

Jewish Counterculture Oral History Project

EVERETT and MARY GENDLER

Interviewed by Jayne K. Guberman

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**A Project of the Jewish Studies Program
at the University of Pennsylvania**

Jayne Guberman (JG): My name is Jayne Guberman. Today is Thursday October 20, 2016, and I'm here with Rabbi Everett Gendler, and we're going to record an interview for the Jewish Counterculture Oral History Project. Everett, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Everett Gendler (EG): You do.

JG: As you know, we're going to explore your experiences during the late sixties and early seventies, and especially your involvement in Havurat Shalom and the impact that the *havurah* has had on you personally and on the larger Jewish community. I'd like to start by talking about your personal, family background just a little bit, so we have a sense of who you were at the time that you got involved in the *havurah*. So let's begin with your family, when you were growing up. You were born in 1928.

EG: I was.

JG: In Iowa. Can you tell me about your family when you were growing up?

EG: Sure. It's not just I was born in Iowa — I mean, (00:01:00) I was born in Chariton, Iowa, which was in my eyes was a quite sizeable Iowa town, 5000 — but as the world measures, it was a bit of a hamlet. And — but that's where we lived, and my family — and I'm thinking that this is a focus on Jewish background and such — my parents were very devoted Jews. My mother maintained a kosher home, which meant when we had meat it had been shipped in from Des Moines. And how much of it we could eat depended on how effective the dry ice packaging was. We ate a lot of dairy in those years.

JG: What had brought your family to Chariton?

EG: Well, my paternal grandparents (00:02:00) had come over from the Ukraine area back in the 1890s. And there was a bit of a mini-depression in the U.S. And they were told that there was a place for small peddlers out in the Swedish farming communities in the Midwest. So off they went, and they lived, I think, first in Southern Minnesota. All my relatives lived in small towns — Blue Earth, Mankato, Minnesota. And Chariton, Centerville, Iowa. Anyway, my grandparents discovered that in the soft coal mining (00:03:00) area of South Central Iowa, there were opportunities to sell merchandise to the Welsh coal miners. So my paternal grandparents lived in Albion, a town of maybe 4500, the next county over. And I think my parents ended up in Chariton because it was a place where they could open a general — a grocery store. My mother had been born actually in Oskaloosa, Iowa, which was a much larger city of maybe 10,000. Oskaloosa actually had

a synagogue. Chariton had either two or three Jewish families, depending on whether a local jeweler named Oppenheimer was or was not Jewish. It was never determined. (00:04:00) But so — my parents were very identified, and as I say, kept a kosher home, and for the High Holidays we would go to Albion. And Jews from all the small towns would gather, and in a rented American Legion hall up on top of a shoe store, that's where they would have Holy Day services. I don't know if you want more, but —

JG: I just want to have a bit more sense of what it was like for you growing up as a Jewish boy in this environment.

EG: That was till I was eleven.

JG: I just want to stay in Chariton for a few more minutes.

EG: In Chariton, I basically — I was both part of the kids and I knew I was a little bit different. (00:05:00) And that had a lot to do with my parents' mixed feelings, ambivalence, towards my full participation in the life of the local community. I'll give you an example. A Boy Scout troop was being formed, and it was going to meet in a church basement. Interestingly, my parents were wary of this. So I didn't join. I did not join the Boy Scouts. At the same time, I can remember when we were in Des Moines, several times my mother would take us to Midnight Mass for the Christmas carols and the service. So it was — so how was it? For the most part, (00:06:00) I experienced very little anti-Semitism, whatever that is. There was one kid who didn't like me, and he would like to taunt me. He would say "Jewish Gene." My full name is Everett Eugene, and in Chariton my nickname was Gene. I changed it to Everett when we moved to Des Moines, but apart from that, life was just kind of normal. I didn't celebrate Christmas or Easter, and nobody else celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or Hanukkah, but —

JG: Was it lonely in that sense for you?

EG: I suppose, religiously (00:07:00) it was. And I sometimes think that most of my — most of my life experiences have been both blessed and compromised by marginality. And I almost feel as though that was part of my birthright, my gift inheritance. There was a touch of loneliness, a sense of being different. And even as I reflect on my Jewish experiences subsequently, I think that is a particular characteristic.

JG: This was also farm country, right?

EG: Oh yes!

JG: Can you describe it? What did it look like?

EG: Well, first of all, my mother hated farms. But we think she (00:08:00) grew up on the edge of Oskaloosa, on what looked like a pretty meager bit of farm. My father, who'd come over to this country when he was seven from the Ukraine — my father loved farms. And even though we lived in Chariton, we had a farm a few miles south of town, 160-acre farm. That was a standard size in those years. And both my sister and I had ponies, Sweetheart and Ginger. And sometimes we would even — they would be trucked into town and I could ride my pony around Chariton. That was wonderful. That was brought to an end when one day I fell off and banged my head on the cement, and mother said, "No more of that. Ride in the country." (00:09:00) So the memory that has really been formative for me — we lived in a quite modest house. As I look back I realize I grew up poor. I didn't know that at the time. It just seemed a bit meager. But about two blocks away was a railroad bridge, and of course it was a big thrill when either the Burlington or Rock Island line — the Burlington Zephyr or the Rock Island Rocket would come zooming through. No express train stopped in Chariton, believe me. But when I went underneath that railroad bridge, that's where the cornfields began. And I used to love to look, and I would go down — I realize, literally, (00:10:00) they probably stretched uninterrupted to St. Joseph, Missouri, north of Kansas. Wow. And the Iowa countryside was gently rolling, and to my eyes still very beautiful and rich. And as I said, my father loved farms. He didn't do farming, but he loved the earth, and that has stayed with me, though there were periods when it was in occultation, as they say [*laughs*] — at University of Chicago and all that. But —

JG: These were the Depression years.

EG: They were.

JG: How did that affect your family?

EG: Well, we'd maintained a pretty decent standard of living when my parents had the grocery store, but (00:11:00) what happened was that a lot of the business was from coal miners. And incidentally, from Lucas, Iowa, just nine miles away. John L. Lewis was born in Lucas, Iowa. Anyway, a lot of the trade was with coal miners and farmers, and so they'd ask for credit. How can you not give credit to someone who's buying milk for his kids? Long and short of it, eventually after — during the Depression, they lost this store. And so then my father and his brother peddled eggs for a while, and then they had a used car lot, and we had small (00:12:00) dairy, milk pasteurizing plant in our backyard, so he sold milk. And he eventually went in with a couple of shady characters, limestone crushing. And then he remained in that the rest of his life. Ultimately did well, but those

were — when he had a used car lot, sometimes Sunday afternoon the big treat would be that we would go for a ride, with my sister and I in the back seat. I guess, with my sister and me in the back seat. [*laughs*] And the car that was selected was one that had a bit of residual gasoline in the tank. (00:13:00) And sometimes we'd say, Oh, can we stop for an ice cream cone? And, literally, depending on whether, between my parents, they could find a spare ten cents to buy two five cent cones, we would either enjoy our ice cream cones or maybe next week. I think that's probably one memory of many.

JG: You mentioned, when we were getting ready, you were remembering listening to the radio.

EG: Yeah! Part of the excitement in Chariton was to listen to broadcasts of the Chicago Cubs or the Pittsburgh (00:14:00) Pirates, or the St. Louis Browns, you should pardon the expression, and the Cardinals. But also, once in a while, maybe somewhat regularly on a Sunday afternoon, we would tune in to a large transmitter out of Chicago, WGN, Colonel McCormick's World's Greatest Newspaper, radio arm. And Sunday afternoons there would be broadcasts of Father Coughlin from Detroit whose anti-Semitic rhetoric was barefaced, right out there — and makes any excesses today look quite moderate and restrained. So I mean, I would be listening and he would be talking about Jewish plots (00:15:00) and I was totally puzzled. I didn't know of any. I didn't know what he was talking about, but there it was.

JG: So life changed when you were eleven. Your family moved to Des Moines.

EG: Moved to Des Moines.

JG: And why was that?

EG: I think — I think my mother particularly had the feeling that, as my sister and I were growing towards adolescence, it would be important to have other Jewish kids around. And we went — actually we went first just as an experiment for Yom Kippur services at the big Conservative synagogue in Des Moines. And as I think back, I realize (00:16:00) that may have been the first synagogue building I had ever been in. I mean, I'd been to these Orthodox services at High Holidays, and we had a lot of Jewish observance in our home —

JG: Where were the services, then, the High Holidays services?

EG: Oh, those were in that rented American Legion hall in Albion — because my grandparents were quite pious. Though I have to say, you know, the piety did not prevent

them from having their stores open on Saturdays. You didn't have much choice. Sunday's stores were closed, and if you wanted to do commerce — so anyway, we went to the synagogue and it was a big Conservative synagogue, (00:16:00) and it had an organ and a choir loft, a mixed choir. And when we moved to Des Moines, we were about three blocks from the synagogue, so it was an easy place to become involved with, both because of proximity, but also because the rabbi was young and lively and politically engaged, and the youth group was about the most interesting place in town. So I would say, yes, things changed very much when we moved to Des Moines. And all of a sudden, there was Hebrew school —

JG: Had you had any Jewish education up until that point?

EG: Only what I'd learned at home and when my mother's father would come for periodic visits. And he would then teach me to read (00:18:00) Hebrew. With the wrong pronunciation, so that when I came to Des Moines, it was an object of scorn and amusement in the Hebrew school class.

JG: What do you mean, wrong pronunciation?

EG: I mean, we would — in standard Ashkenazi, you would say, "*boruch atuh.*" Or in Sefardic, "*baruch atah.*" For whatever reason, and it is a particular accent, I grew up, to the extent that I learned any of it: "*boorich atah.*" So you know, the "ah" became "oo" and the "oo" became "eh." And there is such a — I don't know if it's Galician or something, but so that basically was my Jewish education until we moved to Des Moines. That's one reason that I ended up (00:19:00) with a six-year remedial sentence at Jewish Theological Seminary. [*laughs*]

JG: How did you take to the Jewish education once you got to Des Moines?

EG: I liked it a lot. It was interesting, and I loved religious school. I even, for a short period of time, after I was bar mitzvahed, I even went to the daily minyan and liked it a lot. It didn't stick. I've never been a *davener*, and that certainly affected my whole relationship to Havurat Shalom later. But the youth group used to have discussions about politics and Zionism and the World War, and all of that. (00:20:00) It was livelier than anything else I knew in Des Moines. With one addition — when I was later along in high school, through some radio exchange with a high school in London, I met some of the people at the local American Friends Service Committee. And I just quickly felt a kinship of spirit and values. So that along with the joy of Jewish education and our tradition and the observances now with community, I also felt a deep ethical kinship (00:21:00) with the Friends, the Quakers.

JG: What appealed to you about their vision of the world?

EG: I had always been really moved by Isaiah, Amos, and I suppose what you could call the peaceable passages of Hebrew scripture. It spoke to my spirit. And of course, the Quaker testimony was a peace testimony. So then I could feel a kind of confirmation of inner feelings that were less affirmed in the Jewish (00:22:00) community. And, you know — and there have been some pacifist figures in the Jewish tradition, but not well-known. I've been trying to work on now having some of Rabbi Aharon Shmu'el Tamares become more prominent and have more of his writings translated. I've got a bunch of stuff. I'm working on it now — fitfully, irregularly, discontinuously, but — anyway the Quakers were companions with that and remained so for decades.

JG: Yeah. So moving forward, in a brief autobiographical essay from 2002, you called your undergraduate years at the (00:23:00) University of Chicago “amazing; eyes, ears, and spirit-opening years.”

EG: Wow! Really? I mean, I would agree! *[laughs]* Well, I mean, University of Chicago in those days was simply terrifying and totally engaging. I came from Des Moines and Theodore Roosevelt High School —

JG: What were the years that you were at the University of Chicago?

EG: I was there from '46 to '51. It was just after the Second World War. So along with a number of students from the East Coast who obviously had much greater (00:24:00) acquaintance with classic Western traditions than did I, along with them were a lot of guys on the G.I. Bill. And they came not only with that additional knowledge but with a fund of experience that, please God may it not be repeated. So it was a startling and electrifying, challenging place. You know, to have ideas taken so seriously, and to have them discussed with such passion was a quite unprecedented — we had nice discussions at our youth group in Des Moines, but nothing like that. The other special feature was (00:25:00) that the Hillel Foundation on campus at that time was maybe the single most significant gathering place, generally speaking, outside of sororities and athletics stuff. And there was an extraordinary elf of a man, Maurice Pekarsky — maybe you've heard the name. He was the director, a small quizzical fellow. You could never get an answer from him on anything. Always another question. It was inspiring, aggravating at periods of deep spiritual crisis, really sort of profoundly disappointing. But that was Maurice. He invented what became a classic debate, (00:26:00) the annual Latke vs the Hamantash Debate. I mean, people who had nothing to do with Judaism would participate — nominal Jews, I mean. Daniel Boorstin, who later —

JG: In the debate, you mean?

EG: Yeah! They'd participate.

JG: Can you say what the debate is?

EG: It would have to do with, is the *latke* or the *hamantash* superior? And, you know, a mathematician might give it this twist, a sociologist might give it this twist, etc. Sometimes they might remark on the geometric shape, sometimes on the accompanying holiday. But what was extraordinary was the range of people — Daniel Bell, who at one time was a quite prominent intellectual figure, when he was at Chicago, he would participate. And (00:27:00) Daniel Boorstin. Leo Strauss would offer study groups at the Hillel. And Hans Morgenthau maybe less so, but he would turn up. So Hillel was an amazing intellectual hotbed.

JG: How about a spiritual context for your own development?

EG: Yeah, I continued to probe Jewish tradition. Buber was not yet so prominent or easily available as in a few years, but he was coming into prominence. So *Tales of the Hasidim* was of great (00:28:00) influence. So I continued my contact with the Quakers and would annually attend a week's conference at Avon Old Farms in Connecticut, "Quaker Approaches to Contemporary Affairs." I'd attended one when I was in high school that was held at William Penn College, run — interestingly enough — in Oskaloosa, Iowa, my mother's hometown, though I'm sure she didn't know of it when she was growing up. But at that time I think Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee, but also some other Quaker thinkers and devotionalists also (00:29:00) influenced me, so that some appreciation of silence became for me increasingly important. And I can remember, you know, appreciating at Hillel, both the group singing and the spirit, but also at times withdrawing into silence. And sometimes wishing there were a bit more of it at the communal level. But it was turbulent also in that, I mean — at Chicago in those days, end of the Hutchins era, specialization was not permitted at the undergraduate level. You better not know what you (00:30:00) wanted to do. And I was very interested in the rabbinate, but issues of faith and doubt and the existence of God really had pained effect and — so there was that as well.

