

Bernice and Israel Kazis Transcript

Emily Mehlman – 1994. This is Emily Mehlman, and I am about to record an oral history interview of Rabbi and Mrs. Israel J. Kazis at their home at 186 Puritan Road in Swampscott. Let's begin. Rabbi Kazis, do you want to start? Do you want to tell me something about your growing up, etc?

Israel Kazis: Okay. I was born in Boston in 1911. When I was four years old, my family moved to Cambridge. I grew up [inaudible] elementary school, Cambridge High School, and then Harvard. At Harvard, I got an AB degree, a master's degree, and a PhD, and was also elected to Phi Beta Kappa. The title of my PhD dissertation was "Hasidism: A Study in the Sociology and History of Religion." I'm a graduate of the Hebrew College, a degree – bachelor's of Jewish education. I think I'm one of these early graduates because I got this degree in 1931, more than sixty years ago. I entered the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York in 1940, from which I received the MHL degree, Master of Hebrew [inaudible], and studied under some really great teachers: Louis Ginzberg, Alexander Marx. And then I graduated in 1940, and from 1940 to '42, I served as rabbi of Temple Israel in Wilkes-Barre, PA. In World War II, I enlisted in the Chaplain Corps of the United States Army in January 1943 and served with the 85th Infantry Division in North Africa and in the Italian campaign. After my discharge from the service, after three and a half years in the Army, I was discharged July 1946 with the rank of Major. I was requested by the seminary to serve as interim rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Borough Park, Brooklyn. In November of 1946, I was called to Temple Mishkan Tefila in Boston, now of Newton, the oldest Conservative congregation in New England. I served as its Rabbi for thirty years, from '46 to '76, and then I retired and became rabbi emeritus.

EM: Sounds good.

IK: In 1976, which was the year of the American Bicentennial, the president of the temple at that time was a very close friend of Dan Finn, who was a curator at the Kennedy Library [inaudible]. He met with Dan Finn, and Dan said, "We have Bicentennial celebrations in all kinds of towns and cities. Why don't we have it at a church and synagogue?" So, [inaudible] president said, "I'll talk to the rabbi." Came to me, and I said, "Absolutely." It would cost – the temple would have to lay out \$20,000. Now, the following week, he came to us on an evening. He actually was crying. Why? Because he was bitterly criticized for spending \$20,000 for the exhibit when the temple needed it for the school, etc. Anyway, we set up an exhibit that was truly extraordinary. Dan Finn got in touch with the curators of every presidential library in the United States, and they sent us invaluable material on Jews and Judaism. For instance, they sent us a copy of a little piece of paper that President Harry Truman signed – he was the first to do it – saying, "I hereby recognize the State of Israel." And then we have so many various articles exhibited that it was fascinating. We had a series of lectures, and Moynihan was one of the speakers. The Treasurer of the United States was one of the speakers. Anyway, we involved 250 people from the temple working on this exhibit. I dare say that in the short time that it was up, about ten days, ten thousand people walked through the temple to see the exhibit. Then the men who opposed the [inaudible] praised us for having it.

Bernice Kazis: We organized all of the schools. Remember, all the school children that came through. All the schools were organized to come through –

IK: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

BK: – and to see the –

IK: Really.

EM: Buses.

BK: Buses came in and school kids. We had all kinds of ushers.

EM: Was it set up in the museum?

BK: All over the temple.

EM: All over the temple.

IK: Yeah.

BK: It was really quite an event.

IK: So, I retired in '76, and since then, I have worked on a book, which has been published, *The Book of the Gestes of Alexander of Macedon*. Gest with a G, not a J. It's interesting. My late professor and dear friend, Professor Harry Wolfson of Harvard, went overseas and brought back a whole bunch of manuscripts. Called me in – he said, “I'm giving you this manuscript.” It must have been about at least a hundred folios. “I want you to transcribe it and translate it, write an introduction about the story of Alexander in Jewish literature.” Well, I worked very hard on that, either early in the morning or late at night. It was published. My dissertation on Hasidism has not been published, but I'm working on it now to make it – you see, it was written in 1939. It's 1994 now. But the material in it, particularly the central section, which deals with the teachings of Hasidism, is, I think, worthwhile. I've also written articles for various periodicals, including *Conservative Judaism*, *The Torch*, the *Reconstructionist Jewish Social Studies*. I served on the faculty of the Religious and Social Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1955 and '56. In 1964, I received an honorary degree, Doctor of Humanities, from Suffolk University. And in 1968, I received the honorary degree Doctor of Divinity from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. And throughout the years, I lectured quite a bit on various platforms and preached in many synagogues and churches. I have spoken on behalf of many humanitarian causes, which I'd like to think had some impact. Oh, I must tell you this. I got a call one day from Elliot Richardson, the Attorney General of the United States. He said, “Rabbi, I'd like to visit you.” I said, “Sure.” Made an appointment,

came to my office, and he said to me, "How come? How do the Jews do it? You raised seventeen million dollars in your campaign, CJP [Combined Jewish Philanthropies]. I'm chairman of the United Way, and we have not been able yet to reach ten million dollars. Can you help me?" Well, I spent some time giving him some advice. The United Way campaign was finished, and they went over the top, over ten million. He was so happy. He called me. I sat next to him at the head table of the victory dinner, and it was a really wonderful experience.

EM: What kind of advice did you give him? Do you recall?

IK: Yes, first, I told him that they should be thoroughly acquainted with all the aspects of the United Way. Secondly, they should encourage people to give by insisting that everybody's welfare is of concern to the city, to the community. And finally –

EM: Did you give him some tips about how people in the Jewish community raised money?

IK: Yes, I told him that we constitute about – how many Jews would you say we have in the greater Boston area? Twenty thousand, maybe.

BK: Oh, more than that.

EM: No, I think more than that.

BK Twenty thousand on the North Shore.

EM: I think well over a hundred thousand.

IK: And in general –

EM: Yes, maybe even 200,000.

BK: I think you told him one-on-one solicitation. Men should call up their friends and prepare them for this big event. Right?

IK: Yes, I said, "Don't take a contribution over the telephone. You go and visit one on one," as Bernice said.

BK: Peer pressure.

IK: Peer pressure, right. So, I developed a very close friendship with the – what's his name? The cardinal.

BK: Cardinal [Richard] Cushing.

IK: Cardinal Cushing. A very close friend. He wrote me a letter. Oh, I invited him to speak to our monthly brotherhood "Good Neighbor" night, where our members would invite a Christian to the temple, and there was a dinner. And in this way, they were getting an opportunity to meet a Jew. And for speakers, I invited the presidents of all the universities in the general area: Harvard, Radcliffe, Suffolk, Northeastern, Holy Cross, Boston College, etc. I had invited Cardinal Cushing to speak. He came to my office about an hour or so before the dinner. We sat and talked. He was very depressed, and I tried my best to cheer him up. I said, "It's time to go in to eat." He said, "I can't eat because today I have an upper and a lower denture." He said, "I'm afraid if I eat, they'll fall out."

