

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Melba Winer
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Wendy Brice
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Wednesday, December 10, 2003
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation Building
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish life, family history

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7 MS. BRICE: This is Wendy Brice. I'm conducting an
8 oral history interview with Melba Winer at the Jewish
9 Federation Building on Wednesday, December 10.

10 Melba, do we have your permission to use your words
11 and thoughts in future for educational and historical research
12 and documentation?

13 MS. WINER: Of course.

14 MS. BRICE: Let me just start with a general
15 opening. We know you were born in July 1917. Where were you
16 born?

17 MS. WINER: Well, if you really want to know, I was
18 born in Harper Hospital, but I was born in Detroit. My mother
19 and father were very young, 19 and 20, when I was born. They
20 had purchased a store in Hamtramck because they didn't want to
21 be beholden to anybody, so they borrowed money which they
22 quickly paid back. We lived there for about six years and
23 then moved to Medbury, which was the area that most of the
24 Jewish people lived in. My grandparents lived on Farnsworth.
25 And they belonged to what eventually became the Taylor Shul.

1 I have no idea what the real name of the shul was, but it was
2 the Taylor Shul after it moved to Taylor and Woodrow Wilson,
3 which was the next step for the Jewish Community to move into.
4 And we moved to Chicago Boulevard.

5 MS. BRICE: At what age were you when you moved to
6 Chicago Boulevard?

7 MS. WINER: Ten.

8 MS. BRICE: Let's go back a moment. Your mother and
9 father's names.

10 MS. WINER: Tillie and Harry Sklar.

11 MS. BRICE: And what was Tillie's maiden name?

12 MS. WINER: Burnbom.

13 MS. BRICE: Harry was the son of?

14 MS. WINER: Harry was the son of Jacob and Sophie
15 Sklar. His father was called Reverend Sklar. He was a mohel
16 and a ~~scheha~~^{Schochet}?? and he was very actively engaged in the Taylor
17 Shul.

18 MS. BRICE: I wanted to ask you a little bit about
19 Jacob Sklar. I know he was active at the Taylor Shul. I've
20 come across his name in some documents relating to leadership
21 at the time. What do you remember about his role in the
22 Jewish Community? And let's kind of put this in a perspective
23 of years.

24 MS. WINER: Well, he died when I was really very
25 young. Probably 10, 11. My memory of my grandfather was of

1 an elegant and beautiful looking man with a white Van Dyke,
2 very neatly groomed, and sitting at the table with a glass of
3 tea and sugar between his teeth, reading because he spent much
4 of his time reading. And I have to confess that it was my
5 grandmother, who could have run the country had she had the
6 opportunity and the education, who did most of the work. But
7 grandpa was really a very beautiful looking man and a great
8 scholar.

9 MS. BRICE: Do you recall that he would go to
10 several shuls --

11 MS. WINER: I don't remember that at all. I only
12 remember him being part of the rabbinical team at Taylor Shul.

13 MS. BRICE: The Taylor Shul was also the Farnsworth?

14 MS. WINER: Yes, it was the Farnsworth Shul
15 originally, yes.

16 MS. BRICE: And that was an Orthodox.

17 MS. WINER: Yes.

18 MS. BRICE: But your father was not Orthodox.

19 MS. WINER: Well, my father was raised in an
20 orthodox home and my folks kept kosher. But no, I can't
21 consider them Orthodox. However, my father always belonged
22 and supported the Taylor Shul, even though he and my mother
23 belonged to the Shaarey Zedek. Eventually, when my
24 grandfather died, although there were nine other siblings of
25 my father in the family, eventually my father and mother took

1 a membership for my grandmother at Shaarey Zedek so that we
2 could all be together.

3 MS. BRICE: How old were you when you moved to
4 Chicago Boulevard?

5 MS. WINER: About ten.

6 MS. BRICE: Tell us a little bit about some of your
7 early childhood memories, maybe some of your family traditions
8 or favorite places to go, maybe some of the favorite family
9 foods your mother would cook.

10 MS. WINER: My mother was a great cook. Belonged to
11 all the organizations in town. Was very active with Shaarey
12 Zedek sisterhood and was active in Hadassah, and was one of
13 the founding members of Music Study Club. As a matter of
14 fact, I proudly do some of her recipes. Even today, her
15 recipe for gefilte fish and strudel and many of the other
16 things I do and my children love come from my mother.

17 In those days she would get up at five or six
18 o'clock in the morning, no matter what hour she went to bed,
19 so that she could do all the cooking. There were no shorthand
20 ways of cooking in those years. She would always have her
21 meal done before she went off for her activities or her card
22 games, or whatever she applied herself to.

23 So I came from a family that was very active in the
24 community and in their synagogue.

25 MS. BRICE: Which was Shaarey Zedek?

1 MS. WINER: Yes.

2 MS. BRICE: Didn't you belong to Temple Beth El,
3 also?

4 MS. WINER: There was a short period of time, when I
5 was ten, when I was confirmed, that we belonged to Temple Beth
6 El. My poor father had three places to support. Because
7 there was a store front when Shaarey Zedek was being built on
8 Chicago Boulevard. Many of the people I knew -- children --
9 went to Temple Beth El, so I wanted to go. So my father
10 joined Temple Beth El until I was confirmed and then I went
11 back to Shaarey Zedek.

