



Oral History Library

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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Suki Sandler
Director

February 8, 1991

Mrs. Lillian Gerard
17 East 97 Street
New York, New York 10029

Dear Mrs. Gerard:

As per our phone conversation the other day,
I am sending you herewith a copy of the corrected
version of Philip Gerard's interview with Muriel
Meyers on October 14, 1986.

We look forward to receiving the release
form for Mr. Gerard's "The Home on the Hill."
Thank you for your interest and assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Hilary Bosch
Library Coordinator

Enclosure

Q. This is an interview with Philip Gerard by Muriel Meyers, for the William Wiener Oral History Library. The date is October 14, 1986; the place, the New York City headquarters of the American Jewish Committee.

Mr. Gerard...As you know, we are interested in developing the story of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum as an institution that played an important role in the Jewish immigrant life of the East Side. Our timing seems to be perfect, in your case, because you have just recently written the story of your years at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and you are giving the William Wiener Oral History Library a copy of your Memoirs, which is entitled, "The Home on the Hill: Growing up in an Orphanage." We are most grateful.

How long have you been at work on your memoir?

A. Well, I had not planned to do a memoir. It never occurred to me to do it, because I lived it and I wasn't of a mind to be writing about it. But then, at a point after I had a long career in the motion picture industry and I had retired...For me, pictures were where I was an officer of the company and Director of Advertising and Publicity; I was involved in production. I was a production executive in New York before I retired. It was a mandatory retirement at 65, and I was not quite prepared to step down and retire. So I had to find a new world of interest and what I did was I got involved....in a career. I found myself moving into volunteer work and so I became a volunteer at New York Hospital and a member of their Visitor's Day committee, and a volunteer at R.S.V.P (Retired Seniors Volunteer Program) where I worked with the Director on special projects, including one that had to do with an annual tribute program, bringing together 6,500 volunteers

at the Radio City Music Hall where we produced an entertainment and paid tribute at that moment for the wonderful work the volunteers did throughout the year. They usually did it anonymously and did magnificent work. And I found this very rewarding and it gave me a whole new interest. And I was at that point aware of the fact that I ought to be doing something else that might be of interest, and I thought about the early days and decided that I would write a memoir. But I was going to write a memoir only about the Hebrew orphan asylum, not about Hollywood and the career I had, with very glamorous people and very talented people; sometimes frustrating people.

So I got to write the memoir, and it was interesting...The reason that I really wrote the memoir is that a good friend of mine, a wonderful woman, was putting out a little publication, monthly, called "Dear Molly," ...Molly...She was a lovely, magnificent woman, and for a number of years she was sponsoring this monthly and her daughter really put the details together, and if you wanted to you contributed to this little publication. So I was invited to contribute, and I found myself using the memoir as a point of reference. I wrote a vignette, the first vignette, and they seemed to like it and some of the readers seemed to like it.

Q. What was the first one that you did?

A. I did...I think it was the one about...It was actually in sequence. It was actually in sequence.

Q. You started at the...

A. At the very beginning, before I went to the home. We lived on Seventh Street and Second Avenue, between Second and Third...Between Second

and Avenue A. I'm sorry. That's Avenue A, and Second. Second and Avenue A. Seventh Street. That's where I lived at the time. And just to tell you this...I think I was about seven or eight when...My father had died, my mother had been....They had not been living together at the time because she was ill and he was working and...They were having real problems. There were four siblings; my sister, older; my younger brother and my younger sister.

Q. That was Pauline...

A. Pauline, Bill Gerard, Helen...Bacall. She has a family. As I do. So there were four of us...

I don't remember when the two...This was a blurred period for me. I don't remember ever living with my brother and sister at home, with my mother and father. I think they went into infant homes. My father was a baker...

Q. I think you said they were in a foster home.

A. Yes. I think they were in an infant home before the foster home.

Q. I see. Uh huh.

A. And then they went into the foster home in Staten Island. I remember visiting them in Staten Island. I now was with my mother and my sister on Seventh Street, and we took the ferry over to visit. I have a recollection of the ferry...

Q. You were surprised when you sat down to write these vignettes that you remembered them so...

A. Oh, it all came to mind like a film unreeling itself in my mind. It was vivid, and it was a very pleasurable experience recalling it all.

Because I recalled good friends and the memories that were very meaningful to me as a young man.

I remember at Seventh Street, for a few years, my mother being widowed and on a pension, a widow's pension, and I think the apartment cost us \$10 a month in the beginning. A pleasant little apartment. The bathroom was in the hallway, and we bathed in a tub in the kitchen.

Q. What did you actually have in the way of rooms there?

A. We had three rooms. There were three rooms. And that building is still standing today and is very well cared for. That street is a street of Eastern European immigrants and they maintained that pine...When we lived there it was a very nice street, and a very safe street, and it is today. It's an attractive street.

Q. That's Seventh Street...Probably your apartment is now a condominium.

A. Probably. Probably.

Q. Worth thousands of dollars!

A. Well, it was a well built building. It was a tenement obviously, with a stoop. You always had a stoop. And we played in the streets...

Q. What kind of a stove did you have?

A. It was a stove...What was it burning? It wasn't gas...

Q. Was it coal?

A. It was coal...I'm not too sure. We had gas lights.

Q. Where did it face? Where did the apartment face? Do you remember?

A. I don't remember. It was four stories up. We walked up. I was a happy child in those circumstances. We lived on very little. My mother was

a very frugal but a very good provider, and we ate well. She had only the widow's pension to live on and her brother in Chicago would send her some money, monthly, until he ran out of resources. And at the time he ran out of resources was when my mother made the decision... I think she had a lot of courage to make the decision, because I think she had aspirations for us we were not aware of at the time. Because she did not abandon us. She didn't do that. She took us to the home, through the agency. I don't remember. . there was an agency involved. And I always remember... I tell this story in the memoirs... This is a remarkable coincidence.

I went to school at P.S. whatever-it-was on Fourth Street and walked there as a youngster. I went by a boys' clothing store, which had wonderful things in the window. Just wonderful things in the window. And I used to look at one suit that was so beautiful. It reminded me of the ultimate in clothing. And one day my mother said, "Come, we're going to buy you a suit and my sister a new dress." And I picked out that suit. That's where we went and I bought that very suit. I never thought I'd have a suit like that. And my sister got a beautiful dress. And that's what we went to the home in, in these clothes, which they proceeded to take away from us. We never saw them again.