EM: Was that why he was depressed?

IK: No, he had every illness under the sun. Truly, he was a very sick man, but you'd never know it. He was always smiling. He said, incidentally, that he got more financial support from Jews than from Christians.

BK: That's what depressed him. That's what depressed him. [laughter]

IK: Yeah. [laughter] Now, we appeared on several occasions together, state or city occasions. We appeared together at my favorite Boston College when he said to me, "I'm going to Rome now because they're elevating me from Archbishop to Cardinal." He said two weeks. When he came back, we had another affair together. I said, "How did it go?" He said, "Rabbi, it took them two weeks to do what we can do in two hours." And he said, "I went up to the Pope, and I said, 'I have some very important business in Boston. May I go?'" [inaudible] pat him on the shoulder and said, "You may go." Also, my experience with Governor Christian Herter, who called me and asked if I would write the Thanksgiving message, which goes all over the state. I did it. He was pleased. I got a call one day from Governor [Paul Andrew] Dever. He called and said, "I have David Ben-Gurion and Paula. I want to have lunch with them, and I would like you to join us," which, of course, I did, and had a chance, really, to talk to Paula and Ben-Gurion. Then, let's see. Mayor [John] Hynes. He was mayor then. He used to call me "My rabbi," wherever he introduced me, always. So, I played some part in trying to create good relations between the Jews and the Christians. Let's see now. Well, we have both, Bernice and I, been involved in CJP and raised money, and also in bonds, so many bonds.

BK: Tell Emily about the time you spoke at the Gardens.

IK: Who?

BK: Tell Emily about the time you spoke at the Gardens, at the Boston Garden, for CJP.

IK: Oh, that's right. I was invited to speak on behalf of CJP at the Boston Garden.

EM: What year was that? Do you recall approximately [inaudible]? In the '50s?

IK: About '50, '60.

BK: So early. Earlier. I think it was probably in the '40s.

IK: Here's how I started my speech at Boston Gardens.

BK: I think it was the '40s.

IK: It was [inaudible]. So, I [inaudible] and I looked around. I said, "This is the largest [inaudible] I've ever been in.

EM: But not as beautiful as the one at Mishkan Tefila.

BK: That was really special, wasn't it?

EM: Yes, [inaudible].

IK: Let's see. Oh, when I was with Cardinal Cushing, we were at Symphony Hall then. An affair was held. After the program was over, I said to [inaudible], "I'll get your coat." I brought his coat, and he said, look at the label inside of his coat, and it said Louie. [inaudible] he said, "My sister is married to Louie's brother – is married to a Jew." He really was a real friend of the Jewish people. No doubt in my mind. At one of these dinners, President [Nathan] Pusey of Harvard was a speaker, and he said to me – we were talking about faculty at Harvard. He said, "Professor Harry Wolfson is one of the most erudite scholars at Harvard University," which he really was. Now, I could give you the things that I'm a member of.

EM: I would like to ask you about some of your experiences at Mishkan Tefila. You were there for thirty years, and it was a tremendous time of change in the Jewish community. It was right after the war. I'm sure you had a lot of refugees coming into the community, and the temple changed drastically. It was the time of the flight from that area into Newton. The synagogue moved at that time.

IK: To Brookline and Newton, yeah.

EM: Maybe you can share with me some of your experiences that you had during that time, and maybe Sis can help with that.

BK: During the move? During that whole experience?

EM: When were you and Is married?

BK: '54.

IK: '54. This is what I want to say. This was a phenomenon. I began in Mishkan Tefila in '46. Friday night sermon – there was standing room only for Friday night after Friday night. People just flocked, young people, old people. I remember when Rabbi Liebman, at that time, and I talked; he said, “How did your service go? How did their service go?”

EM: Joshua.

IK: [laughter]

EM: The main service at that time was Friday evening, and of course, now at Mishkan Tefila, it's on Saturday morning. That's been a change.

BK: My husband changed it. We went to Israel on sabbatical for seven months, and on Friday night, we had such a good time staying home [inaudible] and having company that he said, "What are we doing?" And when we came home, he decided that, since the congregation on a Friday night was greatly diminished from days prior –

EM: When they were standing room only.

BK: Yes. And very few people came on Friday.

EM: Really?

IK: Yeah.

BK: And so, he said, "Why should we have it on Friday night?" It just isn't a very successful service. It's not very gratifying to anyone. When we returned from Israel, we canceled Friday night, and, of course, all the other synagogues followed suit.

EM: What year was that approximately?

IK: '71.

BK: '71 exactly.

EM: That was a big change. That was a major change –

BK: That was a big change.

EM: – in the life of the congregation.

BK: Because then it meant that bat mitzvah became Saturday morning, so that also was a big change. It had been Friday night.

EM: Were women admitted to bat mitzvah during your tenure at Mishkan Tefila?

IK: Women were what?

EM: Were women given bat mitzvah? Did that begin with you?

IK: Bat mitzvah? Yeah, sure.

BK: Not minyan.

EM: I see. I see.

IK: Oh, yes. Right.

EM: But they originally were on Friday night.

BK: They were on Friday night.

EM: How did they participate? They did not read from the Torah, did they?

IK: Who? The girls?

EM: Yes.

BK: On Friday nights.

EM: Yes.

IK: They read a prayer and said a few words. It turned out to be a very good experience for them, for their congregation.

BK: When you changed it to Saturday?

IK: Yes.

BK: Yes.

EM: Yes.

BK: Because then they had to read from the Torah,

IK: Right.

EM: Yes.

BK: So, the whole thing changed.

IK: But it's interesting. As I said before, in Roxbury, we got these tremendous crowds. When we moved to Newton, the numbers dropped.

EM: What do you attribute that to?

IK: It's hard to say. Maybe people who couldn't afford it, but maybe they went to theater. I really don't know.

EM: Would you say that the majority of your membership made the move?

IK: Yes.

EM: Yes. All age groups?

IK: Yes.

BK: Most of the people who were members of Mishkan Tefila had already moved. Mishkan Tefila followed the people.

EM: I see.

IK: And their sons and daughters were beginning to join other temples. We were losing them, and that was a strong point that I made with our board.

EM: So, you were in favor of the move, obviously.

IK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Mishkan Tefila would have died if we didn't move.

BK: There's a lot of feeling, a lot of adverse feeling [inaudible] move, that you were going with the rich and leaving the poor behind.

IK: The people remaining in Roxbury accused me [inaudible] rich. The rich people said, "You're spending too much time with them." We offered the building and the school building to those who remained, but they probably felt they couldn't undertake it.

BK: Tell Emily about the sale of the building to Elma Lewis.