JG: You mention that your college years were in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. What impact had the war — and the realization of what had been the fate of East European Jewry, and then the founding of the state of Israel — all of that happened during this period. What effect did that have on you and your sense of self? (00:31:00)

EG: Well, I felt a tremendous struggle, really a conflict, both during the latter stages of the Second World War. I was torn. On the one hand, the Nazi monstrosity was totally beyond the bounds of acceptability. But the mass destruction wrought by the defenders of my civilization was also simply unconscionable. And I am — who can say after the fact? I don't know. It was never an issue because I was too young to (00:32:00) have to register for the draft. But I was very much inclined toward conscientious objection, with the sense that maybe that just cannot be in the face of the Nazi machine. And look, for those who live with hindsight, it remains a live issue. I can only imagine that maybe I would have felt moved to register. Maybe I would have felt moved to ask for alternative service. And some of my closest, later pacifist friends had served in the Air Force in World War Two, (00:33:00) and after that were absolute that no more destruction of that kind for any imaginable reason. Israel, I mean, I was really supportive, excited by it. But I thought of it more as a refuge for Jews in need, never as intimation of redemption. And I still do not recite the prayer on behalf of the nation state power, political entity called Israel when it talks about the beginning of the burgeoning of our redemption. (00:34:00) *reishit smichat geulateinu* — What? I mean, no. Even early, while I was at University of Chicago, I worried about what seemed to me a new idolatry called the worship of the land. As I say, a necessary refuge, yes. The necessity of the refuge representing defeat for the highest human aspirations. Or let's say, not defeat — further postponement. So it was turbulent. It was painful. My socialist (00:35:00) tendencies — I developed those in high school. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, you know, the utopian novel — Oh! right up there with the prophets. And Reb Chaim Dovid Thoreau, Henry David Thoreau, whom I later included in the liturgy, you know, HD. Reb Chaim Dovid, our New England predecessor.

JG: So you mentioned that you had entertained the idea of becoming a rabbi. And in 1957 you graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary.

EG: I did.

JG: How did you decide actually to pursue the rabbinate? What pulled you about that?

EG: Well, (00:36:00) the path of pursuit was somewhat circuitous, as I look. I was drawn to it because, what a wonderful way to deal with these pressing questions of commitment, of worldview, of outlook, of the meaning of life, of why we're here, etc. And on the other hand, all of the questions about, but what *is* the reality of God? And where? And how to account for the lack of intervention, I mean. Wonderful thanks, God, for the Exodus, but what have you done for us recently? And all that. (00:37:00) And you know, the whole — Heschel had not yet come along with his theology of pathos, and Bonhoeffer with the real articulation of the limitations of deity by virtue of human creation. And so my desire

to do stuff like this was so problematic, that I actually at one point decided, if I wanted to go with this, better that I do it through the medium of social work. And sort of wander — after college (00:38:00) I'd done some graduate work in philosophy and then I almost went into history of music, but I didn't. Then I spent a year of a two-year program in the graduate school of social work — had a field work placement three days a week in the Back of the Yards area, in the stockyard area. That was certainly a powerful human experience. But I found that ultimately — it was valuable, and so what can I say? It was so prosaic, and so lacking in depth, reflection. Social work. And it was so much mechanical and even when it was humanly oriented, (00:39:00) it would be addressing the most basic of material needs. But the deep questions that I was struggling with were totally unaddressed.

JG: So what was your experience of rabbinical school, and why JTS as opposed to, let's say, HUC?

EG: Why JTS? Because basically I had been — become identified with what I knew of the Conservative movement. Now, the temple in Des Moines was high church Reform. At our synagogue we had the organ, the choir. And I realized the organist was not Jewish, a third or half of the choir was not Jewish. (00:40:00) And we sang — we used hymns from the *Union Hymnal*. This was this brand of Midwestern Conservative which — it frankly was less traditional than standard Reform services today. This was in the mid-Forties. Oh, United Synagogue. So basically, I went to JTS by virtue of momentum. That had been the movement I was involved with. The seminary was both wonderful and very difficult. (00:41:00) It was wonderful in the quality of instruction and the level of intellectual life. And I mean, Sol Lieberman was formidable and incredible. I mean, a master of an entire body of Greek and Latin literature, and Talmud and Tosefta, oh. Louis Ginsburg was still there. Encyclopedic understates the scope of his mind. And the wit and the sharpness of him! Shalom Spiegel — the most eloquent (00:42:00) teacher I've ever had. Abraham Halkin, oh. A paragon of learning and strict honesty. And grammatical precision, *oh!* I mean, when he would read Torah you could tell the difference between a *Sh'va* and a *Sh'va Nach*, between the vocalic and the quiescent. And, oh yeah, I mean there were other scholars. A little harder to take. Boaz Cohen was a lovely man, but Codes — it was so tedious! I'm almost ashamed. I mean, I used to — I found it so soul-numbing that I used to sit in Codes class, and behind the text (00:43:00) I would be reading Quaker devotional literature. So Heschel was there. He was a lifeline. But the seminary was so wonderful, intellectually. And so remote in terms of nourishing the spirit. And I don't want to get into these divisions, bifurcations, and spirituality can be nebulous and vague and bla bla bla. But it does point to something. It does point to the cultivation of the inwardness. And I found (00:44:00) Finkelstein himself embodied some of that. I really felt a spirituality about him. And his breadth of vision! I mean, he

established Institute for Religious and Social Studies. We, students — we were so narrow. I mean, on Tuesday, when the institute would meet at the seminary and there would be hundreds of clergy, Catholics and Protestants studying with rabbis, we would say, Oh my God, here comes G-day — G for goy. And here's Finkelstein, who was decades ahead in terms of vision. Finkelstein also, you know, enlisted Harlow Shapley, an astronomer at (00:45:00) Harvard, and MacIver, a sociologist at Columbia, and others of real standing, in those years, to begin to address the relations of religion and science. Religion and social science. So, Finkelstein was a visionary, but it didn't finally translate into how we lived our religious lives. And there was one point in my studies there, and there had been some personal issues and relational crises and bla bla bla — but there was one point at which I asked for a one-year leave of absence, during which I took just (00:46:00) one or two courses. One with Shalom Spiegel, and I think one with a crazy Hungarian, Abraham Schrieber who was kind of adjunct faculty, a great aesthete, and a great texts scholar. And during that year I focused on elementary harmony and counterpoint and began piano lessons. I needed a respite from words. And I needed refuge from concepts. And I needed a different dimension of experience. And I was also (00:47:00) in psychoanalysis at the time. I had a Viennese-trained lay analyst, which meant affordable. And I went three to four times a week — classic, on the couch, free association. Unfortunately, I had no remembered dream-fragments to work with. But — and I found my way back to finishing up at the seminary, and —

JG: So by the time you were ordained and were beginning this next period, another decade of your first pulpits, what was your vision for yourself as a rabbi? And you also worked in a variety of different places, from Latin America to Princeton, New Jersey. (00:48:00) How did you decide what direction to pursue in these early years?

EG: Well, Mexico came about. At that time, there was the understanding that those of us in theological schools who had a draft exemption because of divinity status —

JG: This was during the Korean War, you're talking about.

EG: During the Korean War, or, to be technical, the Korean Police Action. I think it was never a declared war, which of course has become the custom since in once-constitutional USA, but never mind. *[laughs]* So we were expected to spend two years in the military chaplaincy. (00:49:00) And I felt that I really could not in good conscience serve as a morale-officer in uniform. I offered, a.) to serve two years, but as a civilian; the military was not having any of that. I offered to do two years at a Quaker work camp outside of the country. The Rabbinical Assembly felt, what a waste. And so there was this small congregation in Mexico City that couldn't afford a rabbi, a small, English-speaking, liberal congregation. And I ended up serving two years there, (00:50:00) with my salary

equal to that of a military chaplain, but without post exchange privileges. Can't win 'em all! That was sort of my alternative to the military chaplaincy. The full truth, why did I go to Rio de Janeiro? I'd come back and was at the end of my Mexican experience, which had been marvelous, wonderful, horizon-expanding and turbulent and painful and a thousand things. I enrolled in a graduate program in History and Philosophy of Religions, a joint program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. (00:51:00) And during that doctoral program, I was also involved at the seminary. Finkelstein had engaged me as a Herbert Lehman Fellow, and I was an advisor to students. I used to run an underground, spiritual minyan — you know, because I had remembered the spiritual undernourishment when I had been a student. And Finkelstein recognized the need for that and asked me to do that. He was an amazingly complex figure for whom I have deep affection. Anyway, (00:52:00) full disclosure, so I go to see a film called *Black Orpheus* — *Orpheo Negro*, I don't know if you ever saw this Brazilian film, filmed in Rio. Magical. A gorgeous woman is one of the leads, the scenery of Rio. Shortly after, I see on the bulletin board at JTS — Summer and High Holiday position with a liberal synagogue in Rio de Janeiro. So that was my call to Rio! [*laughs*] Listen, I can't take too much of your time, but quite a city! (00:53:00)

JG: I bet it was.

EG: I got the call! Anyway. It turned out that actually it worked out so engagingly in Rio that they asked me to stay, "they," actually, as I discovered subsequently, being one faction of this massive congregation. I was the Assistant Rabbi, and I was to work with the youth, but I did some preaching. And my Portuguese improved rapidly and I was preaching in Portuguese which was both very positive and had the unfortunate secondary effect of making myself comprehensible to people. Whoa! Anyway, (00:54:00) long and short of it, in November I needed to — I asked for ten days off because my father was quite ill and I wanted to come visit him. And they took me to the airport and, "Oh, we can hardly wait for you to return." Embraces and so on. And when I get off at JFK, which in those days was Idlewild Airport — I get off at Idlewild, and there's a telegram. It had been dispatched from the airport as I was boarding the plane. "Oh, señor, do not buy your return ticket until you hear further from us." And what I heard further from them was basically, (00:55:00) We'll arrange to have your belongings packed and shipped to you, and we think it will be in your interest and the congregation's interest that we here cease our work together. So I wasn't exactly tossed out, but [*laughs*] had I not gone home for other reasons, I might have been tossed out. That's a whole other issue. I ended up in Princeton. I went back to work on my doctorate. And Wolfe Kelman said, "There's an opening in Princeton, and it would be just ideal for you. It's an unaffiliated congregation." Realize, up until that point, I'd never served a United Synagogue

congregation, nor have I ever. Probably had I a broader vision, (00:56:00) probably, Jewish Institute of Religion would have been right for me. But I didn't know at the time.

JG: The decade in which you began your career was a truly momentous one. It was the sixties.

EG: Oh yes.

JG: And you were very involved in many aspects of the changes that were taking place in American society, through the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war movement. Can you talk about what you consider to be the highlights of that period of your life and the formative influences that shaped how you navigated your way through these tremendous changes?

EG: Yeah. You know, some people, I think, really managed to live their lives directed by a sense of precise purpose. When I look back, (00:57:00) I find that I've had a vague purpose. But almost everything has been circumstantial or guidance. And it depends on your framework. I think both Mary and I have a very strong sense of having been guided. Of being guided. But so, I was — I'd resumed my doctoral program, and I'd finished the course work and taken the qualifying exams. And Wolfe Kelman gets a hold of me one day and says, "I've got the post for you." He says, "Princeton, New Jersey." He says, "You can go. It'll be your kind of congregation. It's mixed, but you would be just right for it. It's a good academic setting. You can work on your dissertation — continue your doctoral — you're finished with all the course work. You just select your dissertation, work on it. You'll be able to combine that with congregational work, and it'll be just right." First of August, 1962. I move into the house of the congregation, and I have some furniture from a small, furnished apartment in New York, but it hasn't come yet. And I'm in a sleeping bag on the floor, (00:59:00) and I get a call from a friend, Sy Dresner. And he says, "Dr. King is having a real problem down in Albany, Georgia, because Chief Laurie Pritchett is very restrained, very proper. And the movement is at a standstill, and he's asked if some clergy from the North will come down and engage in a prayer vigil next week." I say, "Sy, man, I'm sleeping on the floor. I'm waiting for my furniture to come. Next weekend is my first service in my new congregation." I say, "I don't think I can do it." He says, "Look, you'll take a plane out Sunday. Monday we'll meet. Tuesday's the demonstration. (01:00:00) Wednesday you're on a plane back. Nobody will know. Have your furniture delivered on Thursday." And I realized that was really a — will my feet follow my mouth, or will they not? And I — conscientious objector, you know, alternative service in Mexico, and here is somebody explicitly dedicated to non-violence, and minimizing injury to the opponent even while engaging in a struggle for justice. How can I not go down? So I went down and it was (01:01:00) really interesting.

Because the demonstration got postponed for a day or so, so I was in on the intimate planning, had a lot of contact with King and Wyatt T. Walker you know. And Andy Young was, of course, there, and all the people. Well, turned out that when we engaged in the prayer vigil on Wednesday, Thursday, whatever day, in front of the courthouse, Chief Pritchett said, “Do you have a permit for assembly?” And we said, “You don’t need a permit for a public assembly in front of a courthouse.” And long and short of it, about ninety of us were arrested, and we were taken to the (01:02:00) Albany courthouse, and there — I mean, we’d been arrested together, but then we were re-segregated, and half of us were shipped to the Lee County Stockade, one of the places where they used to house the old chain gangs, and half of us were transported to the Terrell County stockade, and we were there two plus days. There had been no contingency planning at that point. And those of us in the white stockade were — we felt that we were unjustly there, and we felt that — I mean, we would sleep but we would not have any food, so we were on hunger strike. You know, (01:03:00) trying to instruct the jailers about what we felt was the injustice of it. So I missed my first Friday night service in Princeton, missed a baby-naming — the family was certainly forgiving. So that was my introduction to the congregational life in Princeton. There was immense support from the congregation generally, and there was one man who resigned, because he felt that King had associations with various leftist groups and he didn’t want a rabbi who consorted with the likes of King. He was actually quite an active member of the John Birch Society. (01:04:00)

JG: Nonetheless, you did continue to consort.