Q. Oh. Too bad. I don't want to repeat too many of the things which are in the memoir, because that's in the archives for everyone to read. But I wondered... On this book, you started it a number of years ago. How long did it take you to write it?

A. I started the book about three years ago, and it took me about a year to do. I would say a little over a year. I never had in mind to publish it, but I think there's a possibility (which I'll share with you)... I hope

it happens because I'd like to see this book (not for the public; it doesn't interest me), but there are today at least a thousand alumnus (sic). . Hebrew (?) . . alumnus and they still publish the (?) . . . which was the magazine of our time. It still publishes, for the alumnus ...alumni. And a very, very successful alumnus who has considerable resources and has done some very nice things to benefit the group at large is interested in publishing the memoir as part of the anniversary...Next year, 1987, is the 100th anniversary of the building of the Hebrew orphan asylum. The original went back further somewhat, but...

Q. Yes, but the building on 136th Street and Amsterdam Avenue was built, I guess, in 1887. Exactly.

A. I think so. I think that's the...But there is a 100th anniversary coming up.

Q. Who is this benefactor? What is his name?

A. His name is Norman Rales. R-a-l-e-s. Norman Rales. He's a younger man than me, and I talked with him the other day and he remembers me so well as a counselor at the home. I was a counselor for four or five years because I went to City College after I had moved up the ladder at various posts and stayed on until I was 22. I left the home to get married....

Q. To get back to your book for just a minute...This means that he is going to publish the book and it will be distributed...

A. It will be distributed to the alumni. As a symbol and as a memento of the anniversary program. There will be other things there. There are a whole series of things planned for the anniversary. . .

Q. Well, that's interesting, and I guess it's that copy which we

will receive. Right?

A. Yes, it's the same copy.

Q. Mine is still not numbered yet. The copy that I have is not numbered and so on...I know that you still have...

A. It's complete though.

Q. It's complete, but I...

A. I've never had an editor touch it and it needs to be edited.

Q. Well, it's really a marvelous story.....

A. Well, thank you. I'm glad to hear you say that.

Q. ...and a great document about the home. I had said that I would like to do the interview in three parts. Pre-HOA, At the HOA, and post-HOA, and so we have done a little of the pre because you mentioned your apartment on Seventh Street.

In the Book you didn't talk at all about the...whether your mother was an observant Jew. Did you go to synagogue? Do you remember that at all?

A. That's a very important question. I think there was an attempt to go to a...No, I never went to synagogue. But go to Hebrew school. Which I didn't take to. I don't think that lasted very long. There was an attempt.

Q. But actually your mother didn't belong to a synagogue...

A. It wasn't that...I'll tell you the problem. The problem, I think, because I believe they were observant Jews; they came out of the traditional Jewish life. My father came from "Glumza," which is Russia, and my mother from Bucharest. And their families gave me a picture of the nature of their tradition. They were not zealots and they were not orthodox, but they were Jewish. They had that in their being. And I think the problem, as far as I

can see, with my family...My family was difficult...In difficult circumstances, I think. The circumstances came about in the very beginning of the marriage, and the problems that came to two people who arrived at a particular time in this country and tried to make a life and had problems. So that the problems were there...My mother took ill very early. With the first child she had a post-partum depression, and she had that again, I think. . . and I think that was part of what complicated things because she was not too well. And I think they had stress in the family just in terms of economics. The children came too fast, not the wisest planning. So I think that diverted them from planning a family life that they basically wanted. . .

Q. Almost didn't have the time or wherewithal to go to a synagogue, really...

A. Well, that's basically true. I think that was part of the problem. But there were references, I know, which always reminded me...And on the wall of my family's apartment was Theodore Herzog's picture...And I remember that was there. So something like that would be a reminder.

Q. Did you celebrate Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and all those...?

A. No, I haven't those memories. I had all of it at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, where it became a ritual; what we did every morning. We went to synagogue. I have to tell you, that doesn't make you a good Jew. No, I don't think so. No, because if you go because you want to go, because you know what you're going for, it may give you some ethical values. I say this only because it's an observation about institutional life. We went to synagogue five, six days a week. Yes? And you say it builds character and...

That's not necessarily so. A lot of other things are needed and...But it was a good thing that we did go. I think that was important; it gave us an identity. And we also had Hebrew school.

Q. So that really, the strength of being...the Jewish rituals...You really learned at the home.

A. At the home. Yes.

Q. Anything else? Before we talk about the home. Is there anything else that you remember about the neighborhood...Was it mixed or all Jewish?

A. I always think of it as being mostly Jewish. But, there were ethnic groups. Very solid pockets of the Polish, Ukraines, in that area. And they're still there. They were always there and they mixed very well with the Jewish community. It was a nice community.

Q. Did you have a feeling of anti-Semitism there?

A. When I left there I was about eleven years old. I was there from about eight to eleven, on Seventh Street, so it's very hard to say. I do know that I played in the street with the kids who were on the street and we did all the street play, whether it was stick ball or "knickies" or whatever. Everyone seemed to be friendly. The streets were like our Central Park and we enjoyed our play and I didn't feel deprived. I really didn't.

Q. When you say the streets were like Central Park, were there a lot of trees and things then?

A. No. I mean you could play.

Q. Oh. They were safe.

A. They were safe; it was a place to play. In the streets.

Q. Right. Right.

A. We had a park. Stuyvesant Park. Or Tompkins Park. On Eighth Street. And occasionally there would be a band playing music on a summer evening, which was pleasant. But mostly my life was around Seventh Street. We went to Coney Island on a few occasions for the big outing, and, of course, we went to movies. I went to movies principally because I was taking a child to school who was younger than I and getting maybe 10¢ a week or whatever it was, which paid for the Saturday movie. And I found that to be a great assignment; very profitable...And I had a girl friend on Eighth Street who, when I left to go to the home, I didn't see. But then some years later...I was now at City College and she was now at Hunter College and we met and went to the stadium concerts together. She was lovely...

