Sylvia Schatz Transcript

Judy (Ninneman?): Today is June 30, 1999. This is Judy (Ninneman?), interviewing Sylvia Schatz in her home under the auspices of Temple Emunah's Oral History Project. This is tape one, side A. Sylvia, it's so nice to be with you today on this beautiful, cool day compared to what we've had. What I'd like to start – really have you reminisce with me about your childhood, if that's okay with you.

Sylvia Schatz: Fine. That's fine.

JN: Let's just test this right now. We're fine. So, we're going to start right now. Sylvia, why don't you tell me about your childhood?

SS: Where would you like me to start? [laughter]

JN: Why don't you tell me what you remember that's important about your childhood?

SS: Let me start with incidents, and then get into other things, if I go way, way back. I grew up in Philadelphia, lived in a mixed neighborhood, mixed meaning some Jewish families, some non-Jewish families. It wasn't a totally Jewish neighborhood. My next-door neighbor – the girl was my best friend, and a lot of the other neighbors were not Jewish. There seemed to be no problem [inaudible]. We belonged to a Conservative congregation, Ahavath Israel, which was within walking distance. Let's see. What do I remember? Well, I can skip to – the big thing I remember as a real little child was playing in the back alley. This is where the cars went in. We used to ride tricycles up and back. A particular thing I remember was turning our tricycles over, making the pedals go, and calling, "Horseradish," the horseradish grinder [inaudible] company. That again, I remember [inaudible] up and down, turning the pedals around, yelling, "Horseradish, horseradish."

JN: A horseradish person came to your house?

SS: He came down the back alley with his cart, with his little grinder, calling, “Horseradish.”

JN: And he would grind it right in front of you?

SS: And he would grind it right in front of you if you wanted.

JN: That’s interesting.

SS: Except my grandfather ground his own. But this I remember. I mean, it was a big part of it. The other thing was the ice man. This is before refrigerators. Because we got our first refrigerator in 1936. I still remember that. We had an ice box before, and there was a card that you put in the window. There were four sides. It was five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five pounds, and you turned the card as how much ice you wanted. He would park. He didn't come into the alley; he would park out on the street, carry this big block of ice on a piece of leather over his shoulder with ice tongs, and put it in the icebox. That I recall. That was when I was little. Used to ride bikes – that was what it was – [inaudible] friends. I went to what was the Logan Demonstration School, which they called the demonstration school for the Philadelphia public schools. My mother was a schoolteacher, and I guess felt very strongly – that's interesting you talked about – felt very strongly about education. There were several other kids in the neighborhood. We carpooled. We went with the children behind us. There was a (Warshaw?) family, whose father was a principal of a school in Philadelphia, and he had two daughters. And then Janet Feinstein, which is interesting, lived on another street, and the (Bessers?), and we used to carpool to Logan Demonstration because it was not within walking distance, several miles away.

JN: Was this school part of a college?

SS: No, it was part of the Philadelphia public schools. But what it was – we used to have visitors. You know what a schoolroom used to look like? There were rows of chairs, and in the back were these five or six regular adult armchairs. Four days a week, we would have visitors. What these were were other schoolteachers, schoolteachers from the city of Philadelphia who came to observe these teachers' teaching methods. These were supposed to be the model teachers, and that's why they were in the Logan Demonstration school because they would demonstrate their expertise. So that my school was – we always had these – about four days a week, we have these other teachers sitting in the back of the room, which we were totally out – growing up with this, starting in kindergarten all the way through, it wasn't a strange thing [inaudible]. I remember that elementary school very well. It was a wonderful, wonderful elementary school. I loved it. I remember my teacher's names. I remember the teachers. It was great.

JN: What was the makeup of the school?

SS: There were a lot of neighborhood children, and there were other children who came in, who could be bused, but who were carpooled in, who came from other parts of the city. How we got in, I don't know. [inaudible] quota. I don’t know. I don’t know how the external people [inaudible] just made a request.

JN: You don't remember taking a test because I went to Latin School in [inaudible] and we had a test to get in.

SS: No, no. This was totally heterogeneous, that I recall. Another thing I do remember, we got to fifth or sixth grade, and we had to walk someplace for junior high school, for home ec [economics] and shop. Boys took shop, the girls took home ec. Of course, that's the way it was. But I remember also they were getting us ready, I think, for junior high school, and so they took this sixth grade, and divided it so that we were in sections. This was to get us ready for it. And I remember one – I have a feeling I was not in the top section, and I was very much put out because I thought I was very smart.

JN: [laughter] I'm sure you were.

SS: Whatever was, and I couldn't understand why I wasn't in what I perceived to be the top section. We had a wonderful teacher in sixth grade, Mrs. Sherlock. I remember her. We did Shakespeare. We did Shakespeare plays. We used to put on sections, not the whole play, but I remember sections. We would put on – what else did [inaudible]? *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* and I was the wicked stepmother. Wonderful. I wore my mother's gold lace evening dress. Barbara (Schlein?) was Snow White. Her grandmother made her one of these beautiful, real Snow White – [inaudible], but she made her one with the bodice, with the vest, with the strings. It was great. It was a great school. I loved it. I thought that was the way schools were. Then I went to junior high school and learned differently. My best friend was still Louise [inaudible], who lived next door, and her cousin (Sybil Davis?), who did not go to that school, which was sort of interesting. When I now talk to our grandchildren who go to Schechter, the question is, they won't get [inaudible], people say. It was never a problem. This was [inaudible], my best friend.

JN: So, education was important to your mother.

SS: Very.

JN: Because she picked out the school for you.

SS: Yes. I had a younger sister who went also. I always had – I don't know where this came – it must have come from my parents, but I was very smart. My sister was the pretty one, and I was the smart one. [inaudible] smart. But I don't know where these things come from, where we pick them up, or how it comes to us, but that was it. She's three and a half years younger than I am. Best friends.

JN: That's wonderful. Does she live near you?

SS: She lives in Philadelphia or outside.

JN: She kept the roots there.

SS: No, she moved around and around and came back. Ended up back there, but she also moved around. So that was that. Anything else that would be [inaudible]?

JN: What about in your childhood, Jewish identity? Did you go to –?

