

1 ORAL HISTORY OF: Judy Cantor
2 INTERVIEWED BY: Sharon Alterman
3 DATE OF INTERVIEW: Thursday, September 23, 2004
4 LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Jewish Federation
5 SUBJECT MATTER: Jewish community life

6

7 MS. ALTERMAN: My name is Sharon Alterman, and I'm
8 doing an oral history interview for the Leonard M. Simons Oral
9 History Project. Today is Thursday, September 23rd, 2004.

10 Judy, do we have your permission to use the contents
11 of this interview for any historic documentation in the
12 future?

13 MS. CANTOR: Yes, of course.

14 MS. ALTERMAN: Thank you. I must tell you that I'm
15 so pleased to have the opportunity to interview you. You are
16 one of the most distinguished women in our community, and it's
17 a great pleasure to have you with us.

18 I know your family has a long history of involvement
19 in Detroit, so let's start by telling us a little bit about
20 your family history.

21 MS. CANTOR: Well, that gives me a very nice
22 opportunity because I think it's a very interesting history
23 that reflects the coming of Jews to America. My mother, it so
24 happens, left a journal. She wrote this journal when she was
25 about 60 years old in 1951, and she told stories that her

1 mother had told her and the family around the Sabbath dinner
2 table about her mother's childhood in Lithuania. So that
3 journal crossed more than 100 years, and it gave me an insight
4 that one doesn't usually have the privilege of getting.

5 My mother's family was the Keiden family. They came
6 from a village in Lithuania. I think it's pronounced
7 Baberishuk, but I couldn't verify that. After the first
8 pogrom, which was very graphically described in my mother's
9 journal, the flight of the pogrom in the very early 1880s
10 through their village, my mother's mother and father decided
11 that they should emigrate to America, the land of freedom and
12 of opportunity.

13 They sent my grandfather alone, which was common,
14 and he came to Michigan because another brother had preceded
15 him here who went on to Toledo. Apparently he went up as a
16 peddler to the northern part of Lower Peninsula, because
17 another brother of my grandfather's was living there, one of
18 the founders of the Petoskey synagogue in the 1880s. So that
19 was a surprise to me.

20 My grandfather earned enough money to send the
21 \$36.40 per passage back to his wife and the five children that
22 were already born. They came to Detroit and my mother was the
23 first one of those eight children born in Detroit, over the
24 Keiden store.

25 After attempting his peddling around Petoskey and

1 the upper part of Michigan, apparently he came back to Detroit
2 when his wife arrived, and they opened the Keiden store on
3 Gratiot Avenue, which is where Joe Muer's used to be. I
4 gather, from what I hear from people, that it was a very
5 substantial store and a very successful business through about
6 1926 when they sold it.

7 One woman in the community came up and told me that
8 as a very little girl her parents would bring there from
9 Canada -- she lived in Windsor -- to buy all her fall and
10 winter clothing. It would be late August, and in order to get
11 through customs back to Canada, she would have wear all those
12 winter clothes.

13 At any rate, my mother was the first one born in
14 Detroit, and there were two others that followed her. They
15 were very traditional Jews and they were very active in
16 Shaarey Zedek. So this is the Shaarey Zedek that goes back to
17 Congress and St. Antoine, which is now I believe the parking
18 lot that's diagonally opposite the plaque for Temple Beth El.

19 They continued as very traditional Jews. The women
20 in that family, even after Shaarey Zedek, which had been
21 Orthodox, became Conservative in 1913, the women in that
22 family still sat up in the balcony and the men on the lower
23 level. And as a child I went between both.

24 My father's father was Rabbi Judah Levin, and he
25 apparently came to America also in the early 1890s, and was a

1 Rabbi in Rochester and in New Haven, two separate times. When
2 Jacob Levin, a name that's known for starting the old folks
3 home, very renowned name in Detroit, and not a relative, told
4 Shaarey Zedek to bring him to Detroit. So he came to Detroit
5 in 1897.

6 I'm named after him, obviously. He died before I
7 was born, and I sure wish I knew him, because he must have
8 been such an interesting man. About 1903 we find patents for
9 his invention of an early adding machine, and this adding
10 machine is in the Smithsonian Institute. And there are
11 patents from Japan and Britain and America. Very interesting.

12 Around 1912 he led the march for Give a Brick to
13 Save the Sick, which was a march down Brush Street to collect
14 money in favor of the Jewish hospital. And that money
15 incidently was directed to government bonds and they figure
16 that about \$7,000 was collected in nickels and dimes from the
17 people on the street that the parade went through. It was
18 saved and it was given to about the amount of \$53,000 for the
19 start of Sinai Hospital.

20 Am I correct on that figure, Sharon? I'm taking
21 that out of my memory, but I believe that it's close.

22 **MS. ALTERMAN:** It sounds like it could be.

23 **MS. CANTOR:** He also did other forward-thinking
24 things. He convened the first meeting of American Orthodox
25 rabbis. The Conservative movement only began in 1913, so you

1 could say he convened a meeting of America's traditional
2 rabbis here in Detroit, and there's a fantastic historical
3 photograph of that.

4 When my father started at the University of
5 Michigan, his father, Judah Levin, said let's correspond with
6 each other in Hebrew to get practice in using Hebrew. Now,
7 Orthodox rabbis didn't do that because they felt that Hebrew
8 was like a sacred text. He anticipated a state and wanted
9 people to start using Hebrew. So my father's post cards in
10 Hebrew, which are in the Reuther Archives, describe things in
11 Ann Arbor such as him meeting the interurban where his mother
12 had sent the packages of Kosher food, and the string broke,
13 and the cookies rolled down the street, he was chasing the
14 cookies. And this is all in Hebrew.

