

Marion Guttentag Transcript

EMILY MEHLMAN: – June the 4th.

MARION GUTTENTAG: The 4th.

EM: Yes. I'm Emily Mehlman, and I'm sitting here with Marion Guttentag at her home at North Hale in Needham, and we're about to do an interview of Marion for the Temple Israel's project, which will be in 1997 about Women Whose Lives Span The Century. Now, Marion, did your life span the century?

MG: Well, I am ninety-six.

EM: When were you born?

MG: January 10, 1900.

EM: So, your life really did span the century.

MG: It did that.

EM: Yes. Can you tell me something about your family?

MG: Yes, that's one of the things I want to tell you about.

EM: Okay. [Recording paused.] Go on.

MG: Jessie and Sadie, my two sisters, are both gone now. One died in '88, and the other died in '90. This is a letter that I received after Jessie's death.

EM: Do you want to read it?

MG: Yes.

EM: Okay.

MG: She was a sewing teacher at the time before she died, and this is one of her pupils. The letter I received was from one of her pupils. "Dear members of the Guttentag family. To all of you, my deepest sympathy from the loss of a lovely, gracious lady, Miss Jessie Guttentag. Miss Guttentag was one of my teachers at the old High School of Practical Arts. Officially, she taught me sewing, and I am grateful for what she taught me of this very useful handcraft. But she taught me much more than sewing. She taught gentleness, kindness, consideration for others, refinement, quiet contentment, and goodwill. I loved Miss Guttentag and still do. For you who knew her so much better than I, the loss must be most painful. I wish my few words could give you some comfort. Very sincerely, Martha C. Engler."

EM: That's a beautiful letter.

MG: Isn't it?

EM: Now, who was Martha Engler? Do you know her?

MG: No. She was one of her students, and I had acknowledged this letter with others at the time. Since Jessie is gone, I felt alone – end of the family. Every time I would take out this letter of hers and get great comfort from it, and I wanted her to know that recently. So I wrote to her, but the letter was returned. She had moved. I don't know where – I haven't been able to locate where she is, but she's a colored woman, and everybody that has heard this letter thinks that she expresses herself so beautifully.

EM: Do you recall what year Martha Engler was a student of Jessie's? Do you have any --? Do you recall, I mean, what decade?

MG: I don't know because I don't even know when Jessie retired.

EM: You had two sisters, Jessie and Sadie.

MG: Jessie and Sadie.

EM: And what about brothers?

MG: I had two brothers; they're both gone.

EM: What are their names?

MG: Sidney and Joseph.

EM: And your parents?

MG: My mother was Ida, and my father was Joseph.

EM: You had a brother with the same name as your father?

MG: No, no, wait a minute. Samuel.

EM: Samuel.

MG: Not Joseph.

EM: Okay, and do you recall when your parents were married?

MG: I don't know, but they were married in New York.

EM: Were they both born in this country?

MG: My mother was born here. My father came from Germany as a young man –

EM: Could you say when?

MG: – and opened the – no. He opened a barbershop.

EM: In Boston?

MG: Someplace around Boston. And then, as he became more familiar with it, he became a constable in Boston.

EM: Is that what he did for most of his life?

MG: That's what he did.

EM: He was a constable.

MG: Yes, here in Boston.

EM: Yes, and where did they live?

MG: Well, I think I was born someplace in Roxbury. I don't remember where.

EM: Now, where were you in the family?

MG: I was the last one.

EM: The last of five. And who was the oldest?

MG: Sadie.

EM: And Sadie was born in what year? Do you recall?

MG: She was ninety-five when she died.

EM: And she was how much older than you, about five years or so?

MG: Well, say, I was – she died in '88 –

EM: She died in '88, and she was ninety-five.

MG: – and she was ninety-five.

EM: I see, so she was probably born in 1892.

MG: Something around there.

EM: Something like that. Yes. Do you recall any of your activities as a child in your parents' home and the schooling?

MG: Well, my schooling was just regular grade schools.

EM: Do you remember the names of your schools?

MG: The Oliver Wendell Holmes. We lived in Dorchester, and I went to the Oliver Wendell Holmes School. Then I went to the High School of Practical Arts.

EM: And that's exactly where –?

MG: Where Jessie was.

EM: Jessie taught there.

MG: Yeah.

EM: And you finished there?

MG: I finished there.

EM: And then what happened?

MG: And then I – trying to think. It's an awful long time ago.

EM: [laughter] Right. I know. So you graduated probably around 1916 or '17.

MG: Yes, '17.

EM: Well, that was really the beginning of the Second World War.

MG: That's right, and I remember working at the Red Cross –

EM: During the war?

MG: – during the war.

EM: Doing?

MG: Just knitting, doing a lot of knitting.

EM: Was your mother –

MG: Mother was handy.

EM: – handy?

MG: She made that afghan on the bed.

EM: Really? Your mother made that afghan?

MG: Yeah..

EM: So your love of needlework really came from your mother.

MG: Yes. Yes.

EM: I see.

MG: A few years ago, I had started knitting a bedspread, and these two beds were in our room. Sadie slept in one, and I slept in the other. It took me a long time to make the spread because I was just doing it in odd times. Then I figure, Well, if I've got one, I've got to make another. So I started the other, and by the time I finished, they were so heavy I couldn't use them on the bed.

EM: Were they white?

MG: White.

EM: In that heavy crochet? Yes. I remember those.

MG: Only they were knitted.

EM: Oh, they were knitted.

MG: Yes.