Q. Was she Jewish?

A. Yes. Yes she was Jewish.

Q. What was her name?

A. Marjorie Lenowitz. She was lovely. And my wife and I were visiting where she was located in her office one day--or maybe we were just engaged--and I said, "I want you to meet an old friend of mine." My wife was Lillian and we...There is a long story about how we met. And I took Lillian up to this lovely friend of mine and they enjoyed meeting, and then she turned around...She was working for a manufacturer of beautiful imported bags. She gave Lillian this beautiful bag, Needlepoint. Absolutely exquisite. I have it to this day. Fifty, sixty years later.

Q. So you managed to have a girl friend, even when you were age ten.

A. That's right.

Q. It seems to me that you've always had very good relationships with

the opposite sex.

A. That's true. I've been very fortunate.

Q. Because I know that when you...Your memoirs tells a number of stories about the girls at the home, which...who, of course, have to be very important to you as a young boy.

A. I can tell you something about the home, apropos of what we see today in terms of child abuse..and read. We read a great deal about it.

When they closed the home, when they closed institutions like the home throughout the city and throughout the state, which was, I think, a decision made through the careful weighing and investigating of the social service workers...Social workers...And that is that it would be better for youngsters to be close to families--even if it was foster family--than in the atmosphere of a brick wall and a thousand children. I am beginning to wonder about this. I'm not so sure that that's necessarily correct. I may be considered a reactionary about this. Because, if what I read is correct, then the foster home is not necessarily working that well. Typically, you can't get the quality of foster parents that you need to give children a life that is healthy and happy. Whereas at the home, there were problems...There were people who were bruised...But by and large, as a general statement, there was no abuse.

Q. There was no what we call child abuse.

A. There was no abuse. There may have been an occasional thing that happened that we were shocked about, but I didn't see abuse. I saw children being slapped hard, yes. But that's not child abuse. That's

discipline that's extreme, but it's not child abuse. There may have been abuse, but I know that the overall picture of the institution was that they were healthy children, healthy play, healthy outlets, stimulated to do things that children of those years were taught to be directed to and they had supervision. And that was what was going on. Now, out of that came a group of men and women who've gone on to fulfill their lives. I don't know what studies have been made, but most of these people have fulfilled lives. They've gone on to have families, careers, accomplishments. Not individuals, but generally speaking, knowing that there are exceptions that have had terrible times. Yes, I know that.

Q. Yes. Uh huh.

Well, getting to your experiences at the home. You spent eleven years there, from 1924 to 1935, and you graduated from CCNY. But...I wonder how many of the home boys went to college.

A. Well, that's a question that couldn't be answered specifically. I don't know the percentages.

Q. Well, would you take a guess, anyway?

A. Oh, I would say it would be high if it was 10%.

Q. So that you were really one of the....upper...One of the upper crust of the boys.

A. But remember though, in those years...We're talking about 1935... or 1930...I don't know what the percentages were outside the school, the average boy outside the home...if he was going to college.

Q. That's probably true.

A. But you're right. It was a small percentage.

Q. It was a small percentage.

A. They did finish high school, though. They had to finish high school. They did that.

Q. They all did. There were no dropouts, would you say, from high school?

A. No dropouts. If they didn't go to high school they went to vocational school.

Q. They had to have some kind of a diploma.

A. Yeah, and they stayed there as long as they could. Until 18. If they got their diploma at 17, they left at 17, and they went to whatever family they had. But that was the purpose; to have that diploma and to have a completion of education. I think they thought the high school was the completion of education, with the exception of...

Q. Did you have a scholarship in order to go to college?

A. No, I got to be a counselor. And I went to college, I was accepted at college...Not that I had a great record but I was accepted and I became...I had been a captain...We had a hierarchy in the institution where the boys were supervised by monitors and the monitor had a small group and the captain had a small group, and the captain had almost a full dormitory. Above the captain was paid staff, the junior counselors and the senior counselors. So I became a junior counselor. I had been a captain as a young man.

Q. You went up the hierarchy.

A. Up the hierarchy, yes. The junior counselor gave me, I think, \$25 a month. I didn't need any more than that. There were no fees...at City College...

Q. And you were living at the home...

A. I was living at the home; I had board and I had a room...I had

a very nice room. Of my own.

Then I became a senior counselor after a year...

Q. I wanted to ask you this. Your memoir doesn't have too much about your life as a counselor, and I wondered...When you were working your way up, as a monitor and captain and a counselor, how did you keep your boys in line? How did you exercise authority?

A. Well, I'll tell you...This is interesting. The first day I arrived at the home...When you came to the home you went to the reception...You didn't go to the main house. We called it the main house, which was in the present house. It was red brick. The other building was off to the side and sort of isolated, and you had to go through various checks and medical tests. We were there for about three weeks. And it was a very lonely experience. You were bothered by being apart from...There were about 10-15-20 people there. Then, when you finally got okayed, everything was fine and you went over to the big home and you had kind of arrived.

The first day that I arrived at this home, that evening...You know, they had certain procedures which you followed. The word that the counselor would say--and they'd say it loud and clear--"All still." Everybody stopped. Froze. If you didn't, you had trouble. So if anybody ever said "All still," in a big courtyard or gym, everybody stopped. It was quite a reminder of discipline.

It wasn't that they said "All still..." Whatever they did, I came into my dormitory and I was supposed to be responding to something I didn't understand. I didn't understand. I got a smack across my face. I couldn't believe it. Because I didn't know what it was for. At least if

you get hit you want to know why. And I suppose I was supposed to do something...So...

Q. Who hit you? A monitor?

A. A monitor. A monitor. A boy. A boy. Or a captain. And this man I think was a rough one. He was one of the rough ones. Some of them stood out as being rough. They kind of liked that authority and they...

So...I knew what it was to get hit. I didn't get hit again. I was very quick to learn how to play the game. So when I became a counselor, or when I became a monitor...

Q. A monitor. Yes.

A. I did it with persuasion and intelligent exchange. And I never really made an issue of authority, or what I wanted my authority to be, because I felt they were responsive to me because I cared about them. So my role was one that reflected sensitivity to others--and these were younger people--and I got great response. I think I was....They cooperated with me, because I really extended myself to them.