IK: Oh, yes.

BK: Or maybe somebody else has told you that story.

EM: No, no. I would like to hear that.

IK: Elma Lewis was the cultural head of the Black community, and she came to me and said, "We would like to have a building. If not, there may be trouble." So, I consulted with our men, and we gave it to her for nothing.

BK: A dollar.

IK: A dollar. Right.

BK: Bernie Grossman gave her the dollar because she didn't have it. Remember?

IK: Yeah.

EM: Were you able to maintain the building in any way?

BK: At the beginning, they did.

IK: Yeah, but afterwards, no.

BK: They took the synagogue, and they made it into a theater. They took away all the stained-glass windows and boarded it up. But the schoolhouse itself – I don't know. I haven't been there recently, but the schoolhouse itself really became a cultural center – ballet classes, Afro-American art. They did use it.

EM: What about the things that were in the building? Did you take any of them with you, like the stained-glass windows? Did any of these parts of the building that were integral to the synagogue go with you to Newton? Were you able to incorporate any of that into the building?

BK: One of the most exciting things in that area –

EM: Yes?

BK: – they buried – they were on the top of Mishkan Tefila –

IK: Tablets.

BK: – tablets, stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. And they buried them. [inaudible] buried them because they didn't know what to do.

IK: [inaudible] right.

BK: They were in many pieces when they came down because nobody paid any attention to it, and they were buried. When the new synagogue was built, and just recently, a new addition, they built sort of a piazza in the middle of the two new buildings, the new building in the old building. They dug up the Ten Commandments, and they're at the far corner of the open area [inaudible] between the temples. And it's really a very emotional scene. They put it all together magnificently, and it stands, and it's a wonderful place at the end of the open area of the synagogue.

IK: It's interesting. We had to raise money to move over. One of my members, Harry Feinberg, a wealthy man, went to his bank and said, "I want to pledge to you \$500,000 as a guarantee that if any of the people fail to pay their pledges, you can take it from this money."

BK: Oh, yes. The men were wonderful.

IK: Unbelievable.

EM: These are the kinds of stories I'd like to hear because many of these stories nobody knows about.

IK: That's right. What else? What stories can I tell? So many stories. Oh, I had a very dear friend, Dana Greeley. He was a Unitarian, and his Church was in Boston, and we became very close friends, so much so that he came to speak to us, and I spoke to them. [inaudible] something.

EM: You'll come back to it.

IK: All right. Oh, yes. It wasn't easy to get the land on Hammond Pond Parkway. Was it [inaudible]?

BK: No, it was Teddy Mann.

IK: Oh, Teddy Mann, former mayor of Newton, was instrumental in seeing to it that that piece of land, a piece of land, would be set aside for [inaudible].

BK: Was MDC property, that's why.

EM: I see.

BK: MDC property.

IK: That's right.

EM: Did you have to purchase it, or was it a gift?

BK: No, they purchased it.

IK: Purchased, but it was reasonable.

BK: Oh, yes.

IK: Very reasonable.

BK: And then, too, there's the whole story of how the other synagogues didn't want you to move in.

IK: This is important. The rabbis of Kehillath Israel, Temple Emanuel –

BK: Emeth.

IK: – Emeth and –

BK: Reyim.

IK: – Reyim – these four rabbis put up a great objection to my coming into their area. It became so bitter, really, I said, “Well, I'll tell you, why don't we call for a Beth Din at the seminary. The four of you and I will appear and let them judge.” We went, and the judge was the late Simon Greenberg, a wonderful man. He listened, and he said, “Rabbi Kazis is right. Why?” He said, “In Europe, they would have, in certain areas, what was called a [inaudible] a synagogue street where synagogue after synagogue after synagogue just filled up the street.” So, they had to give in, and I think actually [inaudible] helped. It didn't hinder them at all.

BK: Competition never does.

IK: No.

EM: Everybody's still in business [inaudible].

BK: I think Mishkan Tefila played an important part in the community. I really think that you and Mishkan Tefila played a very important part in the community. Until you were on the board of CJP, you saw to it that they had kosher meals at all their meetings.

IK: That's right. Until I made this, the dinners by the CJP were not kosher. I got up, I talked about it, and they became kosher.

BK: He was the first rabbi to be on the board of the CJP, and I remember his fighting for larger allocations to day schools –

IK: Oh, yes.

BK: – as well as the fact that there should never be an event of any kind that wasn't kosher.

IK: So, that was quite an experience with my colleagues. They really were afraid. The Hebrew term is hasagat ge'vul, which means the taking over of boundaries, which means that's what we were doing, and consequently it was wrong. Well anyway.

BK: How about when Leonard Bernstein asked you to give the invocation at Hebrew University or some institute of higher learning in Jerusalem?

IK: That's right.

BK: And it wasn't a kosher meal.

IK: That's right.

BK: And remember, he said he wouldn't go unless they changed it.

IK: That's right.

BK: At the last minute, they made it kosher, too.

IK: Leonard was a good friend of mine. His mother –

EM: He grew up in Roxbury.

BK: In Mishkan Tefila.

IK: In Mishkan Tefila. His mother and father were members of the temple, and whenever Leonard would come to visit them, he would come to the temple. I always had them sit on the pulpit with me. He was a remarkable man, really.

BK: I liked it because he called me (rebbits?).

IK: Yeah.

BK: He used to joke.

EM: I grew up around the corner from him.

IK: I had another interesting experience. We got a call one day asking us if we would put up for the night Jimmy Carter, Jody Powell, and the other (assistant?).

BK: Hamilton Jordan.

EM: Hamilton Jordan.

IK: Right. Said, "Of course." He was speaking –

EM: [inaudible]

BK: It was a young member of the congregation who was trying to break into politics, and he thought if he used our name in our house, that it would do well for him politically.

IK: He had a speaking engagement. He was not President yet.

BK: It was even before the New Hampshire primaries, dear.

EM: You were in Newton at the time.

BK: Yes.

EM: Where did you live in Newton?

BK: We lived in Brookline on West Roxbury Parkway in South Brookline.

EM: I see.

IK: What was I –?

EM: Jimmy Carter stayed over with Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell.

IK: He was sitting next to me, and Sis was with the other men. I was amazed at his knowledge of Bible [inaudible]. Anyway, we had a big house in South Brookline, so Sis – it was one of the bedrooms for Jimmy Carter, the other for the two men, Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell. In the morning, they left very early. Sis went into Jimmy Carter's room. The bed was made, clean, and he left a clock on the bureau. She went into the other bedroom, where the two men were; it was a mess. Tell them about the clock there.