EM: Of what kind of yarn?

MG: Heavy. Just heavy yarn.

EM: Cotton?

MG: Yes.

EM: Weighed twenty pounds each, I bet.

MG: When we moved here, both afghans were finished, but I couldn't use them, because they were too heavy for me. So my niece took them. She lives in Wellesley, but she's around here.

EM: Is she one of your brother's daughters?

MG: She's one of my –

EM: Yes, must be, because neither you nor your sisters ever married.

MG: We weren't married. No, that's right. She was – I'm trying to think – Sidney's daughter. She took the spreads, and I went over to visit her to see how they looked on her two beds she had them on, and they really looked lovely.

EM: Oh, I'm sure.

MG: But they weren't on beds that she took off and put on every day. They were in the guest room. So I said, "Well, as long as they're being used, it's all right."

EM: Tell me. Do you recall the Jewish life of your family when you were a child? Were you affiliated with a synagogue?

MG: I don't remember too much. I remember we used to go to Temple Israel on –

EM: Holidays?

MG: I was trying to think of the temple on –

EM: Commonwealth?

MG: Commonwealth.

EM: Commonwealth. You didn't go to the temple on Columbus Avenue?

MG: No, no.

EM: No.

MG: It was on Commonwealth Avenue.

EM: Yes.

MG: And we used to go there regularly on Saturday mornings.

EM: Do you remember who the rabbi was at that time? Rabbi Levi, or before Rabbi Levi?

MG: Rabbi Levi was there.

EM: Do you remember anything about the services?

MG: No, I don't.

EM: Was your mother –?

MG: I know I felt comfortable when I went.

EM: Was your mother involved in the Sisterhood?

MG: No. Well, she may have been for a little while, but not for long. She has been gone for a long time, and I have the worst time remembering dates.

EM: I think you're doing great. [laughter]

MG: Well, it seems to go on, and I can't even remember when I stopped working. I went to Bryant and Stratton Business School for a little while.

EM: Yes. And you got a job?

MG: And I got a job.

EM: What kind of work did you do?

MG: Stenographic work.

EM: In Boston?

MG: Yeah. One of them was in a printing concern in back of the South Station on one of those long streets that go from here to there.

EM: And how did you get to work?

MG: Well, on the streetcar.

EM: From where? Where were you living at that time?

MG: We were living in Dorchester along Kirkwood Road. That was off Commonwealth Avenue. No.

EM: No.

MG: No, it was Kelton Street.

EM: Off Commonwealth Avenue?

MG: Off Commonwealth Avenue.

EM: Kelton.

MG: Kelton.

EM: Kelton.

MG: Yes. Not very far from the Jewish Children's Hospital, up in Mattapan, there.

EM: I'm not picturing the neighborhood, to be very honest with you. Was it near —?

MG: Well, you know where the skating was in the winter in Franklin Field?

EM: Yes. Was it near there?

MG: It was beyond that, out further.

EM: That was a heavy Jewish neighborhood.

MG: Near Mattapan.

EM: Yes. Yes, that was very highly concentrated with Jewish people at that time.

MG: Yes, that's right.

EM: Did you live in a house? In an apartment?

MG: A two-family house.

EM: And your parents owned it?

MG: No, we rented it.

EM: Do you recall how much rent was in those days?

MG: I have no recollection.

EM: Was this, would you say, in the '20s?

MG: Nearer the '30s.

EM: Nearer the '30s.

MG: It was a good-sized apartment because the five of us were still home. Yes, because it was near the children – I remember Sadie and Jessie used to go up to the Jewish

Home where the children were and take them out walking and things of that sort.

EM: Now, you say you lived in this house during the '30s, so that was during the Depression.

MG: Yes.

EM: How did your family fare in those years?

MG: Well, we managed very well. I don't recall any particular hardships.

EM: Your father was a constable.

MG: Constable.

EM: And did he work for the city of Boston?

MG: No, it was for Boston. He had office space in a lawyer's office in the old South Building in Boston.

EM: Your mother was at home?

MG: My mother was home.

EM: Was she a good cook?

MG: She was a very good cook, and she liked to cook.

EM: What did she make?

MG: Oh, she loved to make donuts.

EM: Really?

MG: The last time she made them, she said, "Well, this will be the last ones. I don't think I'll make. I don't think I'll bother with any more." But we always enjoyed them. She liked to cook.

EM: What else did she make besides donuts? Donuts were a treat. What was your usual kind of meal?

MG: Oh, well, it was a normal meal. I mean, she did her own marketing. I used to go with her on Saturday afternoons or Friday afternoons. Do you know anything about Dorchester at all?

EM: Yes, I do.

MG: Well, where Erie Street was, where we were living, there was a store on one side of the street, and we had an apartment over the store at that time. If I got a penny, I was downstairs buying a piece of chocolate. [laughter]

EM: [laughter] It was a candy store downstairs?

MG: It was in the store that was –

EM: Did you get more than one piece of chocolate for a penny?

MG: I don't remember how much they were, but I do remember getting it and then having a hard time getting upstairs to the apartment with it still in my hand.

EM: Did you observe Shabbat, or Shabbos, as you probably called it at that time? Did you have a special meal on Friday night?

MG: On Friday night, yes, we had fish.

EM: What kind of fish?

MG: I can't tell you that.

EM: Gefilte fish?

MG: Not very often.

EM: Did you have challah on Friday night?

MG: Yes.

EM: You bought it or your mother made it?

MG: No, we bought it. We had a bread mixer way back when, and so she made a lot of her bread.