SS: Yeah, I went to Sunday school at Ahavath Israel. Actually, my mother was Sisterhood president. In fact, my father ended up being the regional president. They were both very active. My father was one of these early reconstructionists. This, he thought, was the answer to everything, and it made a big difference in our family, in that, for the extended family, the aunts who were not particularly interested. When my father took over the Seder after my – my grandpa [inaudible] die. My grandpa [inaudible] quite old. My mother's father had gone in the service. My father ran, I remember, the first Reconstructionist Seder, the Reconstructionist haggadot. And his two – they were unmarried. They had married very late – sisters. My mother's sister, who was married – they were both schoolteachers, but had no children, and my uncle, her brother. For the first time, the Seder was an absolutely wonderful thing. It was all in English. They understood it, and it made sense, and they keep asking and said, "So, when are we going to eat? So, when are we going to eat?" They were very active in the synagogue, and we were too. Now, my mother did not start [inaudible] Hebrew school until much later. She didn't think I should start until I was older because most kids who went to Hebrew school started when they started regular school. I didn't start till I was eleven. I remember it was not a successful beginning. I was four or five years older than all the other kids. I had a wonderful teacher, Mrs. [inaudible]. But it just was not – I think I stayed for a year or two, and that was that. [inaudible] big discussion my friend Louise and I had. Her parents started her early. She was probably going [inaudible], which is another whole long story. My mother took me for swimming lessons at the Y, which was all the way at the other end of Philadelphia. We lived in the northern part. The YMHA [Young Men's

Hebrew Association] was South Philadelphia. Once a week, she would drive me down for swimming lessons. I remember the two of us arguing about what was more important: Hebrew school lessons or swimming lessons. What was more important? I mean, you had to learn so you could save your life. I'm trying to remember if there were youth groups. I don't think so. I was confirmed. I remember that.

JN: [inaudible] you didn't have –?

SS: Bat mitzvah?

JN: [inaudible] Conservative [inaudible].

SS: No, not at all. I remember the speech I had to write. [inaudible] I had elocution lessons, too. My mother took me when I was younger. I had to write a speech, which, of course, my father coached me along with. A lot of it was the Reconstructionist doctrine [inaudible] books written in English of Jewish interest and Jewish art. I mean, this was the big thing.

JN: How did he get so involved with that?

SS: How did he? Well, he and my mother had grown up in Young Judea. They met in Young Judea. My father was born in this country. My mother came when she was about ten. She had a younger sister and younger brother. My grandmother, who had been very well educated in Europe, more so than her husband, which is an interesting story I didn't learn until later, took the two girls who were then of school age.

JN: They came from?

SS: They came from Riga. [inaudible] Took them to school and said to the teacher, "I want them speaking English without an accent," so they did. Whether they were good in languages – it's possible because [inaudible] accent. The funny thing was, my mother

had cousins who were the same age, which I always thought were an older generation because they had heavy Yiddish accents, and they were just with a different culture. But my grandmother was insistent that these girls and her son should be well educated, and they were.

JN: So, they learned English in –?

SS: The United States.

JN: In the United States, when they came and spoke [inaudible].

SS: [inaudible]

JN: And education was important to her –

SS: Extremely.

JN: – because she sent them on to college.

SS: They went to normal school –

JN: Normal school.

SS: At that point.

JN: Training for a teacher.

SS: Training for a teacher. Yeah. My aunt apparently had wanted to be a nurse, and my grandmother wouldn't let her because that wasn't a nice thing for a woman to do.

JN: A Jewish woman? [laughter] Is that what you mean?

SS: No, I think – what I heard was it wasn't a nice thing for a woman to do. I'm not quite sure what that means. This is already handed down to my aunt, who has said they both

were teachers. My father was a lawyer. He was born in this country. They went to Young Judea together, and that's where they met. My father was – there was an election, and who was going to be the president of Young Judea?

JN: This was –?

SS: Here in Philadelphia.

JN: This was not a camp. This was an organization.

SS: It was an organization. It’s a youth organization.

JN: They met once a week?

SS: Yes, whatever it was. That’s right. They did Jewish things, whatever that was. I really had no idea, but that was a huge group, which was interesting, because my grandfather went to an Orthodox shul someplace in Philadelphia, which I [inaudible]. But my grandmother sent my mother for Sunday school to Adath Jeshurun, which was a big conservative congregation, and that's where the Young Judea was. She had already [inaudible] made that decision about where her daughters were going to go and what they were going to do. [inaudible] supposed to be an election for president. My father was sure he was going to win, and my mother won. My mother became president, and he was vice president, which really knocked him for a loop. Anyhow, they ended up getting married at some point. She had finished normal school. [inaudible] They got married after he had finished law school. That was where their interest in Judaism or their association had been, and it had always been very much of a secular [inaudible], but he wanted it in an American one. If I recall correctly, he didn't want – certainly wasn't Orthodox. We were raised in whatever conservative traditions there were during the ’30s.

JN: [inaudible] Shabbat dinner.

SS: Yes. Friday night. Actually, services were Friday night, and that's when we used to go. I don't remember going on Saturday. We did the holidays with my grandparents. Now, the kashrut was a very funny kind of kashrut. There was no ham. There was no pork, although when I was young, apparently, I had digestive problems [inaudible]. The doctor said, “Is it possible –?” The story I remember was: “Give her bacon.” God knows why, whatever it was. My mother had a special fry pan. She never called it bacon. She called it “curly meat.” So, I used to get the curly meat [inaudible].

JN: It's interesting you say that because my husband, who was raised Orthodox, a physician told his mother he needed to have bacon.

SS: Really?

JN: He needed it for his health. She couldn’t [inaudible]. No one else [inaudible] strictly Orthodox household.

SS: Yeah, that's right. Okay, so I thought this was the one peculiar thing. What had happened – when I was eighteen months old, I had gotten badly burned on the back of the leg – hot water bath. [inaudible] I don't know what it was. Very badly burned. It was fine. It worked out fine. I was home and whatever. [inaudible] I got up, and everything was fine. So, it may have been that anything that the doctor said that would make me fine, they did. They didn't have two separate dishes. They didn't have a separate set of dishes. They didn't mix milk and meat. They bought kosher meat [inaudible] sort of thing. Nothing else treyf in the house, but that was their –

JN: Accommodation.

