eyesight. She provided incredible gifts. Knowing her and becoming her dear, dear friend was an extraordinary experience because the woman cared so deeply, had a nurturing soul, and was so generous for others and so totally undemanding for herself. She had been a very poor girl and she could never bring herself to indulge her own whims. We finally convinced her in her later years to buy a new television set with a huge screen because we thought perhaps she would be able to see it-her eyesight was so limited. It was a really tough argument. We finally won. She died in October and having known her was an extraordinary experience.
The other major, major donor was Lou Edelstein, who was my father’s best friend in later years. He died just a few months ago. He left Hadassah the largest bequest in our history, a similar bequest to the Jerusalem Foundation and to Technion. A man who believed that if the Jewish people did not take care of our own, there was no one else who would. Although generous to many other charitable endeavors in his own community of Atlantic City and other places, donated his magnanimous gifts for the benefit of the people of Israel, many during his lifetime and subsequently in his bequest. Meeting people like this, who really defy some of the stereotypes of the wealthy, people who care more about other’s needs than their own, who lived very nicely but indulged those who were dependent on other’s help, has been an extraordinary experience for me. I’ve done some major gifts solicitations. I’ve had some interesting experiences in that regard, but those three men named Lou were quite extraordinary.

INT: Tell me a story about solicitation without any names, a funny story.

JANE: There are all kinds of experiences. I think when you do soliciting you have to be able to take rejection as well as success, major league. The three who we just talked about were people who were friends of...well, two were friends of my father’s, the Lou Edelstein gift and the Stein gift, and my father is really a person who can envelop people in the things that he believes in.

INT: So it’s hard to say no to him.

JANE: He has a way of cultivating people and promoting the very positive sides of what’s going on. He’s quite amazing in that regard and through both of my parents we became friendly with the Stein family and with Lou Edelstein. When I say “we” I talk about my husband because as I indicated earlier, we’re really partners in everything that I’m describing. Funny stories? Well, I guess a good story was soliciting the Revlon Foundation with someone who had entre and receiving a very nice gift in honor of Hadassah’s 75th birthday. We took it for $75,000 and I was the one who made the appeal. The person with whom I went had the entre. That was a very interesting experience because of the whole corporate structure and the setting and the grandeur of it all.

INT: The glamour.

JANE: Oh yes. And Ronnie Perelman came in. They were Beth Sholomites and of course we had mutual connections. My cousin was a friend of his and that kind of thing. It was all very...a lot of pomp and circumstance and that was very impressive. I remember going with Professor Penchas on some solicitations, where we were not successful. But listening to him present the Hadassah story—he’s a brilliant, brilliant man—and we solicited at Eugene Lang in New York, who had started the I Have a Dream Foundation, and the entre was through my husband who had a personal connection with Eugene Lang. Eugene Lang sat with his arms crossed, back in his chair. Never leaned forward. Never uncrossed his arms. I had a feeling we were not going to be successful. But he didn’t know anything about Hadassah up until then and he had other interests.
INT: That's not an easy thing to solicit from people.

JANE: It really isn’t. We had asked him for a million dollars but we didn’t get anything.

INT: What do you see happening with the next generation in terms of trying to duplicate what your generation has been able to achieve? Do you see the same generosity continuing within the Jewish community?

JANE: I think so. I think that we have young people who will be heirs to a lot of money. We have young people who are earning huge salaries, huge incomes from investments, in a very positive economic cycle. Many Jewish people have great financial resources. It’s a matter of education, of attraction, but I do believe that there are inherent qualities of sharing and caring that only need to be sparked and tapped into in order to draw a new generation in. They may not be interested in the same kind of formal recognition events. Many years ago, every organization had a formal dinner dance. Now we see a wide range of events by various charitable groups to encourage people to come—sometimes a lecture, sometimes a picnic. We have to be responsive to the needs of the people who are in a position to share at whatever level, not only in huge amounts. The small gifts are very important and that’s been a key part of Hadassah’s philosophy for generations. There’s a place in Hadassah for every woman’s gift. Yes, we’re thrilled to have these major gifts, but we were built on a grassroots concern for the establishment and the creation and the enrichment of the State of Israel, where if a woman could afford $25, we respected that gift. She could become a leader regardless of the financial gift. All she needed was the intellectual ability, the desire, the drive, the personal relationships in working with other people. So I think people can find many ways to give of themselves and we see in the younger generation a much more hands-on approach. At Federation recently we were very moved. A group of young people came back and reported on having gone to South Philadelphia on a Sunday and done household repairs for elderly, isolated Jews—painting their houses, repairing their toilets, cleaning out their old newspapers. There’s a great deal of this sense of wanting to have a hands-on experience, which didn’t happen when I was involved in my earlier years at organization work. So there are many opportunities for people to show their concern for other human beings and to show their support for Israel.

I think there is a diminution in the support of the State of Israel now. Many people don’t have that same sense of urgency that we had. Certainly Israel’s becoming a high-tech nation and getting investments from foreign corporations and improving the standard of living in their own country has affected that attitude, and some of the divisiveness in Israel amongst the religious and secular has exacerbated the sense of tension between the Diaspora and Israel. But I do believe that there will be enough people. There are young people going to live in Israel, to study in Israel, to spend a summer in Israel. We at Hadassah sent the largest group we’ve ever sent this past summer for our Young Judaea work. New opportunities arise. Things will be reconstructed. But hopefully, Jewish people have adapted in the past and we will continue to adapt without losing the basic elements of our society and the philosophy and the tradition that motivates us. I, as a grandmother, have to create new traditions for my grandchildren. Tonight we’re going to eat
blintzes because it was Shavous and we weren’t together on Shavous so we’ll eat blintzes tonight
because that’s customary on Shavous. So some of it of course is food and some of it of course is
discussion and it’s up to each of us to do the best we can, whether in a communal setting or in
our own households.

INT: Do you try and get together for all of the holidays?

JANE: We get together once a week for dinner. The children all come for dinner and they’re
coming tonight. We do spend weekends at the seashore together. Fortunately our grandchildren
live close by so we get to see them frequently. My father, my sisters, two of our three children all
live within fifteen minutes of each other. One son lives in Cambridge but with electronic
equipment and airplanes and trains we’re all very close. And the closeness can exist even when
you’re not in the same geographic spot.

INT: But it’s nice to get to see them.

JANE: Yes.

INT: Is there anyone else that you could think of that you want to mention? This is your
interview—it’s your life.

JANE: I think I’ve really touched on most of the people who have influenced me. I suppose, if I
look at the overall scale, I have found among Hadassah women incredibly interesting, bright,
motivated, dedicated women who’ve created an environment that is attractive. Almost an
extended family. And in fact, national Hadassah is that, both with staff and volunteer. The
relationships with people who share a common concern has so much meaning, and there are
times that one is with people who lead what you might consider rather uninvolved lives, with the
conversations viewed as mundane and life seems to be so purposeless. And yet I don’t want to
negate people who are satisfied within their own family life, not reaching beyond, because that’s
a very important part of what we all do. But I’ve always been attracted to people who are willing
to take that step beyond themselves and to try to make some small difference in the Jewish world
or in the world at large. Mine is in the Jewish world primarily and I consider myself really to
have had a wonderful, wonderful life.

INT: And will continue to for many, many years to come. Do you have more to say?

JANE: I think I’ve said it all. Enough! Enough!

INT: Thank you very much for the interview. We’re going to sign off now. (End of tape 1, side
2-6/2/98 taping) Tell me a little bit more about your childhood and your Jewish education.