EG: Yeah, so that was my introduction to the — I mean, personal introduction to King, whom I had admired before. And then I kept in touch with the movement, and it was at that point that we were at the Rabbinical Assembly in the Catskills in May of ’63. Headlines in the New York Times and photos of the police dogs and fire hose and the little kids. And Heschel was there, and I’d been in touch with people in the movement and (01:05:00) asked if they might welcome a rabbinic delegation, and they were just thrilled. So from the Rabbinical Assembly, nineteen of us flew down to Birmingham and were there for two or three days, just whatever the movement wanted us to do. And Birmingham was actually a lot scarier than Albany, Georgia had been. The police chief in Albany, Laurie Pritchett, had been quite restrained and proper. Everybody knew of Bull Conner, and —

JG: — in Birmingham.

EG: — and the excesses in Birmingham. But Birmingham was also a more (01:06:00) thoroughly segregated city. Ironically, because Albany, Georgia had been an old

Southern town where people's black help lived very nearby. Birmingham was an industrial city, steel particularly, and other industry. And there you could have the workforce segregated, come to the factory during the day, and go home at night. And Birmingham is where they met us at the airport. They had a caravan, and we were divided up — one black driver and three of us in each car, and at certain intersections, as we approached them, we were told, bend down below window level, because (01:07:00) there are snipers, and any car that comes by with mixed colors will take a shot. So Birmingham, I went down to Birmingham, and then it turned out that later that autumn, I was invited by an NAACP chapter in Oklahoma City to come talk. And I did, and a friend of mine was rabbi at the big Conservative temple in Kansas City. He said look, "From Oklahoma City you can either fly straight back to Newark, or you take one hop up to Kansas City, and from there you head back! (01:08:00) Come talk at my congregation." So I did that. That's where I met Mary, and so. We sometimes say, King was our *shadchan*. And then in '65, after we were married, Mary and I went down for the second of the aborted Selma marches. We weren't there for the triumphant march, I figured, by then it was solved, and who needed me. I was very involved with — constantly with King, and I would be on the phone, and got to know Wyatt Walker pretty well, mostly by phone. And I knew Andy Young a little bit and met quite a number of the people. I sometimes say that I had been intending to do a dissertation on some aspect (01:09:00) of social justice for my doctorate, but in lieu of the doctorate and the dissertation I ended up involved in the Civil Rights Movement. You know there was a professor of theology at Pittsburgh University who — no, at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, who lived in Princeton and had difficulty renting an apartment. So we had a small — some activity on the front of Princeton housing, you know the town, etc. And meanwhile here was Vietnam, and you know, a calamity for the poor Vietnamese, but also a very great tragedy in that one of the most ruthless but most (01:10:00) dedicated political leaders we ever had, Lyndon Johnson, who did more for civil rights in this country than anyone ever had, was, of course, alas, derailed by that. Anyway, so I used to do draft counseling, but I guess that was a little later. No, that's when I was doing that. The Princeton clergy were supportive of expressions of conscience, and we even had organized with the dean of the Princeton Chapel a public demonstration at which young men could, if they felt so moved, turn in their draft (01:11:00) cards and we would accept them. But then, it seemed that the Princeton Chapel was in fact not available that particular time, and so we ended up having the public demonstration at Palmer Square.

JG: I want to ask you to try and articulate what for you were the greatest lessons that you took and internalized from your involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, and the anti-war movement. And then we'll move on to the *havurah*.

EG: Yeah. I think the major lesson that I derived was the political power of wisely (01:12:00) applied non-violence. Did it totally transform the U.S.? No. Did it make big differences in our society — the King and the non-violent movement? Huge. One year I was traveling to Atlanta and I knew that Andrew Young was at that point in jail. Four or five years later, I'd fly to Atlanta for a Rabbinical Assembly convention and there's a greeting at the airport, "Welcome from Mayor Andrew Young." That's change. Not total societal transformation, and I think actually — I mean, it's arguable, (01:13:00) but I do think that the political pressure of middle class resistance to the draft and to the continuing, growing Vietnam destruction, I think that helped stop it. So that, briefly, is what I would say.

JG: Okay, so let's turn now to focus on the *havurah*!

EG: Yes! [*laughs*]

JG: In the meantime, also, you and Mary had gotten married. You had two small daughters at that point —

EG: Let me think. No, Tamar was born actually, I think in —

JG: Sixty-five?

EG: Yes, '65. Naomi wasn't born until the summer of '68 when we had moved to Cuernavaca. (01:14:00)

JG: So you got involved with the *havurah* when you came back. When and how did you first become aware of the *havurah* and its vision of creating a small, intentional community?

EG: Well, we were around in '68. I had been close to Reb Zalman for some years. I'd invited him once or twice to Princeton.

JG: Where did you first know him?

EG: At some point, and I don't even remember when, I was invited up to speak — I think at the Hillel Foundation in Manitoba, up where he was living in Canada at the time. But where did I meet Zalman? I'm not even sure. (01:15:00) I met him very early, and — did I know him before? Well, I certainly knew of him when I was in Princeton. Whether I knew of him when I was in Mexico earlier, I don't know.

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JG: But certainly by the time you got involved in the *havurah* —

EG: Sure. I was around for some of the preliminary planning.

JG: You knew Art Green?

EG: Art, I knew Art. From his testimony, I helped Art survive JTS. So we were very close. And, you know, he would come to spend a weekend in Princeton and enjoy our home hospitality, and be encouraged by the (01:16:00) prospect of finishing JTS and actually beginning to exercise some spiritual guidance provided to the community after tending one's own. So I knew both of them, was involved a little in preliminary discussions. But we had — after six years in Princeton, that felt like about enough. And then there were growing tensions. I had some congregants who were active with the Department of Defense and used to commute to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. So the Vietnam stance was difficult. (01:17:00) I was not among those who cheered the triumph of the '68 Six Day War. Or '67, whenever —

JG: Sixty-seven.

EG: Sixty-seven Six Day War. And my Yom Kippur sermon was "*K'chol ha-Goyim* — Like All the Nations: Reflections on Jews, Judaism and Zionism," in which I articulated immense relief and gratitude that Jews in the State of Israel were safe, and terrible misgivings about the potential of it becoming imperial Israel, etc., etc. And that also was (01:18:00) a bit controversial. So anyway, we were leaving Princeton, and at the time we were close to Father Dan Berrigan, and I was also close to Dave Dellinger, one of the Chicago Seven. And Dan was saying, "You ought to go to Cuernavaca. Ivan Ilyich is running a radical study center there." He was an oddball Catholic bishop, and so that's where we went. Naomi was born, and partly because of Dellinger and Berrigan, I got an invitation to Cuba. And there was no rabbi there, but still five congregations operating. Wolfe Kelman (01:19:00) managed to talk to someone who had influence, and I received State Department authorization to travel. It was awkward. Mary couldn't come because we had two — Tamar was three and Naomi was six weeks old. But I went to Cuba for a month in autumn and then again around Passover in the spring and wrote several articles. After the articles were published my application for a third visa from the State Department was rejected. So never mind.

JG: You were going to tell me about how you first heard of Havurat Shalom.

EG: So I knew Art, and (01:20:00) Art and Zalman were planning it. And when our year was nearing an end in Cuernavaca, I'd been invited to a residency at Packard Manse.

JG: What was Packard Manse?

EG: Packard Manse was a sort of social action center. It was an endowed retreat center in — I think on Plain street in Stoughton, right next to Sharon.

JG: Stoughton, Massachusetts.

EG: Yes, Stoughton, Massachusetts. And it was inter-racial, inter-religious, headed by a Baptist lay theologian, and with an Episcopal priest in residence, and a Catholic priest in residence who had been recently released from jail (01:21:00) in Milwaukee for an action. And they were looking for a Jewish presence. And I had spoken in Boston earlier, and I was invited for a two-year appointment as a resident fellow there. So, knowing of the *havurah* in Somerville, and now this invitation to a house in the woods in Stoughton, but we also had a house in Roxbury, and it felt like the ideal position from which to continue social engagement while also having the opportunity to have some connection with Havurat Shalom — though the geography posed some problems.

JG: How would you describe your (01:22:00) personal Jewish identity, sense of Jewish identity at that time?

EG: Certainly experimentally oriented. I used to conduct Friday night services during the summer in Princeton out of doors, and I used to include in the service, as I say, excerpts from Thoreau, D.H. Lawrence, Rainer Maria Rilke, and others of that kind. So I was looking for ways to freshen Jewish religious expression. I didn't feel particularly part of any organized Jewish movement — (01:23:00) just open to the sense of the need for development and experimentation, and reconnecting with the spiritual wellsprings.

JG: What appealed to you particularly about the vision of Havurat Shalom as it was being presented?

EG: Well it, you know, Havurat Shalom had an essential tension between Havurat Shalom *Community Seminary* and Havurat Shalom *Community Seminary*. I appreciated the combining of those elements, of community, interpersonal relationships, with theological seriousness, (01:24:00) and the study of Jewish texts. I liked the people. I had enormous affection and respect for Zalman and Art. I mean, we had our differences, but they were paragons in my eyes. And the thought of, you know, participating with these marvelous young people in this experiment was just greatly appealing — except it was very difficult because we were forty-five minutes from there.

JG: Right. What did you understand yourselves to be committing to? You were recruited as faculty essentially?

EG: I was recruited as faculty essentially, (01:25:00) but, of course, also members of Havurat Shalom. And it was not easy. Mary will tell you more of the challenges of having two kids. But our problem was that because we weren't close —

JG: Close physically, in proximity.

EG: — close physically, I mean, we couldn't go to Friday night services and hang around and have a real Shabbos and then continue with Shabbos morning. If we would go Friday night, that would be very difficult with two young children. Which meant Shabbos morning, but then you come in Shabbos morning, and the kids are tired, and they want to go back. And there were aspects of the Havurat Shalom approach that I liked, but I was not (01:26:00) a *davener*. And so I actually found the religious expression too Orthodox for my own personal taste.

JG: What was your — how would you explain the notion of *tefilah* that was at the center of the *havurah* ideal?

EG: Havurat Shalom was really engaged in what Buber would have called “entering the words of traditional prayer.” And I liked that. And that had been part of what I had been about. Havurat Shalom at that time was almost exclusively focused on that entering the traditional liturgy.

JG: In the second year? This is 1969, right?

EG: Yeah. (01:27:00) My own increasing focus was on taking elements of personal spiritual significance — personal for me, for congregants, for others — and weaving them into the liturgy. So that rather than probing purely the depths of Jewish spiritual expression, I wanted *yichud*, the unification of various elements of my religio-spiritual orientation. And I guess to that extent, and I've not really focused on it or even reflected on it, but I think (01:28:00) I was more inclined to a kind of synthetic approach. I want to synthesize various elements — Thoreau, Rilke. Oh, there are so many sources.

JG: Wasn't that what the *havurah* was about, especially in those very early days? Art Green described the sources that the *havurah* drew on as a “patchwork of creativity,” and many people talk about the tension between innovation and tradition.

EG: Mhm. Perhaps it was. I did not find that in the actual *davening*, in the actual services. They seemed to me far more traditional (01:29:00) than I was inclined towards.

JG: Did you yourself try to bring other kinds of sources into the *tefilah* there — like what you'd been doing?

EG: If I did, I'm not sure. If I did, they somehow didn't quite seem to fit. I do not recall, and here my memory may be faulty, and it may even have been — some of the dimness may be aggravated by any residual effects of the brain surgery. But I don't recall that there was much focus on other sources than the tradition and its deepening and its comprehension. (01:30:00)

JG: Do you recall the incorporation of elements such as silences?

EG: Oh yes, yes. There was that. There were *niggunim* and there were silences. And those were salutary, definitely. And certainly hasidic and neo-hasidic commentary, abundant. That was all very good. And, look, service in the round, which I had always done, which I had begun in Princeton. And then seated on the floor, and so on. I mean, all of that, very plus. And the homemade ark, and Richie Siegel's mother I know had designed the beautiful ark curtain and so on. (01:31:00) Tremendous creativity and innovation, oh yes.

JG: Many people who were involved at the time talk about the intense spirituality of the services, of the *davening*, and I think by *davening*, it's an inclusive vision of all of this. Does that ring true for you? Did you find it spiritual in a sense that was meaningful to you?

EG: Oh yeah, it was very much spiritual. As I say, it was not as encompassing of other sources of spirituality as my own eclectic vision, but it was serious and spiritual in a way that one did not find in ordinary synagogue life. Yeah. (01:32:00) Now, I should mention that — no, continue with your questions about the *havurah*.

JG: No, what were you going to say?

EG: I was going to talk about another *havurah*-type group that we became involved with, the Alternate Religious Community of Marblehead.

JG: That was slightly later, right?

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EG: Yeah, but while we were still at Packard Manse, and while we were still involved at Havurat Shalom. But it was slightly later, yes.

JG: And was that a different experience with the —?

EG: Oh, yes. Radically different

JG: And what was radically different about it?

EG: We were six families.

JG: So this is in Marblehead, is that correct?

EG: Yes. And we used to travel, first from Stoughton to Marblehead, and then later when we lived in Andover and I served the congregation in Lowell, we used to commute from there. That was a thirteen-year involvement. (01:33:00)

JG: In Marblehead?

EG: In Marblehead, with the Alternate Religious Community in Marblehead.

JG: So it was six families, you were saying?

EG: Yeah. And there it was very much child-oriented, but the adults were also interested. But there was certainly not the kind of Jewish learning and there was not the spiritual intensity of Havurat Shalom. There, I mean, Havurat Shalom, one was really engaged with communing with self and the divine. It was a more mixed enterprise at MARC, in Marblehead.

JG: What was the role, within Havurat Shalom services, of Torah study in the context of services?

EG: Quite prominent, I would say. (01:34:00) And — challenging.

JG: Was this something that was familiar to you, or was it innovative, in your experience, to be engaged in Torah discussion during the service itself? And learning?

EG: That was something that was familiar to me because it was something that I had begun to do with congregations as early as my two years in Mexico City. I would often on a Friday evening focus on the Torah portion, cite a particular commentary, and invite

responses. So that interchange and the active dialogue with scripture was something I was familiar with — (01:35:00) and appreciated very much.

