

**Maurice Schanfield**  
**Narrator**

**Rhoda G. Lewin**  
**Interviewer**

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Maurice Schanfield -MS  
Rhoda Lewin -RL

**RL:** Why don't you start out by giving your name and telling when you were born?

**MS:** My name is Maurice Schanfield. I was born in 1904.

**RL:** Where did you live at that time?

**MS:** Strangely, I lived in South Minneapolis in what was an Irish Catholic neighborhood, just a few blocks away from the Jewish community center, on Franklin Avenue, near Adams School. I was born at 2210 Eighteenth Avenue South, which is half a block from the Holy Rosary Church. Our neighbors on all sides were the Eameses, the Murphys, and so forth. I vaguely remember as a child even attending a Mass with some of my neighbors.

**RL:** How long did you live there?

**MS:** We lived there until I was six years old, at which time my father died, leaving four small children. My mother almost died after that because of pneumonia, and I believe that what pulled her through was just her refusal to die because of the small children. Incidentally, Esther [Schanfield Rosenbloom] was the oldest; she was twelve. My father died in January, 1911. With the ensuing illness of my mother, the doctors felt she'd never survive a winter here. So my mother packed all of us up and we went out to California, where we lived in San Diego for a year, a period which I just vaguely remember. I remember being just able to read a newspaper. I can remember the big headlines on the sinking of the *Titanic*, which was in April, 1912. And when we got back to Minneapolis after a year there, my mother feeling much better, of course, we then—in the meantime she had sold our family house on Eighteenth Avenue—but we owned a property on Fifteenth Avenue and Ninth Street. That's where we settled, which is how come we were about half a block from the Glicks, among others. [Interviewer note: The Glicks were my maternal grandparents, who moved to Minneapolis from Muscatine, Iowa, circa 1920.]

**RL:** Was that a four-plex, or a single family home?

**MS:** It was a large double house which was made over into a triplex. We had the large half of the house, upstairs and downstairs, which was a meeting place for all the relatives, who were roomers. Mother, in a way, was the matriarch of the family, and so all the family events were usually held at our house, because of the room that was available. As a matter of fact, we had several kids, my mother's cousins, who were married at our house because it was big enough.

**RL:** Your mother, then, had grown up in Minneapolis, too?

**MS:** Wrong. My mother was born in Romania, and she and her family came to this country in 1892. She was at that time, I believe, fifteen years old. And as a matter of fact, I don't know if the old house is still standing, but there was an old-type brick apartment building on Two and a Half Street, right off Cedar Avenue—I think perhaps that property was torn down when they rebuilt the [University of Minnesota] West Bank Campus—but until that time the house they settled in when they first came was there.

My father was also from Romania; he had migrated to this country in 1883. As the story goes, he and his father came over—he was a boy of sixteen—and they landed in Montreal and to earn money, they went to work on the Canadian Pacific railroad. They were building the railroad at that time, but conditions were much too harsh, especially for two Jewish greenhorns. When they got to Winnipeg, somehow or other—they hiked—and they got to Minneapolis, because they had some people here that they knew. That was how the family happened to be there. He eventually met my mother, and they were married; I don't exactly remember the date, because I wasn't there! [Laughing] Esther, by the way, has quite vivid recollections that I don't have, because of the difference in our ages.

As a matter of fact, an interesting thing is that I never was fluent in Yiddish. My mother's folks, neither of them spoke English very well. My mother's father, he died a month or two after my father did; my mother really had a rough time, because he was a relatively young man, too. And so my grandmother came to live with us. And Esther was raised with Yiddish-speaking people and achieved a certain fluency in Yiddish, which she still has to some extent, I believe, although she never uses it.

I vaguely remember that there was quite a concentrated Jewish community on Franklin Avenue between Seventeenth Avenue running north toward Eighth Street, Sixteenth Avenue . . . They were really poor people. There was an old synagogue on Seventeenth Avenue about a block north of Franklin where I used to go to say Kaddish. The boundaries, of course, of that Jewish neighborhood expanded, so when we came back from California we lived on Fifteenth Avenue, which already was largely a Jewish

neighborhood, although not completely.

**RL:** You say they were really poor people. How do you define that, and why do you say that? Was that because they lived differently from the way you had been living? Can you put your finger on what made you feel that they were poor?

**MS:** I guess I really could only surmise, but I believe that even as a child I recognized that we had more comforts than they had. My father was a highly able businessman. He was a fruit peddler, and he had built himself a route where he sold all the fruit to the Radisson Hotel and Schiek's Cafe and all the rest. And he was acquiring property, and I guess if he'd lived a few more years, he would have been rather a wealthy person. But when he died, he had a few properties—they were all a part, of course, of just acquiring equity—and it turned out that my mother also had business acumen, and so she was able to manage those properties and pay them off. And that was how she had the wherewithal to educate us kids.

I can remember that my playmates, they would be out shining shoes and selling papers when they were six, seven, eight years old, whereas I didn't have to do that. But when I was nine or ten I began to carry a route, because it was my mother's judgment that I should do some work. Which reminds me, by the way, this cold weather that we had the other day, [laughing] I was recalling that we didn't look at cold weather then the way we do now. I used to carry a morning route, and you'd get up at four or five o'clock in the morning, and God knows how cold it was, just as cold as it is now, perhaps, and we survived! We'd go out and deliver papers! Jumping ahead a few years, when I first entered the University I acquired a Model T Ford. It didn't have any curtains—it was a passenger car; they didn't have sedans in those days—and somehow I used to survive driving that Ford to school, with no curtains! And today, unless your heater is working, you don't use the car! [Laughing]

**RL:** You must have been a rarity, owning a car and going to the University.

**MS:** Well, by that time I was doing a little work, of course. The morning route that I had during my latter years in high school was really a moneymaker. I think I must have been making \$80 to \$100 a month on that route!