The other day I had...This happened to me on two occasions. It was really very touching to me. When somebody tells you, looking back, what you meant to them and you don't even know this--you don't think about it; you just do what you have to do--I've been told that I set a wonderful example to contemporaries of...these younger men. Norman Rales.....Well, he's the one who told me this.

Q. Norman...The man you mentioned before.

A. He told me...I said, "I don't remember you. How old are you?" He said, "Sixty-three." I said, "I'm ten years older." "Murray Strong" (?)

was my mentor. When he got in the home I, in a sense, was his. Not everything, but he was a symbol to me. So, when he said to me what, in effect, I would say about Murray, I was very moved to hear that. That I had had such an effect on this young man.

Q. So you did it...Your discipline came out of...

A. It came out of a different kind of relationship.

Q.talking and persuasion.

A. I had an empathy with the youngsters. I liked the youngsters. Not that I didn't slap them from time to time, one or two, because they were testing you or whatever, but by and large I didn't have to...Or at least I didn't do it. I know...A man came over to me at a dinner party at a reunion of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, celebrating some anniversary. Maybe it was Murray "Strong's" (?) and Art Buchwald was there and a couple hundred people...I'm not close to the alumnis but I do get the letters and I do know what's going on occasionally. I attend an event...

So a man came over to me...You don't recognize people when you're not in touch with them. He said, "Do you remember me?" And I said, "I'm not sure. Why don't you tell me who you are?" And he said, "Well, I'll never forget you. You never put a hand on me, when others did." Well, that's a hell of a thing to hear...So that's the kind of...That reminded me of something, because I don't know that I never put a hand on him. I don't remember that at all. I wouldn't even think about it. But to him it was important.

Q. But you had about what...20 or 30 youngsters that you were...

A. Well, when I was a captain I had about 80 youngsters that I was a captain of, and then there'd be about 8 monitors under me. And then above

me was the paid staff. The boys themselves had their own little world of authority. And sometimes they were more cruel than the adults over them.

Q. And then I guess you had the problem of keeping the monitors in line.

A. That's true. It was quite a responsibility...

Q. If they stepped...If they became too harsh, was that something that you had to do something about?

A. Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Q. Uh huh. The one thing that I picked up in your memoir was the fact that you weren't Bar Mitzvahed because you didn't learn Hebrew.

A. I was always sad about that. I don't know what happened. It may be...It may have been...I was stricken with appendicitis after I arrived at the home, and it may have been about that time that I went to Mt. Sinai and had my appendix taken out. By the way, Mt. Sinai and the Hebrew Orphan Asylum had a great relationship because when Mt. Sinai was first founded, the Hebrew Orphan Asylum was established already and had funds...Considerable funds came to them through benefactors...And Mt. Sinai needed some funding for something and they gave it...The Hebrew Orphan Asylum gave it to Mt. Sinai, these funds, for which Mt. Sinai in turn gave them the right to have any member of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum hospitalized at Mt. Sinai at no cost. If you had an illness you went to Mt. Sinai and they took care of you. I was taken care of by...

This is a very interesting story. My appendix was removed...on my chart...and I saw him there a number of times...by Dr. A.A. Byrd. Dr. A.A. Byrd was the leading physician in the world. Obviously he didn't do it, it must have been some resident. But he was there. I remember his

Van Dyke. But we got very good attention.

Then...From Mt. Sinai hospital I was sent to the Betty Loeb Home. The convalescent home (this was all through the Hebrew Orphan Asylum) where I spent a month of convalescence. The reason I didn't stay longer was they apparently liked me and kept me there--I was being strengthened, whatever. So one day, down in the boys' bathroom I got into a little scrap with a boy, whatever it was about, and the wonderful woman who ran the place, she said, "Listen, if you're strong enough to have scraps, you're strong enough to go home."

Q. You...Possibly that was the period when you missed out on your Hebrew and...I was interested, because obviously you had to measure up to the standards of Hebrew comprehension in order to get Bar Mitzvahed. It wasn't an automatic thing and you weren't tutored for it or anything like that. Because some people were and some people weren't.

A. I think so. I think there were others who were overlooked for whatever reason. We were all confirmed; we graduated our Sunday School. We did a very impressive confirmation service, at which I read from the Torah or the Bible...And there's a picture. But I never was Bar Mitzvahed. Therefore, when my son was approaching his 13th birthday, I was insistent that he be Bar Mitzvahed. He was...He was Bar Mitzvahed at the Free Synagogue. He's a member of the Park Avenue Synagogue today. I think he felt a little bit intimidated because I was so insistent that he be Bar Mitzvahed. He did it for himself, but for me.

Q. You graduated from CCNY in 1935. According to your memoir, you married very shortly thereafter. Is that right?

A. That's true. I married in '36.

Q. You don't say anything in your memoir about how you met your wife. It would be...I think it would be nice, now, if we could fill in on your life after...the home...

A. We had some very distinguished benefactors who gave funds and time to the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. The Warner brothers, of the film company. Harry (?) . . Albert (?) . . . Jack. Gave the home a series of wonderful gifts. First...When they first got in touch with the home because...Whoever brought the attention of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum to this group... They arranged for...When Hanukah came, every child in the institution could have any gift they wanted. If you wanted a radio, if you wanted skates, if you wanted a fountain pen, if you wanted a wrist watch...Any gift that a child would want, you listed it, you got it. We received it at a Hanukah party. For years, year after year. Then one day they decided they wanted to do something special for the home, and they built a gym--the Warner Gym--the most magnificent gymnasium. We had a gym of our own, but it was limited, because it had poles in the middle. This gym was the equivalent, of a college gym.

Q. Where was it?

A. On the grounds. It was on the grounds. See, we had a great big playing field. And it was so magnificent. It had everything...A stage, a theatre, film screen projection...The finest place, and sound had just come out and they gave us the finest sound. The finest that anybody had. And they arranged to see, from their exchange, films came in. The new films. "Don Juan," with Dolores Costello and John Barrymore, before it was even released, because they gave us...Instructions to their people in

New York and automatically those films came up. So the kids, on a Friday night, after dinner, there would be films. We could see this wonderful new film, and it was just a great thing...