JG: Can you recall the kind of approaches that people took to that kind of Torah discussion and interpretation? For instance, did the discussion and the discussion leader at Havurat Shalom focus much on contemporary issues and relating the parashah to contemporary issues, or was it another dimension that it was focused on?

EG: My recollection is that it would vary greatly with the particular individual. There were some who were kind of social activists. They would go at it from that perspective. Others were serious devotionalists. (01:36:00) They would approach it in that fashion. That's my general trace-memory.

JG: Do you have any memories of any particularly memorable *d'var torahs*?

EG: Sad — I don't, as I say.

JG: Did you ever give any?

EG: I don't remember giving any. I think I taught some classes. Even that I don't remember so clearly. I did co-teach one with Joe Reimer —

JG: A *d'var torah*? No, a class?

EG: A class.

JG: Okay, we're going to talk about classes in a minute.

EG: I do not remember a particular *d'var torah*. I think I would — the commitment to (01:37:00) being there always felt ever so slightly doubtful. Who knew how it would be with the kids, or what the weather or the traffic would be like, or how would we get there?

JG: On any given Shabbat —

EG: Was I dependable?

JG: I see. What's your sense looking back on what role women had in public worship during the years that you were involved in Havurat Shalom?

EG: I seem to recall that Sharon Strassfeld was a very effective leader of worship (01:38:00) who touched my soul. I remember that also, especially, in Barry Holtz.

JG: What was it about how they —

EG: I'm sorry, what?

JG: What was it about their way of doing this that touched you?

EG: Sometimes just the inflection of the melody, a sense of — maybe even a kind of softness of approach. It may make no sense, but a humility before the text that enabled them to enter the word and make it alive. I don't know any other way (01:39:00) to describe what happened. There were, I'm sure there were others who were very fine, but those are two that I retain in memory.

JG: Do you have a sense of what it was like for Mary at these services?

EG: She will express it better than I, but I think for her they were terribly alien. They didn't feel like my preferred method of prayer at that point, but I could engage, and the intensity was something I appreciated. For her, (01:40:00) I think that was not the case, and it wasn't just the question of women in the *havurah*, though, you know, I'm still thinking about that. Seems to me most of the prominent voices were masculine.

EG: I was certainly aware of the women's movement because it was an internal issue in our own family structure at home. Mary will tell you vivid tales of the inauguration and training of this previously non-egalitarian father.

JG: Meaning you?

EG: Yes! [*laughs*] But at Havurat Shalom, it seemed to me that men and women shared most of the tasks, and (01:41:00) I'm trying to remember if there were other people, other women who led services. I have a dim memory that women were especially prominent on occasion at *Megilat Esther*, the Purim celebration, but I don't have a —

JG: Some people have mentioned Janet Wolfe.

EG: Yes. That's interesting. Yes, she was on the periphery, and I think she represented a quieter kind of spirituality. But she was an influence, yes, in a very soft-spoken (01:42:00) way. I mean, Sharon's was more audible, and a bit more verbal. But Janet, Janet did bring a soft spirituality, yeah.

JG: Do you think that as you try and remember back to this time, were the members — the male members, who are the majority by far still at this point — were they concerned about or interested in the issues that the just burgeoning, growing, inchoate Jewish feminism was starting to surface?

EG: I would say (01:43:00) yes, within the limitations of our own vision at that time. We had a lot of learning to do. And as I look back, I think we were more benighted than I can possibly imagine at this point. I think we — most of us were profoundly unaware of the depths of transformation that would be necessary to give women a full, equal voice. And I think the most difficult aspect was, (01:44:00) as I reflect, that to make way for other voices, men reducing both the frequency and the volume of our own. And that's where — how do you call it? — there's the rub. I think finally that kind of egalitarian sharing entails what all sharing entails, namely, of a moderation and restraint of frequency and volume of one's own voice.

JG: Women often were learning this in the context of so-called consciousness-raising groups, (01:45:00) explicitly feminist consciousness-raising. From what I'm hearing, men were learning this in Havurat Shalom often in the context of their own personal relationships as much if not more than in the communal context at that time.

EG: I think that's accurate, and I think, I mean certainly my learning was primarily personal and familial, inter-familial. And I was not inclined to the consciousness-raising groups, or men's consciousness. I know a number of friends have been participants for decades in men's groups. (01:46:00) I've not been drawn to that.

JG: Many people have talked about the *havurah* as a context in which male bonding and male friendship was really nurtured and given a space to develop in a way that for many people it had not existed previously in their lives. Does that ring right to you? Was that the case for you in any sense?

EG: I don't feel that that was the case for me personally. Somehow I could see that occurring. There were people for whom that was the case. (01:47:00) For whatever reason, whether just a certain personal shyness in terms of groups, or our distance from Havurat Shalom, I felt close to a number of people. We're still close, and I mean some of our dearest friends are from that period. The Paleys and the Strassfelds and Barry Holtz. These are people that are dear to us and are among our closest friends, however rarely we see them. But I think maybe it was Havurat Shalom that provided the context for that bonding, (01:48:00) but I don't feel that my own pattern of relating to people and

developing close friendships was much affected by the general, the special circumstance of Havurat Shalom.

JG: Were you able, living at Packard Manse and not in close proximity as most people were, were you able to participate in the weekly communal meetings that took place and meals, or was that something that wasn't so much —?

EG: Rarely. The essence — not the essence, but the necessary accompaniment of community, namely all the details of the housekeeping, the budgeting, (01:49:00) the this, the that, the reconciliation, how come so much noise through that wall?, etc. And, how come your secondhand smoke is in my face and not out the window? [laughs] You know, these are real issues of community and living together. Those I missed.

JG: So, you also missed, it sounds like, a great deal of quote-unquote “group processing” which was such a prominent feature for many people — and both a positive and extremely challenging feature for many people.

EG: Indeed. We had our dose of it at Packard Manse. [laughs] Remember, I was technically staff, and Mary was de facto staff until the question of recognition came up. (01:50:00) That's — she will relate with relish. No, so all of that *shakla v'tarya* as we would say, all that I'm tempted to call processing, terminable and interminable.

JG: What was that phrase you just used?

EG: I think Freud had a classic phrase, “analysis terminable and interminable.” Will this processing never end? I'm less sympathetic to it, less given to it, less a willing participant in it than I probably should have been. (01:51:00)

JG: And were you able to sidestep it for a variety of reasons, in this context?

EG: Yeah.

JG: Okay, so I want to move to the question of study and learning, which was a prominent place where you played a key role.

EG: Aaahh, yes, yes.

JG: What would you say was the *havurah's* vision for the role of teaching and learning within the community?

EG: Well, first of all, I think that what I recall as Reb Zalman's classic phrases — "One of our tasks is to break the *sefer* barrier."

JG: What does he mean?

EG: Which meant, enough literacy so that you can really grapple with primary texts. (01:52:00) And that, you know, that's a pretty high goal. But I would say that was one very important focus. My other — another sense of the learning was that the texts we engage with be seen in terms of our time and our issues. That is, that the eternal relevance — or relevance renewed — of texts and of thoughts and of outlooks really came into play. I'm trying to remember. (01:53:00) I did do some teaching there, but I —

JG: When you were first involved, the *havurah* was still kind of seen and was functioning as an alternative seminary. That fell by the wayside probably within a year or so of when you began. When you first started, do you have a sense of any particular curriculum or set of skills that the faculty was intent on making sure that people were on top of?

EG: I think probably Art, Zalman, and I had some ideas. (01:54:00)

JG: Were the three of you the ones that were thinking a lot about these kinds of issues?

EG: I was certainly interested in that seminary aspect, and my vision of actually training people to enhance Jewish communal life —

JG: Training people as rabbis?

EG: Yeah. If not as rabbis, as mentors or leaders of groups. At that time, I had written an article, "Is There a Choice?" And I made out a case for living room synagogue groups as alternatives to formal buildings and structures and all of that. I have more mixed feelings about it now. (01:55:00) I like Jewish institutions, I like Jewish visibility.

JG: Jewish spaces, in that sense.

EG: Yeah, yeah. I think — is time beyond space? Sure. And to that extent, I'm a Heschel loyalist. But I do appreciate space and, hey, I'm glad the Pritzkers fund the Zohar, but I'm also glad they fund that architectural award, so.

JG: Many people have pointed to you as an important teacher to them, in the years you were involved. Can you recall what some of the courses you taught were? What did you want to teach about, you yourself? (01:56:00)

EG: That is so interesting. I did some teaching, and I know one of the things I was really passionate about and felt urgency about was nature elements in Judaism.

JG: said the relationship between soil and spirit.

EG: That's good, whoa!

JG: That's your phrase!

EG: Okay! [*laughs*] It says it, yeah. I would say that was very much my focus, my intended focus. In exactly what courses, I can't remember. And I don't know that I have any file of curricula, which is odd, but that's a kind of lapse. Maybe it was right here, and when he drilled these holes a little piece of it — (01:57:00) but I don't know. But yes, I think that, but also, oh my God, look, in those years, my three foci were really peace — the anti-war issue, racial justice, and the preservation of nature. Issues of, let's say, economic imbalance, a little less so. I was aware of them. They've been a continuing concern, but those are the three, were really the emphasis.

JG: Do you recall (01:58:00) sitting in classes at all? Were you a learner as well as a teacher?

EG: I think so. I think I tried to go to something of Art's or something of Zalman's. Sure, I mean, because they were both funds, already, treasuries of knowledge.

JG: Many people have talked about the communal ideal of everyone as both a teacher and a learner and how that fit in with the egalitarian and non-hierarchical ethos of the *havurah* as a community.

EG: That was very much the case. I mean, I'm trying to remember — in any class, responses from the students were highly valued, and genuinely listened to. (01:59:00) From what, as I say, my memories are so vague. I remember co-teaching a course with Joe Reimer. I also have the impression that he did most of the cohesive organizing of it.

JG: What was the class about? Do you recall?

EG: I think it was something about Jews and Jesus, possibly. Because I had had some courses at — when I was in History and Philosophy of Religions, I had some courses with Krister Stendahl who was of some note in those years. And that felt like a live issue,

both because we were involved at an ecumenical center, but also because the question of inter-religious relations was very prominent (02:00:00) in terms of Havurat Shalom.

JG: How so?

EG: It seems to me that, once you take seriously the realm of the spiritual, you are both anchored in and yet launched from a particular tradition into a common sphere. And spatially speaking, you could say either into the common horizon or into the common depth. (02:01:00) But your perforation, and this perforation, and the other maybe, maybe we hit the same artesian vein of water. So I think inherent in the *havurah* quest for spiritual discovery and religious intensity and authenticity, you necessarily must confront and deal with comparable findings from other probings.

JG: Yet, at least my impression is, that your experience — going back to your childhood, and certainly your adolescence and involvement with the American Friends Service committee, (02:02:00) and your postings in various other communities, your involvement in Packard Manse, had given you a much broader exposure to other religious traditions than many —

EG: I think that's true. So some of this may be my personal projection.

JG: But it was also a time where people were very interested, and increasingly interested, in the philosophies of Eastern religions, etc. It was in the environment, in the air. So I imagine this may have been a very welcome perspective.

EG: I can remember one of my teachers at Columbia, **Yakub Taubus**, saying, "Gendler, you're a zen. It's zen Judaism." (02:03:00) [*laughs*]

JG: You didn't have JewBus quite yet.

EG: Not yet. Zen Judaism. But those were the days of D.T. Suzuki and all that. And Allan — what was his name, the West Coaster? Anyway, doesn't matter.

JG: So, one more topic before we break. And that is social activism —

EG: Ah!

JG: — and its relationship to the *havurah*.

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EG: Let me add one more thing about the nature elements in Judaism. One of the things we tried to do was have people from Havurat Shalom — once we'd moved to Andover and we were involved with **ARC** in Marblehead, but now I was serving half-time this small liberal temple in Lowell.

JG: So this is like — '71?

EG: Seventy-one. (02:04:00) We would encourage people to come up and help us with our gardening project, so that they would experience, you know, contact with living plants and so on.

JG: Firsthand.

EG: And Mary — I'll leave to Mary the description of the general experience. I will say Michael Paley was a superb worker. But Michael had spent one summer as a teenager doing agricultural work, I think in Norway, and doing haying. So he was a real — he was a seasoned field hand. Many of the others were very remote from soil. [*laughs*]

JG: Indeed, indeed.

EG: But you were then starting to ask —

JG: I started to talk about social action. So clearly, as we've been saying, (02:05:00) civil rights, the anti-war movement, other aspects of social activism were a central part of life for people. I wanted to ask you how you found the political atmosphere at Havurat Shalom, and how compatible you found it to your own both values and level of engagement and desire to be engaged.

EG: I'd say it varied greatly with the individuals. There were some who were pretty identified as social activists, and I felt an affinity with them. I mean, look, I'd been and was active still in social — the racial justice issue, and the issue of peace and conscription and so on. (02:06:00) And many of the young men at Havurat Shalom had problems of conscience with the American involvement in Vietnam.

JG: Not to mention the draft, in the very beginning.

EG: That's right, that's right. So, in all of that I was engaged. I should add that also at that period at Packard Manse when abortion was illegal in Massachusetts, I was involved in some counseling and referrals of young women to alternatives in Canada, and also because of the time I had spent in Mexico, I had a couple of medical contacts there

(02:07:00) to which I referred a few people, sort of privately, and with total confidentiality, and — there were, anyway. So with all of those, I felt close. And there was that impulse among some in Havurat Shalom. Others, I think, were quieter on that front.

JG: Was it more a question of people's personal and individual inclinations, or did the *havurah* as a whole have a stance on where social engagement and activism should be in the life of the community?

EG: I think the *havurah* was consensual enough so that individual option — my sense is that individual inclination determined the degree of involvement. There was not an overall ethos, but having missed so many of the processing meetings, I'm probably unaware.

JG: Did you and Mary ever attend retreats at Weiss's Farm?

EG: Oh, yes. We were at least at a couple of them. I loved them.

JG: What did you love about them?

EG: The energy. The liveliness of worship, (02:09:00) the melodies. My sense of Havurat Shalom, of the services — there were *niggunim* and there was *davening*. Personally, I really love the NFTY musical expression.

