

Ruth Abrams Transcript

Charlotte Backman: This is a tape of the honorable Ruth Abrams, done by Charlotte Backman at her office on March 6th for the centennial celebration to be held in 1995. Now, if you would be kind enough to tell me and the people that will be hearing this tape, where did your family come from, and what is your background as to your earliest youth? In other words, were your parents born in this country?

Ruth Abrams: Yes, both my mother and father were born in this country. My mother was born right after she came here, like months.

CB: What year would that have been?

RA: Well, I'm not sure. Well, she was born in 1903, so it would have been –

CB: 1904.

RA: Well, no, it would have been 1903. She was born either on the boat or right after [inaudible] problem with her birth certificate was it was twelve-ten, and they don't know whether it was European style, which would be October 12th, or American style, which would be December 10th.

CB: I see.

RA: So, always a question, because it's not clear how it was filled out. My grandfather came from Russia. He was sort of an artist, and he was in the framing business. That was my mother's side of the family. She was one of –

CB: Do you have any idea which part of Russia?

RA: I want to say Odessa.

CB: On the Black Sea [inaudible].

RA: That's my impression. One of my uncles told me that we were from Romania, and I have a big question mark about that. This is my mother's side. My mother had three half-brothers and a half-sister because their mother died in Russia, and my grandmother [inaudible] grandfather came here when my grandmother was pregnant. He had been [inaudible], whatever it means. My mother went to the Boston schools. My father was born in the United States. He's the next-to-youngest of nine. They lived in Hingham – in Cohasset [inaudible] on Jerusalem Road until my uncle Joe, his old brother, graduated Hingham High and got into Harvard. And then they moved to Newton Street in Boston. And then my father and my uncle (Maury?) went to Boston Latin School. They also went to Harvard, all on scholarship. My uncle Joe was a lawyer. My father was a lawyer. My uncle (Maury?) was a physician.

CB: Where I got lost –

RA: My father was one of nine –

CB: One of nine.

RA: – but he had two other brothers, and he had six sisters, one of whom is still alive. Two died without having children, and the others all married and had children, although the women did not go to college. One of my early memories of my [inaudible], my daughters didn't go to college, but my granddaughters will.

CB: When you look back at your grandparents and your father, they were in East Boston.

RA: No, Boston. East Newton Street.

CB: East Newton Street.

RA: [inaudible]

CB: [inaudible] Street in Boston.

RA: Right.

CB: Did they ever talk of their life there?

RA: Well, my memory of what they talked about was how they sort of stayed in two rooms in the house in [inaudible] because it had no heat, and how they would in the summer sell popcorn and candy to make money, and how they would – it cost a nickel a day to get from East Newton Street to Harvard and back. They would bring an apple for lunch, said they had no money. My father was a history major. My mother didn't go to college. She grew up in the West End.

CB: Did your mother ever tell you about what it was like to be in the West End?

RA: Only that she knew a whole lot of people because [inaudible] apparently [inaudible] she worked in a hat store.

CB: And when your mother said that she worked in a hat shop, did she ever describe any of her youthful experiences living in the West End, as far as other immigrants, what it was like?

RA: Just how poor they were. They used to go for walks in the public garden. That was a big treat, see the flowers.

CB: Did she ever say anything about other families? What did they do besides [inaudible]? Did they ever talk about the settlement house [inaudible]?

RA: No. Well, my uncle Mark, did. His name was Mark Borton, and he, I think, was active in the West End settlement house. My mother was not.

CB: By being active, he participated –

RA: I think he was active in it as a young man, and I think as he became older, I think he led part of the drive to try and save it for a while, contributed money to it. There was some sort of event in the '40s or '50s, or before. He was quite active. My mother was not.

CB: Would your mother ever tell you what she did as a young girl in Boston? Would she ever reminisce about it or talk to you or your brother about what it was like to be a young person growing up?

RA: I don't have any clear memory that she did so. She just said there were a lot of people her age there, her sister Ethel worked in a store, and she worked in a hat store. The house where they lived was crowded, and I remember her talking about the public garden. She really loves the public gardens. That's what I remember. They used to go walking Sundays in the public garden.

CB: Did they ever say anything about any American institutions that might have been supportive to them as young people, either your mother or your father?

RA: Well, my father felt that the school systems were supportive, that their neighbor down in Hingham told my grandmother that my uncle Joe was bright. He said, "Go to Harvard." For a while, my grandmother thought that was the only college in the United States. And they felt very loyal to Boston Latin School. [inaudible]

CB: Did your father ever talk about what it's like to go to Boston Latin School?

RA: How hard? How much studying there was?

CB: Well, what the ambience was.