15 Another one that's very memorable is his describing
16 to his father Ann Arbor on a football day, and he says, if
17 they lose, it's like Yom Kippur, but if they win, it's like
18 Purim.

19 All I know about my grandfather of course is mostly
20 what I have read. There was very little talk of ancestors
21 during the years that I was growing up. I've had to discover
22 most of this, put this information together. I think it was
23 part of being a real American. You kind of put Europe behind
24 you, you put the past behind you, and it's in more recent
25 times we recognize how much our heritage means to us and how

1 much we want to know about it.

2 So I did discover among my father's papers after he
3 passed way newspapers from when Judah Levin passed away. The
4 *Detroit Times* had it on the front page. The *Detroit Times* was
5 the big newspaper then, in the 1920s. There were 8,000 people
6 at his funeral, an incredible thing. My sister has said that
7 she remembers walking down Brush Street from the home to the
8 synagogue with a whole phalanx of people that filled the
9 street. That's pretty astonishing. I wish I knew this man.

10 He and my grandmother raised four very interesting
11 sons. My oldest uncle was one of the very early graduates of
12 the Detroit College of Medicine, and in my thinking and in my
13 historical analysis I have felt that the existence, the early
14 existence of the Detroit College of Medicine and the
15 University of Michigan was a big attraction, and made a very
16 major difference in the lives of Jewish families after they
17 got established. You see my uncle's name with the clinics and
18 things of that sort. He then went on and became the head of
19 public health in Los Angeles. He's the only one who left the
20 Detroit area.

21 The two younger uncles were very involved in the
22 Jewish community, and Isadore Levin, whose name was quite well
23 known in the community in his day, a partner of Fred Butzel,
24 was chosen to go to the Versailles Conference to write the
25 mandate for the state of Palestine. He was a Harvard Law

1 graduate, and quite brilliant.

2 He had been a captain under Pershing in World War II
3 in France, and I guess it seemed like a good combination, and
4 he was chosen to write the mandate for Palestine, and then he
5 went to Palestine. And there again, I have newspaper articles
6 about when he returned and spoke at Shaarey Zedek, and of
7 course the whole city turned out to hear what Palestine was
8 like and what his view of the future was, and he became
9 active, of course, in what was later the Jewish Welfare
10 Federation. I find his name on the early National American
11 Jewish Committee, which interests me because Bernie and I are
12 involved with that.

13 The youngest uncle, they thought he'd be a rabbi,
14 but he also chose law school, and he and his wife Karen bought
15 the cider mill and the lake behind the cider mill, and that
16 whole farm from Fourteen Mile Road, a half a mile north and a
17 half a mile in, and we played on that property all my
18 childhood. I had kind of an enchanted childhood because of
19 that. We would go out and swim and ski almost every Sunday,
20 and hike in the woods, and make campfires in the woods.

21 He was a very interesting man, and he was the first
22 male counselor at Fresh Air, and we've given his photo album
23 to Fresh Air and it's been used. All those great pictures you
24 have, many of them come from his photo album of the beginning
25 of Fresh Air.

1 He describes how when they were buying the camp at
2 Brighton, one of the community leaders -- I can't remember
3 just who at the moment -- said, Abe, you come along and you
4 dive into the lake for us. You have to say if this is a good
5 lake to buy for a camp. He checked it out. I thought that
6 was great.

7 He sold off the properties around the cider mill
8 after his wife died, and he lived there well into his 80s.

9 My father was a very interesting man. I found these
10 little scraps of papers in going through their things, and
11 when he graduated from Central High School there was a letter
12 from David Mackenzie -- David Mackenzie was the principal of
13 Central High School who founded Wayne State University, and
14 you and I know the name well from Wayne -- in which he
15 complemented my father on being such a good student, and said
16 I hope you will be able to move onto college. Well, he
17 couldn't. Rabbis didn't make very much money and the
18 beginning days of those four boys were days of being very
19 frugal. So he went to work as a bookkeeper, which I was so
20 surprised to hear because it didn't seem like part of what he
21 became, selling the first aluminum pots and pans.

22 He accumulated the \$60 that was necessary for a year
23 at the University of Michigan. \$60. He went out there and
24 formed one of the very early menorah societies, which was the
25 forerunner of Hillel.

1 When he came back, he taught English to the foreign
2 born at night at Central High School. In 1917 David Mackenzie
3 formed in the first Detroit Junior College and he tapped 14
4 people as the faculty, and my father was one of those first
5 14. So his career at Wayne through the junior college, and
6 then the City of College of Detroit, and then Wayne University
7 and Wayne State University, he spanned all those years. And
8 he was the first Jewish professor in Detroit. There were two
9 already at the University of Michigan, but he was the first
10 Jewish professor in Detroit.

11 Those were tricky times, very tricky times, because
12 if you were liberal, you were called a Commie, and if you
13 think of your history, in 1924 the congressional act to halt
14 immigration was enacted because there was a big reactionary
15 period in our history. He walked that tightrope and continued
16 to express a very rational liberal point of view. Right
17 through until he passed away at the age of 87, if I would go
18 anywhere with him, people would come up and say, Hello,
19 Professor Levin. You were my teacher in such and such a year,
20 and I still have those notes.

21 He was known as a very organized professor, and he
22 had quite an influence on the development of Wayne and in the
23 Jewish community. Of course he was consulted heavily by the
24 Jewish community. He headed the Jewish Social Service Bureau
25 and especially during the years when there were huge needs.

1 During the beginning of the Depression Mayor Frank Murphy, who
2 later became governor, appointed him to the Unemployment
3 Commission of the city.

4 He continued to be active even after his retirement.
5 He went to Israel and lectured at Bar Ilan and he was giving
6 lectures and talks and attending conference all over the
7 world.

