

Lorraine Baron Transcript

Q: I'm wondering if you can tell me a little about them, and also about their commitment to and involvement in Judaism, and how it may have affected you.

Lorraine Baron: How my parents arrived here, I don't know. I know my father grew up in Malden. My mother grew up in the West End before they moved to Dorchester. Both sets of grandparents came from Vilna. That's about all I know of their background. It was something that neither parent wanted to talk about. It was almost like it never happened. But as far as my father and my grandmother – my father and my mother, rather – lived on the same street in Dorchester. My aunt, my father's sister, was my mother's best friend, and that's how they met. My father had a grocery store in Cambridge. So, after they were married, they moved to Cambridge, in North Cambridge, where there were very, very few Jews. This bothered my mother terribly, who grew up in Dorchester. Her whole life was very Jewish, and to my father, it didn't matter. He was not a religious man. My mother was the one who brought all the religion into the family. His religion was how he treated mankind, and from that, I learned an awful lot. My mother brought the Judaism part into the home, and from that, I learned about Judaism. So, I think it was a very good balance. My father, in his grocery store – it was during the depression that I remember that people had no money, and I know he used to keep people on the books. It was done on credit, and this would go on for years. Sometimes, most times, people were very honest and honorable and repaid him. But there were times the people, even when they had the money, didn't pay. But it was still in his nature that he had to give anyone that walked in the store who needed food and couldn't pay for it, he gave it to them. So, from this aspect, I have learned a lot of compassion. And also, he was not a temple-goer. He went on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Now, whether this was due to the fact that he wasn't that interested in it, or because he worked hard. In those days, you worked long,

hard hours, and there really wasn't that much time for him to go. We did not go to the temple often, because we lived in a non-Jewish area, and it was very difficult to get to. My parents made sure that both my sister and I went to Sunday school. I never attended Hebrew school because there was no way for me to get back and forth. I don't know what else you would like to know about.

Q: How did you develop your strong commitment to Judaism?

LB: Before I developed my – being involved in Judaism, I was involved in leadership roles in anything. It didn't matter, really, what it was. I was very active in Russian war relief during the war. I always had a very strong sense of justice, because I remember when I was in high school, they had two Jewish sororities. One was for the so-called upper-class girls, and one was for, this is my interpretation, lower-class girls. Well, I was pledged to the upper-class one. Why? I don't know, but I was, and then I went through all the pledging. Then I turned around, and I said, “What am I doing here?” I said, “This isn't for me.” But I went through the whole thing, and just before I was supposed to be initiated into it, I backed off. I think that was my first instance of working for justice, if you want to call it that. From there on, I just evolved, and I did many, many things. I didn't really get active in Judaism, even though I have always kept a kosher home, because my mother kept a kosher home, and it was important to me to have my children know what a kosher home was, but I was never really involved in things until after I got married. No, that's not true. I was very active in CJP [Combined Jewish Philanthropies]. This was – I've forgotten what it was called – the young people's CJP versus the women's and the men's group. I was very active in that for I don't know how many years. I don't even know how I got involved in it.

Q: But perhaps it was a social connection.

LB: Well, it was more than social. I don't know. I honestly don't know how I got involved, but it was social, but also it was fundraising.

Q: Was this in Cambridge?

LB: This was in Boston.

Q: So, you were living in Boston?

LB: No, no. I was living in Cambridge or Arlington at that point. My parents moved from Cambridge to Arlington. I don't even know how I got involved, but I got very involved in it. I think I'm going from one thing to the other.

Q: This is wonderful, but you were saying you weren't as deeply involved in Judaism until after you got married.

LB: After I got married, and after I had children. Then it seemed to be more important to me than it was when I was younger. But yet for me, there was never any question that I would marry someone Jewish. Whether I did this for my parents, or whether I did this for me, I don't know, but it never occurred – even though we grew up and all my friends were non-Jewish, when it came to dating, I didn't, and I wouldn't. I don't know why, but that was just it. In my day, you just didn't, and I think that's a big step. We knew we had to please our parents, please ourselves, please the community. I don't know.