SS: – accommodation. [inaudible].

JN: Were holidays a big celebration?

SS: Big celebration. I'm trying to remember the age, but at one point – because we were older. I guess we must have been nine, ten, eleven, twelve – my mother started having [inaudible] Hanukkah party. What we did was everyone had to get – you had to get presents that were little jokey, kinds of presents. You had to write a limerick that went along with it, [inaudible] struggling to write in verse. But the whole family, both sides, my mother's side and father's side. That was a big thing. I'm trying to remember what else. Rosh Hashanah, yes. We went to services at our place, but we would have dinner at my grandmother's, my mother's mother. My father's mother, I recall, but she died when I was much younger. I was much closer to my mother's family. I look back on it now; I think that was her decision. There was somewhat a difference in culture. My mother's mother had said before [inaudible]. Her father died. She had, I think, three brothers, her mother, and she married my grandfather, who was badly crippled and [inaudible] running a factory, was quite well-to-do in Riga.

JN: Was that arranged?

SS: It was arranged. He then supported her entire family. You never knew this from her. My mother told me about this later. She was very well off. Apparently, her parents had been originally – when her father died in [inaudible] because my mother used to tell the story of their household, but she still remembers there were two maids. There was (Grossa?) Maria and (Klina?) Maria. (Grossa?) Maria was the household maid, and (Klina?) Maria who took care of the children. My grandfather had a – it was a factory for making the uppers of shoes in a factory. I used to think a factory was a factory. It must have been right next to the house because my mother said she remembered sitting underneath the tea table, chewing on pieces of leather, and listening to the ladies gossip around the tea table. I inherited [inaudible] gossiping about all the ladies in the neighborhood, and whose husbands were philandering and wishing [inaudible]. Anyhow, my grandfather went bankrupt, which meant that either he was put in jail [inaudible] came to America. Grandmother, with the three children, had to go live with her mother-in-law,

which apparently was a big come-down.

JN: So, he had a choice, or did he have to flee?

SS: My recollection was that he had to flee. How accurate that is, or whether that's part of the family myth, I don't know, but that’s the story that we heard. He came and then sent them money to come. But they had to wait a little longer because he refused to send – he didn't want them coming [inaudible]. He wanted them coming – he had tremendous respect for my grandmother, for his wife, who apparently, he felt was above him in the social class. There’s a whole story of when they were first married, she wasn't eating bread. He asked her why. [inaudible] only eats white bread. Whatever the story was. So, he sent her tickets for – I don’t think it was first class, but it wasn’t steerage. He wanted her coming comfortably. They came on the last boat out of Hamburg before the First World War, right before the war broke out. He had a grocery store in Philadelphia, which my grandmother worked in, too. I didn't know this whole story. She's a very cheerful, very lovely, very happy woman. I remember my mother telling me, “She thinks about her mother, who was twenty-three, leaving her whole family and coming [inaudible] children to a place she knew nothing about, totally changing her life with no complaint.” She was not an embittered woman. She was very loving, very upbeat, very [inaudible] lady. I was very, very fond of her. I remember once, though – very interesting. The store [inaudible] you came back midway, and then there was a huge kitchen upstairs. Everything happened in this big kitchen. I guess the store wasn't busy. My grandfather came in. He was listening to music on the radio, and my grandmother said [inaudible] amazing thing. “Your grandfather is not an educated man, and yet he loves to listen to this music. Of course, he's educated in Hebrew things,” which he was. But what hit me was she had realized she had said something which was not a nice thing to say about her husband, and she was trying to cover it up or –

JN: Protect him.

SS: – protect him with it all. But I still remember that. I can remember where I was and where she was and where he was when she said it because I sort of looked at [inaudible] my grandmother and grandfather.

JN: You have very fond memories.

SS: Yes, yes.

JN: It’s lovely.

SS: They were great, yeah.

JN: They sound like very special people.

SS: They were great people. They were great people. I remember my grandfather used to start off speaking to me in English, and then what I realized later is he would switch to Yiddish, which I could understand. I mean, I realized later that he made that switch in between. So, he was very [inaudible]. My grandmother died of cancer, very young, fifty-three, well before I was married. But when I became engaged to Len [Leonard], my grandfather was – I remember him sitting. He had a little book [inaudible]. He was living with us at that time, and I remember him calling his friends [inaudible] his relatives, and I heard him say, “She's marrying, and his father is a doctor.” [laughter] Len was great with him. Len did marketing research, but he was working at the time for [inaudible]. At this point, they had retired and were living close to us. He no longer had the grocery store.

JN: Had they sold it?

SS: They had sold the grocery store and were living in an apartment which was halfway between our house and my aunt's house, so that it was really – I could walk back and forth. He lived there many years. My grandfather was very fond of Len. Len would stop if he came and picked me up and talk to him. He [inaudible]. Wonderful.

JN: Could Len speak Yiddish to him?

SS: He had spoken Yiddish. I don't know whether he could understand him because his grandmother had spoken Yiddish to him. He paid him due respect, and he understood this, in contrast to my brother-in-law, who had never had this. This was my sister's husband. I think was a little put off by grandpa – didn't have the same kind of understanding. Len had lived with – his grandmother had lived with them. There was a whole different [inaudible]. There was a whole different attachment. Ellen was our oldest, and when she was [inaudible] was wonderful. And my grandfather said, "Of course, she had a girl first, because her grandmother had a girl first. Her mother had a girl." But then when [inaudible] son was born, it was his – I mean, this child could do no wrong. My uncle, who was my grandfather's own son, had been a big disappointment [inaudible]. The two girls were well-educated teachers. My uncle [inaudible] married [inaudible] person, had borne a girl, and life was rough for him. He went from one job to the next and never could settle down. It was hard. It was hard. So, it was a disappointment.

JN: Was he a student?

SS: No.

JN: So, he wasn't a student.

SS: He was not a student. [inaudible] I had one cousin – he was not whatever it is they would have wanted, which is unfortunate. We know now you take kids for what they are and let them go, but there was a constant friction there for a number of years.