12 MS. BRICE: Was your father involved also in some of
13 the organizations?

14 MS. WINER: Yes. Dad was a Mason, was active at
15 Shaarey Zedek. He was an usher on the left-hand side of
16 Shaarey Zedek and I have never moved from the seats on the
17 left-hand side because I was so brainwashed that I had to
18 always sit on the left side where my father had been an usher.

19 MS. BRICE: I didn't know they assigned sides.

20 MS. WINER: This being at Federation, I wanted to
21 mention a couple of things about Federation. In those years
22 Jewish people lived together in neighborhoods. They were not
23 scattered as they are today. The women for the most part
24 would go ringing doorbells in areas that they thought would be
25 Jewish. I drove from the time I was 14. My mother didn't

1 drive. So I would drive her, for her to ring doorbells. We
2 would go east of Twelfth Street to some of the apartments.

3 My most vivid recollection was of one time -- I
4 don't remember the name of the street -- when we went to an
5 apartment and she rang the doorbell, and it turned out to be a
6 basement apartment. An elderly couple, probably much younger
7 than I am today, but at the age of 14 they looked to me as if
8 they were very old. She had a wig. She had a little apron
9 on. It's a very strong memory for me. My mother spoke to her
10 in Yiddish and explained why she was there. She was there to
11 collect money for people who were poor. The woman unknotted
12 her apron where she had some coins and she gave my mother 50
13 cents. My mother thanked her and we left. As we left, my
14 mother put down \$5 on a table that was right near the door.
15 That left such an impression upon me. I have never forgotten
16 that. It wasn't that my family was rich, but my mother wanted
17 to spare this woman and yet give to her. So she left her with
18 great dignity but took the money from her, the 50 cents, for
19 Federation or whatever it was called in those days. That
20 really was the beginning of my activity, I think.

21 MS. BRICE: Did you ask your mom about that?

22 MS. WINER: No. I just took it for granted this is
23 the way my mother was.

24 MS. BRICE: How did you begin your career?

25 MS. WINER: I was part of Little Women of Hadassah

1 when I was young because my mother was active in Hadassah. I
2 did elocution, so I was in programs for National Council of
3 Jewish Women, Shaarey Zedek, Hadassah, Federation.

4 My father had passed away in 1944, and shortly
5 thereafter they began collecting to put Sinai Hospital up. My
6 mother gave some money in my father's name and became one of
7 the original members of the Sinai Women's Guild. But she
8 didn't drive so I became a member in order to bring my mother.
9 She remained actively engaged until she passed away in 1977.

10 I guess I have directed shows for all the
11 organizations in town. This was part of me and part of what I
12 could do. And in the days when our funds were minuscule, I
13 thought of giving myself and doing as much as I could for the
14 community when I couldn't give as much money. I was very
15 proud last year, 2002, that I was asked to produce and direct
16 the show for the 140th anniversary of Shaarey Zedek. We had a
17 huge cast. It was fun. That was my big swan song, I think.

18 MS. BRICE: It was very nicely done.

19 MS. WINER: It turned out well.

20 MS. BRICE: I want to talk about Jewish theater in
21 Detroit. Did your family speak Yiddish at home?

22 MS. WINER: No.

23 MS. BRICE: But your parents both spoke Yiddish?

24 MS. WINER: Both my parents were able to speak
25 Yiddish. But because my Grandma Sklar was unable to speak

1 English when I was very young, but she desperately wanted to
2 learn. She would speak Yiddish to all her grandchildren but
3 insisted that we all speak English to her. That was the way
4 she learned English. I understood everything in Yiddish. In
5 order to keep secrets from their children, my mother and dad,
6 Harry and Tillie Sklar, spoke Polish because they learned to
7 speak Polish in the store in Hamtramck. That I couldn't
8 understand.

9 MS. BRICE: You can see where some of the seeds of
10 your life have come from. I know you taught English as a
11 second language for a long time. I want to talk about your
12 interest in theater. Do you remember Yiddish theater in
13 Detroit?

14 MS. WINER: Oh, sure. At Littman's Theater when I
15 was very young. I would go with some of the members of the
16 family. It was very near my grandmother's house on Hazelwood
17 and Twelfth Street. Littman's Theater was in that area on
18 Twelfth Street.

19 MS. BRICE: So this is before age 10 or younger you
20 remember going there?

21 MS. WINER: Yes. I don't know that it lasted very
22 much into my teenage years. I could understand much of what
23 went on, but that was not what influenced me, if that's what
24 you're asking. I'm not sure where we're headed.

25 MS. BRICE: Well, no. I just wanted to find out

1 about Yiddish theater. But I did want to know about your
2 theater career.