Q: It's interesting, because did you see a change when your children were dating then, or do you feel that they held themselves to the same standard?

LB: My older two did. My youngest one didn't.

Q: Was that difficult for you?

LB: When he did?

Q: Yes.

LB: Yes, yes, but then I realized he – well, these are things I shouldn't put in here.

Q: Yeah, let's not go into things that are too personal then. What do you think your greatest successes, challenges, happinesses in life would be? How would you want to be remembered in your life?

LB: Very easily, I can answer that. The fact that I, along with my husband, raised three children who are honorable, loving, honest people.

Q: And what about professional successes? I'm sure you can count as one of the major successes, maintaining a loving marriage.

LB: Well, there's no question about that. That, to me, just goes without –

Q: Right. But it's notable in this –

LB: This also goes with the fact that I didn't date non-Jewish people. Even though I was very tempted many times, I didn't. I think when I got married, you automatically knew that this was – unless it was an abusive relationship, and that would have been totally different, but you automatically – things, for the most part, have been wonderful. There have been times – can I just tell you a joke?

Q: Yeah, please.

LB: There was this couple that were married fifty years. I'll talk rapidly. When they were married, because it was an oddity, they were interviewed on every news media that there was. At this point, they were on television, and the talk host said, "And tell me, in all these times, didn't you ever consider divorce?" And the wife said, "Divorce, no. Murder, yes."

Q: [laughter]

LB: And that's my only joke I know, and that's the only thing I can – and this typifies, I think, for the most part, my relationship with my husband, and I think from my era, most people's relationship.

Q: Do you think that there's a difference between how well Jewish relationships are sustained over time in your experience compared with non-Jewish relationships? Or is that not something you can generalize about?

LB: I can't generalize. No, not at all.

Q: Most of your friends have maintained –

LB: Yes.

Q: – solid marriages.

LB: Yes. Have very few friends that were divorced. Very few.

Q: You say you keep a kosher home. What other rituals do you maintain in your home?

LB: Shabbat candles, not observing Shabbat the way we should. I used to, but we don't anymore. The candles. Any holiday is celebrated. Every holiday is celebrated.

Q: Do you make a sukkah?

LB: I don't, but my daughter does.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful. Have you found –? Obviously, you have been upwardly mobile from your parents and their lives. Has that had an effect on you in some way that's notable? How did they feel about their lives and about your lives?

LB: My parents were extremely happily married, totally devoted to one another, which influenced me greatly. One of the things – this is a different thing, but it's something that typifies my father – is one night I was out on a date, and when I came home, I used to go into my parents' bedroom every night, and we would talk about my date. They wanted to know how I liked him, how this, all of that business. I remember saying, "I didn't like him that much, but he was so rich, and he took me to such wonderful places. We went to the

theater. We went to dinner at a very nice place.” My father said to me, “I want you to leave this bedroom. I never want to hear a conversation like that again.” He was very definite that you do not sell yourself for money. We were not rich, but this had absolutely no imprint in his life. I think this is one of the things that has influenced me more than anything else, because I wanted to please him, and here I was not pleasing him. And I thought, “Gee, he was going to Harvard at that point, and where would his future be?” He came from lots of money, and he really liked me a lot, and all of this bit. I know the relationship could have continued. When he said that, and I've always since that time – I haven't quoted this to my children, but I have made it very clear to them that money means nothing to me, and still doesn't.

Q: Did your parents celebrate Judaism with their parents?

LB: My father's parents were not that religious. My mother's father was a torah scholar who never made any money, and his wife supported him. He studied and taught all his life. So, my mother was brought up with this. Now I've forgotten the question.

Q: Did your parents celebrate Judaism with their parents?

LB: No, they couldn't have. My mother's mother died. I'm named after her, so she was not, but there were five sisters total, and one brother. She was extremely close to all her sisters.

Q: So, did you have holidays with a large, extended family?

LB: Holidays together, yes. With them, yes.