8 **MS. ALTERMAN:** When did he die?

9 **MS. CANTOR:** He died in '76 at the age of 87. On a
10 world trip. He actually died in Dublin on his way to Israel.

11 So my childhood, I had two brothers and a sister.
12 My late brother, Dr. Herb Levin, was nine years older than I
13 am. So I was much younger. I remember at the dinner table
14 was always a table of intense conversation. You know, they
15 were intense times. The Depression and the anti-Semitism in
16 the city, the concerns about Hitler, which my father was very
17 outspoken about when other people were not. He was delivering
18 lectures, warning people about the growing problems in
19 Germany.

20 Fred Butzel was a guest at our Seders I know, but a
21 frequent guest in our home, and other people. Sol Potover,
22 the Lois Pincus's uncle, who was a very noted journalist.
23 Judge James Elman. I remember community leaders and
24 thoughtful people at our table, and I remember being very
25 quiet and listening. There was all this intense conversation.

1 And some of it I remember humorously now, more than vigorous,
2 heated -- because of the New Deal. We had an uncle who was
3 very opposed to the New Deal and my father was supportive of
4 the progressive changes, and I remember people banging the
5 table and my mother crying, Peace! I still enjoy nothing more
6 than an interesting dinner party where there's very, very
7 interesting conversation.

8 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What was your mother's education?

9 **MS. CANTOR:** That's very interesting. Mother did
10 not go to college. There were eight children and they
11 selected the one -- which I think was not uncommon in the
12 families that are getting started -- to go to college, to go
13 law school, and that was Harry Keiden, who ended up being a
14 distinguished judge.

15 My mother did not go to college. All my childhood I
16 remember her taking courses. Hurrying through dinner and
17 dishes and all of these things that she did by herself, and
18 putting on a hat, and going to college courses.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** She was very progressive.

20 **MS. CANTOR:** All the time. But she didn't graduate
21 college. So this journal that I told you about, she wrote it
22 in '51 and died in '91, she never showed it to us. And I
23 tried to figure why would she not show it to us. Did she
24 think we wouldn't be interested because people were not then
25 very much interested in the past? Or I think it's because she

1 didn't feel up to the learning of my father. I think that was
2 part of it. But she was a self-taught woman. She read
3 everything that was ever written about Beethoven, about
4 Roosevelt. But I think that she always felt that she wasn't
5 going to be up to the academic learning that she was
6 surrounded by.

7 But she was a terrific hostess with all these
8 people. You know, these women cooked and baked and did
9 everything.

10 **MS. ALTERMAN:** How did they meet?

11 **MS. CANTOR:** That's an interesting question, which
12 again I never found out the story until some elderly aunt told
13 me after my mother passed away. There were eight children,
14 and they were the type of family that was established in a
15 home over the Keiden store on Gratiot Avenue, and all the boys
16 had Hebrew lessons, until my mother in about 1902 or so said,
17 I want to have Hebrew lessons, too. The girls should get the
18 same education as the boys. My father was hired as their
19 Hebrew teacher. This one aunt was very angry about it. She
20 said, I was so mad at your mother and sister that we girls got
21 our Hebrew lessons.

22 They would have known each other naturally anyway
23 because they were two families who were in Shaarey Zedek
24 together.

25 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So obviously we know where your love

1 of learning comes from. You have a rich heritage.

2 What year were you born?

3 **MS. CANTOR:** I was born in 1928, two years after my
4 grandfather passed away.

5 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And where did the family live at that
6 time? What neighborhood?

7 **MS. CANTOR:** Pingree. Before I was born, it was at
8 Brush and Kirby, which we pass on our historical tours. The
9 houses are now torn down. My grandfather was in the corner
10 home on Brush and Kirby. Apparently the Levin home was next
11 door, half of it. I can't remember the name of the family
12 that had the other half. Bud Marwell was around the corner,
13 Esther Pine was around the corner. And that was very much a
14 Jewish neighborhood.

15 I was born on Pingree and at that time I do remember
16 that Rabbi and Mrs. Herschman lived there. And I see in the
17 pictures Mrs. Herschman -- that was the rabbi of Shaarey Zedek
18 -- pushing my baby buggy.

19 I was about five years old when we moved to Broad
20 Street, and I think that was considered rather far out in the
21 1930s. That was a very nice neighborhood. My mother hosted
22 Hadassah meetings and the faculty wives at Wayne, which was
23 interesting as I look back on it that she integrated herself
24 into the lives of the other women of Wayne. Mrs. Hilberry was
25 a guest in our home, Clarence Hilberry's wife.

1 I very much remember my mother making all these
2 fancy little goodies, dates stuffed with nuts and rolled in
3 sugar. The table was always so full of these delicacies, and
4 I wonder where these women found the time for everything they
5 did.

6 MS. ALTERMAN: Did she have helpers in the house?

7 MS. CANTOR: I guess she did have help in the house,
8 but help was only there during certain hours during the day,
9 doing things like scrubbing floors. They didn't do any of the
10 cooking -- I shouldn't say "they". A woman didn't do any of
11 the cooking or serving or cleaning up of meals. I remember my
12 mother doing that.

13 MS. ALTERMAN: Was she a traditional cook? Did you
14 have all the recipes from the old country?

15 MS. CANTOR: Oh, yes.

16 MS. ALTERMAN: What do you remember about that, the
17 food in the house?

18 MS. CANTOR: Well, I certainly remember mother
19 walking from Broad Street to Dexter, which was a good little
20 hike, and coming back, walking with a little cart, and the
21 fruit from that fruit market and Mr. Oster's butcher shop.
22 You didn't go to a supermarket. You went to one shop after
23 another and bringing the fruit back.