JN: Was he the youngest?

SS: He was the youngest, and he looked just like my grandfather, like his father. He was a wonderful person, but he did not have a happy life, particularly. His daughter, my cousin, had twin sons, and I remember my uncle saying, "How could [inaudible]?"

[laughter] Another story. That’s another story. Okay. Now, where were we?

JN: We were on your family. We've gotten to areas of growing up in Philadelphia. School-wise, you were in junior high and found a big difference between that and the –

SS: Yeah, it was very different. I remember also we were given – *Merchant of Venice.* This was the Shakespeare play [inaudible]. My father went in to talk to the principal about the use of *Merchant of Venice*, which he [inaudible] anti-Jewish play for children who could not necessarily understand it, and why this was being done, and did the teacher understand it enough to be able to explain. He felt it was a poor choice. There were other Shakespeare plays.

JN: That’s the play with the antisemitic –?

SS: Yeah, that’s with the Shylock.

JN: That’s right.

SS: [inaudible] remember, but I remember my father being [inaudible].

JN: Did they do anything about it?

SS: Yes. They said that they would not make me do – they would not do it this year, but that would not necessarily mean they wouldn't do it the following year. So, I don't know what impact – they acquiesced to his request, but after that, [inaudible]. This was also at the time, in the ‘40s, [inaudible] before the war, during the time of Hitler. This was something we were very aware of. The German American Bund was very much in evidence in another part of the – fairly close to where we were. He was very concerned about the way things were being done in school [inaudible].

JN: You wrote about, on your questionnaire, the beginning of the war.

SS: Yes. That was a pivotal experience. There's certain times when you can remember where you were and what it was like. This was one of those times. It was a Sunday. That was the date, but it was actually [inaudible], and we had come back from [inaudible]. I remember where she lived. I was taking a walk with my father, which I wrote, down Girard Avenue [inaudible] Street [inaudible] were talking about. He had marched into Poland [inaudible] September, whatever it was. And was talking about what was going on, and I said to him, “Well, what's going to happen? What's going to be?” He said to me, “I don’t know. I don’t know.” This sunshiny day, I thought it was the end of the world, or it was something horrible, because my father always knew everything. He didn't. I mean, he had an answer for everything. Very self-assured. He did have an answer. I mean, he felt he was very much of a rational person. For him to say, “I don't know,” was so out of character that I figured this might be world-shattering, which it was, but that was [inaudible] recall very, very strongly.

JN: Do you remember any other instance during the war of people talking about what was going on to the Jews –

SS: Oh, absolutely.

JN: – [inaudible] having made papers or an underground [inaudible]?

SS: I recall my aunt and uncle had just come back from Europe. [inaudible] travel in the summertime. When they came back, they said, "These are the things that are happening.”

JN: This was in what year?

SS: This was ’39. They got back right before. They did not want to go. Remember, they did not want to go through – this was traveling by train, but there was no other way, they said, that they could get from here to there, whatever it is, without traveling through Germany. My uncle said he sat on that train, and he ate as much butter as he could. This

was to make a shortage of butter for the Germans. [laughter] But they said they were hearing two different kinds of stories [inaudible], but on the other hand, yes, it was true. My father had become very active. I don't know what the organization was that was an attempt to rescue the Jews and [inaudible]. Next door to us, my best friend had – I don't know if this was a distant cousin, Paula [inaudible] came. She was a refugee from Vienna. She was a pianist, a concert pianist. She was married. We were trying to get her husband out. I remember her father going down with her to wherever he was going [inaudible]. I remember him going back and forth and questioning her. Eventually, he came. I remember seeing him, and he looked like one of these pictures that you see of – [inaudible] I don't think he had been in a concentration camp. I don't think so, because it certainly wasn't – this wasn't after the liberation, but skeletal. Now, whether he had been thin before [inaudible], but I thought, it's true. It's true. [inaudible].

JN: My father told stories about getting letters from people from Germany – his name was Seligman, a very German name, and finding Seligman in the phone book, and they were Seligman and writing and saying that we were cousins. My father said he didn't have any brothers or any relatives. But he remembers other people getting those kinds of letters. Do you remember any of that?

SS: No, that I don't recall. That I don't remember at all.

JN: And sending money to – and sponsoring some of these people.

SS: I don't remember any personal [inaudible]. They were people who were getting together. My father, as a lawyer, was working with some group. I have no idea [inaudible]. There was not a personal response [inaudible].

JN: During the war, did your mom and dad have any extra jobs to do for the war effort?

SS: Yes. What my father did – he was in private practice. He went to work for the small arm ammunition, blah, blah, blah – I don't know what it was – at Frankfurt Arsenal as a

[inaudible] – some kind of administrative work, which is the first employment – I mean, he had worked. He had a private law office, and that's what he did. But he had never been sort of nine-to-five kind of thing. That's what he did. My mother taught. My mother had been teaching. She went back to teach when I was eleven, and my sister was eight. So, she was teaching during that time. But they didn't do [inaudible].

JN: Do you remember any shortages? Do you remember –?

SS: We had ration books. The ration books, I remember. And I remember pooling our sugar resources for my grandmother because you could get sugar if you're going to preserve fruits or something of the sort. I remember my mother [inaudible], “But you don't do that. Why are you –?” She said, “I’m getting it for your grandma.” The point was that my grandmother [inaudible]. I also remember the cans. We used to have to wash out the cans, take off the lid, stamp one, and then flatten them out. Earlier recycling. But I don't remember any shortage particularly. I never felt the Depression. My father had – well, that was earlier. But my aunt was teaching. [inaudible] As I look back on it now, I realize the only reason my parents’ house was safe – they had bought a house – is because my grandmother gave them the two or three hundred dollars they needed for the mortgage. [inaudible] must have been [inaudible].

JN: Oh, that was the Depression.

SS: This was the Depression.

JN: You were young to remember anything like that.

SS: I don't have any recollection of being poor at all. That was a very hard time for many. I mean, Len said [inaudible].

JN: You were too young.

SS: [inaudible]

JN: Len is eight years older.

SS: [inaudible] It was never said we can't afford this, although I do remember going to the grocery store and getting two ounces of lox, which was great. I thought you made lox; you crumbled it up into little shreds, and you put it on a bagel for us. I don't have any recollection. [inaudible]

JN: Good.