JANE: I grew up—we lived on 12th Street and belonged to Beth Sholom, which was at Broad and
Courtland, and in those years, I must say, none of my friends nor I went to afternoon Hebrew
school. We went to Sunday school. Going to Hebrew school was not easy. You had to take a bus. Our mothers didn’t drive. We didn’t want to do it. My parents didn’t press us. We went every Sunday morning and my father drove us, but my formal Jewish education as a child was limited. I was confirmed because in those years you didn’t have to go Hebrew school to be confirmed and there was no bat mitzvah, and I still remember my confirmation speech, which Rabbi Mortimer Cohen wrote for us. He wrote all the speeches. I think it must have been a very strong message because it started out saying—and I don’t remember what the person before me said—but my speech was “the second thing we Jews must have the courage and wisdom to do is to establish a Jewish national homeland in Palestine.” So the message was clear and maybe he chose that for me because of my mother’s involvement with so much Zionist activity. I felt kind of ill-equipped after my confirmation and my mother did arrange, at my request, for someone to come to the house and tutor me. The teacher would come once a week for a few months. It was not a long-term experience, but I have to say my Jewish education came through Hadassah. When I started going to Hadassah meetings we had study groups, and I loved them. This was through the group that I belonged to.

INT: How old were you?

JANE: I joined Hadassah when I got married. I had gone to Penn. I took Education at the University of Pennsylvania, graduated in ’52. We got married. My husband Mickey—his official name is Stanley Leonard but everybody calls him Mickey—and I were married in 1950 while I was still at Penn and I graduated from college pregnant. When I first got married I decided I would go to the Henrietta Szold group of Hadassah and see if there was anything in it for me. In those years they met in town at Temple Beth Zion at 18th and Spruce, and it was the young matron’s group. That’s what it was called, so that all of the young women who were recently married came to this group from wherever they lived in the city. I went there, and at the first meeting I was greeted by Lois Martin, who is still someone I’m in touch with. Lois was a wonderful membership chairman. She greeted me. She introduced me to people. She didn’t know who I was other than my name. They did not know that my mother at that time was president of the Philadelphia chapter and I didn’t want to tell them that because I wanted to go in on my own and it wasn’t something that I was prepared to be boasting about. They seated me at a table with people who were friendly. They were nice and they invited me to come to another meeting and between the first meeting and the second meeting, they found out that my mother was the president of the Philadelphia chapter and they called me on the phone and asked me if I would become the program chairman for the Henrietta Szold group. I did and it was very interesting because I had to arrange the meetings and I was also going to the study groups which were separate from the regular meeting. So it really became an educational experience for me and something that developed into an important part of my Jewish growth and identity.

Tybie Yermish, many years later, was the chapter president and she was an extraordinary woman. She and my mother’s generation had studied with Elsie Chomsky and Elsie pronounced it Homsky. Her sons Noam and David pronounce it Chomsky, and of course they’re world renowned for their...well, Noam is world renowned for his linguistics and political activity. Elsie
had run a study course for my mother and her generation, and my mother would tell me how they quaked when they went into the class because Elsie was a tough teacher. She would give them assignments and they were nervous that they wouldn’t perform correctly, but they developed a very warm relationship with Elsie and became social friends as well as students. Elsie had a tradition of inviting people to her home during Passover, and she would cook the whole meal herself. She was a woman who did not have the luxuries in life, but was an extraordinary teacher, and I recently found out, because somebody is doing a research project about Elsie Chomsky, and she had interviewed me because of my relationship with Elsie, that Elsie was not permitted to teach the subjects she loved when she was at Gratz College because she didn’t have all the accreditation that was required to teach specific subjects. Harriet Feinstein, who’s doing the research, was overwhelmed when she asked me what did we study with Elsie. I’m a saver. I had all of my notes from our courses with Elsie as did my sister Sandy, so we sent her the notes, but Elsie taught us Bible and she taught us the Prophets and these were courses that she was not permitted to teach at Gratz. She taught from primary sources and she taught on a horizontal cut. When we learned about the Bible, we learned about the historical, the religious, the social, the political, and she was a fabulous teacher, a wonderful woman. Tybie Yermish, as I started to say earlier, realized that here was a whole generation that knew not Elsie, so she encouraged Elsie to start another series of courses and Elsie accepted the challenge. Tybie gathered together a group of about ten or twelve of us. I was used to running events where the size of the audience was of great importance because I had been a program chairman and a donor chairman and membership. I was doing all these things now on the Hadassah level where we wanted a big audience, and when we had our first session Tybie drove me. She was a fabulous mentor and a beloved friend. She was one of my closest friends. Tybie picked us up and took us to Gratz College to have our course with Elsie and we had a small group and on the way home I said to her, “Were you disappointed in the turnout?” And she said, “Education was never for the masses.” We had an excellent core. And eventually the group grew—never to anything huge. We were a class at our largest perhaps twenty, twenty-five. We would pack a lunch and one of us would bring lunch for Elsie and we would meet her in the student lounge at Gratz College, which was then at 10th and Tabor where we would have lunch together and then Elsie would give the course. They were six week courses. Maybe we'd do two or three in a year and each one would be a course of study that Elsie chose and they were fabulous experiences.

Elsie did one session with husbands. We wanted our husbands to see this wonderful Elsie that we talked about all the time. It was at someone’s home and one of the men challenged Elsie at the end of her speech and he said, “I believe in the Ten Commandments and anything after that is baggage.” And she proceeded, for the first time in all the years that I had heard her, to articulate her personal beliefs, and I took some notes on a piece of graph paper that I had folded up in my pocketbook. I hadn’t intended to take notes. I didn’t go with my notebook because this was a social evening. I wrote some notes and it was so strange. I talked about the bizarre circumstances of my grandfather’s death. She died a few weeks later and it was the last time we had all been together and it was the first time that I had heard her give such a personal declaration of her own beliefs. Certainly we gathered things over the years about what she believed and what she didn’t believe, but that was an extraordinary experience. So Elsie was a
very major influence on my Jewish learning, as were all the courses that Hadassah provided.

We had symposiums and seminars. The first seminar that was ever done in Philadelphia on bioethics was something that my Aunt Sylvia Donner had organized years and years ago. In those years you didn’t say the word “abortion” out loud, and there were nuns who came to this because abortion was one of the issues on the agenda. She had Dr. Jonathon Rhoads there, who was then the head of the whole hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and she had people who came from the Jewish religious background, so my Jewish education, I would have to say, came through Hadassah. It’s amazing. I’m not the only one. We have so many women who came to Hadassah for social reasons. They moved into a community and they wanted to meet other Jewish women, they wanted to do something other than diaper babies. They needed some intellectual stimulation and through Hadassah developed an education. It’s a component that I don’t think is widely realized. We’re perceived primarily as a membership and fundraising organization. If you ask someone what Hadassah is they’ll tell you a hospital in Israel. But the major influence that we have had on the growth of Jewish family life through the Jewish woman is the significant contribution that I believe Hadassah has made to American Jewish life.

INT: Tell me about volunteerism, that aspect.

JANE: When I grew up, volunteerism wasn’t something that you thought of as unnatural. Now there’s a question here. Should you volunteer? There was no question and you volunteered. If you were in a position where you had free time—and I was very fortunate in that going to work was not an economic necessity in my life—that’s just what you did. Among my friends with whom I graduated from college, all became involved in something. One of my friends came to Hadassah and she hated what we stood for. She didn’t believe in the Land of Israel. She became active in the League of Women Voters. Everybody did something. It was almost a natural expectation that you would give of yourself for the benefit of others, and of course growing up as I did in my house, where everything was centered around sharing and helping, there was no question. One of my friends was interviewing candidates for scholarships to Camp Council. It was just what we did. Our families did it and we did it.

INT: Tell me about how it is for your family, your three children.