**RL:** How many papers were you delivering?

**MS:** Well, I had a special rate because I had a special territory. And of course I can remember buying that Ford . . . I think it cost me \$90. That's a little different from what the price of cars are today! Some of my real pleasant memories . . . There was a "leading spirit" on the South Side called Mac Friedman. Mac Friedman had a store on Franklin Avenue, and amongst other things he sold coal by the sack. I've forgotten what other things he handled, but Mac Friedman was known for his generosity, and how many poor

people he kept from freezing to death by selling coal on credit . . . Mac Friedman, by the way, had these many, many, many years . . . That's how come, like all the Fliegelmans, and the Brins, and all the rest . . . of course Fanny Brin was a Fliegelman, but Mac Friedman was her uncle. Mac Friedman's sister, Tony, was Mrs. John Fliegelman. And the Solomons were related . . . the matriarch of that family, by the way, was Mac Friedman's aunt, Toby Harris. And Toby Harris is my wife Norma's grandmother. I really never to know Norma until shortly before we got married. I got to know her because she came to work for us; she worked for a customer of ours, and she quit that job; at that time I had no idea that I would meet a capable girl. But all of a sudden, finding out, because it dawned on me that so many of her cousins were people that I lived with and had been raised with on the South Side, and she didn't know a lot of those relatives! Her own blood relatives, and first cousins! That came about because Norma was born in North Dakota, and her mother was not Jewish. I guess in those days, you know, marrying outside the faith... But she really got to know, not all, but many of her cousins through me identifying them for her.

**RL:** What year did she come to work here?

**MS:** 1943.

**RL:** Then you were married quite late.

**MS:** Yes, I was forty-two when I was married.

**RL:** So let's go back. Do you want to tell me what kind of special paper route this was? Where your territory was?

**MS:** My big route, of course, was the morning route. That route was a plum. I got it because the boy that did carry it was several years older than I and he couldn't handle the route after he graduated high school and went on to the University. And so I used to help him carry his route when he couldn't for any reason, sick and so forth, so he saw to it that I got the route when he quit. That route was from Franklin Avenue to Twenty-Fifth Street and from Chicago Avenue to Cedar Avenue.

**RL:** Apartment buildings, wasn't it?

**MS:** Well, what passed for apartment buildings in those days. Fortunately, there were several apartment buildings on the route where I could at least get warm, if it was real cold weather. And one of my big places where I delivered papers was, for example, the Lutheran Deaconess Hospital, and that was my "plum account," because whatever papers I left there—I believe it was twenty—I would be paid the full two cents, whereas when you delivered papers to stores, you only charged them one and six-tenths cents, because they had to make some money on them. So that was my prime account!

**RL:** How did you transport all these papers?

**MS:** Well, they were delivered. On Franklin Avenue there was a Greek restaurant between Bloomington and Fifth Avenue, and they would leave the papers off in front of them in two bundles. I would carry one-half the route—the west half—and then I'd come back and pick up the other bundle and carry the rest. It was much too long a route to walk, unless you couldn't use a bicycle. And of course with the lack of proper snow clearance in those days, and all the rest of it . . . it was largely a walking problem during severe weather.

**RL:** It strikes me that mothers either didn't worry as much about their children getting enough sleep then, as they do now, because there you were, getting up at four A.M. every morning, and going out to do your route, and then you'd get to school... Do you have any recollections of mother saying, "Why are you doing this?"

**MS:** Oh, no. No. As a matter of fact, I think that you learned experientially that if you were going to carry the route, and you were going to get up that early in the morning, you'd better go to sleep by eight or nine o'clock at night. I suppose it was a way of recognizing that you couldn't burn the candle at both ends, because you couldn't get up in the morning unless you went to sleep early enough the previous night. Those recollections are really dim . . . If it weren't for you prompting my memory, I wouldn't remember them at all!

**RL:** Then you went to which high school?

**MS:** South High.

**RL:** Old South High, and graduated and went on to the University. World War I comes in there, but you weren't in service; you weren't old enough.

**MS:** When World War I opened, I was ten years old, and when it ended I was fourteen.

**RL:** Do you have any recollections about friends or relatives going into service? Did you sell Liberty Bonds?

**MS:** Not at that age. I do remember though we had some of my mother's cousins who came to this country in the 1900s and I remember that I never could understand—this was the early years of the war, before we were involved—and their sympathies were with the Germans. We used to think that was terrible. I can't develop on that; that's a vague recollection.

**RL:** Is there anything else, then, that you remember about those years in grade school and

high school, before you started at the University?

**MS:** There's probably a host of things, if I could only remember them. I remember that from early on, as soon as we lived on Fifteenth Avenue, there was a baker in Minneapolis, I. M. Berman the Bakers. His bakery was on Fifteenth Avenue and Fifth Street. They used to deliver bread to our house. Mr. Berman has the same Yahrzeit that I do, and he always used to come on my Yahrzeit . . . which again, my father died in December, so it was in December or January . . . he would always come to my house that morning to make sure I was up, and the reason wasn't, as I recognized afterwards, wasn't that he wanted to make sure that I didn't miss my Yahrzeit, it was because my mother always used to send me to my Yahrzeit with a bottle of schnapps and a cake, and Mr. Berman liked the schnapps, and he wanted to make sure [laughing] that they had the schnapps at the services that morning.

**RL:** Was this tradition? Did other people do that, too?

**MS:** No, I would say that many of the people couldn't afford this. This is another one of the things that my mother could afford; she could afford a bottle of whiskey.