BK: Oh, had I known he was going to be President, I never would have done this. I said, "Oh, he left his clock." I never dreamed of him being President. He was very bright, very nice guy, but just didn't seem as though he was going to be President. Probably was the most intelligent of all the presidents, but he didn't know [inaudible]. At any rate, I felt guilty that he left the clock. So, I gave it to the young boy who – the young man who had asked us to keep him, and said, "Do me a favor, Jimmy." I said, "Just return this to Jimmy Carter because he left it."

IK: I think he kept it.

BK: I think he kept it because I never got a thank-you note.

IK: Incidentally, we got a nice invitation from Jimmy Carter to attend the inauguration. I couldn't go. Happened to be sick then, so Sis went –

BK: I went with our Israeli son-in-law –

IK: – with our son-in-law.

BK: – who happened to have been in the country at the time.

EM: Which ball did you go to?

BK: Not the [inaudible].

EM: The reason for asking – because when Jimmy Carter was President, Bernard and I were living in Washington, and we were friendly with some people who were very high placed in the Democratic administration, and we were invited to the ball. And we went to the ball at Union Station, and to this day, I remember it was a freezing cold day, just a bitterly cold day, and I wore a dress that actually belonged to my mother. She had given me a couple of things, and I wore this thermal underwear underneath.

BK: Really?

EM: Because it was full. It was in this big barn of Union Station. It wasn't [inaudible], didn't look like –

BK: Oh, ours was in the hotel. I thought we didn't get very [inaudible]. We were in a hotel. And our son was living in Washington at the time, and so he was there, and we had a really wonderful reunion thanks to Jimmy Carter.

IK: And the next morning, Jimmy Carter invited the people who had been at the inauguration, those who were invited, for breakfast. And you can [inaudible] what happened.

BK: Oh, and you told me to be sure and tell her –

IK: I told Sis – she went, “Please tell Jimmy Carter that I’m very sorry I can’t go, but I’m sick.”

BK: So, when we went to shake hands with Jimmy Carter, I was just so overwhelmed, not by him, but by the Office of the President and this large –

IK: Seal.

BK: – presidential seal that was in back of him that I forgot [inaudible].

IK: [inaudible]

EM: Did he remember he had stayed at your house?

BK: I forgot to say anything, and I left the line. Then, when I got to the end of the line, I said, “I’d better tell him about my husband.” So, I turned around to go back, and the guard said to me, “Why are you turning around? You have to go out this door.” I never did get to tell him. But we had a lot – he kept sending you cards every time you had a birthday. We got lots of communications from him.

IK: That’s right.

EM: I do believe that even though he didn't go out with such high stature, that in history, he's going to be remembered as one of our greatest presidents. I really believe that, even in his retirement, he has done such great humanitarian things.

IK: Look what he just did.

EM: That’s right.

BK: He was a great man. He was a really intelligent, wise –

EM: Exactly.

BK: – man, but not President.

EM: That's right.

BK: I do think that he was very fine and has done a lot of good things. And now look what's coming out. Well, we won't talk about that on the tape, but all the things that they did in order to get the election that you wonder – he had a lot of – unfortunately – underground things happening.

EM: Right.

IK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: I want to ask you about some of the people who maybe were the presidents during your tenure, or people who were members of the temple, who would like to hear about posterity, that you might have had some nice relations with, some interesting relations with. Do you recall any of the people that you associated with during the thirty-year tenure of the congregation?

IK: Yes. First, let me say that we were losing the sons and daughters of the old-time members, and that was one of the reasons why we moved over, so they send their children [inaudible]. Now, when we moved over, the president and treasurer of the temple came to me and said, "Our sons and daughters don't want a Hebrew school. All they want is Sunday school." So, I said, "[inaudible] these two are the biggest contributors." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call a meeting of your sons and daughters, and I'll put before them [inaudible] put it before them a hundred percent unanimous [inaudible] Hebrew school." Then, later on, it was a three-day-a-week school. A three-day-a-week Hebrew school cannot give the children enough knowledge to enter the [inaudible] door of the Hebrew College, and that's what I wanted. So, I came to these two men. They said, "What is it now, Rabbi?" I said, "We must have an intensive division, too." He said, "But that's going to cost much more money." I said, "Yes, it will." "I'll ask the sons and

daughters of that.” I did, and of course, I won. Oh, I did have it – I was invited to become the president of Dropsie College in Philadelphia. One of the professors there [inaudible] spoke to (Wilson?), who was his friend, and asked, “Who can you send to be a scholar and so forth?” He recommended me. So, Sis and I went to meet the board. We met at the Bellevue Hotel. Finkelstein said to me, “When you speak to them, you will say that they must immediately raise a million dollars, not for you, but for the library, which has been neglected, and for more instructors.”

BK: That's [inaudible] Finkelstein –

IK: Yeah, that's the Finkelstein seminary. So, I put it to them. The owner of the Bellevue Hotel was one of the men sitting in front of me. These were not poor people. So, they said, “Well, we'll talk about it, Rabbi.” And the next morning, one of the men came to see me and said, “I'm afraid we can't do it, but Rabbi, the money will be good.” I said, “I know it will be good, but this is what I want: a commitment right now.” He couldn't give it to me. We went back home, and I was criticized for trying to get another job while I was rabbi. I should have told them. And the man who was very critical was this Harry Feinberg with \$500,000 dollars. The following Sunday, he said, “Rabbi, I want you to come to my house. We're going to have a little meeting.” I came. I explained. As a matter of fact, I was going to get less salary at Dropsie than at Mishkan Tefila. And finally, they agreed it wasn't so bad. As I left, Harry Feinberg put his arm around me.

BK: But they made you promise you would never leave.

IK: Oh, yeah, I had to promise I would never leave. Now, we have a brotherhood, sisterhood, but I organized – I called it a forum, a Miskin Tefila forum, made up of the sons and daughters of the old timers, so that I would have them, and we met every Sunday evening in the Women's Republican Club in Newton Central.

BK: For the [inaudible] for the temple in the transitional period.

IK: And we raised \$1,750,000. That's what it cost to build the new building today.

BK: Today, you get two rooms for that.

EM: Yeah, right. [laughter]

BK: I must say that one of the things my husband did, first of all, he was really a peacemaker. He was a rabbi's rabbi, and he was a peacemaker. He really never let anything or anybody get too distressed before he would step in and make peace, whatever [inaudible].

[Recording paused.]

EM: Let's continue. You said you raised some great leaders at Mishkan Tefila.

IK: Here's what happened. I raised at least about a dozen young men who, because I raised them, so to speak, they became the ultimate leaders of Mishkan Tefila, and really have devoted themselves so much; it's been a miracle of these young men.

BK: Not only Mishkan Tefila. Bonds, CJP –

IK: Oh, yeah. That's right.

BK: – Hebrew University.

IK: Oh, yeah. All of them. You're right.

BK: What was Alan? Head of the men's club? The International Men's Club?

IK: Oh, yes, right.

BK: Those were all the boys that started.

EM: Who were these boys?