SS: So, we were up to the war.

JN: Yeah.

SS: I remember hearing about the death. The other thing is my father was a Republican. The city of Philadelphia was a Republican [inaudible]. He was in politics up until the time there was a big switch, and then he switched to Democrats, but he always voted for Roosevelt, and he would never campaign during a presidential election. [inaudible] I don't know, He was in something [inaudible] and always pushed for the Republican, which was very unusual because all Jewish people were Democrats, although during the election, when Wendell Willkie was running against Roosevelt, he was much more pro-Jews. He was much more supportive of Jewish causes than Roosevelt. Still voted for Roosevelt. I remember elections very different from elections [inaudible] time.

JN: Did your father ever talk about the State Department and his frustration of facts that have come out?

SS: My mother did, but not my father. My mother was vitriolic about the State Department, about the [inaudible], and that extended through, and she believed that that State Department [inaudible] brought out from Europe. She was a letter writer, but she

wasn't an in-the-street organizer [inaudible] very much in the establishment. I remember her speaking at Sisterhood functions about how everybody should write letters to the State Department, not only to the State Department, but to your representatives to push the State Department. But privately, she was much more vitriolic. [inaudible] spirit. That's where it came from. You begin to realize afterward where some of this negative –

JN: Spirit. I wouldn't call it negative.

SS: Yeah, okay. Whatever it was.

JN: Did you have a role in a youth group or in school?

SS: Did I have a role?

JN: Was [inaudible] ever?

SS: Not that I can recall, [inaudible], but I don't remember. So, if I did, it wasn't one which – whatever we used to do, but nothing of any [inaudible] that I recall. No.

JN: So, you were in junior high and then went to the regular high school.

SS: I went to Germantown High School. That was a great traumatic thing for me, because I wanted to go to Girls' High. In Philadelphia, there were two academic high schools – Girls' High, which was all girls. It was academic, totally academic, because there was the academic course, the commercial business [inaudible], and there was boys, which was Central High School. I wanted to go to Girls' High, of course. My mother said, "No, you can't, because you're going to go to Germantown High, which was in our district," because my father knew the state senator [inaudible]. She said the reason was – if I were not able to get a scholarship for my brain, they could get me a political scholarship through this state senator, but not if I went to Girls' High. I had to go to the local. I'm not quite sure of the whole thing, but I guess he gave out – this guy was a

political thing.

JN: It was probably out of his jurisdiction.

SS: Yes, whatever it was. But this was the high school of his district, and therefore, this is where he would give the scholarship. And I cried. In fact, I signed up for Girls' High. My mother needed to go back into the counselor's office, the guidance counselor's office, myself. She would not go and tell them that I had made a mistake, and we changed, and I was going to go to Germantown High School [inaudible]. Germantown High School was what they called a comprehensive high school. [inaudible] I was fortunate because the assistant principal, Principal Virginia Raacke, used to take an interest in certain women – girls. Those that she took an interest in – she was a Bryn Mawr graduate. The trustees at Bryn Mawr gave out a trustee scholarship every year. One year, it went to a Girls' High School graduate, and one year it went to Germantown High School because of her. She was the one who pushed for it. I don't know [inaudible], but there was obviously – I mean, there were lots of high schools in Philadelphia. Why those trustees went to those two, I have no idea. Anyhow, I went to Germantown [inaudible]. It was forgettable, except for one teacher, Mrs. Goodman, who taught English. She was a communist of the '30s. Her husband [inaudible]. She taught us Julius Caesar and the political state, which I'll never forget – newspapers. It was the one shining thing in that school. Then Mrs. Raacke – how I got to Mrs. Raacke [inaudible], who apparently decided that I was [inaudible] and that I would be whatever [inaudible]. But I needed to have Latin. I hadn't. I had Spanish, and I had whatever the science is, and I was in – because if she said, no, you need to take another year of Latin, and we'll get you tutored for the first year, and then you can go into the second. I remember going to a young woman who had polio and was tutoring, and I took the first year of Latin with her, then the second year. Then, I guess the senior year, there was a mayor's scholarship given by the mayor. He had given an exam scholarship, and everybody took it. I can remember thinking, " What is this all about?" My high school education – when I look at what my kids did at Lexington High – I mean, I got

by. It was very [inaudible]. Anyhow, I took that. Then what was the other one? Several other possibilities. [inaudible] Then I got the Bryn Mawr trustee scholarship and [inaudible] live at home. We can not afford – you have to be a commuter, which was fine.

JN: So, you took the train to Bryn Mawr?

SS: I used to take the train. I took the subway into Center City and the train out to Bryn Mawr.

JN: [inaudible].

SS: We were non-residents. I didn't know any different. These were my good friends. It was a totally different world than I was used to for a number of reasons – socially, academically. I mean, I had [inaudible]. I was second in my class in high school. But this was not a very rigorous [inaudible].

[Recording paused.]

JN: This is tape two, side A of the Sylvia Schatz interview, June 30, 1999. Testing. Sylvia and I were just discussing –

SS: Our children. [inaudible]

JN: – our children. Do you see this in your children?

SS: Well, what I was saying is that my daughter is Orthodox and doesn't have that problem. She works because she has to. Her husband is [inaudible] – can't work. She has one little boy. What is important to her is her home, her community, and her friends. She seems to have closed out pretty much anything else, not an issue for her.

JN: Where does she live?

SS: She lives in Los Angeles [inaudible]. So that's how she [inaudible]. Well, I don’t know if [inaudible]. Whatever it is, this is how she has decided to live her life, and it seems to be, on the whole, satisfying to her, although she would love more children. It was in vitro, and it was a miraculous baby. He’s six or seven at this point. So, she doesn't have that problem. Gordy, I guess, has a problem – now, we’re talking about [inaudible], and I think that [inaudible] my kids – boys don't have the same kinds of problems, I don't think, although they are much more involved with their children than Len was. I don't know [inaudible] it's a different generation, so the ideas are different.

JN: Or expectations are different.