24 That was another duty that was much harder than what
25 you and I have to do. You and I keep pretty busy, Sharon.

1 I remember full cooked dinners every night, and
2 everybody sitting at dinner for quite a long time, engaged in
3 compelling conversation.

4 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were the holidays like at your
5 house?

6 **MS. CANTOR:** We walked to Shaarey Zedek. That was a
7 bit more than two miles, I think. Maybe a little bit more.
8 Every Shabbes there was Friday night dinner, and it was always
9 fish and apple pie, and we walked to Shaarey Zedek. When you
10 came out of Shaarey Zedek, you stood around on the steps.
11 There's a wonderful picture of Shaarey Zedek and everybody
12 visiting on the steps for an extended period of time.

13 Then my Grandpa Keiden and a widowed aunt and a
14 different bachelor uncle, Hy Keiden, had apartments on Chicago
15 Boulevard, so it was routine that we went from standing on the
16 steps to the apartment where we had Kiddush, and then we
17 walked home and we had chicken dinner.

18 Saturday was a very big deal. And then my brothers,
19 who were very vigorous, went out always to play tennis. I
20 also always remember that the opera was on. And I still love
21 to listen to the opera on Saturday afternoon.

22 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where did you go to school?

23 **MS. CANTOR:** I went to Winterhalter, which is just
24 two blocks away. Barbara Lamed Rosen and her sister Rena also
25 went to Winterhalter, Dee Dee Gordon, Feldman. By the time I

1 was in school there were a number of Jewish families around
2 there. The Maddins, Dee Dee Gordon, the Lameds, Rebecca and
3 Alexander Saunders. I believe Sam Bernstein's parents were
4 there also. I went to Winterhalter and then to Durfee and
5 Central.

6 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were your interests as a young
7 student? Did you excel in any particular area?

8 **MS. CANTOR:** I was on the Central Light, the
9 yearbook. My father skipped me. So there were certain paths.
10 You know, you had 1A and 1B and 2A and 2B. I guess that there
11 were certain curricula in each one, because there are still
12 certain things I still can't do. Like I can't do percentages.
13 One of those semesters that my father skipped me.

14 Central was lots of fun. I was tall and so I wasn't
15 one of the petite dating crowd, but we were lucky in that
16 there were a number of us who were tall. Our parents gave
17 parties. We had parties in friends' basements. Some people
18 had already moved up to Seven Mile Road by that time. I
19 remember parties at -- we called her Bunny. She's now the
20 very famous Natalie Zeeman -- I can't remember her married
21 name -- a famous historian, who's written a number of books
22 and movies. She's at the University of Toronto now. I
23 remember parties in her basement. I remember parties in the
24 Janway basement.

25 When I would give parties, we would go out to the

1 farm in Franklin.

2 **MS. ALTERMAN:** That was a special place.

3 **MS. CANTOR:** That was very fun. At these parties a
4 number of us were 5'9" or over. The boys had to be 5'10".
5 And I'm still best friends with my contemporaries who are
6 5'10" and over.

7 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What about activities at the
8 synagogue, at Shaarey Zedek? Did they have youth activities
9 then?

10 **MS. CANTOR:** Yes. They had Junior Congregation and
11 I remember attending that and consecration. Rabbi Adler came
12 to Shaarey Zedek at that time, when I was consecrated. I
13 remember Mrs. Adler very warmly directing our consecration
14 class. I remember her little round body, you know, short
15 legs, but very good posture, teaching us how to walk down that
16 long aisle when we were 15 and pretty awkward young women.
17 She would tell us, Hold your heads high and take one step at a
18 time.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Life's lesson.

20 **MS. CANTOR:** Some of our classes were taught by
21 Rabbi Adler. He, of course, was more light-hearted than Rabbi
22 Herschman. But he was very interesting. I can still remember
23 him telling us that Jews anywhere you go in the world you're
24 going to find a Jewish service in which you will be able to
25 walk in and it is your service. Bernie and I now travel a

1 lot, and we've been to synagogues and services in many, many
2 places in the world, and every time I walk in, I think about
3 Rabbi Adler telling us this.

4 Before the war that wasn't a concept we really had
5 any familiarity with. If I talked to you now about a service
6 in Hong Kong or something, it's something that you and I can
7 relate to each other. But in those days that was an imaginary
8 thing and seemed very wonderful to me, and it is still.

9 **MS. ALTERMAN:** It's interesting that you talk about
10 his relationship to the young people.

11 **MS. CANTOR:** Oh, yes. He made it his business that
12 he taught that class, and I think that most of us haven't
13 forgotten it.

14 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So when did you graduate from high
15 school? Was it earlier than you were supposed to?

16 **MS. CANTOR:** I went out to the University of
17 Michigan when I was 16, turning 17. But kids do that today.
18 It was socially probably not a good thing.

19 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What was your major there?

20 **MS. CANTOR:** I took my high school teaching
21 certificate, so I had majors in English and history. You had
22 to have a minor for the high school teaching certificate, so I
23 took a course in many different sciences, and that has stood
24 me in good stead because I find that I'm very interested in
25 the out-of-doors and astronomy. I'm not wise about these

1 things because if you take one course, it's just a smattering.
2 But that was an interesting curriculum.

3 Then when I graduated, my older brother, who was
4 already married and living in Washington, wanted me to expand
5 my horizons, and he suggested -- I already had a teaching
6 opportunity here in Detroit -- he said, come to Washington and
7 see what you can get here. My father didn't think that was a
8 good idea. He said, you already have a job. By then you're
9 supposed to be on your own, and women didn't go away. I
10 graduated in '49. But I did go down there and I got a plumb
11 teaching job, and I stayed. And that's where I met Bernie.