**RL:** Did she go out to buy that? Or did she send you out to get it?

**MS:** Oh, no. As a matter of fact . . . Would you please turn the tape off for just a minute? I might say, Rhoda, I have no inhibitions at all about telling anybody that I'm an "arrested" alcoholic. I didn't want to burden this tape with something that might be considered as boastful, and so forth; it's something you're supposed to keep to yourself, so that's why I asked you to turn it off. Part of the AA program is how can you help somebody who's got a liquor problem unless they know that you also had a liquor problem, and there's nothing they can do that you don't know; you've been through it already. If you keep it to yourself—and some people still are—but the surest way of staying sober by the way is working with people who can't stay sober. Because now you have a constant reminder of what you were, and what you did, when you were drinking. But this doesn't have anything to do with the days that we're talking about, because that was far in the future. I can remember there was some beauties to our religious customs—and this is something that I do regret, even after this long, that I'm so far away from all religious observance. On Sukkot, for example, the lulav and the esrog, the Mirvisses—I was practically raised with the Mirvisses . . . their kids, my friends Sam, Ernie . . . they would make the rounds every morning during Sukkot and they'd come to your house and you'd say the blessings, and they'd go from house to house to house. That was a nice custom, and that's what tied you to your religion. Another humorous aside, by the way, I was Bar Mitzvah, and Rabbi Matt, at that time, was not only the Rabbi at the Adath Jeshurun but he also taught Cheder [Hebrew School]. And he convinced my mother that I should continue with Hebrew studies, and so after my Bar Mitzvah, going to Hebrew School as it was then conducted was just, we would say, the elementary grades. We

would have a more concentrated instruction. There was a man named Jacobs, who lived in our neighborhood, and Jacobs worked at the Post Office . . . Incidentally, among the immigrants, anybody who had a government position, even though it was work in a post office, this set somebody apart. This was a carry-over from Europe. He had presence, he had respect, and the fact that he was only a clerk down at the post office had nothing to do with it. Jacobs was a man who had been educated through a Yeshivah in Europe, and my mother engaged him to further my Hebrew studies. Three or four days a week Jacobs would come to my house after he left the post office, and there I would have an hour or two of concentrated study with him. Like any other kid, I always—and this continued for years—I was crazy about fires and the fire department. Everyone chased the fire engines! As a matter of fact, if I hadn't been sick, and if I'd been twenty-five years younger, I'd have gone down to see a fire the other day! I would have a few years ago, but not now, not in my present physical condition. But anyhow, I had to get home from high school at an early hour—this was from high school now—because I couldn't be late for Jacobs. But coming home that March day, we could see a huge column of smoke in the sky, so as always there's the illusion that it's only a block away, so we ran down a couple of blocks... it was a couple of blocks further . . . and it ended up that we went all the way up to Sixth Avenue North and Washington, where a big paper warehouse, W.S. Knott Co., was burning tarpaper. And so I didn't get home that night until ten or eleven o'clock, and the next day, when Mr. Jacobs came, he rapped me over the knuckles for unexcused absence from school. Whereupon I can remember putting on quite an act for my mother, saying that I'm not going to tolerate him . . . a man that hit your son . . . And that day was the last Hebrew lesson I ever took. So that's why I'm less learned in Hebrew than I otherwise would have been, because he was really a good teacher. So anyway, I wanted to show you how your innocent interests, such as chasing fires, can produce adverse results!  
[Laughing]

**RL:** So then you went on to the University. Were there very many Jewish students at the University? Did you make any new friends?

**MS:** Yes, and they turned out to be the finest people in the world. Jewish kids, I'm talking about. In all distressed areas, where poverty was, there was quite a tough element. Like Adams School, which is no longer there, Adams School was really known as a tough school. As a matter of fact, so many of the kids that I was raised with, that went to Adams School with me, ended up with life sentences, and all the rest. And there were other kids who were very rough and tough during these formative years who turned out to be the finest people in the world.

**RL:** Jewish kids?

**MS:** Jewish kids I'm talking about. And of course it was a poor neighborhood for the Irish, and also, of course, there was a Scandinavian element in there. And of course our Jewish kids' gangs were just as tough as they were. I can remember that I was rather a

small kid in grade school . . . I guess I was a little younger, too . . . and I grew tremendously in my high school years. But I had a couple of these tough Jewish kids who were my defenders. You know, there's always the bully boys, and all the rest of it. As a matter of fact, one of the kids that was rough, by the way, who really turned out to be a gentleman, and is still such a good friend of mine, is Ernie Fliegel. Ernie and I are about the same age, and I remember Ernie—he was just a tiny little fellow—but Ernie was always a man. I can remember as a kid he was very handy with his fists, and Ernie came up the hard way and he would have been a champion if he hadn't had that eye injury.

**RL:** How did he injure his eye?

**MS:** He was fighting for the right to meet the champion. He fought a man named Sarmiento, who was a Filipino, whom he beat, but he suffered an eye injury to his optic nerves, and that finished his fighting. Ernie is as nice a guy, as gentlemanly a guy as you'd want to know. As a matter of fact, I still see Ernie quite often. In fact, I just got a New Year's card from him this week. He spends his winters down in Phoenix with his brother. I really have a tremendous amount of affection for him. Ernie told me a very nice story . . . He has an excellent memory, and you should really talk to him.

**RL:** I have.

**MS:** Oh. Well, Ernie used to tell me this story. My uncle Joe was an unusual man . . . When Ernie was selling newspapers and shining shoes on Washington Avenue, Ernie was like all the other kids, he did a little pick-pocketing and all the rest of it. I don't know if he told you this, but this was . . . Incidentally, this was not unusual to him; this was a common practice. And he knew my uncle, who was a very kind man, and was always kind to him. I've forgotten exactly the details of the story, but my uncle gave him a dollar for a paper, and he short-changed him, or something, with a dime. I think he did it consciously, so he came back later to give him the dime, because my uncle was such a nice character. That's the kind of guy that Ernie Fliegel is. Ernie's a man of tremendous loyalties. I relive spending a little time with him . . . There were other people that I thought a lot of, too, at that time, and I can't really bring to mind as I can Ernie . . . and the reason I can remember so much of Ernie is because I still continue to see Ernie.