Q: That's wonderful. And they all lived here in the area.

LB: They were all in the – well, in those days, everybody stayed. Although actually one of her sisters finally moved out to California.

Q: That's interesting because that probably happened in the '30s, either during the Depression or just after, during the war.

LB: It was after.

Q: Right. During the war.

LB: It was after [inaudible].

Q: There was a lot of opportunity in California, and a lot of Jewish people – I have members of my family who did that, moved to California. It's interesting. What did your grandmother do to support your grandfather?

LB: She had a store.

Q: She had a store. Was it a candy store, or was it a grocery? Do you know?

LB: I don't. I think it was a small grocery store, but I'm not really sure.

Q: Did you ever visit it?

LB: No, because –

Q: Because she passed away.

LB: [inaudible] gone a long time, yeah.

Q: One of the questions they suggest we ask is, how would life have been different for you if you had been born a man?

LB: I don't know, because I was brought up to believe that I could do anything I wanted to do. Of course, this goes back a number of years, so I think that was really quite remarkable at that point. But I was never told there wasn't anything I couldn't do. Never.

Q: Have there been large changes in life that have had an effect on you, like the computer, or just some large changes that have taken place, that have been notable in your life, that have either brought you great ease or joy or difficulties?

LB: Difficulty is a computer. I am not computer literate. I turn that over to my husband. I can send email, though, but beyond that, nothing. So, that has had no impact. I think everything that's gone on, just your television, how it brings the news so much closer to all of us. The household appliances are certainly a wonderful thing. So, you can go on to all the things – the proliferation of cars, anything.

Q: Do you travel much? Is travel something that has become easier?

LB: Oh, yes. Well, growing up, I remember the only thing that I did is – I've forgotten how old I was. My parents took my sister and I to New York on a plane. This was unheard of. That was it. And now, of course, planes are so much – well, they're less costly than they were then, and it's a much easier mode of traveling. Yes, we do a lot more traveling.

Q: Do you ever go on any of the trips organized by Jewish groups? Or have you been to Israel?

LB: We've been to Israel, yes, but I've never gone – it wasn't an organized trip.

Q: Tell me about it. Was it wonderful?

LB: Oh, it was unbelievable.

Q: Was it meaningful?

LB: It was unbelievable.

Q: When did you go?

LB: I don't know, fifteen, twenty years ago. I'm not sure. It was like walking through the Bible. I never anticipated. I'm not one that's very emotional. I never thought I would be emotional about that, but I certainly was.

Q: Anything special that you remember from that?

LB: The warmth of the people. Everybody there – because I had heard how cold and distance that the Israelis were to Americans, and we found it just the opposite. They went out of their way in so many small and big ways to help us out.

Q: What do you remember about the Depression? Do you remember anything about World War I, the Depression, or World War II?

LB: World War II, yes.

Q: Right. Not World War I.

LB: No, I wasn't there then.

Q: Right.

LB: The Depression. We were poor, but everybody else was, so I never realized that I was poor. We had a lot more than most people. My mother used to take in some friends that I used to play with and periodically give them food, to have dinner – well, in those days, it was supper – with us because they didn't have anything. I think this is where I got my compassion, from my mother and my father, who were very concerned about people, and this had to run off and be a very strong influence in my life.

Q: How old were you in World War II?

LB: I was born in '27.

Q: '27. So, you were young.

LB: I was young. Yeah.

Q: Were you in grade school then or high school?

LB: No, I was [in] high school.

Q: High school. Was there an effect on the high school, too? And then the war? Did many of the boys go off to war?

LB: I didn't realize – no, not until I hit college, and then I realized that a lot of the boys – but when you're young, you just accept it. I thought it was not a big joke. I don't mean that at all, but it was just part of the way things were. As far as the Holocaust, my parents were concerned, and because [of] that, I was concerned, but I never realized the extent of what was going on in Germany, in Europe.

Q: When did it ever filter into you? Not till afterward, when you began to read about it?

LB: Afterward, you realized, yes. You knew it was bad, and you knew it wasn't good, but I had no idea it was as bad as it was.