So that was that. Then there was another man who did for a period of years--I don't remember his name--he would take the kids, the older kids, out to the amusement park, (?) . . . Park and Steeplechase for a day's outing. He'd have the buses and off you went, knowing that you were going to have all the rides in the world that you wanted, and then you were going to have dinner at the (?) . . . Club. Up at 72nd Street. It was a glorious day. I don't know if we went swimming. I think some of them did. And this went on for a number of years.

The first time...No, it wasn't the first time because that went on for a number of years. It wasn't the first time. Anyway, one time I went out on the bus. I was a counselor and I was sitting alongside a window, and there was a limousine alongside our bus with two very attractive women in the back of the car. And I noticed them and I kind of remembered them as I rode along, as being very attractive. When we got to (?) . . . Park, or Steeplechase, there were these two women. And again I thought how wonderful it would be to know them but "I can't do that. I don't have an introduction; I just can't do that." So...They were striking. One of them was the daughter of the benefactor who was giving us this day...

Q. The "Luna" Park Day, yes.

A. And the other one was Lillian, a friend of hers.

Q. That's your wife.

A. Yeah. My wife.

Q. You are at this time in your early '20s.

A. Yes...in '35, I must have been about 19...

Q. You were born in...I should have asked you in the beginning...

A. 1913.

Q. 1913. So in '35 you were just about 22, right?

A. Twenty-two. That's right.

Q. This is while you were at school.

A. I was at school. And I... I didn't see them again. I just saw them through the day, and we had this lovely day and we went on back to New York at the end of the day for dinner and I had seen them but I hadn't talked to them. Then I went to school, and when I got to school, I was waiting for an elevator and by God if it wasn't the lady I'd been admiring in the limousine standing alongside with me. It was Lillian.

Q. Yes. This was at CCNY.

A. Yes. What is now Baruch College. We went up town as well. I went uptown as well. And I said, "I know you. We met before." And she looked at me and I said, "Yes. We spent the day at 'Luna' Park." And we started to talk and that was my introduction to Lillian. We talked a great deal, and began going out. We saw a great deal of each other, and we continued to see each other right through the year and the next year both of us were out of school, planning to get married and we did. It was a very courageous move because neither one of us had any place...

No, I actually, now, was working for the WPA as...not a teacher, I wasn't teaching, but it was in a school. I was handling kids in a school, doing special projects, whatever, and if you worked for the WPA you had at least a position, because there wasn't much to be had those days...

Q. That was the real Depression.

A. Yes. Difficult times. And...

Q. What was Lillian doing?

A. Well Lillian...She...It was quite remarkable how she got started...She was very determined, still is, about her own interests and she is very thorough. She was interested in the theatre from the point of view of publicity. The legitimate theatre. And she did her thesis on it--marketing in the theatre. And she met some people, because she worked one summer at the Music Hall, and eventually she met a man who was just opening a theatre called the Rialto Theatre, which is just being redone, on Broadway. And he needed somebody to be his secretary and press agent, two jobs in one. Lillian qualified for it and he took her on and she worked awfully hard but she learned so much. He was a remarkable man...Arthur Mayer became a very distinguished...

Q. Arthur Mayer?

A. Arthur L. Mayer. Yeah. You can find him in the archives now. He was an extraordinary man. So she was doing that and learning a great deal, and I was with the WPA, and Lillian said to me (we had a little apartment on 68th street opposite the Free Synagogue, it was a lovely little apartment...).

Q. Between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. 23 W. 68th..

A.very nice street, right now.

A. What did we pay? We paid very little. But Lillian said to me, "I don't think you should be on WPA. It just isn't right. You ought to go out and get into a career. It's not right. There are so many other people

on WPA. Waiting for an opportunity." But they were lucky to be on it. So I left it. I went to work and I did a number of odd, strange jobs for New York Central Railroad in the administrative office. And I worked for Belvedere Fabrics, which was a very successful fabric house. I thought I would be doing some promotion for them. It became a bore. I did lots of odds and ends and was working. Then eventually I got to the fringes of the film business. To the fringes of it, working for a man named Joe Briston who, in business, was associated with Arthur Mayer. He handled European films in this country. So I worked for him and I began to get the idea of the film world, and I worked for a huge chain called Consolidated Amusement Enterprises, and then Lillian and I opened our own offices and handled independent press coverage for little theatres. The World Theatre on Fifth Avenue and...We had some interesting accounts.

Q. What was the name of your firm, or..?

A. Gerard Associates.

Q. Gerard Associates. Uh huh. Where was it?

A. 55 West 42nd Street. And we had the best of the little theatres. Lillian was awfully good at it, and I was learning my trade, and when the war came she went to work in one of the war agencies, one of the relief agencies and I went with the Corps of Engineers in the War Department, as a civilian, and I did press work with a colonel who was supposed to be the head of the department. It was an interesting experience.

Q. You did press work, as a civilian?

A. Yes. What we were doing, we were doing morale incentive work for manufacturers who were doing work for government contractors. We gave awards

for special efforts. And there was a certain amount of coverage involved in doing this. You know, the industry was mobilized for the war effort and we tried to keep the morale high. Basically that's..

Q. You were doing what you knew how to do.

A. Yes. But I was doing it in this particular area. The chairman came out of the steel business and he was delighted to have somebody who knew something about it. Together we did some things. When the war was over, I went to work with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and I stayed with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for a few years and then I got an offer to go with Universal Pictures, in the press department, from a wonderful man whom I knew well. And I went and spent the next 30 years.

Q. Who was that man?

A. Maurice Bergman. A wonderful man. Maurice Bergman. He was the head of the department. Gentle and talented, very decent man. Universal Pictures was an exciting place to be because it was not a powerful company like Metro. It was a small company. That's why it had to make special efforts to succeed with what it had. And we made those special efforts and most of those special efforts came out of the press department, although they eventually made some wonderful films, and they did have some very exciting people. I got to know them personally because I became Publicity Director and I became Advertising-Publicity Director, and in that role I was close to the so-called personalities and stars. And many of them were simply magnificent people. Like Jimmy Stewart I knew very well and Carey Grant I knew. Jimmy Cagney. I knew Rock Hudson very well.