**RL:** So then when you were a little boy in a Catholic neighborhood, did you go over to the Jewish neighborhood to play? Or did you just play with the little kids in the neighborhood, and they were your friends?

**MS:** That's it.

**RL:** Then when you came back from San Diego, did you go back and look up the old neighborhood?

**MS:** No. I don't think that happens when you're that age. At age six I really don't have too many recollections. As a matter of fact, there was a fellow named Joe Hurley. Joe Hurley was one of our neighbors on Eighteenth Avenue, and Joe was a real nice guy, and a rough, tough Irishman, too, by the way. And Joe Hurley was a big kid . . . you know, when they're two, three, four years older than you are, they're a "different generation" at that age! And I remember that when I got into high school, Joe was still there—he wasn't too good a student—although he was a couple of years ahead of me. And Joe Hurley, amongst others, all used to say, "Maurice, what day is today?" The Sabbath was Saturday, and they were joshing me, so I'd always say it was Saturday, because Saturday was a big day for me! This is of no moment at all for me, but I just happen to remember it.

**RL:** How old were you when you graduated South High School?

**MS:** I was not quite seventeen. As a matter of fact, Rhoda, you know, you get too late smart. Who thought of those things? Like my daughter, Janie, who's really quite a pistol. She is sharp. Janie's presently in Salt Lake City, where her husband is at the University of Utah going for his Master's, and perhaps his Ph.D. And Janie was a very indifferent student. She went to Colorado College in Colorado Springs, which is a fine school by the way, and her record there was rather indifferent until she was married—on the campus, by the way, at the end of her junior year—and her husband had already graduated. They came up here to Minneapolis, and he went to work for us, but he isn't working any more for us. He decided to go back into his field. We're blessed, incidentally, to have him for a son, with what a man he is.

So anyway, Janie decided to finish school here, to get her degree here. And she had matured so much in terms of her scholastic record . . . she was such a whiz in philosophy, mathematics and chemistry—chemistry, which is the toughest course—and she always used to say that she felt sad, because if she had it to do over again, she would have liked to have been able to stay out of school for a year or two—this is quite common—for a year or two after your high school, to really know what you're going to do. As a matter of fact, I went to the University only because I was told that's what you had to do, and I can tell you, I never had a Fail. But then again, although I was a rather indifferent student, I was rather good in some fields, and the ones I wasn't really interested in—I'm speaking now about my high school record—I never had a Fail, until I got a Flunk at the end of my second or third year at the University. Why? For unexplained absences! Why did I have unexplained absences? Because I had taken up chess! I had an eight o'clock class in the morning—and balance is hard for everybody to achieve, and certainly for me—I had an eight o'clock class in the morning, eight to nine, and then I'd go over to the old Men's Union—Coffman Union wasn't built then—and I'd start playing chess. And when they closed down the Union at midnight, I'd go home. I would spend the rest of the day playing chess! This was my evaluation of the value of a University education! It enabled you to play chess, which you didn't play otherwise! I guess that certainly if I'd . . . maybe I would have been that foolish enough even if I'd been out of the University for a couple of years.

But Janie certainly wouldn't have. This ties in with my earlier statement to you about my protracted adolescence. [Laughing]

**RL:** How long would you say you were an “adolescent”?

**MS:** Well, I'll tell you, Rhoda, I always had a feeling that acting like a kid was something beneath me, something foolish, because of my accumulating years, and it used to hurt me no end when people would say, “Why don't you quit kidding around? Why don't you act your age?” This was so many years . . . but in more recent years, the highest compliment anybody could pay me [laughing] is to say, “Why don't you grow up?” But gee, I'm still youthful in some of my approaches, instead of a doddering codger! So what I considered, of course, and even then, it wasn't now, because my attitude toward adolescence was so indifferent. And then the net result was . . . what the hell, Rhoda . . . who knows? I've tried to live a fairly good life, as far as being a man is concerned, and if I'd tried to do something else, say being a wealthy man, what difference does it make? If I'd only done this . . . If I'd only done that . . . I've outgrown that thing! That's why I cherish, by the way, the adolescence that you're asking me about.

**RL:** Your uncle Joe was so involved in community activity. Was your father involved? Was your mother involved? When did you begin to take an active part in Jewish community affairs?

**MS:** I don't think I ever did. For one thing, I guess I'm not a joiner. And part of my attitude, by the way, toward community and other affairs, could well be sour grapes, meaning by that that I'm not especially good, I think, by inheritance; I'm not a good administrator, I lack, perhaps, singleness of purpose, but I say this might be a “sour grapes” part. But the other thing that really bugs me is the reverse side of the coin. The best instance I can give you, Rhoda, is say with the AA program. One reason, I think, amongst many, that I was so successful in my recovery program was that early on in AA they talked about every day go out and do something for somebody else, but keep it secret. If you tell somebody that you did something good for somebody else, then it doesn't count any more. And I always—even before that, and always now—I like to, and I do, several times during the year, make a blind donation to something. You get the thread there. As a matter of fact, those checks that I have sent, I go to the bank and buy a cashier's check, and I will mail a check in an unmarked envelope... and again, this has no religious significance . . . this is part and parcel of my feeling against those people who are so intensely involved in communal affairs of various kinds. I don't say that there aren't some of them who are really doing it because they want to benefit their fellow man, but then there are also a large part of them . . . the notoriety that comes with it, the position, and all the rest... this kind of stuff is not for me.

**RL:** You said earlier, when we were talking, that you had lost faith at an early age in “blessed providence.” What made you do that? Was it one event, or just the accumulation

of circumstances that you saw around you?