JANE: In my own family? Mickey and I have three children. Our oldest is a daughter, Judy Erlbaum, and Judy has two children from her first marriage, Lisa Cohen and Michael Cohen, both in college at this point. Lisa is at Cabrini and Michael is at Duke University. Our son Kenny, a computer wizard, lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We have our son Andy Zolot who’s married to Debbie, formerly Genter, and they have three wonderful, beautiful children. Rachel, who’s a student at Harriton, will soon be sixteen. She’s counting the days until she gets her permit, Allison, who is at Welsh Valley Junior High School, is fourteen and David was just ten in May and we all belong to Har Zion. I grew up and was educated at Beth Sholom but when we moved to this neighborhood we joined Temple Adath Israel which is where Mickey’s family belonged. I didn’t like Adath Israel, and perhaps that shouldn’t go on the record, but I never felt
that the school there was good enough. I felt that my children’s time was wasted. They went to Hebrew school. They were bar and bat mitzvahed and they packed up and left. I really felt it was a mistake for us to have stayed there.

Our first trip to Israel was with Rabbi Wolpe and Elaine. I knew Elaine through Hadassah and I knew Rabbi Wolpe through Hadassah because he was one of the teachers of the chapter seminar series, and I thought they were terrific. Really terrific. So when we heard that Har Zion was running a trip to Israel, we had never been there. It was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Israel so we decided to go and we were with two other couples, our very, very dear friends Ruth and Wally Leventhal. Wally had since passed away. Ruth is now Ruth Nathanson. Ruth is part of the Stein family and she’s been so involved in the community now with her sisters, so we shared a lot of common interests because we came from families which were involved. Roz and Bill Bass were the other couple. Bill has since passed away. The three couples were traveling to Israel together so we joined the Har Zion group because I knew the rabbi and I had decided that we were going to switch to Har Zion because I just was not finding any of my spiritual needs met at Adath Israel and I wanted to be part of Har Zion. It was an activist community, the Soviet Jewry movement and so many things that affected Jewish life in Philadelphia came out of Har Zion. I just felt this is where I would be more comfortable. I didn’t feel connected to Adath Israel, even though Rabbi Berkowitz was a very nice friend to us and we to him. For some reason, the congregation didn’t have the vitality. So when Har Zion moved out to Penn Valley, we switched our affiliation and I’ve enjoyed it very much. I’ve been somewhat involved—I’m on the Board there. I wish I had more time to give to it because they do wonderful things. I’ve done a few small jobs. I ran the recent women’s symposium with Val Wolpe, the rabbi’s daughter-in-law.

My career was really through Hadassah primarily. However, well-maybe I should go through Hadassah a little bit more. I had joined the Center City group and I became active and then the group decided that they were going to move to Elkins Park because that’s where most of the women lived, so the Henrietta Szold group moved to the Elkins Park area and I became an officer there. I was treasurer. I learned how to do a trial balance in Hadassah. It was a wonderful learning experience. We learned how to speak. We learned how to do an agenda. We learned how to do time management. We learned so many skills that are what we would call today management skills by being forced to do it because we did it and we learned from people who had preceded us. We moved after the first year of marriage into Merion so I was commuting from Merion to the meetings up in Elkins Park, and it really got to be a chore, and even though this was my close social circle I decided I had to switch to a group closer to my house. I transferred to the Yassky group, which was a spinoff of the Wynnewfield group of Hadassah, which at one time had 1200 members. It was all the women who belonged to Har Zion, and their daughters decided they needed their own group and formed the Yassky group. So I joined that group and met lovely, lovely women who became my friends and eventually I became president of the group.

I was also involved in the Home and School Association because of my children’s being in the Lower Merion school system. The chapter asked me to take on some jobs and I was a little bit reluctant to get too involved and going downtown. My children were in and out but somehow
or another I was drawn in, and they were wonderful women. In addition to my mother and my Aunt Sylvia and Aunt Trudy, whose Hadassah role was a little less powerful, there was Florence Rose who was an incredible speaker. She would speak for Israel Bonds. My aunt was president of Israel Bonds and she was president of the Sisterhood and my mother was president of the Federation so there were all of these role models. It’s what our family did.

I eventually became president of the Philadelphia chapter of Hadassah, and that was in 1977. I served from '77 until '80, and I was the first of the presidents of the Philadelphia chapter to already be a member of the Women’s Leadership Board of the Federation, which I think in those years was called Women’s Council. The name changed. It was customary in those years that the president of Hadassah, when she became president, was invited to sit on the Board, either as an observer or if she were an elected member she would serve, but I was the first one on the Philadelphia chapter Board and I don’t like to sound immodest, but you asked me about myself. I prefer that the accolades come from other people. I had already been serving on the Women’s Leadership Board. I had taken a course with them, an orientation, and had been asked to serve on the Board and had some very enjoyable experiences there, met lovely people, very nice women. I just felt most of my energies went into the Hadassah activity. I don’t know whether the rewards were different or the sense of commitment was greater, but I’ve always enjoyed the work at Federation. It was something that I still consider an exciting piece of my life.

INT: What was your greatest achievement to date do you think?

JANE: In Hadassah? Well, I think I’ve had two things that have been extremely rewarding, and I don’t want to say it’s my greatest accomplishment because it happened with other people. In any of the things that we achieve, there’s always a team and when I was first asked to serve on the national board-I served on the national board as the president of Hadassah, but you’re not given a specific portfolio. The large city chapters were represented. When I went onto the national board-then as a national board member, one of the assignments that I was given was a result of some things we had done in Philadelphia, reaching out to young leaders. I was first appointed the chair of an ad hoc committee on young leaders and then made young leaders chairman. There had been an uprising at a national Hadassah convention by young women. It was a time of people speaking out and demanding and declaring and confronting, and a group of young women had staged a bit of a rebellion at a national convention. They wanted to have an advocate and they wanted to have a voice and they wanted to be represented on the national board, so I became that person, and it was a very exciting opportunity because I created a young leader’s department with representatives from the regions and big chapters in the metropolitan area, a hundred mile radius of New York.

In 1981 I led the first young leader’s study mission from Hadassah to Israel and from that grew an extraordinary, really wonderful, young leader’s component of Hadassah’s work that is now national with representatives from every region and big chapter. It’s one of the most rewarding things that I did. The people who followed me, each added their own creative element to the planning we had started and one of the things that we did when we started was have six
young leader's institutes around the country on the same day and it was amazing. We had hoped maybe we'd get fifty or sixty at each one and in San Francisco there were 125 and in Chicago there were 125. We started having separate sessions at the convention, at the national convention. The rooms were bursting. So that was really a very, very exciting opportunity that was given to me in response to a need that had been identified. Frieda Lewis was then the national president of Hadassah and she saw the need and asked me to be in charge and she was really just wonderful. She let me run with it any way I wanted to. There were very few restrictions, very little accountability. We initiated subsidies to help young leaders to come to our national convention. And it has blossomed and developed and grown and right now I'm mentoring a young woman in Hadassah, in the Newtown chapter right outside of Philadelphia, who was recently accepted—people have to apply to be a candidate to go on a young leader's mission—she is a fabulous leader and she’s part of what is now called NYLAC, the national young leader’s advisory council, which is made up of representatives of the regions and big chapters. It’s a flourishing, wonderful group that’s providing leadership and when I look back on that first young leader’s mission that I took to Israel, of the group that went, I think there were seven who eventually became presidents of their regions or big chapters and moved up to national leadership. So that was very rewarding. And the second thing that was very rewarding...

INT: Okay. You were talking about the two things that...