JG: NFTY as in?

EG: NEFTY, Northeast — National Federation of Temple Youth, NFTY.

JG: NEFTY was New England.

EG: NFTY is more my musical home than either traditional *niggunim* or *davening*. It's interesting.

JG: It is.

EG: Some of the compositions of, not just Debbie Friedman, but say, Michael Isaacson from Reform liturgy. (02:10:00) Wow, that speaks to me beyond some of the neo-hasidic expression, and also — what do you call it, the Renewal community? I'm not drawn to their melodies, if so we may designate them.

JG: Last topic before we stop for the moment, and that is Zionism, which we've touched on. This is the period after the Six Day War, just prior to the Yom Kippur War. And you had particular views on Zionism and the place of Israel. How did that — can you articulate them briefly and say how that sat within (02:11:00) the general context of the *havurah* and people's notions and feelings, personal feelings?

EG: My general impression, and this could just be my private filter operating, my general impression is that Havurat Shalom was for the most part not focused on Zionism or Israel, and that was one of the things I most appreciated about it.

JG: People have described it as a, quote, "distinctly American" phenomenon.

EG: That is exactly what I loved and affirmed about it, and my basic attitude then was — we used to talk about the questionability of vicarious atonement, (02:12:00) which we used to say was a Christian doctrine. Nobody's going to atone for your sins except you, buddy. So the blood of the lamb — spare me that! I think that Havurat Shalom was a blessed antidote to the danger of vicarious Jewish living through the great totem called Israel. And it was American. It is American. This is where we are. This is where we live. This spiritual infusion from what emerged from that sacred soil is ours to receive and root (02:13:00) in the soil where we find ourselves. I would argue that the sanctity of soil is potentially universal, depending on the intention which is brought to a particular piece of land. And the universality of sacred soil is a profound resource in reducing irresolvable conflicts over particular pieces of land. And that — that certainly is something that I felt — I don't think Havurat Shalom was as neutral toward Israel and (02:14:00) Zionism as I have been. But I don't know, I don't know. I haven't done a passport inspection to discover —

JG: But were you aware of — were there tensions around Israel, its place, what you should be doing?

EG: I don't think I sensed much of that in the *havurah*. Maybe there were others who did. Maybe there were some who were more Israel-focused. But my sense of Havurat Shalom was that it was the great enabler of full participation in Jewish religious, spiritual life here where we are. Yeah.

JG: I think that's a great place for us to end for now.

TRANSITION TO MARY

JG: My name is Jayne Guberman, (02:15:00) today is Thursday October 20, 2016. I'm here with Mary Gendler at her home in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and we're going to record an interview for the Jewish Counterculture Oral History Project. Mary, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Mary Gendler (MG): Yes, you do.

JG: As you know, today we're going to explore your experiences during the late sixties and early seventies, particularly as they intersect with Havurat Shalom. And I'd like to start by talking a bit about your personal and family background so we have a sense of who you were at the time you got involved with the *havurah*. Let's begin with your family when you were growing up. You were born in 1940, in Kansas City, Missouri — would you say Missoura?

MG: No, we didn't say "Missoura," but we could. We knew how.

JG: Can you tell me a bit about your family when you were growing up?

MG: Yes, I grew up in (02:16:00) an upper-middle-class Jewish family. We lived in a very nice house, and they sent us to private school.

JG: Tell me about your father and mother before that.

MG: My father had his own paper business, and my mother was a housewife. She was very outgoing and lots of fun and everybody loved her, but she had an underside where she was depressed, and would take too much — and would take antidepressant pills and things. So it was very mixed for her. My father travelled a lot when I was young, so he's on the road with his business. But we were always very well cared for, very well dressed, very well fed, very well educated. It was just a little nutsy in my house.

JG: How about your siblings? Did you have siblings? (02:17:00)

MG: I had an older sister, two and a half years older, and younger brother six years younger. And so I was the middle.

JG: You were in the middle. So you were telling me about your community. What was Kansas City like at that time, and what kind of a Jewish community did it have?

MG: Okay. I mean, Kansas City, if you're in the main parts, it's a beautiful, beautiful city — and a wealthy city, unless you're black or living in those other parts of the city. So the

world that I inhabited was very beautiful — huge mansions, beautifully decorated, country club plaza. So I lived in a very, very lovely world. My own family — in terms of the Jewish community, most Easterners say, There are Jews in the Midwest? Are there really Jews in the Midwest? (02:18:00) I say, “You would be surprised!” So there were some Orthodox, but there was a very large Conservative temple, synagogue. And then our temple, which was like two thousand families or something. It was very, very big. Very Reform, very classically Reform.

JG: What did that mean?

MG: That means, coming out of that classical tradition, we don't want to be that different from our neighbors. We don't want to look and sound that different, but we still want to be Jewish. So the customs — I mean, I went to Sunday school — I got confirmed and all of that, but we always had a Christmas tree, and we dyed Easter eggs. And I once asked my father, “Why do we have a Christmas tree?” And he said, “It's pretty. It smells good.” I thought, Oh, okay. And we used to light the Hanukah candles next to the Christmas tree. So my part of that world was very, very (02:19:00) classical Reform. No Hebrew was taught in the Sunday school. No bar and bat mitzvahs. Confirmation was the big thing, and a lot of the emphasis came out of the social justice — and that kind of approach.

JG: The prophetic tradition.

MG: Yes, the prophetic tradition, that's what I was trying to say. And that was really powerful for me. And we had a rabbi, Rabbi Samuel Mayerberg, who was like Moses. He was tall. He had grey hair sort of pushed back, and he would be in this black robe, and he would give these sermons, and you thought, “Wow!” It was very, very powerful for me as a child.

JG: Was your family involved in the life of the synagogue?

MG: Yes. My grandfather helped found it, (02:20:00) and my father was president during the time that they were building a new building. So there was lots and lots of involvement in that sense. And my more traditional, eastern Jewish friends just can't understand why I feel Jewish and why I am Jewish, because the rituals were just not a part of my growing up.

JG: Such as what? What kind of rituals were not a part —?

MG: Well, for one thing, and we'll get to it later, all the *davening* and all of that, it was like — never heard it, never heard of it. And we never learned Hebrew. We did not read from the Torah.

JG: Didn't read from the Torah during services?

MG: Whatever was in the book. I don't remember them taking out the Torah. They must have, but I don't remember. I was always counting the lights on the ceiling to see (02:21:00) how many were burned out and how many were still going. For me, I think I was really influenced by the prophetic tradition ways and what I was learning through Judaism, and that's what Judaism came to mean to me. For example, I never used to celebrate eight days of Passover. You have a seder, you eat matzah, and Passover's over. I mean, things like that. I didn't know that there were two days of all these holidays. You know, Rosh Hashanah two days? My father would say, "Why do they read in both Hebrew and English? — because God heard you the first time!" [*laughs*] And so it was all that sort of ritual trappings of Judaism that just — they weren't in my world, they weren't in my consciousness. (02:22:00) And when Everett and I got married, in many ways, we called it a mixed marriage, because he'd gone to Jewish Theological Seminary, and I just didn't know all this stuff.

JG: Where had your families come from?

MG: I know on my mother's side, my grandmother was born in Itasca, Texas. And I think some of it on my father's side, I think there was some in Baltimore, and his side of the family came through from Alsace-Lorraine, the —

JG: France.

MG: Yeah, in France. He always said the town of Trieur. I don't know it, but so — that's where they came from.

JG: Your family belonged to a Jewish country club, is that right?

MG: Of course! Oakwood Country Club.

JG: What was it called?

MG: Oakwood. (02:23:00) Oakwood Country Club.

JG: Why a Jewish country club?

MG: Why? All our friends were Jewish, too. It really is — as I said, for example, Sharon just cannot get that I feel very Jewish because I don't know all these other things.

JG: You mean Sharon Strassfeld?

MG: Sharon Strassfeld. My parents' friends were all Jewish. I mean they had to do with the other, with everyone else in the community, but really their circle of friends was Jewish. Mine less so because I went to a private school where there was an unnamed quota of two Jews per class, so I knew lots and lots, lots of my friends were Christian. But they were really involved Jewishly, in their own way.

JG: Did you encounter any anti-Semitism when you were a child at all?

MG: There was one incident, I'm smiling because — there were a couple, there was at least one country club that (02:24:00) would not allow Jews to come to the country club. So at one point, one of the girls in our class was having a birthday party, and she was having it at that country club. And I said, "I can't come because I'm Jewish. I can't go in." And so a number of the other classmates said, Then we won't go either. So it — it was instructive. It was not a really heavy, you know, experience. It was actually kind of affirming because they weren't going to do that. That was probably the main thing. There was a whole section in Kansas City, a whole new area building up, that was *judenfrei*. (02:25:00) I mean, Jews could not buy there. This was in the fifties. It's really astonishing, when I think back on that. But it didn't really hurt me in any way, except that I was just indignant in some ways. It's like, what? What are you doing?

JG: You said you went to Jewish summer camps and that they were an important component of your experience. What camp did you go to? What kind of an impact did it have?

MG: I went to Camp Chickagami in Northern Wisconsin.

JG: Say it again?

MG: Camp Chickagami.

JG: Chicadamee?

MG: Chickagami. And it was run, and I think it had been started by the wife of the Reform Jewish rabbi in St. Louis. His name — Isserman. He was Ferdinand Isserman.

And she was known as Mrs. I. And it was just an absolutely wonderful, wonderful camp. Most of the kids (02:26:00) were from St. Louis, which is where my mother was from, and where that rabbi lived, so that there were a lot of kids from St. Louis, but then some from other parts also. I just loved being outside. I loved canoeing. I loved trekking in the forest. It just was me. And that was fabulous. We used to have Friday night services, and we would all dress up in white. Most of the counselors were not Jewish but we would sit around the fire and we'd have Friday night services and do some singing. And it was really lovely.

JG: What kind of songs would you sing?

MG: Oh, camp songs.

JG: Jewish songs, or not?

MG: No, not so much Jewish songs. Campy songs. But there was a real service as I can remember, it was — but a Reform service. (02:27:00)

JG: Was there challah and candle-lighting — that kind of ritual?

MG: I'm sure there was candle-lighting, I can't remember the challah, but —

JG: Was there candle-lighting in your home?

MG: Not very often, for ritual purposes. No. I mean, we would have candles, but that wasn't necessarily — that was just because they looked pretty.

JG: Was the Jewish environment of this camp appealing to you? Did it have any impact on your sense of Jewishness and your Jewish identity?

MG: What's interesting is that the only sort of ritual part of it was the Friday night services. But there was an awareness that all the campers were Jewish, and maybe some comfort in that. But I was comfortable in other kinds of groups of kids, too. So I don't know how much it influenced, except that (02:28:00) I guess there was a certain connection of the camp experience, which I adored, and the fact that it was a Jewish place where I was experiencing this. And so they got merged together in many ways for me. And as you can see here, my life and soul is outside. Outside — camping, gardening, whatever.

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JG: Did you have exposure to that as a young child that sparked that interest, or where do you see that as originating in your life?

MG: I don't know, we had a nice yard, and my mother used to grow flowers some. But I don't remember even joining in with her that much. I remember I used to climb trees and read books in them. And beyond that, I don't know. It just seems to have been in there.

JG: As you said, you went to a private girls' school. (02:29:00)

MG: Right.

JG: From first through twelfth grades, all the way through. And then you went to college at Stanford in — this was the late fifties, early sixties?

MG: I was there '58 to '62.

JG: How did you decide on Stanford?

MG: Because I didn't get into Radcliffe. [*laughs*] That's how I decided. And I didn't like it. I needed a place like Radcliffe. Stanford was not academically serious enough for me. And it had all these fraternities and all of this stuff. The only way I actually got through it was going to the International Center where I met some people who were very interesting.

JG: What were you interested in studying at that point?

MG: I was an English major. You know, women learn English majors, and then they go and teach school. What else would women be doing?

JG: Was that your vision for where you were headed?

MG: Sort of.

JG: In life?

MG: Yeah.

JG: The following decade was certainly a momentous one, both in your personal life and (02:30:00) in the general society. Can you tell us what were for you the most important

and formative developments during that period? Start with your personal life — obviously you met Everett —

MG: Let me go back a little further, because when I was at Stanford I discovered there was a place called Berkeley, which nobody had told me about at Sunset Hill School for Girls. They did not say, Here's a place you might find interesting. So I was really unhappy that I hadn't known about it because Berkeley was boiling, and it was wonderful. That's where it was all happening. So I would go there from time to time. But it wasn't right next door. But that was sort of the beginning of these social movements, and of anti-war movements and nuclear power and all of this. And I was very drawn (02:31:00) to all of that. Now I spent my junior year in France, and I spent a year in France after my graduation, so those were very interesting years. I wasn't particularly politically involved at that time, but I can remember driving in a taxicab in Paris when it was all these riots about Algeria and thinking, Let's just keep going this way. You don't want to get too close. So I was aware of all of that and I — oh, I know the other thing that's important, which is: my parents and all of their friends were very conservative.

JG: Politically?

MG: Politically. If I tell you that my father voted for Goldwater, you will get an idea. I don't know where it came for me, but early on, certainly in my adolescence, I was very, very drawn to sort of political (02:32:00) things and thinking very differently about it. And the way I got through it there was one Quaker family in Kansas City whose kids I was friends with. And that was where I could go to be home politically about that. Everybody else, nobody would get it! I cheered when McCarthy died. Nobody else did. So it was a very, very conservative thing. And they introduced me to something called *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, which was the radical newspaper, and they were just like home for me. And so when I went to Stanford, everybody had — first day of class in Western Civilization, and I got called a socialist and a commie by the kids in my class because, you know, I was so radical.

JG: How did those labels feel to you?

MG: They feel fine to me. [laughs] (02:33:00)

JG: Did they then, at the time?

MG: I didn't mind, I didn't mind. I thought, you know, they're kind of jerky. They don't know what they're talking about. It was not anything that I disliked, no. They were just

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being dumb. Actually I was proud of it, if I'm being really honest. I was kind of pleased. So.

JG: So you spend a year in France?

MG: The second year, '62-'63., after I graduated from Stanford.

JG: And where were you headed when you came back, did you think?

MG: Well, I thought I was headed to Columbia Graduate School, which I had been admitted to.