I spent a lot of time with them because I would go to California fairly regularly and they would come to the office. I worked with Hitchcock. And one of the most interesting of all was Boris Karloff, who became a very close personal friend and used to visit us. His wife...She's now widowed, for Boris died some years ago. But Boris was probably the most impressive personality I've known because he was the most gentle man and he was so dignified and so truly educated. A bright man, extremely bright man, and the image of his being in the horror films was rather odd because he was the exact opposite of what he did on the screen. But what he did on the screen he did very well, because he was a very professional man. Anything he did, he did well. So he was one of the persons...

Q. You were Advertising/Publicity Director, and then you were...

A. Then I became a New York executive in production, and there I worked for the production department on the coast and we were not attempting something new; starting some pictures that were less expensive and outside of the conventional kind of thing we were making. So a man by the name of Ned Tannen, he and his sister and Danny Selznick (that was David Selznick's son) on the coast, and I represented the unit back in New York. You invited some of the producers and writers to bring their material in to see if it might suit our needs, or you got scripts from publishers and we read stuff to see if this might do. We would go carefully over the material to see if it had what we were looking for and then make suggestions. That was very, very challenging.

I had one film that I had a lot to do with. "Diary of a Mad Housewife," which I brought into the company and Frank Perry was the person

who directed it.

Q. Wasn't it written by (?) . .

A. No...I'll think of it. But it turned out to be a very fine film. It went very well, the audience liked it and it was a big success. You never know what will happen with your project until the audience tells you, and so you can have all sorts of hope and faith in what you're doing, but it has to come together for the audience. When it does, it's a very exciting experience. Because it's creative all the way, and then it's fulfilled with the audience, because it's made for an audience. And I also had something to do with Milos Foreman, a film he made called "Taking Off," which was an interesting film. It really was a film that needed a little more support or something, because it was worthy. It really had a lot of entertainment values. But it didn't work. But it gave him his first film. He went on from there...And there were other things. But I saw the production side...

Q. The production side. At that point you were no longer involved, in advertising and...

A. No, I was a consultant, but others were involved...I had had 25 years of it.

Q. So this was a vacation, really being involved in the film making...

A. In the production, yes...It's very different, and it's very difficult. It is still very difficult. Everything seems to be changing all the time.

Q. Was that your last job before your retirement?

A. Well, that's where I stopped at Universal. I thought when I left

Universal that I would go on to a consultancy; be available to young people who might have projects and direct them to sources where they might get a hearing and perhaps an opportunity. But I found it very difficult. It's very strange, and it's hard to realize this but it's true: When you leave your industry, where you've been all the years; when you have established a reputation and have authority there--once you leave an awful lot goes. You don't take all that with you. It's like the chair remains but you're out here.

Q. You lose that power.

A. The power isn't there. And suddenly you realize...I was sincerely thinking that I would be helpful and see if I couldn't put some things together. I'd have a fee...After about six months of that I decided, no, this isn't a realistic situation so I'm going to leave this and go on to other work. That's when I went to the volunteers...

Q. I'd like to go back to your life with your wife. During the war she was involved in the war effort. And then after the war, what did she do?

A. She had a very remarkable career. She was known to be a specialist in film, particularly the French film. She marketed films, she presented them, she interpreted, she wrote for the papers and wrote for magazines, for many of the leading magazines but mostly for the New York Times, over long years. And the French wanted to open a theatre and they wanted somebody that knew what was involved in this metropolitan area--what you have to do to make it successful--so they got in touch with Lillian. Lillian became the managing director for the Paris theatre. She even got involved

before it opened, planned the thing, picked the pictures and presented the campaigns and was there for, I guess, about 20 years. She did that and she made it into the most successful theatre in New York.

Q. It's marvelous.

A. Yeah. It's a marvelous theatre. She started it and she kept that going and she left when the theatre was merged into another operation so she stopped. And then she moved on to the Museum of Modern Art, where she was special press person for film projects and art. She worked with the director of the press department, so she spent ten years at the Museum of Modern Art.

Q. Was that as a volunteer?

A. No, she was on staff. She was on staff.

Q. So you both have a very strong cinema career...So tell me, when did she have time to have children?

A. Well, that's an interesting question. She had our first child, who is now 42, so it was back in that year, whatever it was. During the war.

Q. 1944 wasn't it..? During the war in 1944. If he's 42 now, she was born in 1944, right?

A. And she didn't...She always feels....She always regrets that she didn't stay home. She stayed home a few months and then went back to the war agency. And we had all sorts of second rate help. She couldn't get anybody. But Rick went on to...Then Jenny came five years later...Two years later.

Q. 1946. Jennifer. She was a lovely child.

They both went to Fieldstone, Ethical Culture Schools both here and in Riverdale. And Richard went to Yale. He was President of his class. Then he went on to law school...

Q. President of his class at Yale or...?

A. At Fieldstone. So he did go to Yale. He had a good education. At first he went to Med school. He was accepted, but he didn't stay. And he went on to NYU law school and he's a lawyer for Manufacturer's Hanover Trust, as one of their special counsels. He's a Vice President in the bankruptcy division. And Jennifer's a graduate of Fieldstone and then she went to Bennington and didn't stay...

Q. Nobody stays at Bennington.

A. She found it very hard and remote and she came back to NYU and she was Phi Beta Kappa at NYU. She is now a mother and does press work for the Westport Symphony. She lives in Westport. We had a home in Westport for about 30 odd years for the summers, and the winters too. We sold it two years ago. It was a beautiful home, on the water, and my wife is very distressed that we sold it. At the time it seemed the thing to do.

Q. So you spent your summers up in Westport. Even though you live in an apartment...

A. Yes. Here. We had a wonderful routine in Westport because it all air and water and lovely grounds and a beautiful setting. The kids never went to camp because it was all in Westport.

Q. What happened as far as your Jewish affiliation was concerned, after you were married? Did you and Lillian join a temple...?

A. Yes. We joined the Stephen Weis Synagogue. But when Richard was Bar Mitzvahed he went...I guess we hadn't joined the Weis Synagogue yet...

He went to the Park Avenue Temple (?) . . and for some reason, and I don't understand this, Lillian got distressed about the fact that (?) . . . said, "Listen. when it comes to preparation for the Bar Mitzvah, everything else is out." So she had clarinet lessons at the Y. She said, "Well why can't he have his clarinet lessons?"