EM: Really? You said she made donuts, so that was probably an offshoot of that.

MG: Perhaps.

EM: Yes. You had chicken, usually?

MG: Oh, yes. We always had chicken. At least once a week.

EM: Not necessarily on Fridays, though.

MG: No.

EM: Did you keep kosher?

MG: No.

EM: No. You considered yourselves Reform Jews from the beginning?

MG: That's right.

EM: Your father was a Reform Jew from Germany, or you don't really recall?

MG: He used to come, and he used to hold the Passover service.

EM: At home?

MG: At home.

EM: Did you and your brothers go to religious school? To Sunday school?

MG: I didn't, no. The boys did.

EM: The boys did.

MG: The boys graduated.

EM: But you didn't.

MG: I didn't.

EM: And neither did Jessie or Sadie.

MG: No, the girls didn't, but the – this is your pen, I think. Pencil.

EM: That's fine.

MG: Oh, this was my father and mother before –

EM: Very handsome people.

MG: – when they first came together.

EM: Your father had a big moustache.

MG: What?

EM: Your father.

MG: Yeah.

EM: Did he always have a moustache?

MG: Yeah.

EM: His whole life? You look a little like your mother, I think, and so do your sisters. Of course, I never really met your brothers.

MG: No, I don't think you did. They were always off, so busy all the time. I don't know whether I've got any pictures of them.

EM: Did your mother do sewing for the whole family?

MG: Oh, yes. Mother used to make the clothes for the boys, suits for the boys, and everything. I'll put it back up here out of the way.

EM: Okay.

MG: And of course, my mother's father, my grandfather, made Army uniforms for the –

EM: Come a little closer, okay? Be careful of the cord.

MG: Yeah. I thought, while I was here, this is my niece that lives in Wellesley.

EM: Yes.

MG: And those are her two daughters.

EM: This was at their wedding.

MG: That was at this one's wedding.

EM: Do you recall what year this was?

MG: She's living in Framingham now. The other one is in – I don't recall what her address is, and they both have two children.

EM: Oh, nice. You have some great nieces and nephews.

MG: Oh, I'm covered with nieces and nephews that are scattered all over.

EM: Oh, that's wonderful. Getting back to your life, growing up in your early '20s, things like that, your mother was still making clothes for all of you?

MG: No, no.

EM: Why don't you come and sit down?

MG: Jessie used to make me dresses occasionally.

EM: Did you all sew?

MG: I didn't at that time. Well, I took sewing at school, at the High School of Practical Arts, and I made a coat for myself once in my last year, but that's about all. With Jessie around, why should I?

EM: What about Sadie? Didn't Sadie do it?

MG: Sadie didn't do much sewing. Sadie taught in the North End.

EM: What did she teach?

MG: Well, she had the third grade, and she had the fourth grade, and she was there for a good many years.

EM: So, after they finished high school, did they go on to further education in order to teach?

MG: Well, yes, they went to Normal School.

EM: Where was that?

MG: In Boston, someplace local. I don't remember where it was, but both of them loved their work.

EM: And you worked as a –?

MG: I went to work after I finally got through.

EM: At Bryant and Stratton.

MG: At Bryant and Stratton. I was working for a printing place, and then, after that, when they were going out of business – I'm trying to think where I went from there.

EM: Well, you must have worked at least fifty years, maybe more.

MG: Well, I stopped work in 19 – I'm going to look, if you don't mind. Just a minute.

EM: Okay. I'm going to shut this off while you do that. [Recording paused.]

MG: So this is what they gave me.

EM: So it says here you retired October 28, 1976, from Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike.

MG: Yep.

EM: This is some wonderful photographs.

MG: They did that.

EM: Now, did you knit the dress, or did Jessie knit that dress?

MG: No, no. It was a [inaudible] dress. Still hanging in the closet.

EM: Still hanging in the closet? [chuckles] You moved it here?

MG: Well, I've been wearing it.

EM: Now, after you and your sisters moved from your parents' home, you always lived together?

MG: Yes. Well, we lived in Brookline.

EM: When did you move to Brookline, do you recall? In the '70s?

MG: Pretty close to that.

EM: To Griggs Road?

MG: Griggs Road.

EM: Yes, I remember visiting.

MG: Kirkwood Road.

EM: Kirkwood Road?

MG: Kirkwood Road. Griggs Road was –

EM: 29 Kirkwood Road.

MG: Brighton, that's where we were.

EM: Right, yes.

MG: And that is just this side of Boston College.

EM: You all lived together, and you all went to work.

MG: That's right.

EM: How did you divide up the responsibilities of the home?

MG: Well, we all paid our board. Let's see, I was trying to think of when Mother died and when Papa died. These are some of the cards that I got when I retired.

EM: They had beautiful handwriting in those days. [laughter]

MG: I know it. Didn't have to bother with penmanship. [laughter]

EM: So when you were all living together, who did the cooking?

MG: My mother.

EM: No, but after you –?

MG: After? Oh.

EM: Yes, after that.

MG: Oh, well, Sadie and Jessie both were good cooks, and they would take turns. Of course, they were always home long before I was –

EM: I see.

MG: – because I worked until six o'clock and they were home at three o'clock. I mean, their schooling was earlier.

EM: You probably kept the books in the family. [laughter]

MG: I didn't think too much about it. They would always have their dinner most of the time before I got home, and then they'd serve me. Then, my job would be to clean up the dishes. But we got along very well.

EM: I know that. When did you start to – you and your sisters – knit for the Temple?