RA: I mean, he was very loyal to the Latin School. He thought it was a wonderful school. He felt that they really did encourage students.

CB: Did he ever talk about the headmaster, for example?

RA: No, he used to talk about declamations, and he used to have to learn the poems and do all the [inaudible] test every week and the studying. Talked about the fact that they had just a kitchen table, and he and my uncle would all study around the table. They didn't have their own rooms, no radio, no television, no distractions except each other.

CB: When they talk about Boston Latin School, I understand from some of my interviews that there was a twenty or thirty percent Jewish student body. But the other youngsters, did your father ever mention ever any difficulty within his growing up with other youngsters?

RA: I don't think he even tried to be friendly with others because they felt they didn't belong. I think that was just an impression I had and just a memory that I have of my uncle (Maury?) saying that the [inaudible] – essentially, what he said was since Jewish people couldn't go to South Boston, he didn't see how Blacks could go, because they would have been unwelcome. That was his impression. Now that's looking back.

CB: But it's interesting to get an impression, and that's what we're trying to do throughout the interview. There's no right, no wrong. It's just how they felt.

RA: That's what he said.

CB: That's right. How they felt.

RA: That was his – right.

CB: He felt unwelcome.

RA: But they did not feel – I didn't get the sense they felt unwelcome in the school.

CB: I got that.

RA: I did not get that sense. I think they felt tremendous loyalty to the Latin School.

CB: At school, they were encouraged for their scholarship.

RA: Right. And the teachers were encouraging.

DB: Did they ever describe how they might have behaved as an immigrant differently from some of their other neighbors, such as the Italians or the Irish, as far as their family life, or did they ever have that sense of how they felt?

RA: I just had the sense that they always felt they had to do everything right.

CB: How would your father or your mother describe their own personal home life? You say your mother worked. Your father worked very hard in scholarship. Did they ever describe their own family unit, how they felt toward each other, their siblings?

RA: My father's family is still very close. They're very close, still very close. Cousins still know each other. Compared to my mother's family – much smaller, but still very close. I see my cousins on my mother's side. Well, the ones that are here. The ones that are away, I know all of my cousins' children [inaudible].

CB: These particular generations, do they get together on my particular family holiday, or is a Jewish holiday?

RA: My father's family gets together every summer, and that's grandchildren, great-grandchildren. With respect to my mother's family, some of them in Portland, Oregon, some are in North Carolina, but the North Carolina branch had a wedding, and everybody came. There were no [inaudible]. That would just indicate that people were willing to come from all around.

CB: When your father's family gets together in the summer, is that a particular holiday time? Was it just vacation time, like a family reunion?

RA: [inaudible] family reunions, and it's at the place where they grew up in [inaudible].

CB: Hull.

RA: Hull. It's Jerusalem Road. I think it's in Cohasset, maybe now. I don't know what it is.

CB: Did they ever mention how they felt, your father or your mother, in regard to the political parties or the labor parties that were in existence?

RA: They were both Democrats. But I think that came out of the '30s. I'm not sure that [inaudible]. I don't think my grandmother ever registered [inaudible]. My mother's parents died while I was so young that I really don't have much memory on that.

CB: Where they came as immigrants, why did they select Boston? It's always an interesting question.

RA: My father was born [inaudible].

CB: But how did —?

RA: How did my grandmother get there?

CB: Yeah.

RA: I don't [know]. My grandmother didn't talk much. First of all, she didn't speak English all that well.

CB: She spoke Yiddish.

RA: She didn't speak English all that well. I don't know how he came to Massachusetts. [inaudible] died when I was sixteen [inaudible] a lot of years, too.

CB: Could you ever converse with her if she only spoke Yiddish?

RA: She spoke a little English, not a lot, but a little, and you could converse a little. Sometimes [inaudible]. What I remember most is that when you come down there, she would make –down there, there's fishing off the wall, and she would fry the perch for me. She'd make lemonade and things like that. Don't have any memory of any long conversation. I remember her saying, “My granddaughters would [inaudible], my daughters would go, my granddaughters were going to go.” That’s all I remember. That’s her most favorite expression.

CB: It's extremely interesting, because much of it's the same [inaudible] these grandparents, and we never really could respond to because our parents were so Americanized. However, let's go on to when you can remember your earliest days. Your parents married. They're both immigrants. Where did they set up housekeeping?

RA: They first moved to, I want to say, West Roxbury, or someplace like that, Brookline Street, somewhere, something like that. Then they bought a small house in Newton, which they lived in during most of my life.

CB: [inaudible]

RA: George Street, Newton, sort of between Newton Corner and [inaudible]. My parents are not quite immigrants.

CB: You went to what school?

RA: I went to the Underwood School.

CB: Underwood School.