JANE: I was asked to chair a strategic planning with Sue Mizrahi, my very, very dear friend and Hadassah colleague who comes from Westchester, New York, and as part of this strategic planning for national Hadassah, we engaged Mike Austin to be our consultant. Mike used to be head of the School of Social Work at Penn and he really was a remarkable person. As we were looking at Hadassah and future directions, he realized that we should get involved in a research program about Jewish women because there’s so little research on the Jewish woman. So we created the National Commission on American Jewish women in cooperation with the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Institute at Brandeis University and Dr. Shula Reinharz became the chair of our commission. I do have a copy of a very small summary of our study which I can give to you, but we conducted a research project under the auspices of Brandeis, funded by Hadassah. Sue and I were the national Hadassah representatives on the commission. It was made up of twenty-four women of various backgrounds, super achievers throughout the country. We had rabbis, academicians, writers. We had Blu Greenberg, Shoshana Cardin, the Jewish mayor of Tampa, a woman, and people from the arts, from the sciences. It was a fabulous group of women and we met just three times and commissioned a research project that Brandeis did with women who were generally unaffiliated in the Jewish world, to find out what their needs were.

From that came the report called Voices for Change: New Directions for American Jewish Women, and the results were summarized into four categories: achieving equality, building community, nurturing the soul, connecting with Israel. The full report dealt with the needs that women have in these four areas and whether or not they’re being met through the Jewish community, so that Jewish communal life really benefitted on the broad scale from this study. This was not something that was specifically for Hadassah. We saw it as a gift to the
Jewish community. And the study was extraordinarily well received. We launched the report at the GA in Boston in ’95 and I must tell you, I was so nervous. Shula Reinhartz, who is dynamite, she’s wonderful, chairs the department of sociology at Brandeis, and she’s a women studies expert. Her husband is the president of Brandeis and she’s a fabulous woman. She was presenting at a session scheduled at the GA and when I opened the program book there were 22 sessions at the same time.

The General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds is a huge event and of course so many options for a great number of interests that are represented, and I thought nobody was going to show up at ours. Why would they pick ours when there were 22 other things happening? Susan Weidman Schneider, the editor of Lilith, was watching me get into a panic and said, don’t worry, don’t worry. We had a session and they had to bring in chairs and push the doors. The women jammed the room. And the response has been overwhelming because it highlighted the need of the Jewish community to reach out to women who are seeking connections in new ways with the Jewish community. The report has been used as a text in universities. It’s been distributed to women’s studies programs, to Jewish studies programs. I understand the Jewish Theological Seminary uses it. Being involved in that activity and Sue and I were very much involved along with Shirley Kalb, who was our director of strategic planning, in bringing it to fruition. Sylvia Barrack Fishman and Amy Sales organized a big piece of the research component. We worked with wonderful, stimulating women and produced something that filled a void in the world of academia and of Jewish life.

Since then, Hadassah has established an International Research Institute on Jewish Women, which Shula Reinhartz is chairing, and it’s such a rewarding experience to see how these initial efforts have enveloped so many parts of the world. They’re holding their first conference next week and I wish I could go, but I’m leaving for Israel. As a matter of fact, this week they have Jewish women from Iran and other countries around the world coming together to talk about the issues and concerns of Jewish women. So Hadassah has taken on a new face. There’s a new image of Hadassah. Younger women are perceiving us differently, and being responsive to the needs of women is something that is reshaping our image. I feel that being involved was a great privilege.

INT: I’m going to get specific with some of these questions. How do you feel being a woman has help or hindered in your participation in the Jewish community.

JANE: Well, it’s helped in that I never had to go to take a full time job anyplace. Being a woman has always been a very luxurious thing for me because my husband has been not only supportive in the economic arena, but he’s very proud of what I do and he makes it easy for me and he helps me and anything that he can do to encourage me has been an asset, so for me, being a woman has been wonderful. Being involved in Hadassah is a unique experience and of course the studies have shown that the number of women who rise to top leadership positions throughout the Jewish world is abysmal, but in Hadassah there’s no competition. We’re a women’s organization, so that the opportunity for upward mobility is not impeded.
INT: So you never really found any gender discrimination or anything in that respect?

JANE: No.

INT: What would you say are some of your values and ideas that you had from this process? Did you have any visions when you first started?

JANE: I always felt the primacy of the family and that's the most important thing you do, so many of the things that I did in my life were geared to the needs of my family. I had mentioned that I was involved in the Home and School Association and I became president of the Cynwyd Home and School Association when our youngest son was going to school there. There was a point where I had an opportunity to take a leadership position on Interschool Council or take a leadership position in Hadassah and I had to make that decision and I guess that's where the philosophy came to the fore. I knew that if I didn't take the position at Interschool Council somebody else was going to do it. If I didn't take the position at Hadassah, I felt that if the Jewish people didn't take a responsibility we had no place else to turn and that my obligation was to the Jewish community. And I think the Interschool Council experience and the Home and School experience highlighted something perhaps that I didn't realize at the time. It was a world in which I had gone in cold, as it were. In the Jewish world I was Betty and Lew Heicklen's daughter. I was Sylvia Donner's niece. I came with a huge support system. And in the Home and School Association, the fact that I was Judy and Andy and Kenny's mother was the same as being everybody else's mother. So maybe there I needed to prove my individual ability, and yet when the opportunity came to go farther there, I chose the Hadassah role because I couldn't do both. I still had children at home and I just didn't want to stretch myself too much.

INT: What other things helped you advance over the years in terms of being a woman or being Jewish in your experiences?

JANE: Other women.

INT: Tell me about that.

JANE: Other women who encouraged me. I don't think I'm the kind of person who pushed herself. Maybe other people see it differently, I don't know. But I always felt that there was someone there who was kind of pulling me along and there were wonderful mentors in Philadelphia. I didn't mention Evelyn Berman. (End of tape 2, side 1)

INT: You were talking about some of the-

JANE: I was talking about Evelyn Berman. Evelyn Berman was a woman who had also been one of the past presidents of the Philadelphia chapter. She was a wonderful woman. Very bright. Very much involved on the American scene. Had a strong sense of the role of an American citizen. Jewish women should be involved and contribute to campaigns for candidates, and
should take an interest in not only the Zionist activity, but the American as well. She encouraged me quite a bit. As a matter of fact, it was Evelyn who first got me on the chapter board leadership capacity as the membership chairman. She called me up and said, “I have a problem, Janie.” Now, she and my mother were friends. These presidents were all friendly. These were people I knew from our social life from my parents as well as through the organization life. She said, “I have a problem. I don’t have a membership chairman. I know you’re busy with your children. I just want you to take it from now until January, from September until January.” And I said okay because I couldn’t turn her down. I was very much in awe of her, had a great deal of respect for her.

And little did I know that in January the membership campaign was over, so that’s how she got me into taking a major portfolio with Marlene Stapler, who was my colleague on many activities. We worked together as partners and Marlene developed multiple sclerosis and was unable to continue in a career where she could have gone forward. It has always been a source of sadness for me that we started out together and she’s recently moved away, but I never talked to her very much about what I did in Hadassah because I didn’t want her to feel that this could have been her life. It probably could have been. Unfortunately, she’s not in good physical condition. But Evelyn encouraged me and it was so interesting.

When I got the information about this project, that the Meyer and Rosaline Feinstein Foundation is funding, and Evelyn was a sister-in-law of the Feinsteins and Rosalie was a friend of my mother’s. It’s a small world. Evelyn is one of the people who was a great influence on me. And there was Tybie Yermish, a former president of the Philadelphia chapter, made aliyah and then came back and became our executive director. While I was president she was the executive director and that was a partnership that was extraordinary. She had an amazing ability to cultivate people and to draw people in and much of the leadership in the Philadelphia chapter of Hadassah came about because Tybie knew how to do it. She knew how to make you a friend, to stimulate you intellectually and she was an amazing women.

**INT:** What were some of the frustrations that you’ve met?

**JANE:** I really could not talk about frustrations. I think that most of my community experiences have been very positive. When people are willing to step forward and get involved beyond themselves, they’re generally people who are very, very nice, caring people. Oh, there’s a political agenda in every organization but I really have not felt frustration in my communal work. I suppose if I did, I might have moved in a different direction.