MG: Oh, well, we had a sewing group on Wednesdays.

EM: Going back –

MG: Way back.

EM: – to the Second World War or before?

MG: That's right.

EM: Would you say it started during the Second World War?

MG: No, I think they had had something there at the Temple before then.

EM: Before then.

MG: And then we started working.

EM: Do you recall who was in the original group? The names of any of the women?

MG: We made things for the hospital and baby blankets, and Jessie would buy the special material for them and cut them out, and get them all basted together so that somebody would have something to work on when they got there. So she spent quite a little time.

EM: You met every Wednesday.

MG: Every Wednesday in the morning, and they would serve – at noontime, they would serve coffee and pastry of some kind, and we'd have – would have brought a sandwich with us.

EM: This was on Commonwealth Avenue?

MG: Yeah.

EM: To start?

MG: Then we had a pretty good crowd, and very often they would have some program after the sewing. Somebody was going to read to them, or there was some music or something going on, so that – well, when they were going to have a sale, we really worked hard to be sure we had a good supply of things to be sewed.

EM: Was it mostly just for babies or for adults as well?

MG: No. Babies.

EM: Just for babies.

MG: Young ones.

EM: But you also make things for the children – was it Children's Hospital?

MG: For the different – well, we made them to sell, really. We'd get a good supply so that they would be raising quite a sizable amount of money on the sales.

EM: Now, in the early years, Marion, you must have been working at this time on Wednesdays.

MG: Oh, yes, I was working, but while I was working, I didn't have the opportunity of being with the sewing group. It was after I retired that I really worked –

EM: I see. I see. But the sewing group started in the '30s, would you say?

MG: Oh, early. It was very early.

EM: While you were still living with your parents in Dorchester?

MG: Oh, yes. Yes. Well, I don't know about in Dorchester.

EM: Do you recall, in the earlier years, during the war years, the Second World War, perhaps, or before that, if there were any educational opportunities for women at the Temple? You said your brothers were educated.

MG: Well, my two brothers.

EM: You went to the Temple in the sewing group and the Sisterhood, but did you learn anything about Judaism at that time?

MG: No, I think the rabbis would give us some information and then, on Saturday afternoons, we used to – we almost spent the whole Saturday at Temple.

EM: You did?

MG: Because they were having different things at different times.

EM: Well, try to remember. You had a service in the morning.

MG: Yes.

EM: And then what happened?

MG: And then, if they had something else in the afternoon sometimes –

EM: Did they have a lunch?

MG: Oh, people [inaudible] – well, they didn't serve. They weren't serving lunches. People brought their own sandwiches.

EM: On Saturdays?

MG: I'm quite sure.

EM: As I recall reading, they had services on Sundays as well.

MG: Yes, they did on Sundays after a while, and we had something on Saturday afternoon too.

EM: Was it instructional? Was it musical?

MG: No, it was –

EM: Was it social?

MG: It was a lecture of some kind.

EM: On Saturday afternoon. Who gave the lecture? Different people?

MG: Different people.

EM: Different men, I'm sure. [laughter]

MG: Yes.

EM: When you had the sales of the knitted things, of the babies' knitted things, were they usually during the week?

MG: The sales were after we had a good supply, we would – I don't think it was every week because we couldn't keep up with the supply. We had a baby afghan that I made that we took chances on.

EM: Are you looking for one right now?

MG: Well, I was going to start one, and I didn't get very far.

EM: Did you bring —? I see. It's in little squares.

MG: The squares, and each square —

EM: About three inches.

MG: —was put together and then —

EM: This is crocheted?

MG: This was on the weavette.

EM: Do you have a weaving machine?

MG: No, we've got a small weavette here.

EM: Oh, it's by hand. It's a little box with hundreds of inch-high spikes, and you weave it, much like a child —

MG: That's right.

EM: — [inaudible] child could do a potholder.

MG: That's right.

EM: Except it's done on fine yarn. Isn't this lovely? In pastel colors.

MG: Then these were all put together with those—those were instructions of different kinds.

EM: I see. It's called a Weavette Weave. It says the price of this little apparatus is fifteen cents. You must have had this quite a while.

MG: That's a long time.

EM: Yes, it says on it, Donar Products, Medford, 55 Massachusetts, 1945. So you had this fifty-six years, at least.

MG: I found this single thing, and I was going to start making another afghan, but I didn't get very far. [laughter]

EM: Well, your eyesight is probably a little challenged right now

MG: Yes.

EM: A little challenged.

MG: But I used to enjoy going to those things, and after we came here, we were supplying them regularly with things for sale.

EM: Now, I want to get back to the Second World War. It's a long time ago. It's more than fifty years ago. Do you recall ever hearing about Hitler?

MG: Never heard too much about him until towards the end, when they wondered where he was, and they couldn't find him. But there wasn't too much, or I wasn't around enough to hear any discussions.

EM: What about the concentration camps? Do you recall hearing —?

MG: Oh, yes. Relatives of my father were still over there.

EM: And you knew about this early on?

MG: Yes.

EM: The late '30s and '40s.

MG: Yes. And we had been corresponding with them at different times.

EM: Now, where did they live?

MG: In Germany.

EM: Do you recall where in Germany?

MG: No, I don't. But we had been corresponding, and Sadie wrote German – used to write the German letters for us.

EM: Do you recall what happened to these people?

MG: Yes, I know a couple of them were gone, and we sent money for them. One of them had been going to marry this man, but he was ill, and they needed money for medication for him. I don't know what happened to him. But we would send money. But the details of it, I am not clear on at all.