**MS:** I don't know. That's too broad a question to permit a simple answer.

**RL:** Then let's have a broad answer.

**MS:** [Chuckling] I doubt if I could formulate it in a few words. I think deep down that life is without purpose. We can make our own purposes, but the vision that some people have about having a benevolent providence, that all things come, and all the rest, this just doesn't... I hope I can repeat what happened to me a few years back when I was terribly sick. In fact, they didn't expect me to live. At that time I was quite calm about it, because I figured this life didn't owe me anything. That I had had a very good life, a very happy marriage, happy with my kids, and all the rest of it, and this business about what's going to happen thereafter . . . How these things come about, I don't know, but that's my feeling. For the professing Catholic, and there are others, who need absolution and all the rest of it . . . somebody dies without a priest being present, and the agony that I understand some of their relatives go through because they hadn't received that . . . this is figments of imagination, for me. How can I give you an answer?

**RL:** Well, that's an answer. So there you were, at the University... playboy... young... Still carrying your paper route?

**MS:** Oh no.

**RL:** Playing chess . . . taking some classes . . .

**MS:** Then, of course, after that occurrence where I came in to see my uncle, now I was working afternoons and going to school mornings, but even when I was working, I was making spending money. The fact that my mother was providing a house, and all the rest of it . . . she had the wherewithal . . . Those things that were just normal with a person . . . with a thought to the future that the average person growing up has, in his teens and afterwards . . . that was too profound for me. I never had those things.

**RL:** How about your social life? Your friends? Where did you go when you went out on a date?

**MS:** Well, again, I can only tell you that, when you're speaking of friends, as I see it, and it might be distorted, because this is certainly subjective . . . But I think I've always been blessed with a knack for making friends, and although I am a highly introspective person, I'm outgoing so far as people are concerned. As a matter of fact, I might say, as far as you and I are concerned, I'm pretty outgoing at this point, and this is natural for me. And so I've never had any particular difficulty in making friends, or in keeping them, and so I was able to tolerate, by the way, a low blow, wherever it went, and of course, inevitably, that

happens. And of course by now—and I've had plenty of opportunity over the last few years—I can now sit back and reflect about how true Shakespeare and other commentators were about ingratitude, or the impermanency of all relationships, and not feel that I've been imposed upon. That's the way things are, that's all. And [chuckling] I'll tell you one thing I've gotten out of this... most of the time I really feel fortunate for this... you see, I'm at peace with myself. And there are so many people who are not. A real good friend of mine, by the way, real good . . . I don't know how to define him . . . but he died here last year. As he grew older—he wasn't very old, I think he was in his fifties when he died—as he grew older he became more successful. But of course now you have to define successful. He was accumulating more and more and more money and his defense of that was, when we tried to talk about it, was that he needed to achieve a certain material goal before he could quit worrying about the future. And he was still seeking for that goal when he died.

**RL:** And you feel you achieved that goal? Or you decided at some point that it wasn't worth going after?

**MS:** I don't think about those things. It isn't that I've achieved a goal . . . The mere mention of that would mean I hadn't achieved it. You see I'm physically somewhat proscribed, because of my physical condition, and this has been very true for the last five or six years, since my very serious illness. I have a heart condition, too, by the way. But I sometimes sit back and reflect how really fortunate I am, Rhoda, because here's Norma and I, we live alone in a very large house. At one time I thought we should sell the house when all the kids moved away, but we changed our minds about that. But anyhow, we have some community of interests, and we also have interests that we don't share. We can share our silences as well as our conversations. Like we sit home of an evening, and neither of us are television bugs, by the way, so we sit home in the evening, and she does her thing and I do my thing, and we don't talk for hours. And the fact that you're happy with this and all the rest is something really rare. I arrived at this, by the way, not by thinking [laughing] but by reflecting back on the course of my day, and I say this is something really to be cherished. At one time I was thinking, gosh, if I really had so applied myself that I could spend three months of winter in Miami or Palm Springs, and all the rest of those things—and those are “plots” I once had—but now what am I going to do in Palm Springs, for example? [Laughing] I feel lost when I'm not at home! I read . . . As a matter of fact, Rhoda, this might sound like it's corn, but I'm so busy doing nothing that I don't have time to do anything else! [Laughter]

**RL:** You do play golf, and things like that. Ernie still does.

**MS:** No. I've had an awful lot of spine surgery, too. I was told thirty-five years ago—up until that time I used to play a lot of golf—that golf was not for me any more, because of the strain. I was told I shouldn't, so I don't play any more.

**RL:** That would be about 1940-ish, before you were married.

**MS:** 1943, that was when it happened. But I finally had all the surgery. I had been in misery for some years before that.

**RL:** Was that an injury?

**MS:** Incidentally, if you really want to get bored—and there's nothing more boring—I can give you a record... my medical history. [Laughing]

**RL:** Well, can we do it for the 1920s and the 1930s?

**MS:** [Laughing] You'd better be careful, because once you get me started on those things . . .

**RL:** Well, it would be a nice report on the state of the medical profession in the 1920s and the 1930s.

**MS:** That's another thing . . . I am highly excitable, and it's a very easy thing for me to lose my cool when you ask me to discuss doctors!

**RL:** You had some bad experiences?

**MS:** Well, who doesn't?

**RL:** Did you have Jewish doctors? I've interviewed a doctor or two, and their spouses, and they're very, very bitter about the Jewish community's reaction to Jewish doctors, the fact that they wouldn't come to the Jewish doctors . . . and after all they should come to the Jewish doctors . . . And I just wondered if this was . . . so would you like to talk about the doctors?

**MS:** You're really opening a can of worms. Well, of course I'm familiar with what you said, that some of the doctors feel that Jewish people should go to Jewish doctors, but I've never felt that myself. I've had doctors tell me that. And of course what I think about them for voicing protests like that . . . you'd just as soon not hear, because I'd have to use some strong language. But all the surgery I've had, it just so happens has been non-Jewish. My doctor, of course, is Al Greenberg. And Reuben Berman . . . I've known Reuben, of course, for many years . . .