3 MS. WINER: Well, I think my mother's dream was to
4 perform. I was an only child for four and a half years, so
5 they bought a used piano and determined that I would learn to
6 play the piano and some day be a great pianist. My name,
7 Melba, comes from Nellie Melba that my mother named me for,
8 who was a great opera singer. I never had a voice, so
9 therefore, that was out. A friend of my mother's was my piano
10 teacher, who eventually said to my mother, I think she has
11 talent but perhaps in her feet. So piano lessons had to stop.
12 Then dancing and elocution followed. In doing so, I began
13 performing for various organizations. That's really the
14 interest from there on in.

15 MS. BRICE: Was your mother a singer?

16 MS. WINER: No. She just loved all of it and lived
17 her life through what I was doing. That sort of thing.

18 MS. BRICE: How did the JCC Theater come about?

19 MS. WINER: Well, I graduated from Wayne with a
20 master's degree in speech and English and theater. As a
21 matter of fact, at the Jewish Center on Woodward, while I was
22 going to college, Harry Goldstein and I had a theater up in
23 the second floor, like an attic, but we had a small theater
24 group up there that we'd been asked to do. This is while I
25 was still at school. Somewhere along the line I met Irwin

1 Shaw and when they were building the Meyers Center, many years
2 later, and I had been involved in theater all these many years
3 doing professional and amateur theater, non-professional,
4 community theater. Irwin called and said that if I could get
5 a group of Jewish people together who wanted to act and could
6 develop a theater group, he thought he could get the money to
7 build a theater on the newly built Jewish Community Center at
8 Meyers and Curtis. I ~~managed~~^{MANAGED} to get a group of Jewish actors
9 and actresses together, salvaged from many groups that were
10 becoming unwound. Temple Players, people I knew from Wayne
11 who were very good but went on to other careers. We formed
12 what we then called Center Theater in our living room. My
13 husband Sidney and I formed the group.

14 Then we began meeting on Davison, what became a
15 center, briefly. Then they hired a director from New York and
16 we had Center Theater. It moved after Irwin, true to his
17 word, had gotten enough money together from the Aaron DeRoy
18 Fund to build a theater. It was a jewel in the community. It
19 still is now. Wonderful acoustics and a lovely stage. We
20 managed to get enough money together to use some rooms nearby
21 for dressing rooms. There was room beneath to build sets, so
22 we had a trap door to bring the sets up. It was really a
23 lovely thing. As we became more and more successful, we got a
24 light board and lights. It was a wonderful thing. I think it
25 lasted for about 17 to 20 years. I'm not sure.

1 MS. BRICE: What year --

2 MS. WINER: Well, it ended when we moved to Maple.

3 MS. BRICE: About what year did it all begin?

4 MS. WINER: In our living room it began in 1955. My
5 children were very young then. As a matter of fact, that's
6 how their careers started, because they all were put in the
7 plays.

8 MS. BRICE: And your children are now --

9 MS. WINER: I have three children. Susan, who lives
10 in Chicago. She started out in theater but then became a big
11 business lady. And Harry, who is a movie director in Los
12 Angeles. And Jan, who was an actress and then became a
13 producer of television commercials, then became the chauffeur
14 for three boys, her sons, and married a sound man, David
15 Kirschner, who does sound for movies.

16 MS. BRICE: Do you have any particular memories of a
17 particular play or group of actors and actresses that you
18 worked with that are just really memorable from those days?

19 MS. WINER: Many of them have become close friends.
20 The plays, well, there was a young man who was having
21 problems, but we didn't know that, nor did the Center know it,
22 and I'm talking about the Meyers Center now, Meyers-Curtis.
23 We had probably one of the most exquisite sets. It was for
24 Flowering Peach. I don't think I'll ever forget that. We had
25 never done anything quite so beautiful and so complex. Sid

1 and I got a call. Our opening night was to be on a Sunday and
2 we got a call in the middle of the night that the set was on
3 fire. We rushed to the Center as did everybody who ever
4 worked there, and our set was destroyed. This young man, they
5 discovered, had set it on fire for whatever reason, we never
6 did find out. However, not to be discouraged, there was the
7 big all purpose room across the hall and that show went on
8 that night with a make-shift set and with performance.
9 Everybody of course applauded the energy and desire for this
10 cast to perform no matter what happened. I remember that.

11 MS. BRICE: Who were some of the pioneers with
12 Center Theater?

13 MS. WINER: Ruth and Leo Selikson. She was an
14 actress and he helped build the sets. Abe and Ruth Sidamer,
15 he designed many of our sets. The list is very long and some
16 of them are gone already. Of course, my husband, who was the
17 front man in every one of them and managed to sell the most
18 tickets and do the best PR work. All the men worked, all the
19 women were very busy with young children, and we all had to be
20 up at 6:30-7:00 in the morning, but we would wind up at
21 Darby's at 11:00 at night after the Center closed and after we
22 had put everything away or designed the costumes or whatever
23 it was we were doing. I remember somebody came up and said,
24 how do you get into the inner circle? My answer was, you work
25 your butt off. It was what we did. We really loved it. Our

1 families became involved, our children became involved.
2 Whatever they could do, they did. We tried to encourage them
3 to participate. Many of us couldn't afford sitters in the
4 early days.