Q: Right. What about the birth of the State of Israel?

LB: That was exciting.

Q: Where were you? What were you doing? What was happening then in your life?

LB: At that point, there was television. I remember we watched it on television, and it was just an unbelievable thing that happened because I don't think until it was declared a state that I realized it would be.

Q: I noticed also, you were married then when –? You weren't married. You were still –?

LB: No, I was a student.

Q: You were a student then. I noticed in your materials that you sent us that you first of all had a professional career.

LB: Yes, librarian.

Q: Was that common at that time?

LB: No, it wasn't uncommon.

Q: And then you became the first Hebrew teacher –

LB: No.

Q: Sunday School teacher.

LB: Sunday School teacher.

Q: In Arlington.

LB: It was the Arlington-Lexington-Bedford Jewish Community Center.

Q: How did that happen?

LB: We were living at Arlington then, and every Jew knew every other Jew because there weren't that many there. And it was David Katseff, who asked me if I would teach at the Sunday school, and I said, yes, I would volunteer to teach. They said they did not want a volunteer. They wanted to pay someone, which they really were right, because this way you had a definite obligation. So, I was paid five dollars for the two classes that I taught. It went from, I think, ten to twelve. I'm not sure of that. Then, after a while, they brought in someone, a male, to teach Hebrew school. But I had a one-room classroom. I would have to keep one step ahead of the kids. It was very nice. I don't know how many years I did it. I did it all through college. I started my [inaudible]. Must have been three, four years that I did it. It was fun because it reinforced and made me learn things that I had

forgotten. Some of these kids were awfully bright and awfully sharp, and I really had to sweat some of these things up. But it was good. It was a very good experience for me. And I think it was for some of the children, too. It was really nice.

Q: What do you think of as your next step in your involvement with Judaism? Because actually, when you think about it, the CJP youth group, and then teaching Sunday school.

LB: Sunday School. Then I went on, I think, to the Sisterhood of the temple.

Q: So, you joined temple after you got married?

LB: No, I joined the Sisterhood, and my husband joined the Brotherhood, then we joined the temple. I'll also tell you another little funny story. When I was engaged to my husband, there was an old shul on Sylvia Street in Arlington, halfway up the hill, and we went there for holidays. Bernie [Burnett] came with me when we were engaged. As we were engaged, you could hear – I mean, as we were in the services, you could hear the chickens crowing in the background, which is something we do not have in Temple Emunah these days.

Q: But they do have a garden planted out there –

LB: Yes, they do.

Q: – tomatoes. They just don't crow. So, your involvement with Sisterhood then led to –

LB: Well, we knew we were going to join the temple. At that point, money wasn't that plentiful. We were newly married, and so we took the route for the Sisterhood and the Brotherhood. Well, my oldest started kindergarten at the temple. So, we were at the temple by then, maybe even earlier, I'm not sure.

Q: Ultimately, you became president of Sisterhood?

LB: No, no, I never became Sisterhood President.

Q: Oh, no, president of Hadassah.

LB: Yes.

Q: Okay. And when did that involvement begin?

LB: I'm trying to think. Oh, when my youngest – no, my middle one was an infant, and she is now forty-two.

Q: Into the '50s.

LB: Yeah.

Q: [inaudible]

LB: Yeah, she was born in '58. So, sometime around then.

Q: What got you involved with the Hadassah?

LB: (Bertha Zellen?), who was an old, old timer, who has pushed Hadassah a tremendous amount, and gave her life to Hadassah. She got some of the other women that I was friendly with. The Arlington group was very small for the women there, and these are still my friends from way back then. We all joined Sisterhood. Then from there, we all went on to Hadassah. So, it was a social situation.

Q: Were there differences in the things that Sisterhood worked toward and Hadassah worked toward that made you want to be in one more than the other? You were both.

LB: I was in both.

Q: Both. What was Hadassah –? What projects were they working on at that time? Were they as involved with the medical facilities in Israel?