IK: Well, one was Alan Tichnor. Alan is a very wealthy man and a hard worker. He became president of the United Synagogue of America. Lou Cates, not as wealthy as Alan, but well-to-do, and his devotion to the temple – he was president at one time – was extreme.

BK: He did one thing. He made an arrangement with Boston University and Hadassah Hospital. Remember? The Hebrew University, the Hadassah Hospital. When there's an exchange of students in his name and Charlotte's name. He became the president of Hebrew University, the president of the [inaudible].

IK: The association, yeah. Who else?

BK: (Mel Miller?)?.

IK: Oh, (Mel Miller?).

BK: Chet Krentzman.

IK: Chet Krentzman is a man – he graduated from Harvard Business School, and he helps firms that are in trouble and puts them on their feet again, very wealthy and very devoted.

EM: He bailed out Mishkan Tefila a few times, too, I imagine.

IK: Huh?

EM: He bailed out Mishkan Tefila a few times, too, I imagine.

IK: Yeah. It's interesting. If I needed money, I could call any of the men that I knew had money, and the next morning, I had the money. They never said no.

BK: Who was president when the temple was built? (Yeamans?). (Nate Yeamans?).

IK: Oh, (Nate Yeamans?). (Nate Yeamans?) also was a very wealthy man. He was the head of a chain of movie houses. Another member, at the time – I don't know if he still is – was –

BK: Redstone? Are you thinking of Redstone? Sumner Redstone?

IK: Yeah. Sumner Redstone, who was perhaps the fourth-richest man in the United States. So, I really formed close personal relationships with a group of young men that has lasted. It made Mishkan Tefila alive. It was vibrant. And then I have here a whole list of the organizations – oh, thank you.

EM: Maybe while the rabbi is taking a break, Sis, maybe you can, if you feel like it, share with me some of your experiences as the rebbetzin.

BK: Well, [inaudible] so serious. [laughter]

EM: First of all, did you like being called the rebbetzin?

BK: I didn't mind.

EM: You didn't mind.

BK: I was sort of the comic relief of this couple. [laughter]

IK: Don't underestimate yourself because she did a marvelous job.

EM: No, not at all. I knew you grew up in a family of great retailers.

BK: I did.

EM: Maybe you could tell me something about the Gondelmans and Mortons.

BK: Oh, yeah.

EM: Everybody remembers Morton's from way back when we all got our coats there.

BK: My father and mother were really wonderful. My father was also a leader in his day. He never had a lot of money. He had a wonderful reputation, and he was always very helpful, one of the first men to support Brandeis University when it first began, and a member of Mishkan Tefila from Moreland Street. My father was an uneducated man. He came from the old country when he was seventeen. As a matter of fact, next week, I'm going to Russia to find his roots.

EM: Isn't that marvelous? Where was he from?

BK: [inaudible] in the Ukraine.

IK: Ukraine.

EM: I'll shut this off while the phone is ringing.

[Recording paused.]

BK: Yeah, I remember I was a great disappointment to my parents because my father always wanted me to wear his furs, and my mother always wanted me to wear clothes, and I really had – that wasn't part of my life's interest, but I liked the business. I liked the business very much. As a matter of fact, after my first husband died, I went to work in business and gave it up when I married my handsome, exciting rabbi. [laughter]

IK: Very [inaudible].

BK: Right? I did. I married my rabbi. I was a member of his congregation when my husband died. He had been a prisoner of war of the Germans during the Second World War. He came home not really so well. Then, Is adopted the three children. It's been very good, only I've been a little bit uncontrollable sometimes, right? One of the funny stories as a rebbetzin was somebody paid to have false greens up in the bimah, and I couldn't

really stand – every time you went into the temple, they looked the same. There's a woman in the temple who dusted them every week, and I really thought it was awful. If you can't have the real thing, not to have any at all. So, I got together some of my friends from the congregation, and one stood guard, and two of us moved all of the false greens into the rabbi's study, in his closet, because we figured nobody would look there. We put all the greens down there, and we swore in blood that we would never tell. I think it was the next day; I went back in the temple to get something, and I heard the woman who dusts furious that the Hebrew school kids had taken all the greens, and everyone was blaming the Hebrew school kids. So, I called up my friends, and I said, "Listen, we can't let the kids take the blame for us. I have to tell what we did." So, they said, "Okay," and I told my husband. I told him it's lucky that the wins of feminism and women's rights were not accepted then, because he made me call the president of the synagogue and tell him. Now I would never do that. Remember? I had to confess to the president of the synagogue, and then we had to put them back.

EM: So, you didn't win out in the end? [inaudible]

BK: Well, we did actually. Everybody understood. There was another way to do it. That was a lot of fun.

EM: I would say that just from your [inaudible], the whole experience must have been a positive one for you.

BK: I had a wonderful time. It was my congregation, and I knew [inaudible] the age level of my parents. I knew all of the people there. I didn't take it very seriously, actually.

EM: If you did, then you wouldn't have loved it.

BK: [laughter] I married the man who happened to have been the rabbi of that congregation, and I sort of was always used to everybody calling me my father's daughter, anyhow. I grew up feeling very secure in the fact that I was a Gondelman girl,

and I never minded that I was my husband's wife. That never, ever bothered me. I didn't know very much when I married – when he married me, and so I went to Brandeis, and I followed him and heard all of his lectures. I studied Hebrew at Brandeis. Well, I had gone to Mishkan Tefila Hebrew School, and I studied with Baruch Levine, and I studied Bible and Mishnah, and that was really fun. I think that my kids had a much richer life because of the aspect of Judaism. They're all very involved in their own ways in Judaism. It was interesting. Our oldest daughter moved to Israel when she was very young. She's lived there twenty years now.

EM: Really?

BK: She was a real Zionist, and she felt – well, we had a very liberal home. I was always very liberal and very non-materialistic. And this was really – politically liberal, religiously liberal, and she just felt she could make a better contribution as a Jew in Israel.

EM: You know what I found in the almost thirty years – actually, exactly thirty years since I've been married to a rabbi – that people sometimes think of me, and I'm asking you this question too, as a surrogate rabbi, confiding in you often, and they tell you things they wouldn't tell other people. Did you ever have these experiences?

BK: Oh, I had a lot.

IK: Oh, yeah.

BK: I had a lot.

EM: Yes. You keep everybody's secrets.

BK: And I do, and I did then, and I actually knew a lot of the things about people that I never shared with my husband –

EM: Of course.

BK: – because I knew it from the marketplace, and I always felt he needed to deal with people on a higher level sometimes. I knew gossip, and I knew a lot about people that he didn't know. I was always careful to keep that and to keep secrets all the time about other people. I never, ever spoke to – I never carried anything about anybody. I still don't, and so consequently, my friends out here – we moved out here, don't forget, I made all new friends when I moved out here. I went to work when we moved out here.