"He can't. That's it." She was offended by this, so she decided, well, we'll go to Stephen Weis. Now, Stephen Weis may be a good synagogue for a lot of good reasons, but Park Avenue is more spiritual.

Q. Well, it's a conservative temple and the other is reformed.

A. Reformed.

Q. Right, right. So there's a different feeling as far as the Bar Mitavahed is concerned...

A. Well, not the Bar Mitzvah. I'm thinking just about the day to day services. I think the two temples differ in a way that is significant. Maybe not for others, but it is for me because I value the spiritual quality of the Park Avenue synagogue. I also have a great respect for Rabbi "Nayich." I think Rabbi "Fein" was a fiery....wonderful person and leader, but he had a tradition of social issues. So you were listening to social issues in the sermon week after week. And social issues are terribly important in life, but they have to have their place in priorities. And also, there is something about the nature of timing and sensitivity. If you go at something too hard, you turn off people. If you have a message to deliver with conviction, then there it is. You don't have to have it next week.

Q. Then you begin to overwork the thing. So that...You did have a... You were an observant family, would you say? Jewish family?

A. Our family? I would say that we were...I'd like to say we were an observant Jewish family but I know what that is, from friends, and we were not an observant family except for the holidays.

Q. How about your children? Do they...

A. I must tell you that my son married a non-Jew and my daughter married a non-Jew. You must see an awful lot of that.

Q. Well, a great deal. A great deal. Unfortunately.

A. I don't understand how it comes to be, because...They both went to Sunday School. As a matter of fact, Jennifer was tutored in Sunday...in Hebrew...Tutored at home by a very...by Nelson Glick's (?) nephew. Nelson Glick's nephew came twice a week....

Q. And what about...Do they have children, your son and daughter?

A. Yes. My son has two lovely grandchildren--two children--and they are both involved in the Park Avenue synagogue.

Q. They are.

A. The family is. They're all involved.

Q. Even though your daughter-in-law isn't...

A. No, my daughter-in-law converted.

Q. Oh, she converted.

A. Oh, she converted. I should have said that.

Q. Well, that's a very different situation.

A. Yes, she converted before the marriage. I should have said that.

Q. Yes. Uh huh.

A. My daughter married a Catholic, a Yugoslav Catholic, who is not a practicing Catholic but is Catholic in the sense that it's very clear that...And the son is apparently being brought up in the tradition of the

tradition of the father.

Q. They have one child?

A. One child, yes. A lovely child. My daughter is a worldly person, I think, and I think she will make him understand who he is.

Q. How old is he?

A. He's seven.

Q. Oh, it's very early in his growing up period. I'm sure he will know...Did you....What was your approach to discipline in your own home, to having been brought up in the rigid discipline of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum?

A. I don't think I was a disciplinarian at all.

Q. Well, you weren't even at the home, were you? Well, you were. You had to be there.

A. Well, I had to see the things were observed, that the rules were met, and I did it my way so...But at home I was never a disciplinarian at all. I did not...I think we were very fortunate. We had two children who were basically very cooperative and they were good kids. Even though they went off on their own directions. I was not keen about the marriages, but that's not my choice; it's their choice.

Q. As long as they stay together, I think that's the more important...

A. Oh, yes, of course. They have their qualities in their families. They're concerned about doing things that are meaningful and they have their interests...

Q. Did the home, your experiences at the home, spill over in any way, as far as your home life was concerned? Your own home life, when you

and Lillian established your home together?

A. Well, I think I must say I put a value on a home that was meaningful, in terms of what a home represents. And my wife happens to have awfully good taste and she had (?) . . so that we always did things together, and I think out of that came some very wonderful results reflecting taste. We had a house full of antiques that we bought on the road; beautiful antiques and we got great pleasure. We didn't spend a lot of money. We filled this home. A very unusual setting, a cathedral ceiling and the step-down, dropped living room. Lovely home. And we made it more-so with what we picked. And in New York we have also antiques. Lovely things, that we enjoy. Certainly we didn't have antiques at the home. It's just a matter of the sense of the ability to do, the desire to do in taste, and the curiosity to find out where...It was like a discovery, finding these things. It's creative, actually. It's a very lovely interest. All of my country things, fortunately, Lillian's country things...When we sold our home in Westport, we were pursued...We didn't put it on the market...Somebody came along and was just terribly persistent. All our things are in my daughter's home. Everything is in place in my daughter's home. Which is quite remarkable.

Q. I guess your daughter lives in Westport.

A. Yes. In Westport. She has a big home. Lovely...So...You asked a question...It's an interesting question. What was carried over from the home. I'll tell you, we had to be neat at the home. You had to be very careful to observe the rules; that things were in place and clothing was in place. We had lockers. Nothing was around; we always had a neat looking

dormitory. I think neatness has...things are in place. I have a need for (my wife is much more casual)...and sometimes I actually find that I'm picking up things and she gets very annoyed and she says, "You can't do that to me." But it's that thing that I think is part of the past. I tend to want to see things orderly.

Q. Of course, you also mentioned that your mother was a very, very tidy housekeeper.

A. She was, yes. She was. Extraordinary...

Q. She must have had that neatness too.

A. I think so. Because my sister has it.

Q. But if you didn't have it, you'd get it at the home.

A. Yeah. You didn't pick that up you'd get a boot. Absolutely.

And then there was...One of the things at the home that I have to point out, that was quite remarkable...We had (and people aren't aware of this) a great advantage at the home. The arts were available to us--music, theatre, film was in--and we were going to the theatre every week, those of us who were supposed to be excelling. If we were excelling, we got the tickets. We used to get tickets for 25¢...They got the tickets for you. You'd get the tickets on Friday....I saw all the wonderful plays.

Q. How were the people who excelled chosen and what were they doing that made them "excell."

A. Well...Somebody was keeping a record of...

Q. Was it the school? Was it the school records?

A. I have to think about that but...The counselors would be recommending...Those who really were cooperating and helping in the group,

making it work, stood out and they were rewarded. And then we had the concerts at the stadium in the summertime, all summer long we would have groups going every day. Every day. So those things were there and you would not have gotten that...I would not have gotten to go to the theatre if I were living on Seventh Street with my mother. So that was an opening of a door; the opening of an interest that stayed with me years later. And they had a great library there. It was a wonderful library, and they encouraged...They did encourage people who were interested to pursue things, to do so. I remember...This was pure accident, but it's in the memoir I guess....I was asked to go to a party...I guess I was alone from the home. There were some other boys from other institutions...It was down at the Hotel Ansonia, I was taken there, and I got to the party and it was a party for Yehudi Menuhin. It was his 13th birthday. His sister was there and his parents were there, and we were there for good cheer and whatever goodies...I think we got gifts. But that kind of thing was an extraordinary experience.