**INT:** Were there any difficulties? The Seventies was sort of a time. We spoke about people, the changes that were going on.

**JANE:** I didn’t find it as difficult. Here was a group of young women who wanted to be involved in Hadassah. What’s bad about that? Now in any proposal that you make there is always a percentage of people who are not going to accept whatever it is you want to do, but at the same
time, there are others who think it’s wonderful or help you to shape it so it’s better. I never really felt a great deal of frustration. I’ve done some things that have been difficult, but not frustrating, and eventually we got it together and there were always other people. I suppose if you’re left feeling abandoned or dangling, perhaps there’s a frustration. It’s really been a very rewarding experience for me.

INT: Who were some of the colleagues that you were speaking about before that had an important impact?

JANE: On the Philadelphia level, there were many who were always there and really worked together. Naomi Barsky preceded me as president of the chapter and she was always a nice, steady, reliable source of direction and help. On the national level—commuting to New York created a very interesting dynamic, because there is a group of us who travel together and we spend that much time together on the train. We’re not always on the same train, not always on the same day, but you do develop a close working relationship and become friends, so that little group has become a new level of friends. I would have to say that in Philadelphia, Cis Golder, is one of my oldest friends—we went to High School together. Our husbands are still very active in the community. Bob and Mickey went to kindergarten together and they’ve been the best friends since then until now.

So Cis and I were involved and I brought Cis into Hadassah and she became an officer, the president of Henrietta Szold and officer of the Philadelphia chapter. We’ve shared many experiences. Ruth Leventhal Nathanson is another. Ruth and I became friends and she became involved in Hadassah and she became an officer. So they’re my very close social friends, where we shared the community activity as well as having our husbands be very friendly. Mickey and Wally, who has since passed away, were very close friends, so that our lives became very intertwined. On a national level, Sue Mizrahi has become one of my must trusted colleagues. She’s brilliant and she and her husband and Mickey and I—her husband Dr. Abe Mizrahi and Mickey and I have become very close friends and they’ll come to the seashore and we’ll spend weekends together and we go to each other’s simchas. There’s a wide, wide spectrum of people who have encouraged me and have been people to whom I could turn. Shirley Kalb, our strategic planning director, is an amazingly wonderful, wise woman. She’s given me a lot of counsel. Oh, I could give you a list of probably thirty people who I feel close to.

INT: ???

JANE: Oh, I’ve been blessed. I’ve had a blessed life. I really have. I’ve been blessed with good health, with a wonderful family, with children who have been healthy and grandchildren who’ve been just a joy. We’ve all enjoyed good health and Mickey and I really have had it all. I consider myself...I have absolutely no wishes that anything could be different. We often talk about some of the hardships that our own friends and family have endured, and we had really a wonderful marriage and a great family.
**INT:** How do you practice Judaism in your home today?

**JANE:** We try to get together for Shabbat dinner. It doesn’t always work. We used to have...my mother always had Shabbat dinner every Friday night, but as our children and grandchildren have different circumstances, we don’t have Shabbat dinner regularly. But we try to get together, even if nobody can cook. My daughter-in-law used to prepare Shabbat dinner. Debbie would have Shabbat dinner, but then she went for her Masters and now she’s going into counseling in the school system. It’s hard for her to come home and make Shabbat dinner. Life just changed. We try to get together on Friday nights, whether it’s in someone’s home or in a restaurant. When we’re at the seashore, we have Shabbat dinner. I cook it, I clean it up, I do the whole thing. The kids all help. It’s great and we do have it. I light Shabbat candles every Friday night. I keep a kosher house. I try to make the holidays fun for the children. If I would tell you what our kitchen has looked like at Purim, when we’ve baked Hamentashen...We have a huge Seder here. I had both of our families, Mickey’s sisters and brother and their children and my sisters and their families. And of course my father is still with us. And if somebody doesn’t have a place to go they know there’s a Seder. People really make an effort to come. My niece Frannie made sure that when she went to London she would be home for the Seder. People really want to be together for the Seder. It is a mammoth undertaking. The year after my mother died my heart wasn’t in it and our daughter Judy had just moved into a new home. She’s very sensitive to people’s feelings, so she said she would have the Seder that year and have the whole family, and it would be a nice opportunity to have them in her new home. She did it that year, and we had to rent a portable oven and put it in the garage, but we did it. She had everybody seated and it was beautiful and elegant. She enjoyed it very much. She’ll make a Shabbat dinner when she can. It’s not at the same degree that it was, but even if it’s in a restaurant we’d say Good Shabbos.

**INT:** What shape does your spirituality take in your religious life and your family life and communal life?

**JANE:** I think that sharing it is an important part of it. Trying to make the next generation feel it. How we actually separate the spirituality from the observance and the Zionist activity...it’s difficult but hopefully, in being in a loving environment that’s a Jewish environment that I’m trying to convey to the next generation, and I’m getting satisfaction myself from making the Jewish parts of our lives meaningful. As an example, two granddaughters were bat mitzvahed recently, and we wanted to have a Friday night Shabbat dinner and we talked about whether we should have it here or there and I insisted that we were going to do it at the synagogue and it was going to be kosher. I must say that the bat mitzvahs, even though they’ve been in places that might not be considered kosher places, our children have made sure that the bar and bat mitzvahs were dairy menus. They got the sense of it and to me, this spiritual element is something that permeates everything that you are and that you do.

I have something hanging in the kitchen by one of my grandsons. He had to do a project for Grandparents Day and he wrote a composition about his grandmother with an illustration above it. He’s now in Duke in pre-med and this is when he was in first grade, Michael Cohen.
And the first thing he wrote was, “My grandmother is Jewish.” And I thought that was fabulous. To me that, in a sense, is what succeeds. Spirituality—it’s difficult to put your finger on it. I find a certain strength in the continuity of the prayers in synagogue and in carrying on the traditions in the home. I guess when my mother died I really questioned a lot of the meaning of going to say Kaddish every day. I found in it a certain sense of eternity, a sense that you’re not the first or the last, a willingness to be part of the community where for generations Jews have been going through the same kind of experience. And a sense of a greater being of some kind, I’m not sure just what, but I do believe that there’s some force, either within us that we bring or that’s been imbued in us. We just saw the movie Amistad the other night and the lead role talked about the generations that preceded him that he was calling upon, that existed to bring him to this moment. They were all there because he would need them. He would call them all in now. And it was a very powerful statement. It’s something that struck me from my own experience, thank G-d not in the hardships that were depicted so brilliantly in the film. This is part of what you inherit.

INT: Tell me about these trips to Israel. I know that you led the Hadassah’s first young leaders study mission. That must have been very exciting.

JANE: It was. It was a lot of work and more detail than I expected, but I think many things you get involved in turn out to be more detail and more work than we expect. But in the end it turns out to be very challenging. It was a wonderful group. We had husbands and wives as well as women alone. We met with all the top echelon of Hadassah leadership in Israel in our institutions and we toured the country. It was glorious, and what was especially nice was that our son and his wife—Andy and Debbie came with us on the trip as did my sister Sandy. It was Andy and Debbie’s first trip to Israel. I remember that very much. When we got off on the bus to walk into Jerusalem, I needed to stand next to Andy. My first trip to the Wall, which was not that trip, I could only think of my grandmother in Berwick, Bubbe in Berwick, who never got to come to Israel, who would have just loved that experience and I think of her when I go many places.