JG: In what?

MG: Comparative Literature. And my father wrote to me and said, "You have to come home. You have to come home and take care of your mother. She's not well." She really had a lot of problems with depression and whatever. And you have to come home. It was like, "But!" I was going to go to Columbia, and then I was going to work my way around the (02:34:00) world. That was my plan. Instead, as I say famously, I ended up a rabbi's wife in New Jersey. But never mind! So I spent, I spent that year—I was not rebellious enough to refuse that. And so I commuted to Kansas University and I got a Master's in English, just because I was doing something. And that was the year that I met Everett.

JG: How did you meet him?

MG: Well, pretty funny story. So all my friends had moved away in Kansas City, all my group of sort of radical, crazy, drinking friends were gone. And I'm in Kansas City. I don't know anybody. So I started going out with the assistant rabbi at our temple. And I mean, it was practically the first Jew I ever dated. It was really amazing. But so he at one point gave me (02:35:00) a call, and he said he'd gotten a phone call from a woman—they both knew her in New York—that Everett Gendler was coming through. He'd been involved with King, and he was coming through Kansas City to talk about his experiences, and would I like to go? And I said, "Sure!" Nothing like this ever happened in Kansas City before. This is pretty good. So we went. And because they had this common girlfriend in New York, we went out with Everett and his brother-in-law and we had tea afterwards. So we started talking, jabber-jabber-jabber. He was across the table from me. So at the very end we exchange addresses and I go home. Not too long after that I get a letter from him saying, "How are you? Nice to meet you—" and I don't remember what else. We started corresponding, and then he invited me to come visit him in Princeton over the (02:36:00) winter vacation. And I had been planning to go skiing in

Colorado, which I've never been able to do since. So I debated, am I going to go skiing, or am I going to? Finally I just said, What the hell, let's see what's going on. So I lied to my parents, only I thought I was lying but I didn't because I said, "I'm going to go to New York and look for work." And I came home ten days later, and I said, "I'm getting married." And they said, "To who?" Because, I mean, I really wasn't dating anybody! I mean nothing. And so because my father was so stuffy about his Reform stuff, I said — and it was his fault he'd brought me back to Kansas City — I said, "Dad, you're going to love him. His side curls are down to here, and his beard's down to here, and his great hat up here." My father's like turning purple and blue and whatever. So — [laughs] (02:37:00) But we saw each other two or three times, visited each other, and the end of May we got married and started getting to know each other! [laughs] It was pretty crazy, pretty impulsive! So, but —

JG: It was. So you moved to New Jersey.

MG: Yes, I moved to Princeton, New Jersey. I mean, when I say, "Well, I became a rabbi's wife in New Jersey," and Everett always says, "Princeton, New Jersey." Which is true, that's a little different than just New Jersey.

JG: Were you involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement yourself?

MG: Oh yes, all of that. I mean, there were many, many things that attracted me about Everett. But that key core one at the beginning was his involvement with civil rights. And as I said, for myself growing up, so much of my Jewish identity is tied up in the prophetic tradition (02:38:00) and in doing social justice. So I thought that was really exciting. After we got married, we did go down to Selma together and that was very exciting — very scary, very interesting. And you know, it was just amazing. In the first Selma, not the second. We were not when they went over the bridge and got all beaten up. We actually went down and we turned around. But there were still views of these dogs straining on their leashes. There was a Unitarian minister who got clubbed to death down there. So this was not playtime. So yes, I was involved in that and then on and on. Everything there was — Vietnam, anti-nuclear power, and women's rights, and two or three others. (02:39:00) I often went to D.C. to march and things like that. It was a very exciting time. That didn't mean that everything that was going on was great, but it was exciting. There was a sense of movement and turmoil, that things were really roiling around and some things were changing, and changing for the better.

JG: Were you aware of the publication of the *Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan's —

MG: I was, very early on — actually, we came back from Mexico, and this was what was in the air — feminism, feminism, feminism.

JG: When are you talking about?

MG: Nineteen-seventy, seventy-one. And so I was aware of all that writing. In addition — this is how important it was for me — (02:40:00) let's see how to explain this. I'd been a very active, outgoing young woman, and very self-sufficient and whatever. And I got married, and I've heard this is true for others, I felt like I fell into a black hole, and I disappeared. All of a sudden, I was wife, I was mother — but none of that was what I had ever thought of as me. And it was a really anguishing process. It was very, very difficult. Because at that time, if you're married, you take care of the kids, you take care of your husband, and it was just all there. But I had been a very independent young woman, and none of that had ever been in my world. And all of a sudden this became my world.

JG: Did being a rabbi's wife (02:41:00) even exacerbate that feeling, or the expectations of you, do you think?

MG: Well, one of the things that we discussed very thoroughly before we got married was his work, not mine. And he was going to protect me from all of that. And I do remember, I was like twenty-three years old. I was really young. And I'd been there for a little while, and in my mind, this woman who was six feet tall with her breasts out to here — you know, dragon lady — said, not fair, not true what she was, but she asked if I would give the opening prayer at the Hadassah meeting. First of all, I'd never even heard of Hadassah before that, but anyway. So I said, "No, I'm really uncomfortable. That's my husband's department. It's not mine." And she said, "Oh, we assumed he would write it." And I said, "Thank you very much, no." And they left me alone after (02:42:00) that. I mean, I really — but it was also hard there because that was a congregation that — the rabbi's up here on the pedestal. And we would come in to a social occasion and whatever they were talking about, it would turn to religion. And I kept wanting to say, "You know, he can talk about other things besides religion! You don't have to do that." So whether it grew out of — I don't think it was so much about being a *rebbetzen*. It was all of a sudden about being a wife and a mother, and all of those things that I had never expected or prepared for, and yet felt pressure because of the society that that's what I should be doing and what I should want to be doing. And as a result, I felt guilty about my needs. And even more, I had this husband who was very involved (02:43:00) politically, and everybody worships him and thinks he's so wonderful. And who am I to say, you've got to stay home tonight and not do anything besides take care of your children! And then I'd say, "Oh my God, but he's changing the world and he's this —" Then I would feel so selfish. It was a very, very painful, painful time. And of course, he'd grown up a typical

Jewish male. And he was like, yeah, that's what you do. What Everett alluded to in his talk was we were living in Stoughton, and I finally had sort of screwed up my courage to say, I want one night a week and I'm going to go into Boston and I'm going to do something I want to do. I think I took jewelry-making or whatever it was. Anyway so the first time I went — he's a grown man. Our children were like (02:44:00) one and a half and three and a half or four. I fixed the dinner and I got a babysitter to put the kids to bed. It was like, that was how much I feel like he was just not capable of doing. I think about it now and he's embarrassed too when he thinks about that! So we had a lot of reworking to do within our marriage about all of that. And I hadn't really realized how angry I was. I knew I was miserable, but I didn't realize I was angry. And then, as the women's movement came along, and there were groups that you would discuss things with —

JG: Did you participate in consciousness-raising groups?

MG: Yes, lots, lots. And they were very important, and you know, I had a lot of anger that I don't think was sort of baseless anger. (02:45:00) I mean, it was anger about this whole setup — about how women were supposed to be, and what was expected of them, and what they were supposed to do. And I just thought, this is really unfair. One of the ways that I worked my way through this, aside from Everett and I managing to stay together, I started writing about Jewish women and historical —

JG: When was that though?

MG: This was like 1970. My first article, it was in *Response*, and they didn't put the title on it, but it was called "Like All the Women." And it was about a Jewish woman, but we've been so fixed in this way, and there are other things that need to be seen about us. And then I started writing about biblical women. (02:46:00) I wrote about Lilith. I was the first one to write about Lilith. I wrote about Vashti. I wrote a couple of other things, but the one thing that people do remember, if they read it, it was called, "Sarah's Seed" And it was a ritual that I was proposing that grew out of the fact that the circumcision is the sign of the covenant in men's bodies. So that automatically excludes women from being a part of a covenant. Now, wait a minute! So what I proposed was a ritual rupturing of the hymen — not the clitoris, just that little membrane, which they could tell if you had ever had sex before or not. I mean, it was a liberating thing, and far less, far less painful than the circumcision. Well! (02:47:00)

JG: At what age were you proposing doing this?

MG: Eight days, as a comparable time for the girls.

JG: Yeah.

MG: And, you know, all you had to do was one little prick, you didn't have to cut something off. So I just became the Lilith of my generation. And I can remember — I think it was Levi Kelman had gone to some lefty Jewish group thing. And what was being said was, "Hide your baby daughters! Here comes Mary Gendler!" Like I had suddenly become the Lilith, and I was going to grab the babies! And the thing that is amazing to me is that was seen as such a radical, such an intrusive kind of thing! But what about circumcision? So I gained some notoriety in the community. I also was doing, was asked to do (02:48:00) a lot of speaking, so it was another part of my sort of finding my new self. And I talked to Hadassah groups, I talked to Hillel groups, whatever. So in some ways, my way out of the hole that I had fallen into was through thinking about things in an original way, and then going out into public and speaking about them, and interacting with people. And all of a sudden I started saying, I guess I do have a self now! It's starting to come out. So a lot of that was really the building of a self.

JG: Yeah.

MG: It was a hard decade. It really was.

JG: Are you still talking about the sixties?

MG: No, this was in the seventies.

JG: Into the seventies.

JG: I want to take us back to the beginnings of your involvement with Havurat Shalom. You've sort of sketched out what happened over the next few years. I want to go back to this moment in '69 when (02:49:00) you and Everett had come back from Cuernavaca, right? Mexico?

MG: I thought it was 1970 when we came back.

JG: It was '69.

MG: Okay.

JG: And first, you were living at Packard Manse with your two young children, and he was getting involved with the *havurah*. I wanted to ask what you recall were your first

impressions of the *havurah*. Did you start visiting the *havurah*, and what are your earliest memories that revolve around the *havurah* itself?

MG: Let me just go back a tiny bit on that. Everett had come, made a trip from Mexico, and he was looking at a couple of things, and one was at the *havurah*, and the other was at this retreat center in Stoughton.

JG: Packard Manse.

MG: Packard Manse. So he was trying to scout out what might be the best for us. (02:50:00) And his interest in the *havurah*, I mean, Art was very close to him, and they very much wanted him to come. And I remember, we looked at places in Somerville, and I just thought, Oh, we can't live in the city. This is just — we can't do it! Whereas we were living in the middle of the woods on a meadow in Stoughton. I think another piece of it was that — I mean, this would have been — was totally Everett's thing. It really was not my thing. The people knew him as a teacher, and respecting — I was just sort of tagging along into a world I had no consciousness of before. I had never heard *davening* before. I had never heard the word "*davening*." I mean, this was just — just like outer space for me.

JG: How would you have described your own Jewish identity at that point? (02:51:00)

MG: How would I have described it? As I have always felt it. I feel surprisingly Jewish, given all of the sort of — in the community, work and life I had, given that it was Reform. I have always felt a very strong Jewish identity. But it wasn't matching anything that I was seeing in the *havurah*.

JG: Was there anything about what you knew of the *havurah* — before you were really involved, just as you were getting involved — that felt appealing to you? Or it really felt like it was Everett's thing.

MG: [*shakes head*] Indifferent. It was Everett's thing. I mean, a whole Jewish community where you would live? No, that was not me.

JG: Did you envision any involvement for yourself personally and with the girls?

MG: Well, in the early years when we used to visit, it was actually very awkward, because we were the only ones who had children. Everybody else (02:52:00) was younger.

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JG: When you used to visit, you mean, when Everett was involved?

MG: Yes.

JG: So you would visit with the girls?

MG: Yes, so we would come up and I think there — a lot of it is really hazy for me, but we would come up for something or other; it was like an hour's drive from Stoughton — and the problem was, if we go to services, I mean, what are you going to do with a two-year old and a four-year old? They're going to run around. They're going to talk or whatever. So they were disruptive.

JG: That would have been disturbing and disruptive to them?

MG: To them, yes. Yes, this was a very serious group of people. Very serious, especially about the *davening*. And so, it never really was my place at all. I made some friends there, and a lot of the people I still know are from there.

JG: How did you make friends there?

MG: Well, I think we went to — you asked about Weiss's Farm. We went to Weiss's Farm, and so I remember getting to know people. (02:53:00) It's all astonishingly hazy for me, that whole period. And —

JG: Did you ever go to Shabbat morning services there?

MG: We were at some services. But I mean, I couldn't be at the services. It was all *davening*. I didn't know what they were doing. I didn't know what they were talking about, this had —

JG: A very different world.

MG: A just completely different world. I mean, more different to me than had been going to France from America. It was like another world.

JG: Did it affect your sense of what it meant to be Jewish — positively or negatively?

MG: It broadened it, I guess. As in, oh, I guess, this is how other Jews do it. My whole world had been Reform Judaism. So it certainly was broadening. But it was not something that I felt I wanted to do (02:54:00) or learn how to do.

JG: Yeah, so it wasn't appealing.

MG: No, it wasn't, it was more — it made me uncomfortable.

JG: This was a period where, as you were describing, you became increasingly aware of feminist issues, and the relationships between men and women. Did you have a sense that other women connected to the *havurah* were also going through some kind of transition and increasing awareness?

MG: Well, apparently, and I don't remember this, but Sharon Strassfeld said I really brought that in, because I came in with my awareness, and that hadn't really been going on for them. And she also said we had a women's group for a while.

JG: That you started, that you tried to start.

MG: I don't remember.

JG: She said it fizzled very quickly.

MG: Well, yes. You know, they were younger women, and they didn't have kids, so they didn't understand. (02:55:00) I mean, it's one thing if you're married, you may end up doing the cooking that you didn't think you should do. Once you have kids, your life is totally different, because they are twenty-four hours a day. So for the twelve or fifteen hours they're up, whose responsibility is it to take care of them? And it's a totally different world.

JG: Were you involved in Jewish life yourself during this period?

MG: That's when I was doing all this writing about Jewish women and biblical women. So yes, I was very involved in it, because I was thinking about it, I was learning about these historical figures, and then I was going out and I was talking. So as a matter of fact, my life was very Jewishly involved at that point. But not in the same way that, say (02:56:00) had I been a real member of Havurat Shalom.

JG: Were there other contexts in which your family and you were able to live an active Jewish life within a community at that point?