5 MS. BRICE: A tiny bit off subject, but when the
6 Center moved to Maple Road, I know there was no theater
7 allocated for that building, initially.

8 MS. WINER: Nor even now. We're hoping.

9 MS. BRICE: That's the end of Center Theater. What
10 happened, did that group eventually coalesce into the JET?

11 MS. WINER: Well, Evie Orbach, when she and Harold
12 moved to Detroit, they came to our house. Maybe 1960 by this
13 time. Evie worked with us at Center Theater. She acted, she
14 directed. Her dream was to have a theater. It took a long
15 time to develop JET Theater. I think they have celebrated 14
16 years now.

17 MS. BRICE: Over the years who do you remember as
18 important community leaders in the Detroit community, that
19 have influenced who you've become?

20 MS. WINER: Well, I think Irwin Shaw was probably
21 the greatest influence on me, because he offered me the
22 greatest opportunities to grow. I told you about Center
23 Theater. Then he called and said in 1972, I believe it was --

24 MS. BRICE: 1971, actually.

25 MS. WINER: 1971, okay. He called and he said, you

1 know, there are Russian emigres are coming into this community
2 and they should not have to go down to the International
3 Institute. They're Jewish, they should be at the Jewish
4 Community Center.

5 MS. BRICE: To learn English?

6 MS. WINER: Well, they should come, they should be a
7 participant in Jewish activities, orientation, culture,
8 tradition. Most of them knew nothing, had never had any
9 opportunity to be part of it. So he said, I want you to
10 formulate an English language program. I was an English
11 teacher at Wayne University. It was Wayne in those days, not
12 Wayne State. I was a theater person. But I had never taught
13 English as a second language. I didn't know how to go about
14 it. I told him that. He said, okay, we'll get people in.

15 So he called in a woman who taught in Los Angeles
16 and a woman who taught in New York. We had no idea who these
17 people were that were coming in. They lectured the people
18 that I had brought in who would be the teachers. People that
19 I knew who were school teachers and retired or whatever or
20 people who just wanted to do this kind of thing. They
21 lectured to us and from that we formulated a plan to teach
22 English as a second language.

23 We didn't realize that they were teaching uneducated
24 people, people who were from different cultures who had never
25 had the opportunity for any kind of an education. We were

1 told, find out what numbers they know, how they are able to
2 multiply, add or whatever. Then you'll know how much English
3 they know and from there you can develop English as a second
4 language program.

5 The first one that I interviewed, in a very big
6 room, was a young man who was sitting across from me to please
7 fill out this form and he looked at it, and he shoved it back
8 at me and he said, Madam -- immediately I wanted to fall
9 through the floor -- he said, I have the largest coin
10 collection in all of the Soviet Union and Europe. I do not
11 need to know numbers. I know them. I am here to learn
12 English. Well, he was speaking to me in English and we
13 quickly threw out all that we had learned from these two women
14 and had to develop a program that would introduce highly
15 educated people who simply did not know English.

16 They were very didactic, too. They wanted to know
17 rules. If you know English grammar, it is filled with rules
18 that need to be thrown out and redone. It was a wonderful
19 time and the program ran for many years. It is still run, I
20 think, by the Ferndale Schools. It ran until '88, '90,
21 somewhere in that category.

22 **MS. BRICE:** And you continued to read? Aren't you
23 doing a reading program now or --

24 **MS. WINER:** Well, I did for the Detroit Public
25 Schools, and I'm going to start in the Oakland County School.

1 I'm just doing individual reading with children.

2 I have made beautiful friendships from these people
3 who are now American citizens. They no longer want to be
4 called Russian emigres. They have added to our lives and they
5 have joined our family for all the holidays. I have watched
6 their children be born, and grow, and go to college and
7 graduate. And I am so proud of my relationship with them. It
8 all stemmed from that program.

9 Go back to Federation. While I was running the
10 school we brought all the emigres by bus to the -- whatever
11 buildings there were that we were using for phon-a-gifts. We
12 brought all of our Russian emigres to the phon-a-gifts. We
13 showed them how money was raised to bring them over. Their
14 concept in those years --

15 MS. BRICE: This is the phon-a-thon --

16 MS. WINER: That still is going on. To raise money
17 for the Jewish Federation. And of course, what we were
18 bringing them to was Women's Division, because I was part of
19 that division. They would listen in on the phones. Their
20 thought was the United States Government had funded them.
21 They had no idea that the Jewish Community had funded them.
22 It was a big secret as far as they were concerned.

23 I wanted them to understand, so I had a wonderful
24 woman who was the translator to make sure that they
25 understood. And she was somebody who had married an American

1 and had lived here for many, many years. A great human being
2 herself. They would meet, all the leadership, the various
3 women's division presidents, and leadership of telethon.

4 One man said to me, why only women? Why no men? I
5 explained to him that being a woman, I was bringing him to the
6 Women's Division but that there was a Men's Division. It was
7 day time that we were coming here and the men got on the phone
8 at night. School didn't go on at night, so it had to be in
9 the daytime. Well, he was hardly satisfied with my answer.
10 At any rate he wasn't willing to listen to women. This was
11 not his thing.