RA: I went to Bigelow Junior High.

CB: What grade did you enter?

RA: Seventh. Might have been [inaudible].

CB: When you were growing up –?

RA: My brother went to Andover.

CB: And your brother was older or younger?

RA: [inaudible].

CB: Why did your parents [inaudible]?

RA: I think my mother did.

CB: When you look back at your early years at Underwood and Bigelow, how did you feel as a student or as a particular –?

RA: Well, I was [inaudible]. My memory of the Newton school doesn't reflect too well [inaudible] because I was [inaudible]. I'd been sick a lot. I think, in the second or third grade, I had perfect attendance, except for the Jewish holiday. They wouldn't give me one of those [inaudible] because I had missed the Jewish holidays.

CB: About what year would that have been?

RA: My second and third grade, so it would have been '36-'37.

CB: [inaudible]

RA: Around then. Between '36 and '38.

CB: How did you remember your classmates [inaudible] Underwood and Bigelow? There were very few Jews at all.

RA: I only [inaudible] who was a lawyer around here was, I think, the only other Jewish person in the school.

CB: At Underwood?

RA: At Underwood.

CB: And Bigelow?

RA: There were some more, but not a lot.

CB: How did you feel when you were at Bigelow? Did you participate in any of the junior high clubs?

RA: I was a Girl Scout. I forget what the clubs were. I did some of whatever the after-school things were.

CB: How did you feel being one of the few Jewish girls in that area?

RA: I'm not sure I really noticed it –

CB: You didn't notice?

RA: – at the time.

CB: Did you ever feel welcome –? You never felt that there was any problem [inaudible].

RA: I noticed it most around Christmas. That would be the time when I would notice it the most. I also noticed that we used to go to Temple Emanuel Hebrew School Tuesdays, Thursdays. We never had the Tuesday, Thursday afternoons off that the other kids had. Newton School used to have no school, at least through grade six, afternoon Tuesday and Thursdays.

CB: I'm of that same [inaudible]. Now, when you went to Temple Emanuel, you went to Hebrew school, which was unusual.

RA: There were a lot of young – lots of people [inaudible].

CB: At Hebrew school, did you go through grades? Do you remember?

RA: Yeah, we read (*We Grow Up Jewish?*). I can remember the books. It was not unusual. I mean, it may have been unusual considering the Jewish population, but there were other young women there, and there were other young men. I mean, other kids.

CB: Do you remember –? What did you do? Did you get actually bat mitzvahed?

RA: Confirmed.

CB: Confirmed. Because I was confirmed. I was confused by the article.

RA: Confirmed. Yeah, I was [inaudible]

CB: Right, and you had –

RA: We didn't read from the [inaudible].

CB: A few things [inaudible].

RA: Well, I don't know. I did.

CB: I know. I did, too. But it was very unusual.

RA: For me, they expected me to do it. I did it.

CB: You obviously were taught by Cantor [Gabriel] Hochberg.

RA: I think so. And Rabbi [Albert I.] Gordon, maybe.

CB: Rabbi [Samuel N.] Sherman.

RA: Sherman. Right. Absolutely right.

CB: Now, when you say you were studying Hebrew, do you remember going from class to class, or did you stay in the same room?

RA: Same room.

CB: Same room. And do you remember how it was an orange book?

RA: Right.

CB: When you look back at when you studied that Hebrew, did you remember anything else unusual about it?

RA: Only that I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to –

CB: You found it difficult.

RA: I just didn't want – it's just not something I wanted to do.

CB: Why did you do it?

RA: Because in those days, you always did what your parents thought you should do. You didn't really have much say.

CB: Now, when you were going to school, and you were confirmed, did you do any other Jewish studying after you finished your confirmation? Did you ever go back to get more studying? Did you go to the Hebrew College? Once you were confirmed [inaudible].

RA: Right.

CB: When you went to Choate, how did you find that?

RA: I liked it. I thought it was a small school. It was kind of interesting. Choate is something from a Victorian novel.

CB: And how did you like Mrs. (Darlington?)?

RA: There was somebody else here, too.

CB: Mrs. (Robinson?).

RA: [inaudible]

CB: Do you remember Mrs. (Darlington?) well?

RA: No.

CB: [inaudible]

RA: I remember the history teacher. [inaudible].

CB: [inaudible] I found that I [inaudible] Mrs. (Darlington?) and Miss (Robinson?) [inaudible]. When you were at Choate, it was a very special school. Do you remember how you felt scholastically?

RA: No, I don't have any clear memory as to how I felt. I wasn't sure because my father's view of the Latin School was that the Latin School was much harder and more demanding, so I was never certain how I felt [inaudible].