12 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Where is Bernie from?

13 **MS. CANTOR:** Bernie's from New York, and he had gone
14 to Cornell Engineering School and had come to Washington at
15 the same time I did to work in the Patent Office as a patent
16 examiner and go to law school. That was the best education at
17 that time. He went to George Washington University Law School
18 for a person to become a patent attorney. He was a very
19 diligent student. He graduated, being given the honor of the
20 best patent law student at George Washington University. It
21 was the year after we were married.

22 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What were your aspirations as a young
23 college graduate? I'm interested to ask that question in
24 terms of the role of women. What were your aspirations?

25 **MS. CANTOR:** Oh, my aspirations. I think it was to

1 get a job as a teacher. I knew that was what I wanted to do,
2 and I still love teaching. I really love teaching.

3 At the end of the first year of my work I went to
4 Europe with a girlfriend. I think that was a little ahead of
5 my time, but not much. My father had traveled all his
6 academic life. He considered it significant that a professor
7 should travel, and he left my mother and the children to do
8 this. We have things like a post card from Cairo in 1919.

9 Did I ever tell you about that?

10 **MS. ALTERMAN:** No.

11 **MS. CANTOR:** That's very historically interesting.
12 He's in Cairo and he sends a post card that said, I wanted to
13 get into the Holy Land but I was told that the Arab riots were
14 so dangerous that I should not go in, and the doors have been
15 closed. 1919. The Arab riots against the Jews. That's a
16 very historically significant piece of information I think.

17 At any rate, I knew I wanted to travel, and we did.
18 And I definitely wanted to raise a family. We moved back to
19 Detroit after Bernie graduated law school. I was teaching
20 high school in Davisberg, Maryland, and I was teaching English
21 and running the journalism program and history, an early
22 course in what was called Problems of Democracy. So that was
23 a good preparation for life for me to be teaching that. Some
24 of my students stayed in touch for decades and decades. As a
25 matter of fact, sadly enough I've survived some of them. It

1 didn't occur to me at the time that there would be very little
2 difference in age between them and me. I had graduated at 20
3 and came down there at 21. So at 18, I was maybe four, five
4 years older than they were, which today, of course, is no
5 difference at all as you grow older.

6 Shortly after our first child was born, I was
7 involved in the League of Women Voters, and Pauline Jackson --
8 I guess she was already my brother's mother-in-law -- Marge
9 Levin's mother.

10 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Wonderful lady.

11 **MS. CANTOR:** She brought me into Federation work. I
12 had five children.

13 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Over the course of how many years?

14 **MS. CANTOR:** In ten years. So my community work was
15 somewhat limited shall we say. Through those years that kind
16 of community work was limited. I did more of the co-op
17 nursery, the PTO. When they hit junior high school, I was
18 teaching for about ten years Junior Great Books, which I
19 loved. That was just such a wonderful experience. And
20 working with the educational committee at Shaarey Zedek.

21 After our fifth child was into his teen years that I
22 started a modest business which became a national business
23 actually, and then --

24 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What was that?

25 **MS. CANTOR:** It was a book called The Coordinator.

1 It was a planning book. The slogan was, "If you're having an
2 affair, you need The Coordinator." It preceded *The Wedding*
3 *Planner*.

4 **MS. ALTERMAN:** How did you get to that?

5 **MS. CANTOR:** With five children, and getting close
6 to the weddings, and it had a section for recording the
7 invitations and it had envelopes for keeping the various
8 things, and marking when you've received the RSVP. It had
9 seating charts, it had an out-of-town listing, who's picking
10 up, what time they're arriving, where they're staying. It had
11 a photography listing, who you want in which pictures.

12 **MS. ALTERMAN:** How advanced! How did you market it?

13 **MS. CANTOR:** The year before Day Runners and things
14 of that sort. So I went and showed it to Barbara Brown --
15 she's now Barbara Wachstein -- at Barbara's Paper Bag and to
16 Lee Specialty, and they said, go to New York. The stationery
17 show is in one month. So I went with somebody from the School
18 for Creative Studies so that it was a contemporary design, and
19 went to the national stationery show. And also with a family
20 tree chart that I had generated. It was one of the early
21 family tree charts that records seven generations, because by
22 then I was getting interested in putting all this information
23 that I was coming across into some sort of a form.

24 That became a national business. It was in stores
25 in England -- 200 stores were ordering from me. The

1 Coordinator preceded doing this on computer. There were many
2 big companies who were beginning to be able to publish this
3 type of thing, and there was the opportunity for people to do
4 it on computers. I didn't want to pursue that any further.

5 I wanted to get back to what I like to do:
6 teaching. So I was teaching English to the foreign born in
7 the Bloomfield Hills schools. That was very interesting. In
8 my class I could have six or eight different countries
9 represented among 15, 16 students. It was an adult class at
10 night. I taught for General Motors the whole Opel group when
11 they came over.

12 After I did that for a number of years, I realized
13 that my hearing was limiting me in that situation. I not only
14 had the issue of hearing people well, but of catching the
15 accents. That was when I took the archive course that you and
16 I both took. I decided a person with a hearing difficulty
17 could handle archives.

18 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Before we go on to speak about your
19 wonderful professional life over the last 20 years, tell us a
20 little bit about your children.

21 **MS. CANTOR:** We have five terrific kids. The four
22 boys are very tall. All the boys are over six feet. It seems
23 to come from the Keiden gene. We're very thrilled that
24 they're accomplished people who contribute, and each in their
25 own individual way. They're each quite different. I should

1 say they each have chosen different paths. Unfortunately,
2 they've also chosen different cities all over the world.

3 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So you travel a lot.