EM: Do you recall if any of them were able to get out before they were incarcerated in the camps?

MG: Well, I don't think many of them were in the camp.

EM: Oh.

MG: I think they either got out or went someplace else.

EM: Did you have any relatives that went to Israel?

MG: I did have a couple of cousins, I think, who had gone to Israel, but we didn't hear from them.

EM: I see. During the Second World War, were you involved in any of the war effort for the American soldiers in terms of making bandages?

MG: No, I didn't. I was too busy at home.

EM: You really probably began working around 1920, would you say? Or even a little before that. You graduated from high school, you said, in 1917.

MG: Yeah

EM: Then you went to Bryant and Stratton for a year or more.

MG: Yes, just part of a year.

EM: Yes, and then you started, and you worked straight through. Did you ever lose your job?

MG: No.

EM: No.

MG: Well, I lost the printing job because they went out of business, and then I went to the engineering firm.

EM: You stayed with them that whole time?

MG: That was the engineering firm.

EM: The one that you retired from?

MG: I don't know if this has any time.

EM: Yes, the name is there. Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike.

MG: Thorndike.

EM: You worked for them as a bookkeeper?

MG: As a bookkeeper.

EM: You worked for them the whole time. Do you recall how much money you earned?

MG: This is where I retired.

EM: Yes, do you recall how much money you earned at the beginning and when you retired? Do you recall in the '20s when you started to work for them? Did you get paid by the week or by the month?

MG: Got paid by the week, and it wasn't a corporation at the beginning, and then it became a corporation, and I'm still getting a retirement check every month.

EM: Pension, yes. Your retirement check is probably more than your salary.

MG: Now I get a check for – first, they gave me a hundred dollars every month when I first retired. Then, I got a check that said \$175.

EM: That was nice.

MG: And the reason – a letter came with it stating that they felt, since I was not there as just a partnership, not an incorporated, that I wasn't getting the salary that I would have if the corporation had been there. Since then, I've been getting \$175 every month.

EM: When you started to work, and you were paid by the week, would you say you got ten dollars a week? Twelve dollars a week?

MG: No, but we worked six days a week.

EM: Oh, you did?

MG: Worked on Saturday, at least half a day, sometimes longer.

EM: Did you get paid in cash?

MG: In cash. No, check. I got a check.

EM: Did you have a bank account? Do you remember?

MG: I have something someplace that –

EM: That's okay. You don't have to get up. I'm just curious as to how things were done in those days.

MG: Yes. I know we worked Saturday mornings. We didn't work all day Saturday.

EM: But you don't remember how much you earned when you started.

MG: No. When I started –

EM: Because I know my mother, who would have been about eight, eighty-one now, she said when she started to work, she earned seventy-five dollars a month.

MG: No, I earned more than that.

EM: You earned more than that. And you were paid by check.

MG: Paid by check, that's right.

EM: Then you came home, and you put some money in for your rent.

MG: What I did when I came home – I gave my mother a certain amount; I don't remember how much.

EM: Yes.

MG: But I gave her something, and I always put a certain amount, even if it was just two dollars, in the savings account.

EM: Do you remember the name of the bank?

MG: It was on Claremont Street. I don't remember which bank it was.

EM: Did your family have a car?

MG: We didn't have a car. My father had a car, and Jessie drove.

EM: That must have been quite something. I mean, I'm sure there weren't that many women driving in those days.

MG: I know it, but she was the one that took the lessons and drove. She used to have to take him different places at night when he had to leave papers on people. Then, I took lessons for driving right in the middle of Park Square, of all places.

EM: If you're going to learn, that's a good place to learn, I guess.

MG: And by that time, Jessie was ready to give up the car. My father had gone.

EM: What year would you say this was?

MG: Well, it was before I had graduated.

EM: From Bryant and Stratton.

MG: No, from high school.

EM: Really?

MG: That I started taking lessons.

EM: You were sixteen years old, so it was like 1916.

MG: Yes, something around there.

EM: Oh, I would say you were very advanced [inaudible].

MG: But I didn't get very far with it because by that time, I don't think I drove the car at all. But I did get a license.

EM: Do you recall what kind of car your father had?

MG: It was a Dodge, I think.

EM: Do you think your family was well off?

MG: What?

EM: Would you say that your family was well off?

MG: Well, we always had enough to eat, that's for sure.

EM: Were you able to do things like go to the movies?

MG: Well, not very often. Once in a while, Saturday nights, my mother would go to Fields Corner in Dorchester, and I'd go to the movies with her Saturday night sometimes, but we didn't make a regular habit of it.

EM: What other kinds of social things did you do?

MG: Not very much socially. We always had too many odds and ends that had to be straightened out at home.

EM: I'm looking at these two chairs that you have here with the needlepoint seats.

MG: Jessie made one, and I made one.

EM: And how long have you had them, would you say?

MG: Oh, well, we had them long before we came here.

EM: Oh, of course.

MG: But I don't remember. And then, these pillows, Jessie made one, and I made one.

EM: Beautiful. Did you spend most of your evenings doing needlework at home?

MG: Or reading.

EM: Do you recall what you liked to read? What authors you liked to read?

MG: No. But I've always had more or less trouble with my eyes anyway, and so I don't remember much about that at all.

EM: When you did these chairs, did you use a special magnifying –?

MG: No, I managed then. Those chairs were done – well, we've been here eleven years, and we had them at the other house for a good many years. We were on Kirkwood Road.