12 We did a lot trying to introduce the Jewish way to
13 them. I brought them to the various temples and synagogues
14 for Succoth, which they loved, and they marched around the
15 shul for Simchath Torah. They knew nothing of this in those
16 years.

17 The other thing, in 1980 something, I was asked to
18 gather docents together and write their talk for the Holocaust
19 Museum before the museum was completed. That came because I
20 was still involved at the Jewish Community Center doing
21 various things.

22 With everything that you do, you grow. I'm always
23 amazed when I am thanked for doing something because I really
24 want to thank the community. It's helped me mature into who I
25 am and what I am. It's opened my life to people and places I

1 never could have been normally. A much wider field of people
2 to embrace. It's been very exciting. It's been a great ride.

3 MS. BRICE: What do you see --

4 MS. WINER: I have one more thing. My husband was
5 president of Fresh Air Society. As mates who saw the same
6 things at the same time, whatever I did he embraced, and
7 whatever he did I embraced. I did a lot of the shows for
8 Fresh Air Society. Camp Tamarack as it was known in those
9 days. Sid and I built the dance barn there. We wanted the
10 arts, which were so important to us. Music, theater, movies,
11 everything that the arts embraced, we wanted it to be part of
12 the lives of the children at camp. It is still there. It
13 still very much a part of camp and they have used it as
14 another area of camp to embrace children who find that this is
15 their interest.

16 Harriet Berg, bless her heart, with whom I have
17 worked for so many years, was the dance director at camp for
18 all the many years. I think she has recently retired. That
19 has been another part of Federation that we have been involved
20 in and that Sid so dearly loved.

21 MS. BRICE: How long was Sid president --

22 MS. WINER: I think two years. Then he remained
23 very actively engaged for several years afterward until he
24 wasn't well.

25 MS. BRICE: In all these organizations how often

1 were you or he involved in matters of finding funds and
2 funding? Because it all connects back to Federation.

3 MS. WINER: Daily. I mean that's an ongoing
4 problem. There are so many areas. You build a building and
5 in five years it has to have things done. It needs to be
6 painted, something's wrong with the furnace, the air
7 conditioner, the windows, the doors. Something. So with all
8 the things that Federation does just locally, there are areas
9 that you need monies for.

10 The camp constantly has to grow. The Jewish
11 Community Center. Whatever. Many of the organizations
12 bringing people over, caring for them, caring for the elderly,
13 all of these things.

14 Then when you think of Europe and the Middle East,
15 and what the needs are there, imagine during the years that
16 the Soviet Union was finally allowing some of the Soviet Jewry
17 to come either going to Israel, America or to Europe, wherever
18 they were able to take them in. Then we had Ethiopian Jews,
19 Argentinean Jews. We all learned, as I did from my mother
20 putting down money when she was taking money, we learned that
21 it was important to take care of our own. Nobody else was
22 going to. So fund-raising is an important part.

23 Much of the work that I have done, I've always
24 believed that you could teach people sugar-coatedly through
25 programming, and whenever I try programming, I try to do it

1 with teaching. Maybe comedy, maybe tragedy, but whatever it
2 is, it encompasses that which I am doing. I like to fund-
3 raise through programming and that's what my programming
4 involvement has been through the years. It hasn't been just
5 for fun, it's been a teaching tool.

6 MS. BRICE: What's an example of how you combine
7 teaching and programming for fund-raising?

8 MS. WINER: Well, for Federation as a matter of
9 fact. We have done programs which teach. I remember that the
10 National Council of Jewish Women, Jo Winer used to write
11 wonderful programs. They were actually instruments teaching
12 about taking care of children or political ideas, but done
13 with tongue and cheek. Even the dance routines that were done
14 and some of the great ladies in Detroit had the best legs,
15 believe me. They wouldn't acknowledge it now but they were
16 wonderful song and dance girls in the '50s and '60s. When we
17 meet, it's still just a real joy because we have these shared
18 memories.

19 The sad part of growing older is not growing older,
20 it's losing the people who share these memories. They were
21 really fun and strong friendships are bonded through these
22 programs in which we make people understand that they have to
23 give and the reasons that they have to give.

24 MS. BRICE: This community is such a hallmark for
25 its philanthropy, community leadership that turns into

1 national leadership. Why are we more unique in that way than
2 so many other communities?

3 MS. WINER: Well, we started out, I think, as a very
4 small community in Detroit. We all lived in the same areas.
5 We all bonded. I was second generation American. My mother
6 was one year old when she came here, so I have to consider her
7 really an American born. My father was 13 years old coming to
8 Detroit. They knew that they had to help their parents and
9 help themselves, educate themselves, and help their neighbors.
10 And the only thing I can believe is that we all were so
11 strongly bonded as young people. All of our parents were
12 involved in the community. Every one of the women I know, I
13 knew their parents who were very deeply involved in the
14 community. And they have remained that way. You know the old
15 story about learning from your mother's breast, well, I guess
16 that's really true.