4 **MS. CANTOR:** Yes, we travel a lot to visit them and
5 to celebrate together as much as we can. Our oldest son is a
6 veterinarian and was a professor at Washington State
7 University and a pathologist and a microbiologist, and his
8 wife is all the same. He is now living in Princeton, New
9 Jersey, doing advanced work for Bristol Meyers Squibb. Of
10 course we hope he'll cure all the things that ail all of us.

11 Cliff is an attorney in Redmond, Washington. Also
12 married with three children. His oldest daughter will
13 graduate college in the spring, and the twins have just
14 entered college.

15 Jim is in Anchorage, Alaska. He is the Assistant
16 Attorney General to the state of Alaska. He and his wife, as
17 you probably know, ran the Idiarod, each one of them, and
18 they're certainly the only Jewish couple who ran the Idiarod
19 and completed. Completing it is a different success. Each of
20 them completed. They still continue to camp and do wonderful
21 things with their children in Alaska, and they come to
22 Michigania every summer so we can be really together in
23 Michigania.

24 Ellen is an artist and is meeting her success in
25 Europe. So while she has a New York apartment, she's mostly

1 spending time in London. Exhibiting and showing in many other
2 cities of Europe.

3 Mark is a business turnaround consultant. He has
4 been very successful in terms of helping businesses turn
5 around. He and his wife, to my astonishment -- his wife is a
6 veterinarian and is a co-owner of a veterinarian clinic on the
7 west side. People from New York when I meet them say, oh,
8 yes, we know your wife. We take our Pekinese there. They
9 live in New York City on the Upper West Side with their two
10 children.

11 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So how many grandchildren do you
12 have?

13 **MS. CANTOR:** Nine.

14 It surprises me because we have moved -- we first
15 lived in Hollyhill Farms at Thirteen and Middlebelt, and by
16 1965 after Mark was born, we moved to Wing Lake, on Forman
17 Drive. So the children had a childhood that they could enjoy
18 the out-of-doors. They could come home from school and grab
19 ice skates and skate and swim and canoe. Bernie was very
20 active with them in the Boy Scouts, and we camped in the
21 summer and did outdoor things of that sort. They all seem to
22 have a yen for that. They all seem to have continued that
23 with their children and their families. And we're very
24 pleased about that.

25 We're also so pleased that at least one of the

1 grandchildren has come into Tamarack. She's gone up to Au
2 Gres and she sees our sons' names carved in the walls at
3 Kennedy. It has made a very big difference in her life and in
4 her connection to Judaism because when Glen and his wife Ingle
5 were teaching at Washington State University, it was Pullman,
6 Washington, and there was a very tiny Jewish community. A
7 nice Jewish community but very tiny. That was when we
8 suggested that she come to Tamarack in the summer. It just
9 opened her eyes to the Jewish fun. She's very committed to
10 that. Those Tamarack kids keep in touch now by IM -- instant
11 message. E-mail I'm told is too slow. Even this past month
12 -- it's only a month since camp closed -- two of them have
13 been in New Jersey and visited her in Princeton.

14 So that is a winner. And I very much believe in the
15 Fresh Air Society, which I think is interesting because my
16 root goes way back to Uncle Abe as the first male counselor.
17 Actually, on the Keiden side, Sadie Brown, my mother's sister
18 being among those very early -- Sadie Keiden Brown -- the very
19 early women who the first year --

20 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Took the children to Belle Isle?

21 **MS. CANTOR:** Yes.

22 We have grandchildren from five to some preparing to
23 graduate college. We're zooming all over the country. We
24 have two graduations at two opposite ends of the country in
25 one weekend in May. Somehow we'll have to manage that.

1 **MS. ALTERMAN:** So after the family grew, you decided
2 to start a career. Tell us about your work as an archivist,
3 an author, a lecturer, a fund-raiser. You've done a great
4 many things in the last 20 years.

5 **MS. CANTOR:** It is about 20 years. It was probably
6 an opportune time in my life that Shaarey Zedek had its 120th
7 birthday, because by then the children were through with their
8 schooling. Rabbi Groner called me in to help with the 120th
9 anniversary, which would have been in about 1982. They were
10 producing the book which you know about. It had been
11 commissioned to Wayne State Press. Eli Grad and Betty Roth
12 were writing it.

13 I had come across these pictures, a black and white
14 photo album with black pages, and little Kodak pictures that
15 my father had taken of significant events. He had a real
16 sense of history, even then. Those pictures have now been --
17 you know, they're the famous icon pictures because there were
18 no other candids as such.

19 I also had information, such as the *Detroit Times*
20 front pages that I spoke about and other kinds of very
21 interesting information. I showed it to Rabbi Groner, and he
22 said, well, we'd like you to go to the Temple Beth El archives
23 to look up our history. We don't have a repository. So that
24 was the beginning, that we realized that we really had to
25 begin a Shaarey Zedek archives. Many, many people gave many

1 pieces of information and documentation, and it was a very
2 important time, because if you think about it, a man who would
3 say be 82 or even 90 years old were still alive and would have
4 had memories back to the beginning of the century and the turn
5 of the century.

6 One of our treasures is that Evelyn Kasle in
7 approximately 1976 did oral histories of our seniors using the
8 high school kids -- she trained them -- to interview them.
9 That's an irreplaceable treasure to have memories told to you
10 about first-person events at the turn of the century. So that
11 was the beginning.

12 Shortly after that I entered the archival program to
13 get trained professionally. The 1982 celebration at Shaarey
14 Zedek was a very major celebration. We took over the whole
15 social hall and invited members to bring us memorabilia in
16 certain categories, such as weddings and other things of this
17 sort. It was very successful for what it was. It was very
18 amateurish, but very successful because it involved lots of
19 people.