EM: Well, you were on Kirkwood Road when you retired in 1976.

MG: Yes.

EM: And then you must have moved shortly thereafter to Griggs Road.

MG: That's right.

EM: Did you own your apartment on Griggs Road?

MG: No. Yes, we did.

EM: Yes, I thought so.

MG: Yes, Griggs Road was a two-family house, and then my brother married and had the apartment downstairs – one of my brothers. Then, on the next street to ours, my other brother had been married, and he and his wife and the children were living in that house. We could see from one bedroom across to the other room, to one of the bedrooms in their house. See, the children used to wave all the time. That's the niece that is now living across the way here –

EM: Wellesley.

MG: in Wellesley. She was just a little tot. And she had one brother who lives in Newton now.

EM: Can you tell me how you observed the holidays, both the American holidays and the Jewish holidays?

MG: Well, the Jewish holidays we observed very quietly.

EM: Did you have [Recording paused.] American holidays and the Jewish holidays?

MG: Well, the Jewish holidays we observed very quietly.

EM: Did you have special meals?

MG: What?

EM: Did you have special meals?

MG: Yes, we had special meals, special foods.

EM: Did you fast on Yom Kippur?

MG: Yes.

EM: From way back when.

MG: Way back when. I don't remember way back when.

EM: Yes, but you all fasted on Yom Kippur?

MG: We did fast.

EM: And on Rosh Hashanah, you went to —?

MG: We always had candles on —?

EM: Friday night.

MG: — Friday night. In fact, these candlesticks were given to Jessie when she retired —

EM: From teaching?

MG: —from school, from teaching.

EM: They're lovely.

MG: And that vase in the middle, one of my nephews, who lives in Washington, he's an international tax lawyer, and he had been working in Washington for the law firm, and they shipped him to Japan to open an office in Japan. He was there, he thought, for one year, and it was over three years that he was there with his family. When he came home,

he brought that to me. It's a vase.

EM: Black lacquer.

MG: Yeah, it's got a little stand under it. [Recording paused.]

EM: For your immediate family, did you have other people coming?

MG: Most of the time, we just had the immediate family, the seven of us.

EM: Did your mother prepare special foods for Passover?

MG: Yes, she made wine.

EM: Do you remember any of them?

MG: I don't remember.

EM: She made wine?

MG: Grape wine.

EM: She made her own wine?

MG: Yes.

EM: Where did she do that? Right in the —?

MG: Right in the kitchen.

EM: Special for Passover?

MG: Yes.

EM: And did she make sponge cakes?

MG: Oh, yes.

EM: Did she change the dishes and the glassware? Or she kept the same?

MG: No, she didn't change anything.

EM: And would you have gone to the synagogue on holidays and Passover, for instance?
Do you recall?

MG: Sometimes, not regularly.

EM: How would you have gotten to Commonwealth Avenue? Did you take the streetcar?
Did you drive?

MG: Streetcar. Commonwealth Avenue was very easy.

EM: When you were on Kirkwood Road, that's right.

MG: When we were on Kirkwood Road –

EM: You just took it right down.

MG: – it was just the one line.

EM: What were the streetcars like in those days? Not like today?

MG: The streetcars?

EM: Yes. They were [inaudible].

MG: Well, they used to – yes, it was a long car.

EM: Wooden car.

MG: There were a couple of cars together, and I used to have to go up a hill in order to get to the streetcar and go right into Park Street.

EM: When you went to the Temple you got off right there, though [inaudible].

MG: Oh, before it went into the subway.

EM: What would you have worn when you went to Temple?

MG: Well, if it was suit weather, I'd be wearing a suit, perhaps.

EM: Did you wear a hat?

MG: I don't remember.

EM: You must have.

MG: I must have. That was a nice Temple.

EM: Beautiful. What are they doing with it now? Did the college take it over?

EM: It belongs to Boston University. It's the Morris Auditorium, and they use it for large assemblies, classes, final exams. Have you been by there in recent years?

MG: What's that?

EM: Have you been by there?

MG: No, I haven't been back over there that way at all.

EM: It looks the same from the outside.

MG: Yes.

EM: It looks the same from the outside; it really does.

MG: No, I haven't been over that way at all.

EM: What about the American holidays? Of course, you observed Thanksgiving?

MG: Oh, we had Thanksgiving.

EM: Yes?

MG: And we usually had the family.

EM: Yes. What about Christmas? Was there any kind of Christmas?

MG: Yes, we did for the children.

EM: Yes. What did you do?

MG: They hung up a stocking, and then the family would fill them with nuts and food.

EM: So all five of you each had a stocking.

MG: Yes. Oh, yes.

EM: Did you have a tree?

MG: No, we didn't have a tree.

EM: No, but you did have a stocking.

MG: But we did have stockings.

EM: And you felt that there was nothing non-Jewish about having stockings?

MG: No, no.

EM: A lot of people you knew did that?

MG: What's that?

EM: A lot of people you knew had stockings?

MG: Yes. Yes, and we always had one article of clothing that they happened to need at the time that would go into the stocking wrapped up.

EM: Now, what about Hanukkah?

MG: And Hanukkah, we would have candles sometimes. I don't recall regularly.

EM: What about gifts at Hanukkah?

MG: I don't think we did very much of the gifts. It depends on just when they fell.

EM: So the winter holiday was really more of a Christmas holiday than a Hanukkah holiday?

MG: Yeah.

EM: And you never questioned that?

MG: No.

EM: No. As you became older –?