CB: Did you feel you were doing well when you were at Choate? It's a very special school. Not that many – I think in each class, maybe twenty girls. Maybe fifteen. Do you remember?

RA: I don't have any memory.

CB: It didn't really impress you, perhaps.

RA: No.

CB: Those years of growing up before you went to college, what did you do in the summer?

RA: We had a beach house. We still have it. My sister [inaudible].

CB: Where was his beach house?

RA: 46 [inaudible].

CB: [inaudible]. When you were there in the summer, did you do anything within the community, as far as joining the community center there, or any –? Just went?

RA: I went to Girl Scout camp a few years, and I went to a day camp down there, but I did not join a community center. We were not part of that [inaudible].

CB: I know you have a younger brother, fifteen months younger.

RA: And a sister, who's almost eight years younger. She lived in Washington. Her name is Susan Medalie, M-E-D-A-L-I-E.

CB: And your brother's name is?

RA: George S.

CB: George S. Abrams. What was your social life when you were a young person? At Choate, did you have any social interaction?

RA: No. Very little.

CB: Little social.

RA: Very little.

CB: Your social interaction was perhaps mainly with your parents, your family life.

RA: Family, parents.

CB: And your cousins?

RA: Yeah.

CB: When you were at Choate, were there any other activities? I know you said that you belonged to the Girl Scouts. Were you interested in any other activities, [inaudible] music?

RA: We did have music at Choate. I think there was a music [inaudible] there, and I took art. She had an art course at the museum we took.

CB: Any other activities within this city that were of benefit to you [inaudible]?

RA: Well, we used to go to story hour at the Newton Public Library when we were younger. Then, some people at Choate were [inaudible] girls' club that I [inaudible] I don't know quite whether it was organized or [inaudible].

CB: When you talk about you went to the Boston Public Library for story hour –

RA: No, Newton Public Library.

CB: Oh, the Newton Public Library.

RA: Newton Public Library.

CB: The one on Mount Vernon?

RA: That's when I was in –

CB: Mount Vernon Street?

RA: No, the one down in Newton. The Children's Public Library is right near Underwood.

CB: It's on Vernon Street.

RA: Is that Vernon Street? We would go Tuesday afternoons or Saturday mornings at 10:00. Went all the way through the sixth grade, maybe seventh grade, the story hour.

CB: Did you do anything when you were at Bigelow or Choate – any other activities that you might have taken advantage of that were available through the city, either Newton or Boston [inaudible].

RA: We used to go to Crystal Lake for swimming [inaudible]. Crystal Lake.

CB: That's of interest. In other words, you [inaudible] Newton, but I was curious, did you ever go into Boston to the museum? Did you ever go to the plays?

RA: My mother, we had the course that we took Saturday morning –

CB: The art course?

RA: The art course in the museum. Then, my father used to take us – we went to the Harvard Museum of Natural History on Sundays. My father used to take us. We went to the Glass Flowers. We saw some of the children's [inaudible]. I remember once my mother took me, and I think my brother, but I'm not sure, to the Yiddish theater in Boston.

CB: What did you think of that?

RA: I could not understand it.

CB: You couldn't understand it?

RA: I felt really removed from it.

CB: Right. In other words, Yiddish was not spoken at home. The only person that would speak Yiddish would be your grandmother.

RA: No, my mother and father could speak to each other in it when they didn't want us to know.

CB: I see. [inaudible] meant don't talk in front of the children. In your recollection of your young days, what was your parents' attitude toward your [inaudible]? Your mother helped you or wanted you to go to Choate. What other things did they –?

RA: They wanted me to go to college. It's clear that was a clear goal for them.

CB: Where your father had gone to Harvard – your uncle – was Harvard and Radcliffe the most desirable?

RA: Yes. Radcliffe [inaudible] from my father's family's point of view. My mother's family was sort of like, "Well, [inaudible]."

CB: When you went to Radcliffe, how did you find that?

RA: I think I liked it better in retrospect than I liked it when I first went. I thought it was scary [inaudible]

CB: Why was it scary?

RA: Well, it's big. [inaudible]. Even though Radcliffe, at that time, was quite small, the class, because the women all lived in [inaudible]. There were only three hundred [inaudible].

CB: And did you find the student life pleasant?

RA: Yeah.

CB: Did you?

RA: It was pleasant.

CB: And how about scholastically? Did that go along well for you?

RA: That was fine.

CB: In other words, you had no problems. You did well. Did you have other friends, new friends in your college days that were perhaps not Jewish or [inaudible]? How did you mix [inaudible]?

RA: I've always had mixed.

CB: Mixed friendships.