20 Then while I was taking the graduate archival
21 courses that you were also taking, I was invited to a Jewish
22 Historical Society meeting, and it was apparent they were
23 talking about the Journal not having been published for a
24 year. There were older people involved and fewer and fewer of
25 them. The original people who started the Jewish Historical

1 Society I feel very indebted to. Irving Katz and Irving
2 Edgar, Walter Field. These people knew in 1959 that we had
3 better collect this stuff or it was going to be uncollectible.
4 They started the Journal, which had very, very valuable
5 information.

6 By then they had passed away, and there was no vigor
7 to continue that Journal. So Leonard Simons said, I will do
8 one. That was about 1989 or so, and he did a 30th anniversary
9 issue. Then he turned to me and said, I'll do one, Judy, if
10 you'll do the next one. So then I became the editor. We
11 doubled or tripled the size, but we also doubled or tripled
12 the scope. We now look at many, many more interesting things
13 than just the beginning of Judaism in Detroit. Our scope is,
14 I think, quite fascinating, and people love it.

15 **MS. ALTERMAN:** How many years did you serve as
16 editor?

17 **MS. CANTOR:** Eight years. I feel strongly that any
18 community person, the most important thing they can do is find
19 and hopefully train their successor. None of us go on
20 forever. So I was very fortunate to find Aimee Ergas. When
21 Aimee left for a year in Europe with her husband, she found
22 Wendy Rose Bice, after Wendy had done the book on Fresh Air.
23 So we've had a nice succession of vigorous editors, and it has
24 remained a very interesting journal. I love to have people
25 tell me, still, that they read this or that.

1 **MS. ALTERMAN:** It's of very great significance in
2 our community.

3 **MS. CANTOR:** I think it's a very interesting, yes.
4 And of course now it's an invaluable resource because in
5 recent years we've developed an index and put it on the
6 website in digital form so that around the world articles are
7 called up.

8 **MS. ALTERMAN:** What about your exhibit work? After
9 the first exhibit you did at Shaarey Zedek, I know you did
10 Blacks and Jews.

11 **MS. CANTOR:** Yes. I was commissioned to do the one
12 on Blacks and Jews, which was very interesting. I was
13 commissioned by American Jewish Committee, Jewish Community
14 Council, New Detroit and NAACP, those four. There was a
15 modest exhibit, but it had very interesting material in it.
16 That exhibit went up to Lansing, and it was shown by church
17 groups all through the state. The black churches were very
18 interested in it.

19 We specifically made it a portable exhibit. There
20 was three panels that could go on three folding banquet
21 tables, and that was by design, knowing that if we did that,
22 we could move to places like churches, things of that sort.

23 It also went to Washington the hundredth anniversary
24 of the American Jewish Historical Society. So that was an
25 interesting challenge.

1 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Consciousness raising on the part of
2 both communities.

3 **MS. CANTOR:** Oh, yes. Definitely. Not only
4 consciousness raising, but an understanding of how each had
5 worked together. During many years the Jews and the blacks on
6 the community level were working very, very closely together.
7 I think that this exhibit attempted to bring that out and show
8 that, and hopefully it did. That was an interesting
9 challenge.

10 Becoming American Women I know is what you want to
11 ask about. Dulcie called me to do that. Bernie and I had
12 seen the original Becoming American Women when it opened in
13 Chicago, and told Mary Lou, who flew with the powers that be
14 of the Detroit Historical Museum to see it, and got on the
15 list of bringing it into our community. Then Dulcie called me
16 one day and she said, you're the one. We're going to ask you
17 to do a modest exhibit and I was given I think 16 feet of wall
18 space to make this pertinent to women in Michigan. We just
19 called it Becoming American Women in Michigan.

20 That was so interesting and so fun because we put
21 just a notice or two in the *Jewish News*, and we were very
22 specific because it had to meet the outlines that the major
23 exhibit had, which was women, it had to be pictures of women,
24 it had to be Michigan, had to be Jewish, and had to be from
25 1880 to the 1920s. If you remember the variety of pictures,

1 there were many immigrant pictures, immigrant families with
2 the grandfather and his yarmulke and his beard, and you see
3 the Americanization of the younger people in the family. We
4 had women as cosmopolitan as taking European trips. So you
5 had this tremendous variety.

6 We chose something like 20 pictures for the wall
7 that were blown up and framed professionally and all of that,
8 and they created one unforgettable one, Dottie Davidson Gerson
9 in her graduation dress from Central High School holding her
10 diploma, and her dress is all white, in lace, and she just is
11 Queen of the May. And that showed how important the high
12 school graduation was to that early Jewish family.

13 There's one of Meyer Prentis's wife, before she met
14 him, in her bathing suit. Just a smashing picture. There was
15 a picture of a woman in Petoskey in one of the huge hats, the
16 Gibson Girl style. And the girls in big white bows in the
17 back of their head.

18 So the 16 pictures were on the wall, and we had all
19 of these other wonderful ones, and we decided to make two
20 stands in front of the exhibit and put those into books.
21 Those books, as you know, are still of great interest.
22 They're fun to look at and they're very illuminating about the
23 era.

24 We even had several people who were interested in
25 costume design. Many non-Jews came through, and there were

1 experts in costume design who studied the books, because it
2 just told so much.

3 Mary Lou said that more people came to that exhibit
4 than had ever before come to any one exhibit. So that was
5 very rewarding.

6 MS. ALTERMAN: People are still talking about it.

7 MS. CANTOR: They still enjoy it, yes.

8 MS. ALTERMAN: And today you have some wonderful
9 adventures, some wonderful projects on your plate. A bunch of
10 books.