SS: Expectations are different. Gordy’s wife has always worked. There's much more [inaudible], but I think expectations are different with different generations. Mark is not married, although he has a companion [inaudible]. That’s not an issue there. David, again – (Angie?) goes to school, but she doesn’t work outside. So, I don’t know. So, she doesn’t. I know that Lily feels the pull [inaudible]. She's an economist and has always worked and uses her name, although that's also a shift.

JN: This is Gordon's wife.

SS: This is my son.

JN: Where do they live?

SS: In Washington. I remember her saying, “I don't mind being called Lily Schatz. I just don't want to be called Mrs. Gordon Schatz.” [inaudible] However, we used to say – she said socially we're Lillian Gordon Schatz, or Mr. and Mrs. Schatz [inaudible] bat mitzvah invitation, which we just got, I noticed at the bottom, “Lilly [inaudible] Schatz.” It’s the first time I had seen – in fact, someone said to me, “How come [inaudible]?” Well, professionally, she has always been Lily [inaudible], but in social situations, she’s always been Lily Schatz. So, now she has made – I mean, I think that bat mitzvah invitation

marks the change in what she's going to be doing. Not Angela. Of course, Angela said, “Who would want to be called [inaudible] anyhow?” [laughter] The kids have not – I don't see that. I see that in other people. When you have said, “What do you do –?” I'll go back to your question. How do you get the stimulation when you’re retired? One of the biggest things has been that book group. This I have enjoyed thoroughly. It’s a thing that makes [inaudible]. It’s an intellectual stimulation. The other thing that I have found was when I retired – Elizabeth [inaudible]. I said to her, “I'd like to do something, and I'd like to do it in the educational field.” I mean, I'm not interested in fundraising [inaudible] religious committee, but I would like to do it. At the time, she said, “Fine, we need a liaison between our synagogue and Isaiah for the institute.” And then Harvey [inaudible] was in Israel. I'm trying to remember exactly when he came back. The two of you can be co-chairs of adult ed.

JN: The other person was?

SS: Harvey [inaudible]. So, Harvey and I got together, and we did that for a year or so. Then Lori Greenfield became interested, and she started – she is a dynamo. I realized working with her, and with that generation of younger women, not quite a generation down – well, it could be. [inaudible] One tends to see oneself as younger than one really is. I guess she is my daughter's generation.

JN: Which is fine. It keeps you young.

SS: Well, the thing is that – there was a point where I had misjudged, misspoken, forgotten my age, my year. Getting to be seventy, hitting seventy was a tremendous [inaudible]. Anyhow, I got to work with these other women, these younger women. It was wonderful. Now I can see them when you talk about having to balance [inaudible] more ease than others, or less angst than others. But that's been very interesting. Being able to take the courses and think again, to think intellectually – I enjoy that. So, that's been fantastic. The other thing I've noticed, which my sister did for me, is if you want to keep

up friendships, you have to work at it. That is, I used to stay in touch with the people that I was at the school, and I did for the first year or two. Then, after a while, I found out their interest – we had gone in different ways. The group I still stay with, not the teachers I've taught with, but the people in what had been the Curriculum Resource Center – these were the specialists. Once or twice a year, we get together [inaudible] pleasant, but sort of a reminder of things past, because again, our paths have moved a little bit. But the real stimulation has come in the courses, talking to the other people, and then making an effort to stay in touch. For example, there are two or three people that we make appointments to meet for coffee. So, we get to sit down and talk [inaudible], which is something that my sister and I do all the time. In fact, my daughter said, “What do you talk about?” We drove once before to Harrisburg and back, talking the entire time. Have no idea [inaudible]. When I say she [inaudible] me once, she called and said [inaudible] found out that I had never made the overtures. She always called me, and she said, “Oh, my sister and I are so close.” I hadn't talked to her for weeks. We still talk. I found out that she was very angry with that. She was the one who always was [inaudible]. What was important for me was not [inaudible] to find that, but to realize that someone could be very angry. We could be very angry. She could be very angry. But I kept feeling it'll never be the same, and it was. It was okay. I could make up. This has nothing to do with the intellectual part, but with my own personal growth. I was brought up – you don't get angry [inaudible]. My sister and I never fought.

JN: Was this a girl issue?

SS: It was a girl issue. This is the way people were supposed to be. My mother [inaudible].

JN: You didn’t have brothers.

SS: I had no brother, so [inaudible].

JN: I'm wondering if in other families you saw little boys or cousins. You know what I mean? I wonder if it's –

SS: No, it's not that this is what girls should do. This is what children should do. This is what people should do. The girls next door fought. Their mother [inaudible]. They were two girls. These were my best friends and my sister's best friend. We were a pair. We never raised our voices at one another. I don't know how she did it, but my sister and I [inaudible] fight. Why we still are so fond of one another, I don't know. We said we should hate each other, but there's never any – we don't fight, and we don't make waves. That was what was appropriate [inaudible] angry. You didn't get angry. So, I never learned to confront the anger and find that can come out the other way to be whole. [inaudible] So, this was a point which enabled me to change in some of my relationships with other people, is that it's still hard for me. But I can [inaudible], and I can express that [inaudible] accommodating. I think that if my mother had some – I'm guessing [inaudible]. Go ahead.

JN: Some of my questions are, if you had been a man, life would have been different.

SS: I think yes.

JN: That was why I asked that question about raising children.

SS: Yes. If I had been a man, I would have gone on to graduate school immediately, and I would have gone into a profession. That would have – yeah. Part of that is generational. Yes. Of course, the feeling that I have is – there's no reason why I couldn't [inaudible].

JN: And stereotypes. Do you feel that you were stereotyped as a woman? I think what we talked about [inaudible] seems to have struck you, and I interpreted that as a stereotype of – could they say that about [inaudible]? And we didn't discuss that. And also, the stereotype of a Jewish woman. So those are two things [inaudible].

SS: I remember. All right. [inaudible] got something else. Maybe I didn't want to be stereotyped as a Jewish woman, because I remember Arthur Hertzberg was a rabbi at [inaudible] very young [inaudible]. When he left, he was apparently [inaudible] Englewood, New Jersey, where he was rabbi – blah, blah, blah. But one of the things he said – when I say to Louise [inaudible] I'd like to [inaudible] Shabbat, continue your Jewish practices, even if you don't do the things that [inaudible], but do something different. And he said to me, “Sylvia, I can see you growing up to be president of Hadassah.” I’m going, “I don’t want to do that.” He was saying to me just what you’re saying.