RA: I had a number of non-Jewish friends from Newton, one of whom, a woman named (Mary Blanchard?) [inaudible], who went to Sacred Heart, but then joined the [inaudible] Bigelow. I had a number of Jewish friends. I did not lead a very Jewish life.

CB: [inaudible] So, you didn't have just Jewish friends.

RA: No.

CB: You didn't particularly have a Jewish life. What did you do with your spare time when you were in college? [inaudible] [Recording paused.] Sorry about that.

RA: That's quite all right.

CB: We were talking about your days at Radcliffe and your social friends, that you had a mixed group of friends. At that time, when you were going to college, what activities did

you do outside your scholastic days? Were you involved in any –?

RA: I was. I was trying to think – I know I was with [inaudible] the Radcliffe [inaudible] for a while at the Radcliffe [inaudible] Society. It may not exist anymore. And I forget. I had some other things, but I don't recall a lot of them.

CB: Were you active in any of the newspapers or –?

RA: No, my brother was on the Crimson, though I was not. I was active. I was [inaudible] vice-president [inaudible] class.

CB: Your class at Radcliffe was 19 –?

RA: '53. I can't remember what I was, but it was something, and I was a dorm representative [inaudible].

CB: Now, when did you decide you're going to go to law school?

RA: My father was always [inaudible].

CB: That a woman should be able to take care of herself?

RA: Right.

CB: And you picked Harvard after Radcliffe for law school?

RA: [inaudible]

CB: [inaudible] That's correct, but you made that decision that would be your goal.

RA: My Uncle Joe [inaudible].

CB: I see. How'd you find Harvard Law?

RA: [inaudible] I did not care anything about [inaudible].

CB: Why was it [inaudible]?

RA: They didn't want women. They weren't equipped for women. It's still not a great place [inaudible]. It's getting better, and they're working [inaudible].

CB: When you were there as a student, and it was dreadful, is that because they didn't –?

RA: They picked on women [inaudible] didn't want women, so [inaudible]. I think it was probably [inaudible] because they were the last major law school not to have any women.

CB: And how many law students were in your class? Women law students?

RA: [inaudible]

CB: And how large was the law school class?

RA: Probably a hundred and [inaudible].

CB: You really were a [inaudible] group.

RA: Yeah, unwanted.

CB: And scholastically, how did you find –? Was it difficult for you?

RA: Yeah.

CB: [inaudible]

RA: [inaudible]

CB: And when you were coming to the end of your law school career, what decisions did you have to make?

RA: Well, having to decide [inaudible] and what I wanted to do. [inaudible]. I can't remember his first name. He was with the Legal [inaudible] with my father. My father [inaudible] law school. My father was the first Harvard Law School graduate to have both his son and a daughter graduate.

CB: [inaudible] own firm?

RA: Yeah, he had his own firm.

CB: So, you worked for Mr. (Schaber?) for —?

RA: No, I didn't. I worked for some of [inaudible], but I really worked for my father since I was an alternative [inaudible].

CB: You entered the law firm rather promptly after graduation, and your brother joined a year later, right? When you were practicing law as a family profession, were there ever lawyers in this firm, or was it just [inaudible]?

RA: There were other lawyers in the suite.

CB: I see. But you were the unit.

RA: Right.

CB: Family unit When you practiced law, how was it to be a Jewish person in this law profession?

RA: Well, it was fine to be Jewish, not so good to be a woman.

CB: It was fine to be Jewish.

RA: I mean, I didn't know this because to be a woman meant you didn't get waited on. Everybody thought you were a secretary. So, the fact that I [inaudible] discrimination against women was such that if there was discrimination against Jewish people, it went right over your head.

CB: So, they thought you were a secretary?

RA: Right. But that continues. The year is '78. We were having a snowstorm the week before [inaudible], and I had my [inaudible]. I went to a place across the street, and I got sandwiches [inaudible]. The young woman behind the counter said, "Isn't that just like men? They always send the secretaries out [inaudible]."

CB: That's a wonderful story. What else did you notice as a woman lawyer? Were there other women lawyers that you ever associated with? Did you ever get to —?

RA: There were not a lot of women lawyers. There were some older women lawyers. They had kind of a different viewpoint. They didn't think women should be in the courtroom, and they still exist. They were perfectly willing to do the titles and stuff like that.

CB: Did you ever network at all with these women?

RA: Well, I did. I mean, I was a member of the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers, which was the only group at that time.

CB: How large a group was that?

RA: I must tell you that one of the [inaudible] when I would graduate from law school, one of the jobs that one of the major law firms offered was to take care of their [inaudible] because I was a woman, and make sure their pleadings get in on time and things like that.

CB: [inaudible] title?

RA: [inaudible]

CB: This Mass Association of Women Lawyers –

RA: Still exists.