I went to Russia this summer with the Jewish Agency and did something that I think sounds a little bit bizarre but I did it nevertheless. I had a lock of her hair. She had red hair and she was very vain about her hair and she was a bit of a rebel. She refused to cut her hair and wear the sheitel when she got married, and that was really considered terrible. She had beautiful red hair and she had cut a lock of it and saved it and when she died my uncle gave it to me. He lived at home with them. And when I went to Russia I took a little piece of it with me and it was such a weird feeling to touch it. I had never touched it. All her DNA was in there. Years ago I didn’t think about DNA. I just thought I was part of Bubbe’s being but...I had many trips to Israel. I’m leaving on Saturday night for the World Zionist Congress and I’ve been a member of the Vaad Hapoalim. My term expires at this time but I’ve served for many, many years. I’m excited about going and I’ve attended, four Zionist Congresses and I’ve been to Israel about eighteen times.

INT: This is going to be hard for you because I see you as a very modest person, but what special talents or qualities did you bring to your participation in the Jewish community?
JANE: That is hard. I guess...I seem to work well with people and learned some of the arts of diplomacy from my parents, who were both masters of it, so I guess maybe I would say that that is one of the talents that I bring. I'm generally able to resolve situations in a controlled manner. I'm not a person who loses control easily. I think you'll have to ask somebody else.

INT: What do you think you've discovered about yourself and the Jewish community.

JANE: I've discovered about myself...I guess I've done more than I thought I could do. I've accomplished more than I ever thought I could do. The opportunity for self-growth and self-actualization and intellectual development has happened because of the Jewish community involvement and I really feel, and I hate to say this because it's such a cliche, that I've gained much more than I've given.

INT: As women's role have evolved and continued to be identified and changed, what is your hope for the future of women's involvement in the Jewish community?

JANE: I would hope that women could achieve at whatever level they want to in anything that they do and that raising families would be considered a valuable activity, because I don't think there's anything that's more important and more rewarding. Unfortunately, there was a period where women saw it as something to be ashamed of if they stayed at home with their children. Working with Young Leaders, that was one of the issues that was very high on private discussions and agendas, juggling family and career and the guilt. I've been through some of that because I've done some juggling and there have been sacrifices my family has made because I'm not here and sacrifices, not many, that I may have made because of my family. Time-wise only, where I had a conflict and I felt the family is more important. I would hope that the opportunities would be there for women. You look at the Federations around the country, hardly any women are in top leadership position, and you look at Philadelphia with a woman like Carol Karsch, who was the first woman to be president of our synagogue, who is the assistant to the executive director, regardless what title they've given her, she's still number two. It's unfortunate that a woman like that is not part of the old boy's network. I don't think it's the capability as much as it is the network.

INT: What does it mean then to be Jewish and female in the twentieth century?

JANE: (Laughter) How many books do I have up there? What does it mean? I hope it means that a woman can be proud of her Judaism. I think there are new, wonderful ways that women are expressing themselves creatively and intellectually. A number of women rabbis and scholars and performers. We just went to a concert on Sunday. Mickey's family were all professional musicians. Someone did a research project about the history of klezmer music in Philadelphia and his Uncle Morris, who's now eighty-five and has a memory like...he's unbelievable, became one of the major figures in the study and several of Mickey's cousins play the authentic klezmer music that they learned from another uncle, their father, Jacob Hoffman, who was with the Philadelphia orchestra. This whole musical world now...Mickey's cousin Elaine Watts and her...
daughters formed the first women’s klezmer; Juliette Spitzer Wachs, has a group of women who are performing, singing Israeli and Jewish music, original compositions.

And there are so many Chavorot going on and women’s study groups. The opportunities are limitless and I think that gradually the Jewish community will become accustomed to women being more involved. I’m reading a fabulous book right now called “Memoirs of a Geisha,” and I can’t help but make the comparison between the life that this woman led, she was born in 1920, I believe, and what Jewish women’s lives were like. I’ve been telling my family about it because there was a slave existence at the same time as the Jewish woman held an honored and prestigious role in the family. I think the Jewish community, except perhaps some of the more extreme elements who don’t want to accept modernity, I think the Jewish community comes to a position of accepting women and of having outstanding women, the women who worked so their husbands could study in the yeshiva, and I think that Jewish women will probably have a much easier time of it and will be able to accomplish both. Husbands respect women who are fulfilling themselves now, whereas years ago it was considered an embarrassment for a husband whose wife had to go to work.

INT: Where do you see yourself in this picture?

JANE: My time is coming to a tapering down and I’m very happy to see younger people take over. You have to be blessed with the health and the strength to do the things that you want to do. I just hope that I could stay involved at some level and have the capacity and the family situation, that Mickey and I will be well and able to do all the things we enjoy doing.

INT: What advice or warning would you offer to your daughters or your successors as they become involved in the Jewish community?

JANE: Oh, I guess you have to be honest and sincere about what you’re doing. I think sincerity is a big, big winner. If you go into it for personal aggrandizement, if you are seeking kudos and honors, it’s the wrong reason. You have to go out of a sense of wanting to make life better for the Jewish people, wanting to support Israel. A feeling of having a commitment to what you’re doing, because then you enjoy it. If you’re looking for the other piece of it, it’s a messy world. That’s not a good world to be in.

INT: Is there any other message of anything that you would like to say, something I haven’t touched on or anything else that you would like to end with today?

JANE: I’ll probably think of twenty-five things later, but I believe that each person at whatever level they can participate needs to do something beyond themselves. That I’ve been fortunate enough to devote so much of my time is my blessing, but the people with less time and fewer resources manage to make an impact on other people’s lives. I think it’s a very important thing to do at whatever level. Even when my son Kenny tells me that he donated blood, I see Andy and Debbie involved in things, what they’re doing to help their children and to help the school and to
be involved in Hadassah. Debbie was an officer at one time, my daughter Judy was an officer at Hadassah’s Yassky group at one time. Judy’s working in a helping field. She’s doing family therapy with teenagers. It really adds meaning to your life and to spend your time self-involved and not using the abilities and the gifts that you have—I think everybody has within them the capacity to help in some way. And I’ve been blessed. I really have been. When I look back I just consider myself most fortunate that I was nurtured in the kind of home that I was and that I still have the encouragement and support of all of my family. I was leading the business session at the Hadassah national convention in New York a few years ago and my kids got on the train and came over and sat in the back and rooted for me, and it was a tough session. It was a wicked one, probably one of the hardest ones I ever had to do. So there’s this sense of their involvement with it and I think it’s enriched their lives and it’s enriched our lives. I just can’t imagine what it would have been like not to have had this opportunity.

INT: Thank you very much for this interview.

JANE: It’s been great. I’ve loved it.

INT: If I have to come back for any other reason, because you remember something, will you write me a note about it?

JANE: Sure. I really enjoyed it. (Tape shuts)

INT: I’m adding to this tape with Jane because she had a second thought.

JANE: It should have been a first thought, and it really was the need to say a little bit more about my husband Mickey, who is an extremely giving, charitable person, although he’s not interested in sitting at meetings or listening to speeches. He has really—I guess because I felt that most of what I say means we because I never could have done it without him, I think I should acknowledge if this is going to be recorded anywhere, that his example has been something that has motivated me in many ways. Mickey has a wholesale furniture business. He is constantly giving door prizes to people, buying ads and tickets to their events, supporting whatever cause it is that comes along. He’s been on various campaign activities for the Federation. He’s very generous. He does a great deal of good, communal work, in addition to his nature, which is a very giving nature to the people who surround him, either through his role in business or the family. He’s really the Rock of Gibraltar and I think, just again, maybe taking that for granted, I should have included it in the message. He too, through the things that he enjoys doing, has supported countless organizations. He’s a strong advocate for Israel and AIPAC and we’ve been involved in the Delaware Valley Pac (pro-Israel). We have a long list of activities that we’ve enjoyed participating in, and he comes to the national Hadassah conventions and he just makes everything easy for me, in addition to the things that he supports on his own. Golden Slipper Club. Israel Bonds. Just a long range of activities that are part of his life and part of his very giving, caring, charitable nature, which permeates everything he touches.
INT: It sounds like that’s why you both get along so well, and he’s been an influence in your life.