JN: He had a stereotype.

SS: A stereotype. And boy, that was not what I [inaudible].

JN: That was not your vision.

SS: That was not my vision.

JN: Your vision was?

SS: My vision was I was going to be – I didn't know what, but something else. I was going to do something professional. What would that professional be? I don't know. I don't know whether it would have been – it would certainly be professional because another thing I remember is father's sisters. He had two unmarried sisters, and one of them said to me at one time, “Oh, are you going to be your father's secretary?” I thought, “I’m not going to be anybody's secretary?” How could she think I wanted to be a secretary? Whatever it was – I mean, my mother was a teacher, but I was going to be more. In fact, I remember my father saying to me after I graduated from Harvard and was going to teach, “You’re going to teach in elementary school.” I said, “Well, what did you think [inaudible]?” He said, “Well, I hope you teach college or that sort of thing.” His full vision, and this may have been part of mine, but this was not really where I conditioned myself

[inaudible] more academic. Is that what it would be?

JN: Yes.

SS: Yes. It wasn't business. It would be professional or more academic. Yes. Now, why didn't [inaudible] kids because her husband was an academic? I don’t know. I guess I didn't have enough of a push. I wasn't driven. I enjoyed doing what I was doing [inaudible] this little thing out here, which was [inaudible], but I never did anything.

JN: Well, you did. You’re being hard on yourself. [laughter]

SS: Well, okay. The funny thing is, I went back to a fortieth college reunion. I never went back because I didn't have that close association [inaudible]. Of course, [inaudible] get ourselves together. But as the women came – and we'd all grown and matured a little bit differently. After the first day, somebody said, “We will feel as if we're failures. Those of us who married feel that we are failures because we didn't have a great academic career. Those of us who had a great academic career didn't [inaudible]. So, we’re all a big bunch of failures,” and everybody relaxed a little and realized that that’s how we all felt. The line was that M. Carey Thomas was the first president that only our failures married. But later on, they said, no, they revised [inaudible] our failures only married.

JN: Wow. That’s very interesting.

SS: That was an interesting – but I think that's revisionist history.

JN: We talked about basically – when I look at what we've gone through – a life cycle. We started with your grandparents. What role do you think your parents and your grandparents play in your vision of what you want to be or what you are as a grandparent today? I know we couldn't interview because you were off to LA, and I was off to San Francisco waiting to see – I expected a grandchild. [laughter] This is a role we’re both playing. How do you see that fitting in? Or how do you think society changes have made

you want to look at things differently as a grandparent?

SS: I think it's different. I feel that my grandmother and my mother – I would take them as role models. I don't think I would do – as grandparents. Start with my grandmother, who thought I was wonderful and could do anything. It was wonderful. I would talk to her. She would tell me about [inaudible] reserved. She didn't indulge me particularly, but I do remember shopping with her. Two different things [inaudible] the butcher shop, and she [inaudible] ordered whatever it was. It wasn't the butcher, but someone who was sitting, one of the men, [inaudible], “Tell your grandmother [inaudible] grandmother is a lady because the butcher asks her for a certain amount of money for whatever it is.” I forget the words he used. “She gives me back [inaudible].” Butcher asks for $1.25, I give him a dollar [inaudible] whatever. He wasn't part of the butcher shop becuase he was sitting on the side. The other thing is we went to – so, my grandmother was [inaudible]. She certainly wasn’t, when I looked at her, a vision [inaudible] earlier pictures. We went to the bakery shop. She would order whatever it was, and then be ready to pay for it, and then – ah, remember that I like these keyholes, which were round [inaudible]. Each time we went, she would say yes, that’s all that I want, ready to pay him, and then she’d [inaudible]. She was very thoughtful and very aware. My mother with my children – my grandpa would cut out a cartoon and put it on the refrigerator, *Dennis the Menace*. [inaudible] If I wanted an elephant, I'd ask my grandmother. I mean, this was whatever the kids wanted. She would make sure that [inaudible] she would get it. We were never indulged. We were not deprived of things, but she listened to those kids. They were extremely fond of her. I guess that’s what [inaudible]. I guess being indulgent. That's what grandmothers can be. Also, as a safety [inaudible] fourteen-year-old with a mother who’s [inaudible]. They sometimes come [inaudible] stay overnight. They don’t have issues [inaudible] kids are great. Now the question was again, do I see my parents, my mother, and my grandmother –? Did they help me? I would say I'm the same kind of grandma. There aren't things that I would say that they did that I would say, “Oh, I will never do that.”

JN: Did you bake with them? Or do you bake with your –?

SS: [inaudible].

JN: Traditional?

SS: That kind of thing. Cookies, we've done. Traditional things. My mother didn't particularly – my mother read [inaudible]. My mother read to them a lot. She did less – because we didn't live close by. She read to them. She got the books, and that's what I did with my kids, more so than – they will garden with me.

JN: You do have a beautiful garden.

SS: [inaudible] enjoy that. But I started when the kids – my Arlington grandchildren lived in Israel. They were there and had been [inaudible] seven years. [inaudible] was born there. What I did with her is I would get the books I would ordinarily [inaudible], read them to her on tape, make a tape, send the book and the tape. That's what I did [inaudible]. Now, my mother didn't [inaudible]. But she used to read to my kids [inaudible] or send them books. That was the big thing. Or she had a drawer, which I don't do – these were little things, things that she would collect because they came as souvenirs or something [inaudible]. She'd take [inaudible] – not necessarily. I find a difference in some grandparents. I don't necessarily – the kids come, I take them to the museum, but by and large, we don't go to different places. I've heard other grandparents who are taking kids here and here, and that's a different model. [inaudible]

JN: We talked about – at the very beginning, after you met Len, wanting to go to Israel, and he said he'd been in the mud for four years. He was going to do that. But you have – now, did your daughter live in Israel? Your daughter lived in Israel. And a son lived in Israel. Any others?