EM: Really?

BK: Yeah.

EM: What did you do?

BK: I resettled Russian immigrants. Fifteen years. I resettled two thousand.

EM: With the Jewish Family Service?

BK: Jewish Family Service. [inaudible] I created the whole program, set up a school for the teaching of English, and I set up a vocational [inaudible].

EM: You never worked while you were at Mishkan Tefila. You did work; you just didn't get paid for it. [laughter]

BK: Well, and I also went back to school in the '60s, and I took a course and immersed myself in the culture of the Black race, and I taught in the ghetto. I taught second grade. I thought I could make a really big difference. It was in the '60s, during the Martin Luther King – during his death.

EM: You taught in Roxbury?

BK: Yeah. The school isn't there anymore. It was right up from Kasanof's bakery, right in that section. I went into Roxbury every day [inaudible].

IK: I was afraid to let her go in alone after King was assassinated. So, I went in with her.

BK: The day of the assassination, my husband didn't want me to go to school because he was afraid that something would happen to me. And I said, no, I had to go because the kids would be very distressed. So, he drove me in. Somebody else came, too, because my car was there, and then I had a whole contingent of young Black men who helped me and escorted me out when the day was over because they knew that they wanted to protect me, and they knew that I had come in to help the kids, and so they wanted to protect me when I was leaving.

EM: That was '68.

BK: Yeah.

EM: What year did the synagogue actually move?

IK: '57.

EM: '57?

IK: Yeah.

EM: Really?

IK: Yeah.

BK: When I went in – '67, '68 is when I was in there, and I noticed that there were many Jewish people left, elderly Jewish people, left in Roxbury, who no longer had the bakeries and no longer were able to get their newspapers. And in the area where Mishkan Tefila used to be, they built city housing, and there were many Jews as well as Blacks in that apartment building right opposite. They took the parking lot that used to be the parking lot, and the (Lubavitcher?) that had the building for a while sold it to the city, and the city

built housing. So, I organized a group of women from Mishkan Tefila, and we went in and found a place to meet. We met monthly, and we brought in all kinds of Jewish art, Jewish music. Every month, we brought in a program for all of the Jews who were too poor to leave, too old to leave, and who were trapped in the area. We brought them Yiddishkeit every month for – I think we did it about four years, four or five years, until they either died or were moved into housing, CJP housing. I remember that very clearly. And I also organized – because I felt I had some expertise at this point about the Black community, I organized the high school students to go into Roxbury and work with high school kids.

[Recording paused.]

IK: One Friday night, I forgot what the occasion was, but Temple Israel – after the service, an usher came up to me and said, “Rabbi, there was an elderly man here. His name was Cecil Derry.”

EM: Derry?

IK: Derry, D-E-R-R-Y. He wanted to come up to shake your head, but it was too crowded, and he had to take the streetcar to Watertown, where he lived. Cecil Derry was my Latin teacher at Cambridge High and Latin School. He was seventy-five years old when he took that trip because he saw that my name was mentioned, etc. I said, “I’m taking my boy Richard to meet Cecil Derry.” Mr. Chips. It was a beautiful meeting, and my son will never forget that. I can honestly say, except for that one occasion about Dropsie College, I never had an unhappy experience at Mishkan Tefila. Not really. They’re good people.
[inaudible]

EM: Do you ever get [inaudible]?

IK: Sometimes, yeah. But since we live out here, I go to the temple out here. When I retired, Bernice said, “Maybe we’ll go down the Cape.” I said, “Let’s drive [inaudible].” We did, and we found this place.

EM: It was already built?

IK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was built.

BK: That's a friend of mine. We're doing interviews of Russians on the Holocaust, on their experience during the Holocaust. It is busy, isn't it? I never noticed how busy.

EM: It's good. It's certainly not boring here. You never have a dull sight in front of your eyes.

BK: I love it here.

EM: The ocean, the people.

BK: I just love it here so much.

EM: So, you have a daughter in Israel. A son?

BK: We have a daughter in Israel, and her oldest son just became an officer in the army, and I'm going on Sunday to his graduation.

EM: To Israel.

BK: Yes.

EM: My husband's going to stay home with his very attractive Russian lady who comes and stays with him. So, that's Amy. She's the oldest, and she has three kids. Ariel is the oldest. He'll be twenty in August, and he's in the army. She has [inaudible], who is seventeen, and then she has (Mikhail?), who is fourteen.

IK: It's interesting. Our son-in-law's family, his father fought in 1948. [inaudible] fought in '67. And our [inaudible] Ariel is in the army.

BK: [inaudible] fought not only in '67. '67 and '73.

IK: Oh, yes. Right.

BK: Right? So, that's that family. Then we have Toby. Toby lives in Newton, and she has two kids. Jesse is at Ithaca College in communications. He's going to be twenty.

IK: And her husband is a physician on the staff of the Mass General Hospital.

BK: And her daughter just graduated Hebrew College [inaudible], and she's seventeen. And then there's Richard. He got married later, and he has a little boy, seven. He'll be seven.

IK: Show her that little –

BK: Show her that little thing?

IK: You won't believe this.

BK: And then there's a little one, three. Noah.

EM: You have grandchildren in every generation, as they say, every decade.

IK: He's six years old, but when he wrote this, the teacher had been talking about home, and she said, "Write about home."

BK: Well, I don't know if he would like it to read.

EM: He's six years old?

BK: He was five when he –

EM: He wrote this?

IK: Yeah.

EM: "A lung is a house for air. The sun is a house for fire. Heaven is a house for God. A lake is a house for water. Winter is a home for ice. The sky is a home to the sun." This is magnificent.

IK: Isn't it amazing?

EM: This is magnificent.

BK: That's the little boy –

EM: Five years old.

BK: – [inaudible] Israel.

IK: Five years old when he did that. [laughter]

BK: He came to me one day, and he said he really had a big problem that his mother and father came home from work on Friday, very, very tired, and sometimes they forgot that it was Shabbos, and what should he do about it? And I said I wasn't getting into that one. I said, well, maybe he and I could talk about it, and that we would each try and wish the other good Shabbos before Shabbos. So now every Friday, either I call him and say, "Good Shabbos," or he calls me, and he says, "It's good Shabbos, Bubbe. Did you remember?" And I said, in that way, his parents would now get it. I wasn't going to do it with his parents.

EM: You say you go to Temple Israel here?

IK: Yeah.

BK: We go to Temple Israel.

EM: Do you go regularly?

BK: I go. I used to go regularly [inaudible].

EM: Religiously, as they say.

BK: Religiously, right. And then my husband doesn't go. It's just too much for him.

EM: It doesn't look like it is, unless today is a really great day. [laughter] It must be a great day.

BK: So, he doesn't go. And then it suddenly dawned on me that the community wasn't what I really needed. And so instead, I began a Bible class.