11 MS. CANTOR: I was asked to write the book for
12 Michigan State University Press. I stayed home for well over
13 a year doing the research for that, and that's been very
14 satisfying. That's part of a series on discovering the people
15 in Michigan. There's one on the French people in Michigan,
16 the Dutch people in Michigan, the Polish, et cetera. And they
17 keep telling me that this has sold more than any other one in
18 the series. But I think that's not surprising because Jews do
19 buy more books. Jews love books.

20 MS. ALTERMAN: Do you have any stories to tell about
21 the research that you did while writing that book? Anything
22 that comes to mind?

23 MS. CANTOR: There was a question of pulling
24 together a lot of threads. And that still stands me in good
25 stead. I told you once that when Bernie and I went to the

1 National Archives in Washington, as you climb the steps,
2 that's where the Constitution and the Declaration of
3 Independence are deposited. The engraving about the steps is
4 great. It's "The heritage of the past is the seed that brings
5 forth the harvest of the future." So all that we learn and
6 read about is not just nostalgia. It's significant and very
7 interesting, but also significant in terms of creating the
8 future.

9 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And what about the 350th anniversary?

10 **MS. CANTOR:** Well, that's a wonderful opportunity
11 that was given to me. This is the 350th anniversary of Jews
12 in America. I don't think you want me to tell the story here,
13 but it does go back to 1654 when the first band of 23 Jews
14 landed in New Amsterdam, which was under the temporary
15 governorship of Peter Styduvesant. It was celebrated in 1904,
16 the 250th, and in 1954, the 300th, and this is the 350th.
17 It's celebrated nationally now, as it was then, as well as in
18 Michigan.

19 The American Jewish Committee asked me to chair
20 this, and Avern Cohn is the honorary chair. We conceived that
21 this should be more than one organization putting on one big
22 event. We gathered together back in the spring of 2003 the
23 directors or presidents and representatives of most of the
24 major Jewish groups in our community, and we're lucky to have
25 a Michigan Jewish Conference with Susan Herman, so that we

1 have reached out to all the communities in Michigan. We felt
2 that by giving them a year's advance warning, they could start
3 planning, and indeed they did. So there is just one event
4 falling after another that range -- it's like beyond
5 anticipated hopes.

6 Shalom Street will have an exhibit for children.
7 Federation has an essay contest and a poster contest. They
8 have a teachers conference. All the universities are doing
9 something. Cohn had a wonderful lecture. Oakland University
10 is having a discussion on film and its influence on Jewish
11 culture and vice-versa. Michigan State, the Hillel, has
12 planned something. University of Michigan, the special
13 collections library is having a special thing in the spring.
14 There's all kinds of activities, and the coalition has been
15 very successful. Our big celebratory event will be at the DSO
16 for a pops concert of four Jewish composers: Irving Berlin,
17 Richard Rogers, Gershwin and Bernstein, which should be loads
18 of fun.

19 The activities will continue into 2005 across the
20 nation, and here, too. The emphasis is on the unique
21 opportunities that America afforded by being a land of freedom
22 and how Jews contributed back to America. So it's a double-
23 sided celebration, and I think it's just wonderful.

24 **MS. ALTERMAN:** And you've done a wonderful job.

25 Judy, the impact that you've made on this community

1 is very remarkable, and as a woman of your age, perhaps you'd
2 like to comment just a moment on how you see a change from
3 generation to generation in terms of our role as women, in
4 terms of our involvement in community. Do you see any change?

5 **MS. CANTOR:** Well, of course we see change in that
6 in the early days when women were very busy, as we described.
7 My mother had Hadassah meetings. They were volunteers. My
8 mother taught English for the National Council for Jewish
9 Women for those first Holocaust survivors. She had to take I
10 think two buses and a streetcar to get to Twelfth Street from
11 Broad Street to teach these classes.

12 Bill Davidson's mother, you know, was a very early
13 organizer of Hadassah and kept involved all of her life as a
14 real pacesetter.

15 The women through my generation have had other
16 opportunities, and I think as I look about me, there is a
17 remarkable amount of volunteerism in our generation. The
18 younger women are employed, and they're running top speed with
19 families and jobs, and still we see volunteerism, but it's
20 much harder. It's very difficult. And they had to organize
21 and prioritize, but they really have to organize and
22 prioritize, and yet they do.

23 The young woman, Erica Pearsman, who is the chair of
24 the DSO concert, is a remarkable young woman. She's a lawyer,
25 she has a family, and she's doing this job, and she's doing it

1 remarkably.

2 I think if the inspiration is there to accomplish a
3 purpose that's bigger than themselves, you still find people
4 interested in volunteering. I'm very impressed with the
5 spirit within the Jewish Historical Society, how in ten years
6 it has become very, very vibrant because of young people's
7 interest. So somehow if the inspiration there, if there's any
8 way, I think that people continue to volunteer, as busy as
9 their lives are.

10 **MS. ALTERMAN:** Thank you. We're coming to the end
11 of the interview, but is there anything that I missed that you
12 would like to speak about.

13 **MS. CANTOR:** Oh, you've covered so much. I never
14 expected to cover this much. And I thank you very humbly for
15 this honor. It was astonishing to me to be asked and I thank
16 you very much.

17 The one thing I didn't speak of is the fact that my
18 husband has had such a tremendous effect on my work. He, as I
19 indicated before, in his profession is very, very diligent.
20 He's constantly reading. I think he gets 30 professional
21 journals a month. He's very interested in history, so what I
22 read he reads. If he reads something, he gives it to me, and
23 we talk about. And he's been encouraging to me. He's a lot
24 smarter about history than I am, and he's been encouraging to
25 me every inch of the way.

1

MS. ALTERMAN: So you've have a wonderful life

2

partner.

3

MS. CANTOR: Yes. Thank you so very much.