I have a strong feeling about medicine generally, including hospitals. Why should a person who can't afford it be subjected to hospital charges that are so high because the hospital doesn't want a competing hospital to have more equipment than they have? So they buy a half-million-dollar thing and another half-million-dollar thing, and that's all

reflected in the charges that you pay. “What do you care?” They say, “We carry insurance. It's the insurance company that pays it. But of course we know how expensive insurance is, and we know that better than you.” And it comes right back to . . . Now you ask yourself a question: does a hospital justify its existence because it wants to make pain and suffering easier for a fellow human being? Or do they justify its existence because they want to have the finest thing in the world, and the fact, incidentally, that they might be helping people is incidental? They've achieved their purpose if they have established themselves as a real high hospital. If they're recognized by the University of Minnesota Medical School, this is a real feather in their cap. Incidentally, this is also true of non-Jewish hospitals . . . and I'm purposely not naming any hospital . . . [laughing]

**RL:** We've got this blank space in your life . . . from the time you were starting off at the University, studying history and playing chess, until you arrived at the age of forty-three and Norma was sitting in the office . . . You were selling insurance during that period? You were with Schanfield, with your uncle. What kind of insurance did you sell?

**MS:** I was a partner. Almost everything. Not everything, but we even have a “life department” here, we have a man who handles the life insurance . . . As a matter of fact, what you're really asking me now is my personal history, which I have no objection to giving to you, though I don't know what value it is. Although I'm somewhat of a paper tiger, too, I can come on quite strong, I guess I'm also shy, quite shy. And I guess that I really don't know how to characterize it in terms of language. For example, I guess I'm a romantic, because I'm still a hero worshipper. Not to the extent that I was once upon a time, but I would get involved in something like T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia . . . God, when I was originally bitten with the T.E. Lawrence “bug,” going back to 1927 or 1928, when that abridgement of that book about the desert was published . . . but it isn't that I want to talk about T.E. Lawrence . . . I want to tell you about my enthusiasms, and about being . . . I'm either profoundly depressed—but these have been balanced out somewhat—or I'm way overboard the other way around, and I guess the term for it is that I—incidentally, this isn't a scientific term—but I'll call it an “addictive personality.” I wasted ten years of my life in a card room. I became a card player, after chess. I became a bridge addict, and then a pinochle addict. Instead of working, I'd get involved in some games on a Friday night and come home on Monday morning to change clothes to come to work. This is a thing, in fact, the type of excess that I was committing. And of course from cards I then went to booze. I was drinking all that time. So you can now fill in those vacant spaces. I haven't held a card in my hand for about thirty years! It's just like with booze . . . despite some of the findings that come out upon occasion that they can again teach an alcoholic to drink, that's never been proved. Neither is the old saying, “One drink is too many, and a thousand is not enough.”

**RL:** Did you ever become a workaholic?

**MS:** Yes, I've been through that, too. So, to the same extent that there's no such thing as

becoming, quote, “a social drinker,” once you've gone off the deep end, likewise with cards, or at least for me. Because either you don't play, or if occasionally I'm over at a friend's house and I'll see them playing cards, and I'll watch for a while, and I'll say— incidentally now I have a grown-up image of myself as a card player, because anybody who hasn't played cards as long as I have is no longer much of a card player—but I'll say, “Yeah, I'd like to get that guy on a slow boat to China . . .” It's always latent there. You know, it's like the story about the human brain is like a computer, once it's stored in there it's always around there someplace, and with the proper stimulus, it's re-aroused.

**RL:** Did you gamble with cards?

**MS:** Oh, yes. I spent big money.

**RL:** Did you play somewhere here in town, like at the Rec, or at people's homes?

**MS:** Probably both. In those years, there was a bridge club at the Radisson that ran for ten or fifteen years.

**RL:** Was it a club room, like the Press Club? Or somebody's suite? And people would just sort of drift in and out when they had the time?

**MS:** That's right. It was a suite of rooms at the Radisson, and you'd drift in there for an hour, and get out of there twenty-four hours later.

**RL:** Was this something that members of the Jewish community were particularly involved in?

**MS:** No. I think, in my experience, that as many people of the people that I gambled and played cards with were non-Jews as were Jews. I've had a “measuring stick”—its accuracy I'm not presenting as anything accurate, it's just the way I look at it—I don't care how you segregate people; they can be Rabbis, doctors, insurance men, or anything else, you usually end up with the same percentage of saints and the same percentage of bastards. That's rather a crude way of putting it, but . . . One of the things that really chagrins me to no end is statements like “Ninety percent of all people are honest.” You know that the amount of dishonesty—including my own self, by the way, although I hope that when I'm conscious of it I'm not as dishonest as the next person . . . This is kind of, again . . . [Pause]

Do you know the Serenity Prayer, by the way? Incidentally, there's no structure within AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] . . . you go to an AA group that's your own group, but you can go to any group that you want, and there's no structure. They can have any kind of form that they want . . . but any meeting is always opened with the Serenity Prayer, which goes, “God grant me to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I

can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” That really is a profound prayer. So I say I really should grin about the great amount of hypocrisy and dishonesty and all the rest that man exhibits . . . and I’m including myself, by the way . . . but then I fall back on the Serenity Prayer and I say to myself, “Look, don’t knock your brains out. There are things you can’t change.”

**RL:** Now can we go to religion? Your sister, Esther, was very involved. She taught Sunday School at Adath Jeshurun. When did you decide that you were going to go a different way?