MG: Because I had never really studied until we started going to Temple. Most of the boys did, but they never thought of the girls needing it.

EM: Things are quite different today.

MG: Oh, they sure are.

EM: Aren't you pleased about that?

MG: Yeah, things do change.

EM: For the better.

MG: I hope. On Thanksgiving and holidays like that, we always had company for dinner.

EM: Did you observe Easter in any way?

MG: No.

EM: No. Just Christmas as a non-Jewish holiday.

MG: Yeah.

EM: But you thought of that more as an American holiday –

MG: That's right.

EM: – as opposed to a Christian holiday.

MG: Yes.

EM: Growing up and going to school, were most of your friends Jewish?

MG: No.

EM: No. No.

MG: No. But there were a lot of friends – [Telephone rings.] Excuse me.

EM: Okay, I'm going to shut this off. [Recording paused.] Okay, Marion, we were talking about your friends, and you said growing up, and that's how you started.

MG: Yeah. We just lived normally. I mean, we didn't try to outdo anybody else or anything.

EM: What about when you were working? Here you were, a single Jewish woman working for a large company.

MG: And then, just before we moved here, this firm of Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike moved not very far from here.

EM: So, did you drive?

MG: No, no, I wasn't working then.

EM: Oh. How many women were in the office during the '40s, '50s, and '60s?

MG: Oh, they had a big – they had one room, a little bigger than this, with a computer.

EM: A computer?

MG: It was one big machine; it filled the room. That's when they first started using those machines in businesses.

EM: Did you use the machine?

MG: I didn't use it, no. Well, this is me.

EM: I see that. You were quite a bit heavier in those days, weren't you?

MG: No, I don't think so. It may look that way.

EM: No, maybe it's that big Bertha collar.

MG: That's it.

EM: On the dress.

MG: This is one of the offices of the firm, and this is the party they gave me, pastry and [inaudible].

EM: Were there other Jewish women who worked in the company?

MG: No, there weren't many Jewish women.

EM: How did you do on the holidays? Did you take time off for the holidays?

MG: If I wanted. Oh, if I wanted.

EM: And there was never a problem?

MG: Oh, no.

EM: Did you ever experience antisemitism in your work?

MG: No.

EM: What about in your life in general?

MG: No, I haven't run into anything. These are different engineers.

EM: Now I want to get into another subject with you: you and your two sisters.

MG: What?

EM: You and your two sisters remained single your whole lives.

MG: We remained single, all of us.

EM: Did any of you ever have —?

MG: The boys got married, but we didn't.

EM: Did any of you have an opportunity for marriage?

MG: Not that I know of. We were too busy earning a living. Yes, we never –

EM: Of course, in the days that Jessie was teaching, to teach in Boston, you had to be single.

MG: You had to be, yes. A married person couldn't teach.

EM: What about for Sadie?

MG: The same way.

EM: She taught in the Normal School.

MG: No, in the North End.

EM: I see, in an elementary school in the North End.

MG: Yes.

EM: Of course, she didn't marry either. Do you think that the ruling that only single women could teach was a –?

MG: Well, I think it's different today.

EM: It is different, but do you think that that ruling had perhaps influenced you?

MG: I don't think so. The boys both got married, and they really have nice families. This is Jessie's locket.

EM: I see that. It has her monogram on it.

MG: Yes.

EM: Silver.

MG: And it was last week, Jessie's –

EM: These are your nieces and nephews inside?

MG: These are some of the nieces and nephews.

EM: Grandnieces and nephews.

MG: That's right. That's right. These are the two children. This one lives in – the one that lives in Wellesley now, and that's her brother, and he lives in Newton now. These other three are from the other brother, and this is Laura. She is the mother of the – she's the one that's up in that picture there, and this is her brother and her other older brother. I still have trouble trying to remember the names of all of them and where they happen to be living. But I had been invited by one of Jessie's friends, who Jessie had been to school with his mother, and when he was an infant, she brought him to show us the baby. We were living on Kirkwood Road at the time, and so she came up with him as a baby. Well, a few weeks ago, I had a telephone call, and he was inviting me to go to dinner with him.

EM: How old is he now?

MG: He and his wife.

EM: Oh.

MG: He's a grown man.

EM: Do any of the great nieces and nephews have children?

MG: Oh, all the greats – this is them. One of those girls up there and her husband –

EM: So you have –?

MG: – and her two children. She lives in Framingham.

EM: So these are –?

MG: That's the one –

EM: This is a great niece?

MG: A great niece.

EM: So this is a great-great niece –

MG: That's right.

EM: – and a great-great nephew.

MG: Right. So no wonder I can't keep track of – [laughter]

EM: Your life really does span the century. There's no doubt about it if you have great-great nieces and nephews. You have, right now, in your family – one, two, three – four generations alive.

MG: That's right.

EM: I don't think too many people can say that.

MG: I can't remember where they all are now and who is –

EM: Marion, do you remember any unusual family stories? Any special happenings that occurred? Any occasions? Any serious illnesses that occurred in your family, and how they were dealt with? Do you?

MG: I'm trying to think.

EM: Now, who are David and Elizabeth?

MG: David is one of the –

EM: Great nieces and nephews? This is a Mother's Day card. Were you sent this this year?

MG: This is David.

EM: Oh, when he was a small child.

MG: And that's his girlfriend. He has two grandchildren, not from this woman but from another woman.

EM: This is David. Is Lisa David's child?

MG: David –

EM: Lisa may be coming to the States in August, it says.