MG: Yeah, well I mean, after — we were two years in Stoughton and then in '73, or in '72, we moved up to Andover. And Everett had a congregation in Lowell. And it was a

wonderful group of people. It was filled with people who couldn't stand regular synagogues. So they would come from all over the area, very independent-minded, Reform backgrounds. And very outgoing. I mean, when we were in Princeton, nobody would talk to us about anything but religion, you know. But they knew Everett was a person — in Lowell! So that really — those were fabulous years. (02:57:00) Thirty years. I loved the congregation. And as we were leaving, I said to Everett, you know, "I'd like to have a party, and I'd like to invite so and so and so and so." He said, "Do you realize you just named the board?" And I said, "What? Then I take it back!" I mean, I wasn't going to do this *rebbetzin* thing! But it shows you how they were our close friends! So that was just wonderful, wonderful. Just my level.

JG: And these are people who had families also, you're saying?

MG: Yes, yes.

JG: One of the critiques that's been directed at the *havurah* is that it wasn't really a sustainable model for Jewish life because it was basically composed of young people, mainly men, in their twenties, unmarried, single, most of them — some of them with girlfriends. A few (02:58:00) who were just recently married

MG: There were some married.

JG: But they weren't dealing with the realities of family life.

MG: Right.

JG: Careers and jobs and all of that. They could focus entirely on this. Sounds like in this environment in Lowell you were able to find a group of people who were dealing with very similar —

MG: It was just families, just plain families. I always thought of the *havurah* as being this super, super duper religious place. You know, and it was just all of this religious stuff going on all the time. And it just wasn't where I lived, or where I ever lived inside of me. Judaism has been important. It sometimes astonishes me how firmly my identity is Jewish, but it's back to sort of the way I was raised. Which is, all different kinds of friends and people, but a wonderful place where I could practice my spirituality and my Judaism, (02:59:00) a group of people that I felt very comfortable with. And when Everett went up to interview at this place, he decided he was going to lay everything out. You know, "I'm against the war, I've collected draft cards, da da da." And one of the women said, "Rabbi, what you do is your own business! We're not going to tell you what

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to do!” And we were going home and I said, “Everett, take it! Just take it, take it, take it!” Because it was just really — turned out to be totally compatible, my place and our place.

JG: Art Green in a very recent article in *Pakn Treger* which is the publication of the Yiddish Book Center, characterized this very early period at the *havurah* as pre-women’s movement, pre-feminist consciousness. It sounds like that was in fact the case.

MG: It was, until (03:00:00) I came along.

JG: Was that true in this other community that you were getting involved with also?

MG: Oh, no there were a lot of with it people there.

JG: It was also a couple of years later.

MG: It was a couple of years later, and I had really — I and we had worked through some of the hardest part of it.

JG: What does that mean, you’d worked through some of the hardest part?

MG: Well, we had a lot of negotiating to do in our family, Everett and I.

JG: As did many families, actually.

MG: Like, I know how important you are, and I know how you’re saving the world, and I know I’m feeling guilty — but damn, I get something too. I get some time. I deserve some time. So there was a negotiation around that. And Everett is as nice as they come, but he was raised a Jewish male. And he was raised with that entitlement. And it was very, very hard for him to understand. So we just kept (03:01:00) hanging in there, you know, and doing things. And eventually, eventually what really changed for him was he realized that he wanted to have time with his children when they were little. He didn’t want them to just grow up without him. And over the years, he’s become so closely tied with them. And he thanks me very much for my nudging, because he wouldn’t have had that otherwise.

JG: During this same period when you were starting to find your own voice, Jewish women were starting to on a broader scale too, at least the founding of *Ezrat Nashim* occurred in New York in 1971, followed by a couple of conferences in New York City that drew hundreds of people over the following years. Were you aware of those, or were you interested in them?

MG: Yeah, yeah I knew them. I didn't go, but I did know of them, sure. (03:02:00)

JG: Did you find any women to talk to who were also involved? You had tried within the *havurah* to start something and that didn't work. Did you find Jewish women who were interested in exploring —?

MG: Well, I was in various groups. I think they might have been in Boston, though.

JG: Were any of them oriented towards Jewish life at all?

MG: Not that I can remember.

JG: So these were general consciousness-raising? And you were finding this within yourself, it sounds like, to bring it out into the world. What kind of a reception were you getting among women for your ideas?

MG: It was good, it was good. And I remember at one point speaking to a sisterhood. And I was like, sisterhood — these people are going to be so boring and whatever. There were several older women there, and it was like, Go! Go, girl go! They were fabulous. And that sort of shook that prejudice out of my mind. (03:03:00) And it was affirming, because people listened, people appreciated what I was saying, so it was a very affirming experience.

JG: You thought of something else from your childhood that you wanted to mention.

MG: Yeah. About how Jewish I felt. This was — I was at this private school, Sunset Hill School for Girls, and there was an unaffirmed or unnamed quota for Jews, which I figured out in like the tenth grade. It was two Jews per class, and they were almost always the top two, the smartest. So I think maybe it was in — I don't know what year — but we had this wonderful, wonderful drama teacher, and we were going to put on the Christmas play. So I had this long hair, and I was small, and she said, "Mary, wouldn't you like to play the Christ-child?" It's like, (03:04:00) she was so sweet that she didn't even think about it! And I said, you know, that would make me feel very uncomfortable. I don't think so. So I ended up being — the other Jewish girl and myself ended up being a couple who were sitting down to dinner, to have something, and our resistance was we sat down and we went "*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam,*" and then — it was just like this little rebellious act and a sense of saying, No, this is who I am. And I've never forgotten that.

JG: That's great. Is there anything else that you'd like to add about your experiences directly with the *havurah* during this period?

MG: It all seems so vague to me. We did go to Weiss's Farm, to some of Weiss's Farms. One of my main memories, however, is of our children running around chasing fireflies — (03:05:00) there, and people sort of thought that was cute. No, I don't know why it is such a tabula rasa for me. Whether it was so not right for me that I just sort of tamped it all down. There must be something of that, because I know that a number of the people we have become very close friends with — oh, here's the funniest one. So, Joe Reimer was a member of the *havurah*. At age forty, I decided I was going to go back to school to get my doctorate in psychology. Who becomes my advisor? Joey Reimer! So it was so funny to do it with him — because he was younger than I am, so having this other reversal was really, really funny. And we had been friends, and we are friends now, afterwards. But it was really funny.

JG: So you went on, just to give people a little picture of (03:06:00) what else you did with your life, you did go on to become a psychologist, and just tell us really briefly about your career.

MG: Actually, my career in psychology started earlier. I got a Master's in counseling from Antioch. But my family always says, I just always was in school, and it really was a lot of that. So I had been running groups, and I had worked at mental health centers, but I really wanted to have a legitimate degree. And so I did, and it was partly private practice. For several years I was the clinical director at a Jewish Family Service in Lawrence, near where we lived. I had a private practice, and [was] working there. So that was over a period of twenty years at least. And in (03:07:00) '95, Everett was ready to retire, and I was getting so sick of the billing stuff with the psychology, I just couldn't wait to get away from the managed care stuff. I couldn't wait to get away from that, because it was just infuriating and eating up my time and whatever. So I decided I would leave, too. But partly that doctorate was I wanted to prove that I could do it, that I could really get a doctorate. So we were up all night — my two girls were in high school at that time and we used to have tea in the kitchen in the middle of the night periodically, so it was very good. And important to me that I had that.

JG: And did you find your career as a psychologist fulfilling?

MG: Yes. Until the managed care came along. Seriously.

JG: I meant the work of it, as opposed to the administrative piece.

MG: The first part was very hard because I lived — I was working in this community mental health (03:08:00) center, and, I mean, just the lives that people lead, the things that were happening, whatever. That was very depressing, and I had to learn just not to take it home, because it would make me sick. And then I was working with more, the Jewish community and whatever, and that felt like just easy compared to what I had been doing before. But, yes, I really liked being a psychotherapist, I really did. I especially liked working with children and families, but I did it all, individual, groups, whatever. So yes, that was a very fulfilling thing to do.

JG: In this concluding section, I want to focus on your thoughts about how this period of involvement in Havurat Shalom effected other aspects of (03:09:00) your life moving forward, and your reflections on the broader impact of the *havurah* on broader Jewish life as well as your own Jewish life in America. So just to recapitulate, you were active in the *havurah* from 1969 to '72, and at that point, Everett, you took a pulpit in Marblehead?

MG: Lowell.

EG: In Lowell. And the commitment there was half time. That had been a temple that had always took pride in running its own affairs. They wanted a rabbi. They wanted someone to teach, to lead services, but they wanted to manage it. So I didn't have to attend board meetings, and in fact they preferred that I not. And that certainly coincided with my preference, so, but yes, I think became involved with that. (03:10:00) And from '76 to '95, I was part of an ecumenical chaplaincy and taught Philosophy and Religious Studies at Phillips Academy, a boarding school, ninth through twelfth, in Andover.

JG: A private school.

EG: A prep school.

JG: Did you continue to be actively involved in developments in the *havurah* movement in the following years?

EG: I would say somewhat. A couple of times we went to National Havurah Institute. And my own way of doing — conducting prayers and running the temple, the parts of it that I was responsible for, were very much *havurah* style.

JG: How so?

EG: In Lowell, for example, (03:11:00) my predecessor wore a gown, a black robe, and stood on the bimah. I arranged the chairs in a semi-circle, and I sat with the congregation

every week. Not at the High Holidays, but at every other service. So just sitting with them already represented, I think, some of the *havurah* spirit now leavening a previously lumpy congregational life. I guess I always thought of myself as either contributing to or working alongside the trends that I think (03:12:00) the *havurah* movement contributed to the enrichment, and really the salvation, of American Judaism.

MG: Also —

JG: Can you articulate, either one of you, beyond the sort of sitting in the circle, and being down off the bimah as a rabbi, any other aspects of Judaism which you think of as *havurah* Judaism that felt important for you to continue, both to teach and to incorporate in your own lives?

MG: Well, I assume you talked about the Marblehead group.

EG: I just mentioned, but nothing —

MG: In a sense, we were part of a *havurah*. They were six families, and five of them were from Marblehead, and they just could not bear the way that Judaism was being practiced and taught in synagogues. And somehow they found Everett. I don't know they read something — (03:13:00)

EG: Art Green referred them. They read about Havurat Shalom, and I had just written that article "Is There an Alternative to Synagogue?" And Art referred them to me.

MG: So we actually were together fifteen, fourteen years —

EG: Thirteen years. No, exactly thirteen — I remember, because as is classically the case, at thirteen you drop out!

MG: Right, but it was couples with young families, just almost same ages, all of us together. And we would meet maybe monthly. And it was always just sort of — not the standard ways of celebrating, but making up our own traditions and — do you remember some of the —? Well, I'll tell you, the one I liked best was the Sunday of Rosh Hashanah, we all went to the (03:14:00) beach —

EG: Plum Island.

MG: And got there before sunrise. And as the sun came up, we'd blow the shofar and chant and sing and whatever. And then we'd have a picnic and we'd stay. We did that for a long time, and it was very important to us and our children. Our children remember it.

EG: But that service — and we began doing it with Marblehead — my congregation was a one-day Rosh Hashanah congregation, so I didn't have to be anywhere — and birthday of the world, and so on. We did that, and besides sounding the shofar, eventually people would bring drums, and Mary would bring a Tibetan prayer horn, and always after (03:15:00) that, with the sun coming up, we'd all sing "Morning has Broken." And then we'd have readings and reflections, and a traditional sounding of the shofar, and then, weather permitting, picnic, shared breakfast. And it was beautiful. Then members of my temple wanted to join in, so they came. And that still continues — you know, Temple Emanuel of the Merrimack Valley — they still, second morning Rosh Hashanah, pre-sunrise gathering at Plum Island.

JG: We haven't talked about the *Jewish Catalog*, which was published in '73 originally, and several other editions. Were you able to make use of that? Did it have any impact on your life and your work within the community? (03:16:00)

EG: I contributed several articles, Mary contributed one on *tzedakah*, and of course. I mean, that was a basic text. I mean, at one time, for somebody very traditional, you might refer them to the abbreviated *Shulchan Aruch* in English. You referred them to the *Jewish Catalog*, Volumes One, Two, or Three — or all of the above. It was really a do-it-yourself manual, absolutely. As I say, certainly that spirit infused our own services at Temple Emanuel. Here, I'll give you a couple more examples. You asked about my relation to the *havurah* movement. I'd say the movement still has some catching up to do. (03:17:00) For example, we had an annual May Day Lag B'Omer ceremony up in our field in Andover. We had a two-acre hayfield, besides our garden. And I would every year cut a fresh eighteen-foot sapling and trim it, attach to it eighteen colored ribbons. I made a special crown for it with biblical verses and something from E.E. Cummings, and yeah — and Chaucer. And we would have a ritual procession around the field, and at each directional point a flag would be planted (03:18:00) with either a verse from *Ecclesiastes*, referring to north and south, or from *Song of Songs*, east and west, or the reverse. And then we'd put up the May Pole and do the ribbons. And you know, there are still people I meet who say, I remember as a kid coming with my parents to your Omer May Day celebration. So there was a lot of innovation. For example, it's too long for the tape, but my temple came to observe Jacob Lantern Sabbath — the last Friday night in October. And I have a whole thing about pumpkins, but we (03:19:00) illuminate our *sukkah* with a carved pumpkin. It certainly is more authentic than an electric light, if you want to talk about desert illumination, so — but our small temple, the last few years of

Jacob Lantern service, had an average number of more than fifty, five zero, carved pumpkins on the bimah, every one with a candle. And the service was awesome. And standard, but then a period of reflection and darkness and the organist playing, and associations with the light and rays and emanations — I mean, it's incredible. We also had very big emphasis (03:20:00) on the Tu b'Shvat seder for which I think I am credited with having not initiated, but certainly brought it to wider attention. And also, and this has not yet been adopted, but hang around a few generations and it will be, we made a sun wheel at our temple. And I had the collaboration of a wonderful artist from Newton, actually, a woman named Karen Frostig who taught at Mass —

JG: I know her.

MG: Do you know her?