EM: Are you the leader?

BK: We have no leader.

EM: Well, I see.

BK: Eight women. We meet every Tuesday. We read the [inaudible] of the week, and each one –

EM: In English? Or are you doing Hebrew, too?

BK: English. These people don't really do it in Hebrew.

EM: Are you all age-appropriate?

BK: No, we're spanning from fifty to seventy-five. It's been wonderful. We don't do the (haftara?); we just do sidrah. Anybody who wants brings in all kinds of other material. I have to say that, because I have a lot more material coming into my house with the Jerusalem Post and The Jerusalem Report and all of that. I bring in a lot more

information than the others do. But we've met every single week without a break since September of last year, when I decided I really didn't enjoy synagogue, but I really missed the reading of the sidrah and just following along in the Bible [inaudible].

EM: It sounds like you are truly an example of somebody who was adult-educated, as opposed to child-educated, Jewishly speaking.

BK: Yeah, I am. And I like it. I like it very much. My husband did a good job. I remember when we were first thinking of getting married, and we were talking about Judaism, and there were a lot of things about Judaism I really didn't care for [inaudible].

EM: Did you grow up in a Reform home?

BK: No, my parents belonged to Mishkan Tefila.

EM: Oh, that's right. You said second days; that's why I asked.

BK: Yeah, but I still – as a rebbetzin or as Is's wife, the second days –

EM: Extra cooking.

BK: Yeah, right. So, I talked to him about it, and I always remembered his answer. And he said, "Well, it's like a fine antique. Some antique chairs you can sit on, and some you just look at." He said, "But you don't throw it out. You keep them." And I sort of always remember that with refinements and elaborations here and there. It was kind of a nice thought to think about Judaism in that way.

IK: [inaudible] about our little grandson, Noah. We have seven grandchildren. Sis was saying to Noah one day, "You're the best, you're the smartest, you're the loveliest" – all the superlatives. He looks up at her. He says, "Bubbe, you mustn't say that. You have six other grandchildren." [laughter]

EM: This must be [inaudible].

BK: Yeah, he is.

EM: Goodness [inaudible].

BK: A little anti-social, but otherwise, he's okay.

EM: What school does he go to?

BK: He goes to Brookline school, the one on Toxteth Street, right at the corner [inaudible] Brookline.

EM: Lawrence School?

BK: Yeah.

EM: [inaudible] live in our neighborhood.

BK: Yeah, the Lawrence School.

EM: What street do they live on?

BK: They live on Gardner Road.

EM: Oh, I grew up on Gardner Road.

BK: Oh, I grew up on Royal Road.

EM: 174 Gardner.

BK: They live at 121. And I grew up –

EM: So, they grew up right around the corner from Royal Road.

BK: I grew up on Royal Road. Not grew up. I moved there –

EM: I'm surprised they go to the Lawrence School. Maybe the Pierce school they go to. Pierce, I think it is, not Lawrence.

BK: No, they wanted to. They used to live on – oh my goodness. Where did they use to live? Perry Street. And the child went to Lawrence School from Perry.

EM: So, he stayed?

BK: They had the right to change.

EM: I see.

BK: Now, Richard was in a very special class at Brookline High. Remember, after Sputnik, they had a very highly – everybody with a high IQ could go into a class? It was a special class.

EM: How old is Richard?

BK: Richard is forty.

EM: Oh, so I don't remember that. I'm older.

BK: Yeah, it was a special class after Sputnik, and if you had above 140 IQ, you could go into this class. And twenty-five kids, up until they went to high school from the fourth grade, all with the same kids going [inaudible] excellent education. Really, very fine. They were a little antisocial, too. But at any rate, Richard believes in public school education. He works with kids in public school education, trying to help the children who won't be going on to college to make the most of their own resources. And he has organized groups connected to corporations, laboratories, industry, where the kids go into these areas and work while they're going to school.

IK: It's to affect a good transition from school to industry.

BK: So, they'll know what's available.

IK: It's called Jobs for the Future.

BK: Well, we'd better get back to what we're supposed to do.

EM: Yeah, it's okay.

BK: We like to talk about our children.

EM: [inaudible] I like to talk about mine.

IK: I have a whole –

BK: [inaudible]

IK: – bunch of organizations [inaudible].

EM: Well, they have that probably on file. But if it makes you happy to talk about it, it's fine with me.

BK: Talk about your experiences better, honey.

IK: All right.

EM: I don't want to tax you. I mean, we can stop anytime you're ready to stop.

BK: I think he's having a good time.

IK: Yeah, I'm enjoying it.

EM: Most of the people that I've interviewed have. I never had a person who didn't enjoy the experience. Many of the people that I interviewed were really not well, and they totally rose to the occasion. The first interview I did was of Helen Fine. I was quite nervous. Oh, I was very nervous. And she, at the time, and still is at the Hebrew rehab, and I was told that she was quite confused, that she wouldn't get one straight story. Well, that was a good day for her. She was fabulous.

IK: Wonderful.

EM: So, I understand. People look forward to these experiences.

IK: Trying to think of some stories, experiences.

BK: I can tell Emily the story – remember when we decided to do something nice for Israel, and so I said, “Okay, we'll have an opening for all second-hand clothing, anything that you think people can use in Israel, and we'll send them.” And we had a great time. Everybody in the temple was working. I love to get the women to be doing all kinds of activities.

IK: When I was on the CJP board and on the executive committee, etc., I used to sit behind some men who weren't particularly anxious to give money to day schools. I kept talking and talking to them. Finally, they did. They agreed with me. Incidentally, the Solomon Schechter Day School in Newton was founded a little more than thirty years ago. I was one of the founders.

EM: I'd like to hear about that.

IK: A group of rabbis, especially Rabbi Nelson, myself, and Rabbi Gordon, thought that we should have a conservative day school, so we established it, and we started with six students. And now, thank God, I think we have about four hundred. It's been a marvelous experience.

EM: It certainly fulfilled a need in the community.

BK: It met in the synagogues at the very beginning, met in Temple Mishkan Tefila, Temple Emanuel.

IK: Now we're trying to raise money –

EM: And the third one? Temple Reyim?

IK: Yeah.

BK: I don't think it ever met in Temple Reyim. That was too far away, I think.

IK: Yeah, you're right.

BK: It was Mishkan Tefila and Emanuel. I think so. Tell Emily how –

EM: My children graduated from that school.

BK: From Solomon Schechter?

EM: Yes, Solomon Schechter.

IK: Pardon me?

EM: My children went to Solomon Schechter.

IK: Wonderful.

BK: So did all our grandchildren. All our grandchildren. It wasn't in existence [inaudible].

IK: Running a day school was a very expensive proposition. I was vice president. I was asked if I could raise some money. I did. On the telephone, I called my friends, members of the temple, and so forth.