17 MS. BRICE: Do you think because the Jewish
18 community was so concentrated for so many years, that that
19 formed this nucleus of doers and movers and shakers --

20 MS. WINER: Yes, indeed. I mean, we moved as a
21 group until 1967 when we disbursed. But before that, we all
22 moved as a group. We moved from the Medbury/Farnsworth area
23 to the Twelfth Street area. Hastings Street is what I was
24 searching for. Everybody lives somewhere in that area.

25 You talk of Boesky's. That was at Twelfth Street

1 and Hazelwood. Everybody knew that. It's not the same
2 anymore because people began moving out to the Maple area to
3 the area of Telegraph, out of Southfield, out of Oak Park.
4 The only viable one was Huntington Woods. The children who
5 grew up there have moved back there for the most part, and are
6 very happily living there. So that has remained the same.

7 MS. BRICE: Do you think that this disbursing of our
8 community is inspiring young leadership or do you think that
9 the roles are --

10 MS. WINER: Well, I think young people are coming
11 back. They went away for a very long time, but I think they
12 are coming back. When I look at the meetings today that I go
13 to, and I go to a lot of meetings, I see wonderful young
14 faces, 30 and 40 years old, and I'm thrilled, who are taking
15 the place of those of us who were 30, 40 years old when we
16 started. The young people are just in the last few years
17 coming back into the fold. But for a long time they went
18 away. They were too busy with doing things that pleased them
19 and it was focused on their activities rather than on the
20 world's activities and needs. They forgot about other people.
21 I think they're coming back now and I'm thrilled to see that.
22 I love continuing my activities because I'm inspired by the
23 young people who are doing a great job.

24 MS. BRICE: Keeping you young?

25 MS. WINER: Oh, of course. I'm hoping to do that.

1 You know I told you my mantra is, it's that I intend to grow
2 older but I'm never going to grow old.

3 MS. BRICE: That's sweet.

4 How is the role of women as volunteers changed and
5 what do you see evolving now?

6 MS. WINER: Well, I'm finding some coming back, even
7 those who have gone into the work area. A lot of the evening
8 meetings are involved with women and men who are coming back.
9 I say again, it's the young people that are coming back into
10 the areas of philanthropy and understanding the needs. And
11 understanding their own need for connection with Judaism,
12 culturally, traditionally, and tradition has a lot to do with
13 giving of oneself and taking care of the needs of others.

14 Look how many people are studying Hebrew again, and
15 how many people who are perhaps in the Reform movement or
16 reconstructionists, but are taking classes from Orthodox
17 rabbis. Very interesting. So I do feel that there is a
18 coming back into the fold or whatever one wants to call it.
19 Not necessarily that they know that they're doing that, but
20 it's just that they find they want to make time for that, too.

21 MS. BRICE: I'm going to flip way back in time.
22 What year were you and Sid married?

23 MS. WINER: 1940.

24 MS. BRICE: And then he went off to war --

25 MS. WINER: '43 he was in the Army.

1 **MS. BRICE:** When Sidney returned, what was his
2 profession?

3 **MS. WINER:** He was in the collection business. Sid
4 had gone to law school at night. He helped support his family
5 and put himself through college. When he came back to
6 Detroit, he went to work for a collection agency and went to
7 law school at night at Detroit College of Law. He didn't like
8 what they were doing, so he opened his own collection agency
9 and eventually just remained in that. And from one desk, one
10 telephone, one file cabinet, he grew to many offices around
11 the country. That was what he did.

12 **MS. BRICE:** What was the name --

13 **MS. WINER:** Creditor Service.

14 **MS. BRICE:** Where were you living in 1967?

15 **MS. WINER:** We were on Sherbourne in Sherwood
16 Forest, Seven Mile Road area. As a matter of fact, the night
17 of the riots, we were to meet -- we had taken Goldie Adler and
18 the Women's Division Executive Director. We took them out to
19 Meadowbrook. We had a bite of supper at Kingsley Inn. On our
20 drive back there were no cars but a lot of police cars on
21 Woodward. We were amazed. We were to meet another couple at
22 Kingsley Inn, and when we got there they had left a message to
23 call them. We called and they said, get home, there's been a
24 riot. We couldn't believe it. We got the two women home
25 safely and we got home driving down Woodward and through

1 Palmer Woods, Palmer Park. Our neighbor was there with a
2 hose, hosing our house and his, because the hardware store on
3 Livernois had been blown up. We were two blocks away but all
4 the ash was all over the place. Our lawn was covered with it.
5 It was a very frightening time.

6 MS. BRICE: Where were your kids --

7 MS. WINER: Our kids were home. Our neighbor was
8 screaming at us, where have you been? We, of course, gathered
9 many of our neighbors across the street and so forth who were
10 alone in their house came over to our house. And for the next
11 few days I was feeding a lot of people. It was very
12 frightening.

13 Then of course then what happened was the exodus
14 from Detroit of many of our Jewish people. They moved out to
15 Southfield and then West Bloomfield and Birmingham, and all
16 the areas. That began the disbursement of our Jewish
17 community, and we no longer -- many of them who brought their
18 children up in the suburbs, the children no longer had a place
19 to walk to like we did. My children could walk to their
20 school, could walk to the library, could walk to the drug
21 store which was a block away or the bank or a bookstore. We
22 had all of these things at Livernois and Seven Mile Road
23 available. Now children had to be driven everywhere and
24 mothers began to be very busy being chauffeurs.