**MS:** I didn’t decide. I just drifted. Now Esther really had very little religious affiliation, and going back thirty years ago she began to derive some real fundamental emotional satisfaction from Judaism, and not in the . . . You know, that term “religion” is so misleading . . . not because of its religious aspects, that she’s seeking for salvation and all the rest . . . she really was intoxicated with the richness of the Jewish religion, and this was what caused her participation. And I really envy her for it. At the same time I say “envy her for it,” I can remember a very good instance in point. When our children grew to an age where my oldest girl, now six years old and going to grade school, comes home and says, “Why don’t we go to Sunday School?” how are you going to face that? So the question comes up, “What kind of Sunday School are you going to send her to?” At this point, I really had an argument with the wife. Now my wife Norma, by the way, she was raised in North Dakota, and her uncle, her mother’s brother, was a Methodist preacher. And so what religious experience she had as a child was Christian. Her mother was not a church-going person—I’ll come back to her mother in a minute, if you’ll remind me—in any event, I was fully possessed, by the stories of my childhood, by the stories I knew about the people who were chopped up out there in Russia, chopped off three of their fingers, and such, and so I had this latent hostility, because what was the most terrifying word to a European Jew that migrated here? It was “Christ.” So automatically of course going to any Christian Sunday School was just impossible for me . . . I don’t mean to imply that Norma was advocating this, but in any event, as a result of this, she and I, to resolve this difficulty, went to see Stanley Rabinowitz, who was the Rabbi at Adath Jeshurun. In those days I was a member of Adath Jeshurun. I really wasn’t sharp enough, and cogent enough, to really understand what he was talking about, because I was really obtuse. I really had no real religious awareness. But as I voiced to him, in answer to his position that you must have the child identify with some faith, as much as he wasn’t recommending a Christian faith, nevertheless that, as against nothing, he would recommend that. And when I voiced my bias, my hatred, for things Christian, he says, “Well, then, the answer is, if you want to have a Jewish community, you have to move back to the Jewish community, so sell your house at the lake and move into town.” Well, it’s easy enough for him to say I should sell my house at the lake. All my life I wanted to live at the lake, and to stop living at the lake and sell my house? And so, as again more mature reflection in subsequent years made me realize that I made a choice, that the kind of life I was leading was more important to me than my kids’ identification with religion

or anything else, but the decision was mine. But I don't know if I was answering your question . . . What was your question?

**RL:** I guess I just wanted to hear you talk about your religious feelings. So you sent your children to the Unitarian Sunday School?

**MS:** For a time. They didn't want to go.

**RL:** And now you belong to Temple Israel?

**MS:** I made that switch. After all, I was born and reared in the Adath Jeshurun, but I made that switch thinking that I was taking the “geographic cure.” A good instance of the geographic cure, by the way, is a guy that lives in Minneapolis and he can't stay away from the booze. He drinks and he drinks, and he knows he shouldn't, but he keeps on drinking, so now he gets an idea, “I'll move to St. Paul, and there, if I'm out of Minneapolis, I won't be drinking.” So he moves and finds out it's as easy to drink in St. Paul as it is in Minneapolis. Well, I was taking the geographic cure by moving to Minneapolis . . . And as long as I'm mentioning the geographic cure, maybe it was because I didn't feel particularly warm toward Rabbi Goodman [at Adath Jeshuran] anyway—and incidentally, I don't know the man, this is just a personal reaction—the man I've always thought a lot of, and still do, I think he's an angel, is Rabbi Max Shapiro, so maybe, if I go to Temple [Israel] I will recapture some of my Jewish observances. So I resigned from Adath Jeshurun and went to the Temple, to find out that I can ignore the Temple as readily as I can the Adath Jeshurun!

**RL:** You felt you were missing something? You felt you ought to go back?

**MS:** I still do, at times.

**RL:** Why?

**MS:** Because there's a certain . . . I can give you a very good instance. Irv Paradise. At Irv's request, some years ago, I went with him to Simcath Torah, and that evening when services were over I spent a little while talking to him, and I was bemoaning the fact that things that had really aroused so much fulfilling emotional response in me was what the Catholic ritual and all its sacrament and ritual, with the Mass, and all the rest of it, had been lost for me because they didn't have the traditional songs that I was so familiar with in my youth. For example, on Yom Kippur, the *La Saneh Tokev*. Are you familiar with what *La Saneh Tokev* means?

**RL:** No.

**MS:** Well, I'll read it to you in English. It says, “The great Shofar . . . the Shofar gadol ye

tkah . . .” That means, “The large Shofar is sounded, and a still, small voice is heard . . . with fear and trembling, they all proclaim, ‘Behold, the Day of Judgment is coming’ . . .” This whole host of evidence being arrayed for judgment, that has an emotional relationship to me, since I’m an emotional person. Now I’m telling this to Irv Paradise, and Irv doesn’t like this at all, because you see—and this is the first time this was ever presented to me—he said the more primitive Judaism, before the Hellenic influence came in, the entire focus of Judaism is on the good life in this world. There is no reference made to salvation, or to the life hereafter. This was the Hellenic influence that eventually lead up to Christianity . . . after all, what is Christianity but a large part of neo-Platonism, and all the rest of it . . . that all this business about salvation and all the rest is not part of the Judaism that he likes, and therefore this song, *Lo Saneh Tokef*, is not for him, because he doesn’t believe that the whole host of evidence is arrayed before the Lord. He feels that there are other imperatives, that if you want to do good, it is what Judaism teaches, not because, like in the other faiths, the Day of Judgment is coming, and are you going to bask in hellfire, and all the rest of it. Well, this was entirely new, and now I felt, God, how ignorant I am, and why didn’t I have enough study, and begin to learn about this, and all the rest of it? So you’re asking me if I’m not entirely satisfied? If I were, I’d be an awful turnip, really!

**RL:** You’ve studied a lot.

**MS:** Not really.

**RL:** It’s your interest in history.

**MS:** I don’t have the facility for concentrated study; I lose interest after a while. I want to ask a favor of you, by the way . . . When we get finished with this, I want to ask about music. I was interested in music, though I didn’t want to practice, and all those things, but I was interrupted, by the way . . . I had a nervous disease called chorea, and I was out of school for a year, as a youngster, nine or ten years old . . . uncontrollable twitching.