BK: When you retired. This was what you did when you first retired.

IK: Yeah. In a short time, I raised \$850,000 dollars.

EM: You must have a golden tongue.

BK: He did. He really did. That was what he did after he retired. For two years, that's what he did. He called everybody in the congregation, and he raised \$850,000 dollars. One of them, the biggest one – how much did the (Schumans?) give you at the beginning? That started you off.

IK: They gave me \$100,000 dollars. Why? The wife of this man was a girl with whom the boys at Harvard and Radcliffe got together, and I knew her. She was married to a very wealthy man. So, I went and got \$100,000 dollars. Several months ago, an anonymous gift of a million dollars was given to Schechter. I think I know who gave it, but I'm not saying. I think I had something to do with it. But anyway, the schooling that you get at a day school is marvelous. I mean, just can't compare a three-day-a-week Hebrew School. So, I guess I was a fairly good money-raiser. I raised a lot of money for the Jewish Theological Seminary. A lot. A lot.

EM: You had dinners or one-on-one? How did you do it?

IK: One on one.

EM: One on one?

IK: Oh, yes. [inaudible]

BK: Also dinners. And most of the –

IK: And also dinners.

BK: – men that he mentioned before as president of the synagogue, who are now or have been in the past members of the board of the Seminary.

EM: How did you feel about women being ordained?

IK: About what?

EM: About women being ordained as rabbis?

IK: I'm for it.

EM: You're for it?

IK: Sure.

BK: Don't you remember when you and Gordis got up at that meeting?

IK: Oh yeah.

BK: And you were the only two of the older rabbis.

IK: There was a rabbinical assembly convention, and Bob Gordis, [inaudible], and I got up and spoke very strongly in favor of it.

BK: When the younger men were making a big noise. Remember?

IK: That's right.

BK: Yeah, you were one of the leaders of that. But you never gave women the right to be counted in the minyan while you were rabbi. You kept saying, "When the new rabbi comes. When the new rabbi comes."

EM: Do you think Mishkan Tefila will ever have a woman assistant? No?

BK: I'd like to see them have a president – a woman. They haven't even ever had a president who was a woman.

EM: Really? I didn't realize that. Is there an assistant there now?

BK: No.

EM: Rabbi Menitoff is –

BK: Is alone.

EM: – all alone. How large is the congregation now, would you say?

BK: I think it's about the same.

IK: About the same.

BK: Between 750 and eight hundred families.

EM: Really? And there's no second rabbi?

BK: My husband very rarely had an assistant, and he had the same amount, even probably more than today. Well, there are some now younger people coming in. He had an assistant for a short period of time. How long was Larry there?

IK: Oh, he was there –

BK: Larry Silverstein?

IK: Yeah. Larry Silverstein.

BK: He was there for – what? Two years, three years, something like that.

IK: Yeah, two or three years. Yeah.

BK: It was at the time when napalm was being dropped. Do you remember?

EM: Vietnam.

BK: He gave a sermon. Do you remember how many months you spent answering all the mail that came in?

IK: Oh, yeah.

BK: [laughter] Remember that?

EM: He was a little too liberal?

BK: I remember that very clearly because people were storming out, and everybody was upset, and you weren't upset with them, and you sat patiently and answered all the letters.

EM: He was against the war, I guess.

BK: Oh, yes, very.

EM: We had a similar story in our situation. My husband was an assistant to Bernard Bamberger, Shaaray Tefila in New York, and he was there from the years '65 to '67. Those are the same years, I believe, that Larry was with you, because we knew Larry in Germany, Larry Silverstein. We were in Wartburg, and we were in Frankfurt. I guess Larry came to you at the same time that we went to New York, and Rabbi Bamberger also never came out against the war at the beginning. And my husband, also, like Larry, did the same thing. He was very liberal and very against the war in Vietnam. Rabbi Bamberger was a gentleman about the whole thing. He gave him freedom of the pulpit all the time.

IK: Oh, yeah. I did, too.

EM: He never let him not speak. And then after a certain amount of time, he came up to him. He was a real mensch, as I know you are a mensch also.

IK: Oh, he was. [inaudible].

EM: "No, Bernard," he said, "you are right." He said, "I didn't agree with you at the beginning, but now I see that your point of view is the right point of view. That's what he said.

IK: Nice, nice. Very nice.

EM: Tell me about Cantor Shelkan. We haven't spoken about him. He was with you for a long time.

IK: Yes, he was. I came to the temple in '46. He came in '47.

EM: He came right after Europe, right from the camps?

IK: Yeah. His wife was a secretary at the assembly in Washington.

BK: [inaudible] was it?

IK: Yeah. Anyway, she went overseas, and she met him and was instrumental in getting him to come here. He was kept alive by the Nazis because they used him to entertain the troops. His voice was [inaudible]. He is a remarkable man. He went through such difficulties.

BK: They had a great pulpit together, really great.

EM: I know that. That's why I brought up the subject, because [inaudible] talk about that a little bit.

BK: There was never a minute when they weren't simpatico and with each other.

IK: Oh, yeah. We were just like brothers.

BK: My husband just let him do whatever he thought, because he had class, taste, and music ability. And he was really magnificent. He was just magnificent. And they together were just –

EM: A great team.

BK: – such a team. They were wonderful together.

IK: And our sexton (Dumba?).

EM: Yes, I'd like you to talk about him, too.

IK: He came from Vilna. He was loaded, I understand, on a truck or a wagon that was taking corpses and burying them. I think he was shot. He was wounded, but it was getting dark, and he rolled off the wagon, lay there, and this is how he survived.

BK: He's brilliant.

EM: How did you come to these people? How did they come to you? How did you make [inaudible]?

IK: Well, the seminary, as you know, recommends cantors and rabbis. [inaudible] come to us?

BK: I don't know how [inaudible] came to you. He lived in Roxbury. He married Evelyn. That was just before my time.

IK: Yeah, that's right. I officiated at his wedding.

BK: Yeah. He married a woman who lived in Roxbury. And therefore, I think he came – because they're very observant, extremely observant. He's brilliant.

IK: And knowledgeable, extremely knowledgeable.

BK: Oh, knowledgeable about politics and –

IK: Everything.

BK: – European history. They were three brilliant men. They really were. They just knew everything.

IK: It was a great experience. When I look back upon it, it's with a real happy feeling that I have when I think of my service there. This girl here, she's something, I'll tell you. I've never known a rebbetzin to be as beloved as she is.

EM: Well, I think maybe this is the time to come to an end, unless there's something else you need to say. I think we've heard some great words from you, and I want to thank you. It was a great afternoon for me, and I know it was for both of you.

BK: Yeah, we had a [inaudible]. We had a good time.

IK: Oh, yes. I enjoyed it.

EM: I hope that every day after this is as good as this one. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]