SS: They all visit. [inaudible]

JN: So, your involvement with Israel came through and somehow was mightily –

SS: Well, Len belonged to Labor Zionists, so he was an ardent [Zionist]. Paid no attention [inaudible] living [inaudible] cousins. Finally went right before or after – I forget which [inaudible]. So, his family also [inaudible] head of the English department at Tel Aviv University, so that it was – it was a Zionist organization. And our kids did. In fact, Gordy's taking his family to Israel before her bat mitzvah because afterward, it's getting to school. But he's going. His friends are there. It's interesting. The boys went to Haverford, which [inaudible] school. When Gordy went – the first one – they started with [inaudible]. There's no problem at Haverford in starting a Jewish group [inaudible]. And now [inaudible] Bryn Mawr, Haverford [inaudible] – it's not only kosher food but [inaudible] services. [inaudible] very strongly identified Jewish [inaudible]. Ellen was there for quite some time. Mark just went for a visit. But both boys took their junior years in Israel.

JN: You've been back [inaudible].

SS: We went. Our first visit was right after the '67 war. That's when Ellen was thinking about going to the university [inaudible]. We went to Temple [inaudible] trip there. And then we went back again. She was there, and then we used to go every year [inaudible] living there. I haven't been back since. The country's changed. If it ever was the way you thought it was, [inaudible] envisioned it would be. We were active in PNAI, which is Parents of North American Israelis, which is [inaudible] support group. When David came back, [inaudible] we didn't need it. I feel strongly affiliated, connected with it, concerned with it, and upset with it. But I had long – I remember deciding at one point, one of the times that I was there, and I was driving from the [inaudible] suburb, almost of Jerusalem. I was driving in [inaudible] whatever it was. It's not a physical thing that I would miss if I were here, if I would come to live here. It's the social [inaudible] which I'm not – it's just not there. [inaudible] there used to. There used to be a romantic view, which I find [inaudible].

JN: I think we have covered a lot – childhood, early marriage, children, Temple life, philosophy, feminism, love of family, love of Israel [laughter], and frustration. Anything we haven't covered – great adventures or activities you do fun other than what we talked about – your gardening?

SS: Gardening. But we graded benches BSO [Boston Symphony Orchestra] that sort of thing [inaudible]. That’s what we enjoy. We have mid-years group. If you live to be 140 – whatever – which is a social group, sort of interesting.

JN: What kind of group is that?

SS: This is [inaudible] – Paul Rosen, who used to be a member of our congregation [inaudible] fourteen, fifteen years ago. He retired and found it a very difficult situation. What he wanted to do was to get other people who were either planning to retire or going to retire together to do things, to enjoy life. He started what he called his mid-years group, and this was Isaiah – and it was supposed to be Jewish, or unaffiliated, but was Jewish – getting together once a month to do something. The host or hostess decided what that was going to be. It could be the fair. It could be the museum. We would have a picnic. We’d take a walk and eat. Eating has to come with it, before or after, whatever it was. And it's been enjoyable.

JN: How many people in it?

SS: Well, we've come up close to thirty, which is – and the question is [inaudible], and some people have died. We've lost some members that way. He had hoped that it would form – the people would form intimate friendships.

JN: Like havurah.

SS: Very close. And that hadn't happened for a number of reasons. It takes a long time to form an intimate friendship, and it can’t be once a month. And they're disparate people.

Some people you like better, and some you don’t. I mean, who would you turn to? What he was hoping was you form the kind of friendship that you could turn to in an emergency, I don't think that [inaudible] friendships [inaudible] but that kind of intimacy – the only one that I could think of [inaudible] I would say that my sister [inaudible] is the one person I could – a few other people that I am able to be very honest and open [inaudible] and it has to be [inaudible]. I feel very strongly. It doesn’t necessarily translate that her husband [inaudible].

JN: [inaudible]

SS: [inaudible] difficulty making this really intimate friendships. But I’ve been fortunate because I feel [inaudible] sister and with probably maybe two other people that I would be really open totally, which is comforting [inaudible].

JN: It is comforting. It is comforting.

SS: It's hard to find. Once you get past a certain [inaudible].

JN: I'm sure that illness or obligations to family or other things interfere [inaudible].

SS: Yes.

JN: Life changes. Looking at you, Sylvia, and your husband is an inspiration.

SS: You begin to feel that [inaudible], very interesting time.

JN: You didn't feel it at all in the forty or the fifty?

SS: Yeah, there’s always forty, fifty, even sixty. But I refused to believe I was sixty-nine [inaudible] sat across [inaudible] same age. We were talking about something [inaudible] sixty-eight. She said, [inaudible]. I realized it when I was on the treadmill, I’d been putting in sixty. I said, “I can’t be sixty-nine. I can’t be sixty-nine.” I was [inaudible].

JN: Is this [inaudible] class?

SS: I was at the Lexington [inaudible].

JN: Can you move to her?

SS: I moved [inaudible]. But that was a time when [inaudible] all of a sudden, you're taking a year off. What I realized is that seventy – how can I be –? [inaudible] going back again [inaudible] I'm not an old lady. [inaudible] If a seventy-year-old said to you, "I'm not an old lady," wouldn't you laugh hysterically? [inaudible]

JN: [inaudible] [laughter]

SS: But in my head, I don't. When you walk [inaudible] past a shop window, one of these plate-glass windows, and I see this [inaudible] old lady walking down the line [inaudible], all of a sudden realize, "It's me." That's because the vision –

JN: Even the physical in the mirror is not what you picture yourself to be. Where you picture yourself – because I know where I picture myself [inaudible] what age?

SS: I picture it closer to fifty.

JN: [inaudible]

SS: Impossible. Because I look back at the people that I knew – I mean, my mother was sixty-five when she died, and I remember her saying – my grandmother died. She was so young when she died. Fifty-three. I remember thinking to myself when as a kid, "What do you mean fifty-three? Fifty-three is old." But the older I get, the younger [inaudible].

JN: Generations [inaudible]

SS: [inaudible] has changed. So, that's part of it.

JN: That could be another whole tape. Anything else that you think we should –?

SS: No, I think at this point –

JN: I thank you so much. This will be the end of the Sylvia Schatz interview. Thank you very much.