CB: How many women lawyers did they have?

RA: I have no idea [inaudible].

CB: [inaudible] group of fifty?

RA: I have no idea. It could have been big. It could have been small because, for me, whatever they were, the same – and many of the older women are still alive. They're doing an oral history of some of those older women now what their memories were, but many of them worked very hard for the firms. They've never got to be partners and never got any recognition for the work they did.

CB: When you look at the women lawyers today, what you see is [inaudible]?

RA: Oh, I think they feel that they can do anything. I wish it were true, but it's still got a few years to go before there's any gender equality.

CB: By that, you mean –?

RA: But the young women don't feel they can't go into court. They don't feel that they can't do things, that it's inappropriate behavior for women.

CB: But it's a question of being partners in law firms.

RA: It's a question of inheriting clients, [inaudible] rainmaker.

CB: And actually being partners in a major law firm –?

RA: Well, not only being a partner, but being a partner with some economic [inaudible].

CB: All these years that you worked, I have [inaudible] some of your career highlights.

RA: I was assistant district attorney. I was assistant attorney general.

CB: And how many years did it take for you to move from one step to the other [inaudible]? When did you become assistant district attorney?

RA: Well, [inaudible] assistant district attorney in February '69, and then I stayed there until [inaudible]. Then I went to the Attorney General's office.

CB: You were there from 1969 –

RA: To '72.

CB: – to '72.

RA: And then went on the Superior Court. Oh, no, it was '71. Excuse me, because I worked for this court for a year.

CB: And when did you become a Superior Court justice?

RA: September '72.

CB: And you became the Supreme Judicial –

RA: February of '77.

CB: So, you actually worked for your father and brother's law firm –

RA: For about four and a half years.

CB: For four and a half years. What do you think was your most [inaudible] part of your career? Where you are now, or do you feel that –? How do you feel about your career?

RA: The most fun was in the DA's [inaudible]. No question.

CB: [inaudible] I love that. Did you have a certain amount of satisfaction doing those cases?

RA: Yeah.

CB: How many women have moved over into the criminal court?

RA: [inaudible] more unusual when [inaudible].

CB: When you were in the criminal court, how did you feel you were received?

RA: Well, let me put it this way. Two things. Number one, it was a novelty to have a woman. Not hostile, but they didn't think you're going to make it. But after you sort of prove yourself, they were very cordial, very warm. I do think that [inaudible] police, they are distrusting of anybody, not necessarily Jewish people or women, but they are fearful because their view is that lawyers turn [inaudible] become defense lawyers, so they don't trust, and that people basically – so, they're somewhat – and I think this is borne out by a lot of [inaudible] they are not forthcoming for a long time. And that has nothing to do with being Jewish or being a woman.

CB: Police attitude –

RA: It's a police attitude. It was an exciting time, in some ways, to be a prosecutor, because the Warren Court was putting all sorts of restrictions on search warrants. Miranda came down, so that one was always trying to – it was a time when I did a lot of police education, did a lot of night work, drafting warrants. Now very common. At that time, not very common for lawyers to be doing that.

CB: When you look back at those days, you pretty much worked a long, long day, very little time for yourself.

RA: That's correct.

CB: I just get that impression.

RA: That's correct.

CB: And where did you live in those days? Did you live –?

RA: Cambridge.

CB: You lived in Cambridge. And have you always lived in Cambridge?

RA: No, I grew up in Newton.

CB: Oh, I know that. But since you graduated college and law school.

RA: Basically, I've lived in Cambridge.

CB: You're a Cambridgian.

RA: Cantabrigians.

CB: Cantabrigian. Have you usually lived alone?

RA: Yes.

CB: I read in your article that you feel you don't participate in the Jewish community because it might disqualify yourself.

RA: Well, I don't do a lot because some of those issues come up here on the [inaudible] number of issues. If I were active [inaudible].

CB: When were you aware that you would have to do this? Did you ever involve yourself in any Jewish [inaudible]?

RA: Not really.

CB: Not since college?

RA: Not really, no. [inaudible] I was not active [inaudible]. I've led sort of a non-traditional Jewish life. The DA [inaudible] a few more, but not a lot more. So, the extent that your colleagues provide some [inaudible] not particularly [inaudible] Jewish family [inaudible].

CB: You're very close with [inaudible]. Very close. Well, you're 15 months apart.

RA: And we had [inaudible] stay together.

CB: Does your brother have a family?

RA: Yeah, two daughters. [inaudible]

CB: Your brother has two daughters. You balanced out with the family.

RA: [inaudible] I took my older nephew with me one day [inaudible] murder case. The police [inaudible] took his picture, showed him [inaudible] took him [inaudible] when he came home, said to my sister, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a woman lawyer."
[inaudible]

CB: Your sister lives in –

RA: In Washington.