JANE: Oh my goodness, yes. He’s given me the courage to do things sometimes when I didn’t think I could do them. He always sees the positive outcome. If I’m a little bit worried about how it’s going to go, he’s always sure it will be fine. He’s been a great sounding board. And his perceptions and conclusions about situations always make a lot of sense. Right now I’m involved in something that’s a lot more managerial than anything I’ve ever done before. In addition to the work that I’m doing with the Blue Ribbon commission right now, which is addressing the restructuring of the Hadassah corporate body in the United States, our regions, our chapters, our groups. I’m coordinator of the marketing communications division, and it’s much more managerial than anything I’ve ever done before. I deal with staff more than with volunteers. It’s not a place where I’ve had extensive experience but again, as I said before, in Hadassah-you learn to meet your challenges. He’s, of course, an expert in the field, having run a successful business for many years, so that he’s really a good person to talk to when I’m not sure how to handle a situation. He gets to the bottom line. It’s great to have somebody who you trust and who’s judgement is good and who makes it all so pleasant for you.

INT: It sounds like you’ve also opened up a lot of doors for the people who follow by setting precedents because they weren’t there before.

JANE: One would hope that there’s a legacy that has meaning. I think through Hadassah I have done that. Again, I’m fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity. I should say through Hadassah we’ve done it, because it’s been part of the whole family. At one of my birthday parties, Andy was the MC and he got up and said...he was doing a pretty good roast and he talked about his little sister whose name is Hadassah. So it’s part of who we are.

INT: They only know you as Hadassah. All right, Hadassah Jane Zolot, thank you very much.

NOTE: Because of a taping problem, a section of the interview was repeated. This section is out of sequence and may be repetitious, but it does include additional information.

INT: Tell me about your mother. What was she like?

JANE: She was modest. She had the ability of talking to people to draw them out. She never projected herself. She was not a demanding person. I remember very few disagreements and that kind of thing. She was willing to accept people as they were and yet, she was a brilliant woman who had a very strong sense of what was right and wrong and you knew it in her own gentle way. She was very encouraging. Both of my parents were not critical people. They encouraged in very positive ways, and when I look back on the home in which I grew up, and as I say, we just assumed this is how it was everyplace. We were blessed. My mother passed away in ’91. She was eighty-five years old, so she lived a very full life and really had so many interests in the community. As I said, she graduated from Beaver College and she went to work for a law firm, and at the time of the Crash one of the lawyers committed suicide. There was always a little joke
in the family, that this is where my mother was, and she joked about it all the time. She had a lovely sense of humor. She loved to laugh. She was a very delightful, wonderful human being.

Her house at the seashore was an example. I remember when we would go to the shore and my grandparents would come. One end of the table would have one kind of a tablecloth rolled up in the center of the table, because my grandfather from Berwick only ate a certain diet. He was diabetic and he ate the exact same thing every day, and he ate his main meal in the middle of the day. My grandmother from Philadelphia, Bubby Payes, had a heart condition, so she was on a different kind of a diet. Zaidy Payes had a very serious stomach problem so he was on another diet. There had to be two separate tablecloths. I remember how they sort of rolled where they met, because Zaidy from Berwick was eating meat, was eating chicken soup and chicken which he ate every day, the boiled chicken soup with the two carrots; then there would be another tablecloth because milchigs was being served at the other end of the table.

INT: You were kosher in your family?

JANE: Yes, and I am. I keep a kosher home. And that’s another story. It’s fun to remember all of this. My mother had cousins who would come for two weeks at the seashore. Our house was just...everybody who came—my parents rented a different house every summer and in later years, they only rented houses that were either at ground level or had a ramp because my mother’s mother had a heart condition and couldn’t walk steps so they had to have a bedroom on the first floor. There was lots of family life that went on there and my mother’s sister, Sylvia Donner and her husband Harry, would always be at the seashore. They would have a house with their children and Aunt Trudy and Uncle Philip Richman were part of the Richman-Hoffman family and they owned a big house where three families lived together, the two brothers and sister and their spouses and children. And that house was another wonderful saga. Books could be written about any one of these houses. They were all very intellectual people and it was very lively...lots of debate and intellectual excitement. That house was a place where we also went. So life at the seashore, which was Ventnor and Margate, was a very important part of our growing up. But my mother ran this household where everybody came and stayed together. My mother was very involved in Hadassah. Hadassah was the key organization in our lives.

INT: How did she get involved?

JANE: I don’t know how she started, but she was very active in junior Hadassah which existed in those years for young women out of high school or college, and she was a leader in junior Hadassah. It was an important part of her life and her social life, because they not only did Zionist work but they also had social events with young men and so on. Being part of Hadassah was a natural thing in our family. My grandmother, her mother, had been. She was part of the Logan group of Hadassah. My mother then became part of the Oak Lane group of Hadassah and they were her contemporaries, and I remember my mother having study groups in our home, because study groups were a big part of the Hadassah activity. I remember study groups which she led in our house and I remember all of the phone calls and the activity with her Hadassah.
work and eventually she became president of the Philadelphia chapter, which was and still is one of the largest chapters in the country.

INT: How did she meet your father?

JANE: Well, they were cousins so they knew each other through family events. When my father came to Penn, there were times he would be at my grandparents' home because they were his cousins and my mother’s in-laws were actually her aunt and uncle. So they met and my father used to tell stories about driving out to Beaver College to take my mother out on dates and in those years, Jello was a new thing and they would tell stories about my father shaking the Jello and everybody thought that was terrific. His friends had a car and they would go out in the rumble seat.

They were married in Philadelphia at the Majestic Hotel and I have a picture of the bridal party. They had a very large, formal wedding. At that time my grandfather was obviously quite successful. From the sounds of it, it was a rather elegant affair. My mother had beautiful taste in everything that she did. Understated, elegant taste. My parents were married and I was born in '31. They were married in '28. They moved to a house. When they were first married they lived with my mother’s parents and talked about sneaking out in the middle of the night and going to Jewish Hospital, not wanting to wake up the parents when it was time for me to be born. My father always points out the little coffee shop where he went to have some coffee while he was waiting. It’s nice to have all of these places nearby and memories.

My mother was always active in Jewish communal life. She was active in the Sisterhood and very involved in many Federation agencies. She was the first woman of Russian Jewish descent to be president of the Women’s Council of the Federation of Jewish Agencies and through some stories that she told us, and memories that Lillian Karsh had—Lillian Karsh was vice president of the Women’s board when my mother was president, and she and my mother were very close friends. Two years ago the Exponent was going to do a series on mothers and daughters, Zara Meyers I believe it was did the interviewing. They never printed the story because something came up and that took precedent, but we had done a little research within the family because I was being interviewed and I wanted my sisters to participate and my sister Sandy Kohn, who’s development director now of the Jewish Family and Children’s Service, met with Lil Karsch, because Lil had some wonderful memories. Some of the stories she told were fascinating because Lena Leventhal, the wife of Judge Lewis Leventhal, had been one of my mother’s mentors. I don’t think they called it mentor then, but she was a very dear friend of my mothers. They were invited to our wedding. Lena Leventhal had really encouraged my mother to become active in the Federation and my mother was asked to be president.

In those years, there was quite a schism between the German Jewish community and the Russian Jewish community and not everyone there looked kindly upon my mother’s being made the president of the Federation and the board. Some of the women boycotted her meeting. So my mother met with Lil Karsch and my mother decided she would send a postcard to everybody who
had not attended the meeting and say that I missed you at the meeting and I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting and gave the date. And still they didn’t come. So my mother decided that the next meeting would be held at one of the local agencies that was sponsored by what was then called the Deitshen which I realize is a somewhat denigrating term, but it was one of the agencies sponsored by the German Jewish women who were much more interested in the local health and welfare agencies than they were in the overseas services, and my mother was an avid Zionist at a time when it was an unpopular thing to be. So my mother held this meeting at one of the agencies, the Rebecca Gratz club, one of the local agencies, and the women were forced to come because it was their agency, so that was how my mother solved problems. That typified my mother. Not a confrontational person. She figured out how to make things happen in a way where everybody came out feeling good and it was a very unique skill.