**RL:** What instrument had you been studying?

**MS:** The piano. What really was significant, my sister Esther is in Music School at the University, and we’re living in this big house . . . this of course is before her marriage... and Esther always had her own concepts of time, like she’d get up at midnight or one or two o’clock in the morning, and she’d play the piano all night. We had a large house, upstairs and downstairs, so it was permitted, and all those songbooks that she had, I used to sit there by the hour listening to these songs. She’d sing them in her soft voice, and I think of all those beautiful songs by Schubert and Franck, and all the rest of them. You never hear them, like there’s a Caesar Franck song, “The Marriage of Roses,” I’ve never heard it except when Esther played it. It’s the most beautiful thing ever! And all you listen to is “Ha-Cha-Cha” and all the rest of it. Anyhow, a lot of those songs I still remember

from listening to Esther practice during the night. Going back to that inner group community on Franklin Avenue, the “dean” of that community, other than Mac Friedman, was a man called Charlie Juster. Charlie was a cousin to P.B. Juster from Juster Clothes and all the rest of it. Charlie Juster was a man who was looked up to because he had a job, one of these public jobs, for the County Treasurer or something, and Charlie, who had come over from Europe as a young man, he had been—either he was or his father was—some kind of an official in a little town, a Jewish community, in Romania. So people looked up to Charlie. And amongst the poor people, who didn't even know how to pay their taxes, they would give money to Charlie Juster and he would pay their taxes, and all the rest of the things. Now Charlie, early in his life, as a young man, he married a woman who was as Irish as Paddy's Pig. The whole community, by the way, was horrified... but at the same time, you know, how can you persuade people? You either appeal to their vanity, or to their pocketbooks. And since Charlie, to this community, was a man who had the “in's” and all the rest of it, he wasn't ostracized. And his wife became more Yiddish than even the most Jewish of people. His wife became very fluent in Yiddish. In those days, the old Romanische schul on Thirteenth Avenue and Ninth Street, they still separated the women from the men, and during the High Holidays, who would lead the sobbing in the balcony was Mrs. Charlie Juster. Charlie, I remember, had an unfortunate interest that he couldn't control, and that was gambling in commodities, and Charlie eventually diverted funds—people's tax money—and finally when the thing broke there were a lot of these poor destitute people who couldn't pay taxes or anything else, because Charlie Juster took their money. Charlie pleaded guilty . . . my uncle was a man of considerable influence, by the way . . . although a lot of it was goodness, not political influence . . . and he was trying to raise money for Charlie's fee plea, so as to compensate these people who had lost money, but one of Charlie's victims broke from the traces, and swore out a warrant against him, and with that the whole program collapsed. This incidentally was in my early days, so it must have been in the late 1920s. So Charlie served a couple of years in the penitentiary, and when he came out he was ostracized completely. His wife was now dead, and Charlie used to come up to the office, and he'd stay there. He'd come Saturday mornings—we used to work Saturdays—and he'd stay all day Saturday, and my uncle, he was the only person who showed him any kindness—that was the incident I wanted to tell you about. What a cause célèbre it was, in terms of the community here. If you think that Watergate was something, you should have known that one! I can still picture his wife by the way. Here I am, a little kid, and I look up there and I see her crying [laughing] . . . delicious, you know.

**RL:** I forgot to ask you about the Depression. What are your recollections of the Depression?

**MS:** Of course we were aware that the Depression was on, but of course those were my card playing days in the 1930s. But my uncle couldn't say no to the starving people, and they'd come up to the office, and my uncle would give them \$10, \$20, money he really didn't have . . . We survived the Depression.

[Segment erased at his request, while he refers once again to his addiction to gambling.]

Norma's mother is really a Spartan Norwegian. She's had a hard life. She has always risen above her circumstances, and for the past seven or eight years she's been a complete invalid because of arthritis. She never was a church-going person, and her kind of day now is, I have a sister-in-law who is unmarried, and the two of them live together. They have a lovely home out on First Avenue South, and Doris gets her ready in the morning, and then she goes to work, and she comes home at noon to take care of her needs, and then she's alone all the day until Doris comes back at five or six o'clock. And she's there, my mother-in-law . . . and you would think that nothing is wrong with her. She's always pleasant, she doesn't complain about those things, and she has in recent years become an ardent Bible reader. She reads her Bible every day. And here is something to see; this really is something that gives somebody strength. So this is something I can look forward to.

As a matter of fact . . . What the hell is the name of that guy? He died . . . Mel—he was a professor of psychology at Brandeis—I have a book of his at home, a series of lectures given at Ohio State University. It's about peak experiences . . . Have you ever heard the term “peak experiences?” Peak experience, to define it, or to attempt to define it, Rhoda, is that we've all had these occasions in life when we seem to be outside of ourselves. There's something transcendent, something so spiritual, so significant, like maybe when one of your children was born, or something else. And it only happens at certain times, and it can't be repeated. Now the idea was . . . for example, a peak experience is a vision of the Virgin Mary, or things of that kind, something like that, the common things . . . but Mel writes this book on peak experiences, talking in the first place about how misleading it is, because religion has assumed to itself a limited vocabulary, and when we speak about the spiritual, for example, then it has religious connotations generally, but it isn't so. It can be spiritual, having to do with “spirit,” without having any relationship to any faith, any religion, or anything else. And this is really a liberating insight. And there are times, there are things that have happened, to me, so far as Norma's concerned, like when I was really suffering from pain, I can remember some thing Norma did for me, it just lives on and on and on. And that's a peak experience, see? And it has nothing to do with the religious connotation that's usually the approach to it. In any event, this is rather rough and doesn't convey what I really want to tell you; if I could only find that book, Rhoda, and tell you at least where you can buy it, because I won't give it up. That is, if you would like to. In any event, my mother-in-law—this is what we were talking about—she has peak experiences coming out of this. [Knock on door, and he says, “Come in.”] A family that migrated here—I think it was just before the World War—and they settled in a house about a block from us. We played ball in the streets, and the mother would call her son “Shpitchik,” and she'd ask Shpitchik to come in, of course . . .

[End of interview]