MG: Well, Lisa is the mother of the –

EM: The baby.

MG: – the babies.

EM: Oh, remarkable. Getting back to what I asked you before, do you recall any very happy occasions you want to tell me about? Do you recall any sad occasions you want to tell me about with your family, with your sisters?

MG: No, we really got along pretty well together.

EM: You all had a very good life, would you say?

MG: Yes, yes. And I don't recall anything –

EM: Anything out of the ordinary either way?

MG: Out of the ordinary, that's right.

EM: Nobody won a big lottery and –?

MG: [laughter] No.

EM: [laughter] Nobody was famous.

MG: No, but I have been getting – this thing is the craziest thing. Day after day, I will go to my mailbox here.

EM: Oh, and you get those sweepstakes things.

MG: Oh.

EM: Well, just avoid –

MG: Two and three at a time.

EM: Just ignore them.

MG: What?

EM: Just ignore them.

MG: I know it, but it's so aggravating. Once it'll be \$10,000, the next time it will be \$25,000.

EM: [laughter] Well, we could all use it, I suppose, but you have to remember that there's no such thing as a free lunch.

MG: Oh, it's terrible. And if it isn't that, it's requests for contributions. Everybody is asking for money. I don't know where they think we're getting it from. We have to live on what we have earned in the years, and yet they keep – every mail, there's either two or three requests for contributions.

EM: Do you recall working for any charities when you were younger?

MG: No, I don't.

EM: Doing any work for any of the organizations? Were you a volunteer for any of the women's auxiliaries of any of the organizations?

MG: No, I never had time.

EM: Just the Temple. Just the Sisterhood. You did work for the Sisterhood, and sewing and knitting.

MG: Yes, well, I made – even while we were here, I made quite a few things.

EM: How many sweaters do you think you've knit in your lifetime?

MG: Well, when I didn't have sense enough to remember to keep track of those that I have made and sold myself.

EM: I bet you've made five hundred sweaters.

MG: Oh, easily, yes.

EM: Easily.

MG: I told you about the doctor that had ordered two some time ago, and he said, "Just let me know when they're ready, and I'll come and get them," he said, "so you won't have to bother bringing them over." I told him when they were ready, and not long ago, when I saw him, I said, "How did the sweaters work out?" He said, "They're fine. My wife thinks they're beautiful." He said, "Could you make me one more?" And I said, "Well, maybe sometime." He said, "Well, then, make it two."

EM: [laughs] You know, I just lifted one up off the couch here. Here it is. Is this your most recent?

MG: No, this is the one that isn't finished yet. It hasn't got any buttons in it because I have to buy buttons, and you can take it out.

EM: Okay.

MG: I just put those in, so I see the two buttons.

EM: I see.

MG: Sizes of the buttons.

EM: This is a variegated yarn.

MG: Yes, a variegated yarn. That works up very nicely.

EM: I must say that I am sure that I've bought at least a dozen sweaters from you over the years.

MG: Well, I wouldn't know –

EM: They went to lucky babies.

MG: – if they were through the sales.

EM: I have a few that I'm keeping in my own home for the happy day that I might be able to give them to my own grandchildren. This is a sort of large one. [inaudible] sizes.

MG: Well, size two. I don't make them any smaller because they grow – usually, when they're smaller, they have all kinds of buntings and things that they wear. Size two, they can grow into without being too difficult. Here are the other two that I've made for him since. I told him they were ready, but he was going away, so he didn't bother coming for them.

EM: Do you remember the names of the women from the sewing group from way back?

MG: Do I know them?

EM: Do you remember the names of the women that you were knitting with?

MG: Oh, I am no good at names. Here, there are so many names to try to remember, and I can't seem to –

EM: These are absolutely magnificent. They're both white.

MG: The decorations.

EM: And the trim at the top and the cuffs –

MG: And at the cuffs and the bottoms.

EM: – and the hem are variegated yarn, one with pink, yellow, and blue; the other with green, lavender, and blue.

MG: It's hard to –

EM: Just beautiful.

MG: Well, I had just –

EM: This is for the doctor.

MG: Yeah.

EM: Well, I hope that you knit until you're a hundred. If you don't think you have anything more to say to the interview, I think we'll close, and I'll say thank you. It's been a wonderful morning for me, and I hope you've enjoyed it as well.

MG: Well, I have. But if only I could remember a little more.

EM: I think you've remembered quite a bit. I hope when I'm ninety-six, I'll be able to remember half.

MG: Would you like to stay to lunch?

EM: I don't think I'm going to be able to. I'm sorry I didn't know before because when my husband called, he invited me to have lunch, but maybe I'd like to come back another time. Could we make another date?

MG: Yes.

EM: That will be great. We thank you very, very much, Marion. It's really been a wonderful morning.

MG: Well, I hope I gave you some information. I feel as though I have left all my information elsewhere. [laughter]

EM: Well, you know, if you remember something, you can call me, and I'll come back, okay? Thanks very, very much.

MG: I do think this is a very memorable thing.

EM: Well, this letter that you read at the beginning of the interview was written five years ago, and perhaps I can try to find her. Would you like that?

MG: Oh, that would be nice.

EM: I will take down the information, and I will try to find her for you because there are ways of finding people, and I have probably a little bit more access than you do at this time.

MG: Well, I don't know anything about the girl except this, but if she can express herself so beautifully.

EM: Okay, I'm going to try to find her for you, and I think that that will be something that will be something that will make you a little happy.

MG: Very nice.

EM: Thank you. Bye-bye.