I remember during the war my parents sponsored several families who came over from Germany and required sponsors here. And there were two families I remember in particular—one woman was Betty Hope and her son went on to become extremely successful. They were lovely people. I don’t remember if there was a husband there but it was Betty Hope and her son Carl. He went on to develop a process with photography that was very, very unique and he became quite successful.

And there was another family who I remember so well, the Schwabys. They had owned a small department store in Germany and when the war came they sent their children to England. The girl was my age. The boy was a bit older and they had lived in London for several years separated from their parents. The family did get out and they were reunited and they came here and he became a piano tuner and he used to say to my father, “Appreciate what you have. We too used to go away for the summer. We had a home on the lake.” They were obviously not only prosperous but cultured people. If he was able to become a piano tuner, obviously they had been well educated in music. Eva Schwaby and I used to play together. It was Eva and Carl and the parents were Lottie and I don’t remember who was Mr. Schwaby. I don’t know if he had a first name. (Laughter) Things were a lot more proper in those days. So my parents helped them quite a bit. They were part of our family. They would come to our house, we would go to theirs.

When I look back on it now, children were not as—what shall I say—sharing of their emotions and experiences. We played. She didn’t talk very much about what had happened to her. I only knew because my mother had told me about their experiences, but my mother was very active in HIAS. She served on the board of HIAS. She was just involved in practically everything in the Jewish community. She was involved in Technion and Hebrew University and all of the women’s groups, as well as the boards of Federation, Israel Bonds, Hadassah.

INT: I’m here with Jane Zolot. This is the second tape. Jane is wanting to say a few more things that she didn’t say.

JANE: I didn’t talk about my involvement in the JCRC which was, and continues to be, a very rewarding experience. I served as chair of the commission on Israel and other international
concerns and shared that chairmanship with Barry Ungar, a brilliant and wonderful young man, lawyer, who came from American Jewish Congress, and we chaired the commission during the time of the Lebanon War. It was a really rough period for the Jewish community. Working at JCRC was a very, very interesting experience. David Mallach was the director of the commission and he was such a devoted Zionist and fine young man. We worked very well together and we took a mission to Israel of Pennsylvania congressman and senators from the United States Congress and Senate and most of the people who went were congressman. Senator Arlen Specter met us in Israel and that was a very unusual trip because it was the only trip that I went on to Israel that was geared to both Jewish and Christian people.

INT: When was this?

JANE: It was Memorial Day of 1983. It was a Memorial Day weekend. And that was one of the conflicts. The family was all together at the seashore and I said, “I’m going to Israel,” but it was a fascinating trip and we met with all of the leaders, Arab leaders, who normally were not part of the agenda on Jewish organizational trips. Local Arab leaders and people who were significant players in what was happening in the Palestinian areas and Lebanon-Palestinian community. So JCRC has been a very interesting experience. I was an officer there. Meeting with Quaker groups and other non-Jewish groups expanded my horizons greatly.

INT: How did you get from Hadassah to that? It wasn’t a far jump.

JANE: Well, Hadassah people sit on the board of the JCRC. Hadassah is represented on the Israel commission and I was invited to co-chair the commission. Somebody must have thought that maybe it would be a good idea and it was interesting because they always had a man and woman chairing their commission at JCRC. They were one of the-I think-in the forefront of that awareness and sensitivity. So that was a very interesting experience and still is. JCRC doesn’t have to defend Israel as much as it used to but the challenges have changed. I think when the peace process started, the animosity level changed and there’s been a perceptible shift in a general acceptance of Israel, whether people agree or disagree with individual policies.

But over the years we’ve seen that whole Zionist philosophy incorporated into by the Jewish world so much more and the whole Jewish world has become more Jewish. My mother told me about going to GA’s years ago where if they said Hamotzi it was shocking, and when I told her in the recent years when I started going about you could go to Shabbos services-reform, conservative, orthodox, reconstructionist, and they benched after meals she couldn’t believe it because she said that when she first started, the GA barely had a Motzi at a meal. So the community has changed quite a bit over the years. I’ve seen that growth and the acceptance of Israel. Some call it the Zionization of the Jewish world.

So I’ve had an opportunity to see that, and JCRC provided horizons for me to meet with non-Jewish groups, to meet with black groups, to really get a sense of building bridges of understanding within our community. That has been very interesting and continues to be. I still
sit on the board here. I had a very fascinating experience last year. The National Museum of American Jewish History mounted the Henrietta Szold exhibit and Henrietta Szold, of course, was the founder of Hadassah. The exhibit had been started in Baltimore and it was brought here to Philadelphia and I was part of a group that was planning various events. I was invited to give the keynote address at the opening of the exhibition. I know a lot about Henrietta Szold but when you have to stand up and give a speech to a group of people who come with such varied background—I knew there would be a large Hadassah contingent because we would certainly rally around this exhibit—and people who knew nothing about Henrietta Szold except what they might learn that night. It was a challenge and I remember one day when I just locked myself in my bedroom. I never got dressed the whole day and I was surrounded with books that I had been reading and marking and I wrote the speech that I would give that night, so that was a bit of a challenge as far as preparation.

And one other thing that I think I need to mention is the Soviet Jewry movement. I was very touched by Connie Smuckler and the group of women with whom she was involved. When they first started going to the former Soviet Union and Connie would come back and tell stories about Ida Nudel at the women’s leadership board of the Federation with tears rolling down her cheeks. It was sincere and she was totally drawn to the plight of these poor people and had the ability to convey the need and the sorrow and the challenge.

When I became president of the Philadelphia chapter there were two things that I initiated. This was in 1977. I began the Hadassah project, which was picked up nationally, called Project Yachad. It evolved from an experience that Connie and a group of women had had when they went to the former Soviet Union and the Jewish women on Simchas Torah danced in the forest outside of the city to express their Judaism and it was a very risky thing to do. We started this program at a chapter board meeting and Connie and Eileen Sussman, the executive director of the Soviet Jewry Council at JCRC, came to the Philadelphia chapter board meeting. I was the new president and we accepted this Project Yachad—hands together—and I then called the national office and they accepted the program nationally. I remember I got on the train early one morning and went to New York. At that time it was such a trip. Now I do it practically by rote. And the national board accepted that project. So that was something that really touched a generation and we were talking about things of that generation. The opportunity for people to be involved in the movement for Soviet Jews was very powerful and it all sort of ties together when I talk about Tybie Yermish and our close friendship and what a beloved mentor she was.

I remember having a little study group right here in my home, and Tybie was sitting on the couch where you’re sitting at this minute. She bought the “Jews of Silence,” Elie Weisel’s book, and we had a small group and we sat and talked about the book. We had read it and she led the discussion, sparking our interest and motivating us to action.

A poignant memory was being installed as a national vice-president of Hadassah in Jerusalem at our national convention in 1991. Seated on the dais, looking out at the huge crowd in Binyonei Haoma (convention center) and realizing that these men and women from all over
the United States were Hadassah was extremely moving. I felt the power of our mission and the strength of our numbers. To be chosen as a top leader and to assume the office in Jerusalem, the heart and soul of the Jewish people, was unforgettable. For the first time, no family member was there to share in my special moment, but oh, how my Philadelphia colleagues cheered me on.

**INT:** Thank you Jane, very much. I’ve taken up so much of your time.

**JANE:** I’ve loved it. I find that I like talking about myself. (End of tape)