25 We remained in our area until 1977 when Sid said,

1 you know, it's very lonely here. The drug store had closed,
2 the bookstores were closed, the hardware no longer existed.
3 Grinnell's Piano, where they had burst in and taken musical
4 instruments out, no longer was there. He said, all of our
5 friends have moved away and we were waving the flag, you know,
6 hoping that people would come back to Detroit. But we finally
7 moved out into the suburbs in 1977.

8 MS. BRICE: How did the riots affect Sid's business,
9 or didn't it?

10 MS. WINER: No, it didn't. Not really. As a matter
11 of fact, more people owed money to doctors and hospitals, and
12 so forth. He was very busy during those years.

13 MS. BRICE: He didn't have a business right in the
14 heart of the affected area?

15 MS. WINER: No. He was on Seven Mile Road but up
16 near Meyer's, which was not as badly affected as the other
17 neighborhood was. It was affected, but not as badly.

18 MS. BRICE: New subject. I know you've traveled a
19 lot. I know you have a hobby of when you travel you find
20 synagogues. Talk about some of those memories you have and
21 where you've been.

22 MS. WINER: Well, the most recent one, my daughter
23 suggested shortly after Sid passed away in April, the next
24 year in October she said let's take a trip. She suggested
25 Spain where neither one of us had ever been. We went to every

1 synagogue in every city that we went to and we found cities
2 that we didn't even know about had synagogues.

3 It was a very exciting adventure because, just to
4 mention two, in Madrid we finally found one that was on a side
5 street in what was called the old section. And we were in
6 what was called, I guess, the new section of Madrid where all
7 the art museums are and so forth. We had a cab take us. He
8 couldn't get down this narrow little street. There were cars
9 parked on one side and you could barely walk on the brick
10 street. He pointed out to us where the synagogue was and
11 there was two policemen, Spanish policeman, out in front with
12 great big guns slung over their shoulders. One on one side of
13 the street and one on the other. It was kind of like a two-
14 story apartment building might look, flat fronted, right on
15 the street with one step up to the doorway. I asked
16 permission of the policeman, he told me to go ahead. I rang
17 the doorbell and eventually someone, through a little peep
18 hole spoke to me, and I told him who I was and why I wanted to
19 be there, and that I was a Hadassah member and I was a member
20 of Federation of Detroit, Michigan, and that I was Jewish, I
21 was with my daughter. I went on into this long story. He
22 opened the door a crack and he said, I'm very busy.

23 I said, I won't take much time but we're leaving
24 tomorrow, which we were, and I said, I really would love to
25 see your synagogue and I would love to leave a contribution.

1 Ho, ho. Back up. I went in and he was very quick to tell me
2 that there were 1500 Jews left in all of Spain. That's what
3 he said. I have no idea whether -- he was from Israel and had
4 come to Madrid with a Jewish agency and had been given this
5 job. He took us upstairs and I asked whether there were
6 services. Oh, yes, he said. I said, how many come, when do
7 you have them? Friday night. Fifty, 60 people. I didn't
8 really think so but that's what he said. There was a box and
9 I did leave a contribution. He really shuffled us off to
10 Buffalo. He didn't let us stay very long. At least it gave
11 us a little feeling of what the building was like. He said
12 all the other synagogues, the great synagogue, were gone.

13 MS. BRICE: Is this fairly simple inside?

14 MS. WINER: Very. The first floor was just offices
15 on one side. Cubby holes with glass fronts. The street side
16 windows were blocked on the inside. There was a library, an
17 ark on the second floor. I wanted to see the Torahs but he
18 wouldn't open them for us. I felt very lucky to have gotten
19 in at all. I was amazed that they had to have two guards in
20 front. He said, it's 24 hours. So that was Madrid.

21 Then we went to what had been the oldest Jewish
22 community in the world. It's about an hour outside of Madrid.
23 We rented a car and drove. We had to park and walk around the
24 town. What were closed cathedrals had been the oldest
25 synagogues. One we couldn't get into, it was being renovated.

1 One they were having a tour so we quickly attached ourselves
2 to the tour. The Spanish woman who was leading the tour,
3 obviously not Jewish, told of the history of this place which
4 was closed. It wasn't being used. It must have been
5 magnificent at some time. It had what would be a three-story
6 arched ceiling and she said that it had been a synagogue
7 first. She said, you can see one thing that was left that
8 they obviously forgot. A Jewish star up in the molding in the
9 ceiling, very high up. If you concentrated, which we did, we
10 saw the Jewish star. The only thing that was left that made
11 you understand that it had been a synagogue. However, in the
12 travel book it does say that this was the synagogue.

13 Jennie Weiner had written an article before we left
14 in the *Jewish News*, maybe in May or June. Knowing that I was
15 going to go in October, I cut the article out. She had taken
16 a tour of Spain and Portugal that spring. She had gone to
17 this town and had gone to a Jewish bookstore. She wrote the
18 story of this young woman who owned it. We asked everybody,
19 where is this Jewish bookstore. It was around the corner from
20 the synagogue and this is the story of this young woman.