LB: They were interested more in building things. Well, buildings, hospitals, that was the main thing then. Now, they've gone into other areas, but at that point, it was rebuilding the hospitals.

Q: What did you do to help that happen?

LB: Well, I was on the board. What I did was what we all did. I did no more or no different than the others. We tried to raise money and support whatever areas needed support. And then from there, I'm still active.

Q: You made a choice not to work when your children were born.

LB: Yes.

Q: I'm jumping around now, too. Is this a choice you were happy with?

LB: Oh, of course.

Q: Are your children taking a similar kind of route, or what's happened?

LB: I have one daughter-in-law that stays home. My daughter works half-time, and my other daughter-in-law works part-time. She works two days in the office and half a day home.

Q: You listed on the sheet of things areas that had an influence on you, also feminism and perhaps the Civil Rights Movement.

LB: Yeah, both of those.

Q: How were you –?

LB: A feminist? Well, there was no organization in those days, but I just believe, because I was brought up this way, that a woman could do anything she wanted, and I still believe that, even though I'm an active feminist, that you can do whatever I want. My daughter was brought up this way, that there wasn't a thing – she was a math major when women were never math majors, but we knew she could do anything she wanted.

Q: So, it's a movement. Do you think it had a deeper effect on your daughter than it did on you, the feminist movement? It seems like you have a very nice balance between teaching her the value of home and –

LB: No, I don't know, because it was different between the two of us. It was different in that there was no organized feminist movement in my day. There was none at all. I have always been a very strong individual, and I always went to my own drummer, whatever you – and I still do, I think, because of the way I was and the activities that I was involved in, that it had to rub off on my daughter the same way things rubbed off on me.

Q: Yet that example would also teach her not to be a radical. She wouldn't need to be a radical.

LB: She was never radical.

Q: She would just need to be herself.

LB: Right, right. Never. Neither of my children have ever been radical.

Q: And how did the Civil Rights Movement –?

LB: The thing I can remember the most, how it really started, how I felt so strongly – we went to Florida on our honeymoon, which was in 1954, and we took, at times, public transportation, and we were on a bus that was not crowded. Yet, there was the back row for segregation, for Blacks, and I wanted to go sit in that back row. My husband gave me

a hard time on it. He said, "When you're in another area that you're not familiar with, you don't do this." But it bothered me very much, and I really wanted to go and sit in the back row. Because after a while, there were empty seats in front, and the back was not empty, and people were standing. I still remember it very, very vividly, and it bothered me. That was really the first time that I realized how much segregation hurt, hurt those that looked at it and watched it, and certainly – not that I equate my feelings with the Blacks. In those days, they weren't Blacks. They were Negroes, and that was the first time that I really came up against that because even though I was brought up in a non-Jewish area, I never, never felt any antisemitism, none whatsoever. Whether because my father was so vivid and vital in the community, or whether that was just it, I never experienced it.

[Telephone rings. Recording paused.]

Q: You mentioned that – was it Northeastern that you went to?

LB: Yes.

Q: Was that your formal education? Did you have any other formal education?

LB: Oh, I took graduate courses all over the place, but I never received a graduate degree.

Q: What were your graduate courses in?

LB: Courses in library science. For a while, I taught English as a second language, which I took courses in order to qualify for that.

Q: What kind of students did you have?

LB: Foreign.

Q: But I mean anything predominant?

LB: No, none of them stand out in my mind. So, it couldn't have been that great. I don't even remember what the other courses were. I took a lot of courses, but I never got a degree.

Q: What about hobbies and craft abilities?

LB: Craft abilities are zero. Music is zero. I always read a lot. I wasn't physically active. I'm more active now than I was then.

Q: When did you start swimming?

LB: Oh, after my kid. I didn't know how to swim. After I was too old to sit with my kids in the pool and watch them, and because they didn't want me anymore, I went to Hayden [J.W. Hayden Recreation Centre]. One of the hardest things I ever did in my life was to learn to swim.

Q: That's admirable.