CB: – Washington. So, really, your close family ties would be with your brother. Where does he live?

RA: [inaudible]

CB: Do you spend much time with him socially, or is it just –?

RA: Yeah, I see him. We go to the Harvard hockey games, the Harvard football games.

CB: So, you enjoy your Harvard background right through your adult life. One of the big parts of this article from The Advocate, which is in June of '91, you explain that the law practice has changed. What particular changes do you see for the women that are engaged in the practice of law?

RA: I think for women litigators now, they [inaudible] – it's not unusual for women to choose litigation. I think it is still difficult for women within the [inaudible]. I think that the consciousness-raising that has gone on means that women are more aware of the slights. I mean, you knew they were there before, but now you're sort of aware of them over and over again. [inaudible] appears to me there's been a [inaudible] civil than it used to be and less civility.

CB: How would you explain where you – I don't know how well you know your nieces in Newton. How is their life different than, say, your life growing up in Newton, as far as their education, as far as their being a part of the community?

RA: That's a hard question. I don't really know.

CB: You don't know how your nieces would be different than your life? Well, they're not, obviously, growing up in the Underwood section. Are they growing up in an area?

RA: No, they're not growing up in the Underwood section. And they obviously – I mean, I didn't go to Europe until '63 [inaudible]. They obviously went as youngsters – much younger. So, they've obviously had different life experiences.

CB: Would that be economic?

RA: That would be an economic [inaudible].

CB: How old are these nieces now?

RA: One is twenty-six, and the other is twenty-eight.

CB: What has been their experiences as far as college?

RA: The oldest one went to Tufts. Then she worked for Club Med for a few years, graduating BU [inaudible]. The younger one went to Harvard. She had a [inaudible] fellowship [inaudible] then she's now doing [inaudible] master's from there.

CB: I was just curious to know if they followed law.

RA: No.

CB: That's what I was looking for.

RA: My two nephews – one's got an MBA from [inaudible], and the other does a MD [inaudible] Cornell. So, there are no lawyers.

CB: I was curious because it sounds so wonderful. I thought maybe [inaudible].

RA: My older niece may go someday.

CB: Do you ever feel, since you are – you said your friends were always mixed – any problem [inaudible] with your being a Jewish person?

RA: I identify with the community.

CB: You identify.

RA: I identify with the community. I don't really lean on – I'm not very religious. I don't work on the High Holidays. I don't eat [inaudible], but I [inaudible] my whole house out.

I'm not [inaudible], don't happen to like pork [inaudible] kosher. I do identify with the Jewish community in general. If you would ask me to describe myself, I would say I was Jewish [inaudible].

CB: I noticed that you are a patron for the Center for the Jewish Studies at Harvard. Have you ever gone to any of their lectures?

RA: I go to some of their lectures. [inaudible] I give them money [inaudible].

CB: Are there any other particular Jewish agencies, societies, groups, or philanthropic areas that you are interested?

RA: Most of my [inaudible] Radcliffe [inaudible] was a good experience [inaudible].

CB: Do you feel that there are any Jewish values that you might have?

RA: I think [inaudible].

CB: And what about any moralities?

RA: Like?

CB: I don't know what you feel. [inaudible]

RA: I don't have this kind of probably – when you talk about moralities, are you talking about sexual morality, and I don't really [inaudible].

CB: I would think of more ethical values. Perhaps that's what I meant. For example, for many years, it would usually be very male-oriented [inaudible].

RA: [inaudible] –

CB: Among the Jewish –?

RA: It is [inaudible]. On the other hand, the one ethical value that [inaudible] do think has [inaudible] training is that one must [inaudible] you got to give charity. [inaudible] Jewish value. That may be [inaudible] put them down, but it's certainly [inaudible]. And I feel, in some ways, that I have some [inaudible].

CB: There were certain times within our historical [inaudible]. Do you have any remembrance of the times of the Holocaust, the war years?

RA: Let me tell you my memory. My father was head of something called HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. I remember him trying to [inaudible] out to get people into the United States. I remember him sending – when the [inaudible] Act was [inaudible] I remember my father sending both Henry Cabot Lodge and John Kennedy telegrams to vote against it. I remember him telling me that Henry Cabot Lodge sent a letter saying he would consider it, but Kennedy sent the telegram immediately back, saying he agreed, and any information that he could give him would be greatly appreciated. I've always had a fondness for the Kennedys for that. It was a personal act and response.

CB: During the Holocaust, that's the war years, you were a very young girl. Do you remember any talk about the war?