By the way, I saw--about three or four months ago--as part of RSEP, we had RSEP people go to a broadcast Bill Buckley was giving for some people on seniors and volunteers, and one section of the program had Yehudi Menuhin. And I said, "Oh, isn't this marvelous." I had seen him in concert many times but I had never seen him up close. So when it was all over and he walked off the stage, I walked up to him and I said, "You don't me but I know you and I know you well, because I was at your bar mitzvah party." He said, "You were?" I said, "Yes, I was invited to join you at the Hotel Ansonia." He said, "Oh, the Hotel Ansonia." And then he said something about

Papa and about the life of this whole setting--his world--because they did have an apartment there. I found that a nice moment.

Q. Did you tell him you were one boy selected from the Hebrew Orphan Asylum.

A. Well, no. I felt so badly...You ask that...I felt so badly. It went so fast. I walked away and I said, "Oh, I didn't tell him that."

Q. Having talked about your experiences at the home..Have you talked to many people?

A. No, actually not. I went through life, my career, my professional life, never talking about my experiences when I was young. And I saw no reason for it and there was no need for me to do so. But when I decided to write my memoirs, then I've talked about it ever since. I've been talking to people about when I was...These were delightful...

Q. I know you had lunch at the Oak Room with Art Buchwald once. And then...Did you ever talk to him about your growing up in the Asylum.

A. I did on one occasion...Not that one, because I found it difficult to do so. I was taken there by Peter Stone who was his friend and my friend--Peter Stone is a writer--He wrote "1776," he wrote some wonderful film scripts. And it was a very pleasant lunch and he is a very bright man and has lots of good humor, but I didn't want to throw that out; I thought it was rather personal. Then I went to Maurice Bromley's birthday and he was guest of honor...Not guest of honor; he was there to honor Murray...And he was wonderful about it. I must tell you something...This time...It was about two years ago, and you felt that he was so proud and so committed to this group and this tradition. And he didn't do it with lip service. He was

saying things that were interesting. But then I remember I heard him 25 years ago, at a... It may have been at a federation luncheon or a JCCA luncheon at the Plaza, at which he spoke about his early days at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. You know, he was not in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum; he was in a foster home. He said that what he would do every summer was go to camp with the kids from the home, where the kids came, and he said there he got beat up regularly, and he said that's where he decided to become a ^{humorist} genius. But he was part of the home in terms of a foster child but he was also back there with... And he knew Murray Strong from the early days, who was Director of the camp as well.

Q. Well, there are some wonderful alumni of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and I'm looking forward to talking to more of them.

A. Well, you will enjoy... You should talk to Murray...

Q. I haven't talked to him. Someone else did. I am going to be speaking to Maurice. ^{Bernstein}

A. Well, you tell him that an admirer of his and a colleague of his and a friend of his, was in the seat before him and I wish him the best.

Q. Yes, I certainly will. Do you have any special memories of Maurice at all?

A. Well, I can see his face in front of me...

Q. Did you ever have any...

A. The thing about Maurice was that Maurice was an intellectual. ^{typical for the staff people} You knew that and that he was not particularly staffing people... Not typical. He became Assistant Superintendent... I think he was Superintendent for a while too.

Q. Yes, briefly. In 1940. For one year, uh huh.

A. And I always felt that he was a little...too special in a sense, because he had an image of...I said intellectual; that's one way of putting it..In my mind. I don't know if it's true for others.

Q. He was communicating on a different level? Is that it?

A. Well, there was nothing about him that was physical. He was not that kind of person. He was a...As you called him, a rabbi; he fit the image of a rabbi. Or a professor; he would be the image of a professor. And so, from my point of view, I always felt there was something special about him. He was unusual...

Q. You left the home in 1935 when he was...

A. I think it was 1936.

Q. And at that point, I guess, he was the Assistant Director.

A. I remember his presence. He was low key too. He didn't make a lot of noise.

Q. Yes. He wouldn't be going around cuffing boys.

A. No, he wouldn't be going around cuffing boys. You're absolutely right. He was a lovely man, and I, frankly, knew him for all those years and never knew him well.

Q. Well, you're slightly different in age.

A. Yes. I think he must be...

Q. You're ten years younger than he is so...

A. He's well?

Q. He's well, and I'm looking forward to seeing him this afternoon.

A. This afternoon?

Q. Yes. I've got a busy day.

A. Do you have everything you need?

Q. I think we have a feeling about your life.

A. Well, let me say one thing I've been thinking about because... I have to say this about the Hebrew Orphan Asylum. I will speak only for myself, from my own experience...I think it was an extraordinary world and that it existed, and I can talk about what I know is something that should be part of this archive in a very important way. Because it was a symbol...First of all, it was created by a community, the Jewish community created it, and it set standards. It set remarkable standards, and out of which I'm sure much remains in other places, in other worlds. But mostly, in that difficult time, as long as it was taking kids--and it took a lot of kids. When I was there there were only 800 kids, when I first came. Then they had 1,000 and it may have been more. Then it came down to 800. They kept reducing and making it more comfortable. And they were changing all the time. From the time I arrived, when I first arrived at the home, there was a day out to go to your family once a month. So if you were in the clear (that is, if you did not do anything wrong) you had a problem so you couldn't go, but by the time I left, they were going out every week to the family and they could stay overnight. So there was a constant attempt to liberalize and understand the needs of the kids. It wasn't just semantic, and I've never given "Lilo J. Simmons" any credit *for the remarkable progress we achieved in the orphanage* for doing whatever happened in the things of progress, but he must have been the spirit force that made these changes possible. They had a great board. They had a great board of distinguished Jewish community leaders. *Shassberg, Mendel* You'll find out who they are. There was Warburg and Loeb...A wonderful