EG: You know her! Oh, she's fabulous, very gifted. Anyway, she helped me design a sun wheel for (03:21:00) the great sun ceremony on Wednesday morning, April 8th. It was in 1981. And it's celebrated once every twenty-eight years. Anyway, the sun wheel is four feet in diameter with a Hebrew acrostic in it. I'll show you a photo of it, if you're interested. And what do you do with a four-foot-in-diameter decorated wheel — you know, that fits on a closet pole, and so you can turn it? Well, I realized this is what we need at every turning of the seasons. And ever since 1981, and it is still used, four times (03:22:00) a year at temple, there is some poetry and a blessing and a proclamation of the succession of the seasons, and then some music — always “Turn, Turn, Turn” — and the turning of the prayer, the sun wheel. Now, so I mean, I think of all of these — of participating in the spirit of *havurah* Judaism.

JG: I have a question.

EG: You think of other things, Mary?

MG: No.

JG: We're talking about the spirit of do-it-yourself Judaism that was sort of encapsulated and promoted by the *Catalog*. And at the same time, the *havurah*, the original *havurot*, (03:23:00) the first *havurot*, and *havurah* Judaism, had begun with, among other things, a very strong critique of the sterility of services in, quote, “big-box Jewish synagogues” and particularly the role of the rabbi. So I'm wondering how you came to articulate for yourself and envision the role of the rabbi as you saw it and wanted to live it in this context, which called for people to participate much more fully themselves.

EG: I very much thought of myself as (03:24:00) essentially a resource person, someone who could help people give expression to some of their inner stirrings with the aid of traditional Jewish practices, perhaps modified, adjusted, reinterpreted, for a particular occasion. So I did not view myself as the authority to which people came for directive decisions, but rather as an enabler of expression of deeper feelings. The idea of, “Well, I don’t want to be impeded by traditional forms of expression. I want to give expression to my own original thought.” (03:25:00) If we were all capable of such inspired expression of what lies within, the world would know no prose, only poetry. Most of us are not so gifted, and part of the genius of Jewish tradition is the ceremonies that can give expression to these deep layers of feeling. So always — and it’s still the case, my sense of being a rabbi was making available to people what they may not be aware of, helping them appreciate the flexibility, the fluidity of these forms, that are not fixed absolutely, and helping them realize what a treasure they have (03:26:00) for relating what lies within to being shared with others. At some level, I think what we’re really talking about is enabling — enabling speech and expression to unite us around our inner lives.

JG: Mary, in a similar, somewhat similar vein, it strikes me that part of what *havurah* Judaism did, at least in the beginning, was identify in very personal ways the voids and the lacks in Jewish life and ritual. And taking it upon oneself, (03:27:00) understanding that you had the agency, you yourself had the agency to try and change what was not working for you. And in so many ways, what you’re describing about the impact of feminism, and how you took that and moved with it into an exploration of your own Jewish life, and then sharing it, exemplifies exactly that. Does that speak to you? Does that ring true?

MG: Yeah, yeah. It probably made me more involved with Judaism than I would have been. When the feminist movement first came along, I was just thinking of it as sort of our household, the kids, and whatever. But in some way I think that being involved with the *havurah* (03:28:00) helped to move that along. And I think the way, the direction, I took it was in exploring what is Judaism anyway. What is all this stuff? Do I relate to any of it? Does any of it work in my life? And that’s, I think, how I then got into writing about women of the Bible and new Jewish rituals for people.

JG: And actually exploring what some of those metaphors, classic metaphors, and looking for the women’s voices, which was really the vanguard of what Jewish feminist scholarship and the exploration of ritual, and the innovation of new rituals that spoke specifically to women’s lives. And you got involved in that too.

MG: Actually, I don’t want to brag, but I think I was the first (03:29:00) one who started writing and speaking about that. Certainly not the most famous and not the best known,

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but something came out in 1970 and so as far as I know, was in *Response*, that was the first.

JG: Something of yours.

MG: Yes, something of mine came out. But then it sort of spread and it became, people got more and more involved in more and more of the analyses. But, yeah.

EG: Let me, I just thought of one other thing. The sensitivity to the environment and so on that I'd begun to articulate. It was in 1978 that our temple in Lowell converted our eternal light to solar power. (03:30:00) 1978. Very powerful symbolic act. People still appreciate it. I mean, fossil fuels. Nuclear! Eternal, be real! I mean, once upon a time, the olive — that was totally renewable. Sun, over how many billion years, but it will do as eternal source. And to plug your symbolic *Ner Tamid* into the sun! Wow!

JG: Do you see the evolution of Jewish environmentalism of recent times as a direct outgrowth of these early efforts that you were, in so many ways, responsible for nurturing?

EG: I would hope (03:31:00) that it contributed.

MG: Many people call you now the father of Jewish environmentalism.

EG: Or the grandfather!

MG: But for a long time he was not appreciated. Everett has tread along the edges for so many years. And people sort of go, oh! And then they eventually find out, yeah, that's wonderful, that's it. I mean, he was really coming out with that. Even when we were at Packard Manse, we sponsored a weekend on environmentalism and all that. It was just the beginning of that kind of awareness.

JG: And you spoke earlier about your view from the margins, in a sense, and also your roots in the farms, the farms and the landscape and the (03:32:00) soils of Iowa.

EG: I would add, by the way, and I've not been active in it, I mean I've always been a member — but the growth of vegetarianism within Judaism. I came to that very early.

JG: How did you come to that?

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EG: A combination of some — the biblical *Genesis* account, a romantic period when Chinese nature poetry and Mahler's "Das Lied Von der Erde" was dominant, and we — I had known a wonderful old couple in Maine, Helen and Scott Nearing, who were vegetarians.

MG: Do you know of them?

JG: Back to the Land movement. (03:33:00)

MG: They were very important in our life.

EG: Very important!

JG: Can you say a few words about that, please, and them?

EG: When I went to the Quaker summer camp when I was in high school, for a week, kids on that campus — William Penn Campus in Oskaloosa — were very excited about a newsletter published by some guy named Scott Nearing. And I registered it, and then when I was studying at University of Chicago, I noticed that Scott Nearing was speaking at some public hall on the Near North Side of Chicago. Its nickname was Hobo College. A lot of, you know, fringy types would sound off there. Anyway, I went. I met Scott in (03:34:00) 1946 and then maintained contact with him and with Helen. They were always influential, and they had been vegetarian. So they, and Louis Finkelstein was another contributor to my vegetarianism, because at a certain point, I did not find Kashrut compatible, and he said —

JG: How so? Can you say?

EG: It was irrational. What was the point? A lot of it was intended to keep us from excessive contact from those who ate differently, and I wanted more contact. But it just didn't make sense. There were elements of it, (03:35:00) considerate slaughter, okay. But, anyway, I can remember talking with Finkelstein and he was saying, "Look, I can understand that you find Kashrut incomplete," he said. "But given your general values and your sensitivities, why are you eating meat at all? Why aren't you a vegetarian?" And that was a powerful question. And I thought about it and slowly made the transition. And I don't know, what is it, fifty-five, fifty-seven years? So it could become habitual.
[laughs]

MG: And Everett was vegetarian when I met him, and I had grown up in Kansas City, second largest stockyards in the country — meat, beef, pork chops, everything. Heavily

meat-eater. (03:36:00) And we met. I'd never really heard about vegetarianism, whatever. However, I really am so grateful he was vegetarian and not Kashrut, because I couldn't have done it. I could not ever have kept kosher. If you thought it didn't make sense, to me it was just you know, this voodoo stuff, and obsessive. This glass, and this piece of silverware, and this sponge, and that — I mean, just ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I was talking to somebody the other day and I was saying, had you been kosher, I'm not sure this whole thing would have happened. I mean, that sounds really extreme, but our first visit to his mother, I used the wrong glass. She said, "That's okay. We'll bury it!" (03:37:00) I'm twenty-three years old, like, ah! And I thought, this is really bad stuff. Whereas I had always loved animals and vegetarianism made perfect, perfect sense to me. When we were first married, I'd be vegetarian at home and we would go out and I would eat meat. Then one summer Everett took a bunch of youth groupers up to Maine. And we went to see the Nearings, it was my first time seeing the Nearings. And they didn't proselytize. They didn't anything. They were just them. And I remember going back to the camp — it was a USY camp, and getting a hamburger, and sitting in the corner, and wolfing it down. My last meat for — it's been fifty-two years or something like that. So they were a very powerful influence. I'll just say a little more about that. When we came back from Mexico, Everett had talked about them and said, "Why don't we go up (03:38:00) and spend three weeks up there and they can teach up how to garden?" Well, we were not staying with them, they would say, thank God. And I had two little ones, and Helen was somebody who was always on the move. So they'd be in the kitchen. She'd run them over, zoom, zoom. Fortunately, we brought a babysitter along, but anyway they became very, very important in our lives. And it's hard for me to say all the ways, but sort of who they were, how they were living out their values. How, when they talked about things, that was how they lived, and that was how they did — more extreme than would be right for me. I really did not go for the Clivus Multrum toilet, which is self-composting. I'm a little too bourgeois for that. But just the idea of you're living your principles, you're growing your own food, (03:39:00) and —they became very important. And Helen especially was important for me. It's hard for me to say why. I don't know. I absorbed a lot of Helen, but in my own way.

EG: Hmmm.

MG: Uh oh, what? [*laughs*]

EG: Yes! Totally! No, the energy, yes! The energy, the vitality, the eternal youthfulness, the continued activity undeterred by aging, all of that you exemplify, darling.

MG: She camped with us when she was ninety-three, right over there. She did say she didn't feel comfortable bathing in the stream, but she camped.

EG: Well, it was very hazardous footing.

MG: It was just a whole approach to life, and you know — living your values, practicing them. She was just a very (03:40:00) important role model for me. Scott was a bit stiff and gruff. Hmmm. Occasionally he would smile. But she was just effervescent, and whatever — really, really an important archetypal figure in my mind, for me.

EG: Look, the difference between Helen and Scott, you can summarize it this way. Helen at one time had played the violin. Quite accomplished. Not quite professional level but might have had aspirations and might have made it. She loved music, and so do I, especially classical music —

MG: Come on, come on.

EG: But so, once in a while, Helen would purchase a record. Just so she could hear something. And she loved that. And Scott (03:41:00) would say, “You’ve already heard it.”

MG: Why are you playing it again? [*laughs*]

EG: There you have it! Whereas we’d come up and we’d invariably take her to one of the Sunday at Kneisel Hall in Blue Hill, Maine, and she would be in ecstasy.

MG: Okay, let’s see.

JG: Coming back to the *havurah* —

MG: Sorry, wandering a bit.

JG: No, it was important. And looking at the *havurah*’s vision for community, for prayer, for social justice, for the role of learning both in one’s own life and communally, what would you say were the *havurah*’s greatest strengths?

EG: Hmm. I think from the fact that there may be no synagogue currently operating that does not (03:42:00) have *havurot* within it. I would say there was, first of all, the early recognition of how essential community is to individual development, and the devastation of community in the U.S., I mean, and the anomie and the despair, and the rootlessness, and the lack of values. I would say Havurat Shalom and the *havurah* movement early recognized the importance of companionship, fellowship, human sharing. For me, the

great strength of the *havurah* movement is its religiosity, its religious focus. (03:43:00) Because I think that the purely horizontal is not self-sustaining. One needs the vertical, whether heights or depths. And the *havurah* movement recognized that. I mean, William Blake put it perfectly: he has a little epigrammatic essay. A few lines, it's called "There is no natural religion." Nature is entropy. It slides downhill. Energy is slowly drained. You need the inspiration. I think the seriousness of the quest, the spiritual quest at Havurat Shalom (03:44:00) is also a beacon. And the spirituality, and the Jewish meditation movement, all of that. and a more reflective devotional-oriented group of younger rabbis. I don't say that's a direct influence, but those developments reflect what the *havurah* early perceived as the crucial need for our continuation.

MG: Amen?

EG: [laughs]

JG: Amen. Is there anything else either of you would like to add?

MG: There is one thing that I didn't mention which is my passion for the (03:44:00) out of doors, and that in some ways grew out of my summer experience at Camp Chicagami. That I really love the outdoors, and I have really come to feel that that is my spiritual home. It's with growing things. I can go out, and I'll spend twelve hours a day not even know that it's gone! Just doing this and that, and then be totally happy — totally, totally at home. So I have really come to feel there's where I express and receive my spirituality.

EG: When I observe Mary cutting flowers and then contemplating them, she probably wouldn't use the word — and arranging them so artistically. I mean I recognize it (03:45:00) as really a very high, advanced form of worship. Of *tefilah*. And look, *tefilah* is, after all, ultimately connected with a root, having to do with connection. And that is her deep connection to roots, branches and efflorescence. And I'm touched just observing it. So I think when she says that, it's a true expression of her worship, however alien the term might be on her tongue.

MG: Don't get too sappy about all of this.

JG: One other thing that I would note, even as we're having this last conversation, (03:46:00) is the orientation towards what, once again, Art Green called the patchwork creativity, the sense that all the world, in a sense, is for us to draw on in our own worship, in our communal worship. And this was something that certainly animated the early *havurot*. It seems to have animated your approach to the rabbinate, your approach to life

as well. Do you see that as having filtered into, as a legacy of, or an outgrowth of the *havurah* and *havurah* Judaism and into the larger Jewish world?

EG: (03:47:00) I didn't experience the *havurah* movement as really living that out. It certainly subscribed to it intellectually, but that's not where I felt the emphasis was. I found it much more on reclaiming the authentic Jewish tradition. What's your sense, Mary?

MG: My sense of the *havurah* is so vague and so — but yes, I found it. There was a way in which I found it “too Jewish.” Again, that's my Reform background. But it was just so intensely focused on Judaism. And that to me was too narrow. I couldn't fit (03:48:00) in that.

EG: Zalman was way out there! But I don't think the *havurah* movement was.

JG: Maybe that's a place where they departed, Zalman —

EG: I think the emphasis — they may have subscribed theoretically to the same principles, but in practice I would say there was a significant divide. You put it very well.

JG: Well, thank you.

EG & MG: Thank you.

JG: It's been a remarkable conversation. We're very grateful to you. We hope we haven't worn you out.

EG: Not at all!

MG: Oh, come on. We just walked around Machu Pichu.

EG: We've only begun to talk.

MG: We're on our way to Iran.

JG: That's right! We just found out about the trip last week.

MG: That's right.