21 She was maybe late 30s at this point. In her
22 household in Spain, she'd been raised as a Catholic. Every
23 Friday night her mother lit candles but she had no idea why.
24 As she grew up and graduated from high school, she decided she
25 was Jewish, that that must have been the history of the Friday

1 night candles.

2 MS. BRICE: Was her mother deceased at that point?

3 MS. WINER: I didn't ask.

4 So she decided, or her family must have sent her to
5 Israel because she wasn't working. She went to search out her
6 roots. In doing so she met a young man from the same
7 community that she was from and he was doing the same thing.
8 Because they had customs in his family that he couldn't
9 understand and so he decided that he must have Jewish blood.

10 They got married and they have a little boy, Jacob.
11 Their shop is called the Jewish Book Shop of Jacob. They get
12 all of their things from Israel. They decided to go back to
13 the original site of Judaism in Spain in this community. They
14 live not too far away and run this shop. They're closed on
15 Shabat and Friday night, and they have kosher wine that they
16 sell. We bought many things from them including a bottle of
17 wine that we coddled all the way back and used for Passover
18 the next year. It was a very interesting adventure.

19 I did call Jennie Weiner and I brought the article
20 and she was so excited to have the article. It was the first
21 time she had been in the newspapers. I told Jennie what an
22 adventure we had because of her. She said, you followed
23 through and I didn't. I sent the young woman pictures of her
24 that I took in the book shop. So, yes, that was kind of a
25 highlight.

1 Everywhere we've been, we've visited synagogues.
2 Singapore had a beautiful synagogue. It looked
3 somewhat like a very small version of Temple Beth El that was
4 on Woodward Avenue. It had pillars in front and steps up to
5 it right off the sidewalk. A man in a yarmulke was sitting
6 out in front leaning against the building. He was the shamas.
7 He let us in and there was a plaque on the wall before you
8 entered the synagogue, a beautifully done plaque, which told
9 of all the people who had contributed to the synagogue. It
10 made you feel right at home because they were fund-raisers,
11 too. The first thing in front of you as you entered the
12 sanctuary was a box for you to put money in. However, the man
13 said that he had very poor eyesight and he had to have an
14 operation. If we would also contribute -- he was not Jewish
15 -- to his operation, he would deeply appreciate it. So we got
16 taken both ways. Very interesting when you decide to do
17 certain things in certain communities.

18 There was a synagogue in Tokyo that we managed to
19 get to. We've had some very special kind of excitement.

20 **MS. BRICE:** When you travel the world and you find
21 these synagogues and meet the people, what do you walk away
22 with?

23 **MS. WINER:** The sameness. I went to Egypt and I
24 went to the big synagogue in Cairo, where nobody comes. It is
25 huge. It is gorgeous. But they have very few Jews left.

1 Nobody comes. The year I was there was when the Israelis
2 opened their embassy and they were just in the process, and we
3 were going to leave like two days later, and I went to the
4 embassy where the boxes were out on the street, in the foyer.
5 I begged them to come in. I said, I'm a good Jewish mother,
6 I'll help you clean. They wouldn't let us in. It was the
7 first time I'd ever seen a very handsome, maybe 25-year old
8 Israeli, in a suit and tie. You normally don't see them so
9 formally dressed but he was representing the embassy. They
10 were going to have Purim in the old synagogue.

11 We purchased three books. All these Siddurs were
12 there. One in French, one in Egyptian, one in English. We
13 took the three. They're small, maybe eight inches by four
14 inches. They were lovely. Larry Jackier was collecting these
15 and he had never been there, so I gave him one that I had
16 brought back.

17 Jews, when they have the opportunity, are the same.
18 It is hard to believe because of the language, customs,
19 perhaps the clothing and the experiences might be a little
20 different, but there is so much sameness and it is very
21 exciting. I said I feel very lucky.

22 I went to Seeds of Peace Monday night. I have ~~to be~~
23 close with that. Seeds of Peace. I have supported it for the
24 last six years. I dream and pray and hope that because I'm an
25 old teacher, that children will lead the way. If we teach

1 tolerance and if we educate a lack of hate and the
2 misunderstandings that occur between people, and if we can
3 give them some hope of growing up in a different world, maybe
4 that world might come to be. And so that's why I support
5 this. Perez was there, an Arab man, both of whom received
6 citations. Carl Levin also received one. There were over 600
7 people there. More Arabs and Muslims than there were Jewish
8 people. It's good to see a room that can hold 600 people
9 peaceably. Beautifully groomed, talking to each other and
10 breaking bread together. Maybe. Who knows. Not in my
11 lifetime but I'm hoping these kids who dressed themselves so
12 beautifully that night and have every time I've been to one of
13 these affairs, I'm hoping that this will bring Israel some
14 peace.

15 MS. BRICE: Amen.

16 MS. WINER: Amen.

17 MS. BRICE: I think that's good.