LB: I used to be physically sick the day I had swimming. Really, physically sick.

Q: And now you love it.

LB: I love it now, but it was a tremendous challenge.

Q: That's amazing. What about your greatest adventures?

LB: I don't know.

Q: Your trip to Israel sounded like one.

LB: Yeah. I think that would probably – I think of everything that was, yes.

Q: Actually, I have two last questions. One is, what would you want posterity to know about you, or what lessons would you want them to learn from your life? What would you like to share with your children and grandchildren?

LB: That I was honorable, that I was honest, and that I was concerned with humanity, how much I always loved them and do love them.

Q: And if you were going to say what your greatest joys in life were?

LB: Well, I always thought my greatest joys were my children. When I had my first, I thought nothing could equal it. When I had Beverly, who was my second, I had my daughter that I always wanted. Then I had Bruce, and each time, it got bigger and better. To this day, they were my greatest joys, until my granddaughter, Hayley, came along, and I thought absolutely nothing could ever exceed or excel with Hayley. She still is my firstborn grandchild. But then we had Harry, and I said, "Gee, I would never love him as much as I do Hayley." And what happened is, I do love him as much as I do Hayley. And then, of course, Ben came along, my "Benny-Wenny," as I call him, is absolutely my pride and joy, until we had Elaina. And Elaina is my impy little granddaughter who is absolutely a joy. And after her came Brett. Brett is absolutely a darling and a joy, and we're waiting now for our number six to arrive. I'm sure this one will have as big a place in my heart as the other five. I'm also very fortunate in that with each of my in-laws, or outlaws, as they refer to themselves – when Saul came into the family, I thought he was just great, and I could never get another in-law that I liked as much. And then Anne came along, followed by Kathy, and I have this wonderful feeling. We are very lucky in that we have our children and grandchildren who like one another and want to be [with] one another and are friends with one another, and there is no other greater legacy that I could ever want or have. I just remembered I didn't mention my oldest son, Neil, by name. When he came, we thought the Messiah had arrived. There just wasn't anything. With each of them, they're all special, and they're all truly loved. I am proud for the way they have

grown up, because I do think they're all honest, honorable, and compassionate people, and for that, I am grateful.

Q: Do they share the Jewish holidays altogether?

LB: We share every holiday together. All holidays, yes. We go away on vacation together, and we're a very, very close family, and I'm grateful for it.

Q: Thank you so much. [Recording paused.] Lorraine, you mentioned that there was another thing that you wanted to talk about, and I'm glad we can add this on.

LB: The one thing I did not talk about at all was my Sunday school experience. I went to Temple B'nai Brith in Somerville, which is still in existence, which has changed, I'm sure. But at that point, it was my only formal Jewish education. There was a rabbi there that I would like to pay tribute to. He has long gone. He went from Temple B'nai Brith to one of the big temples in New York, which I don't remember the name of, if I ever did know it, but his name was Rabbi Rutenberg. I don't know his first name because I always called him Rabbi Rutenberg, but he took me and spoke to me like I was an adult, and treated me as I was an adult, and was the only one of my religious schoolteachers that I can remember. I just wanted him to be noted in this. Maybe somebody else may know him, and there would be some kind of comparison between these things. But that's about all I can think of at this point.

Q: How many years did you go to Sunday school?

LB: Oh, many. I don't know.

Q: All through Grammar School.

LB: Oh, yes, yes. I don't think I went when I was in high school, but I did go when I was in elementary school, I know. And also I was a – oh, I forgot about this part – a leader at

Temple B'nai Brith. They had a youth group, and it had a title. I was a leader for the girls there as I got into high school. So, more things are coming out, but I didn't remember it. I can't remember the name of it right now.

Q: What kind of activities did you plan for them?

LB: Social, mostly.

Q: Dances and [inaudible]?

LB: Dances and activities about the holidays. There was a boy's group of the same ilk, and I can't remember the ilk. And we used to get together and do different things. So, it was another dimension that I had forgotten about. There were probably more there, but I don't remember them right now.

Q: Thank you.