RA: I remember my father saying how bad it was. I remember the year 1939 [inaudible]. I remember it was '39 [inaudible] going to be a war [inaudible]. I remember my father saying [inaudible] remember that. I remember I went with a friend of mine [inaudible] on December [inaudible]. It was strange. I thought the Germans [inaudible].

CB: Did your family –? Your father was actually active in HIAS.

RA: He was president.

CB: Head of HIAS, the president. Do you remember any of the efforts of the Jewish community, or not particularly Jewish? Anybody, as far as when the immigrants or the

people were coming back to – were coming into America after World War II, that would be any time between '45 and '50. They wouldn't have come immediately. It would be closer to '50 that people –

RA: I don't have any –

CB: No memory?

RA: No memory.

CB: Do you have any memory of your father talking about Father Coughlin.

RA: I do because he [inaudible], so he was still there when [inaudible]. Before I got to Harvard [inaudible].

CB: Do you remember anything after the war years [inaudible] Civil Rights? Do you remember those days?

RA: Well, yeah. I was the assistant DA.

CB: So, what did you remember particularly about [inaudible] in Boston?

RA: You mean Mrs. [Louise Day] Hicks?

CB: Exactly. Mrs. Hicks, the bussing.

RA: It was clear – well, I was on the other side [inaudible].

CB: Remember any of the bus [inaudible], the Montgomery walks?

RA: I remember reading about them, but not –

CB: It was '60s through '70 –

RA: [inaudible]

CB: Do you remember any of the uprisings during the Vietnam War? Do you remember any of your feelings?

RA: I remember them. I wasn't really [inaudible] removed from them because I was not a student.

CB: Those issues would not have been –

RA: Would not have been in the DA's office.

CB: Are there any other social issues? By that time, I would say you were mainly into the –

RA: Criminal law.

CB: Criminal law. Did you have contact with any of the Jewish organizations within your law circumstance? Did you ever have anybody that would have presented a case? I think I read somewhere that were involved where they were trying to dispute over the Vilna Shul.

RA: I'm not going to discuss that. [inaudible]

CB: That's still pending. Are there any other issues within the –?

RA: [inaudible] some case – I can't remember – [inaudible] denied him unemployment benefits because they said he wasn't available from noon on Sunday until Monday. It's clear they didn't understand [inaudible].

CB: In the last few years, you probably are not quite as tied in on time. What do you enjoy doing for –?

RA: I go to the theater. We travel. Just got back from [inaudible]

CB: Do you do that by yourself?

RA: Or do it with my friends or my cousin. [inaudible] it's clear that it was not something [inaudible] wrote it up [inaudible] hundreds of pictures on the wall [inaudible] Rabbi [inaudible].

CB: It's in the style of the country.

RA: It's in the style of the country. Usually, if I travel, I usually try and see [inaudible] Rome, Florence [inaudible].

CB: So, in other words, although you don't practice a religious life, you have that feeling that you –?

RA: [inaudible]

CB: How do you feel about the situation in Israel? I see that you went to Israel three times. How do you feel about the Israeli –?

RA: [inaudible] I don't know. [inaudible]

CB: What is your feeling about [inaudible] Israel?

RA: Everybody is [inaudible]. I am an American. I would never live in Israel. I [inaudible] defend America. I would stay here no matter what. But the [inaudible] all over the world.

CB: Do you ever participate in sending them any contributions? Or do you support them?

RA: I've sent money, but mostly the [inaudible].

CB: And when you travel to Israel, how do you feel when you're there?

RA: I like it. I mean, we're not really used to the shutdown that happens on Fridays [inaudible] Saturday.

CB: How do you feel particularly about your Jewishness that's [inaudible] say you're very close to your cousins. How are your cousins [inaudible]? Are they particularly religious?

RA: I have some who are very religious and [inaudible] some who are more or less – let me put it this way: none of my cousins celebrate Christmas. None of them have Christmas trees. None of them do anything like that. So, to that extent, they're all committed to the Jewish [inaudible]. Most of their children are bar mitzvahed or bat mitzvahed. They're not all from [inaudible].

CB: Within that cousins group, are they intermarrying?

RA: There have been no intermarriages yet. There may just be one. But basically, no intermarriages yet, and only three divorces. Very low [inaudible].

CB: Can you think of anything else that is particularly unique to you as the only woman on the Supreme Judicial Court, that I had not asked you?

RA: No, I think you've done a good job.

CB: The value of your experiences are unique, and we very much appreciate your giving us the time. I think, as we said before, your experience as a woman, whether you were Jewish or not, was unique.

RA: Yeah, experience as a woman –

CB: Is unique. And we appreciate very, very much your giving us the time. Thank you.

RA: If you want to watch, you can come in.