

Transcript of Interview with Mildred Ziskind
Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project
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Tape 1, Side A begins almost to the end of the tape. The first part of Side A is blank.

Tape 1, Side A

Ann Powell: ...for the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society. It's August 1993 and I'm interviewing...

Mildred Ziskind: Mildred Mermelstein Ziskind

AP: Where we would like to begin is at the very beginning. Were you born in Homestead?

MZ: Yes. I was born in Homestead on November 28, 1918, which happened to be on Thanksgiving Day and my parents always felt that we should celebrate Thanksgiving and my birthday together. But anyway of course it was always the 28th and it was a different day. But if you look up 1918, which I did, I was born on Thanksgiving Day.

AP: Well, so they had a nice Thanksgiving, something to give thanks for.

MZ: And we had a Dr. Moss, D. M. Moss, and he just did everything. He delivered me, he took out tonsils, and he was just a GP who did everything including deliver babies, and do tonsillectomies and, not too many house calls, you almost *had* to go to him. Yeah, even then, he didn't make too many house calls. But he was very convenient because he was on Eighth Avenue in Homestead and it was very convenient for everybody to go to. And I lived on Dixon Street, 507 Dixon Street in Homestead, and I attended Second Ward Public School and I skipped between the fifth and the sixth. I was an honor student. Then I went on to

AP: We have to, How did you family get into Homestead for starters? Was it your parents who?

MZ: Yeah, my father, he came to the United States. It must have been a long time ago because he was married, my mother was his second wife and he had two children.

AP: And he didn't marry in the United States,

MZ: In the United States. So, and he married my mother when he was 31-33, I guess. My mother was 20. He was 13 years older than my mother. But he was previously married to a Molly Markowitz. They had two children, Florence and Eddy, who are my half-sister and half-brother. But when my father married, you know, in the Jewish religion, if you have two little children, there's no waiting period, like a year, so when he found somebody which could have been three months later, and my mother didn't even know him, I think she knew him for two weeks or three weeks before they were married.

AP: Was it a match?

MZ: It was a match. Somebody--she came to visit her sister from Philadelphia and my father was a widower and a cousin of my mother's who knew both of them. She said I

have a cousin here visiting her sister and I think you oughta meet her. And he did and they got together and I think within three or four weeks they were married. So she never went back to Philadelphia. And I was, I think, what was it, I think they got married at the beginning of January and I was born November 28th.

AP: (unintelligible)

MZ: But whatever it was, I was four years older than my sister, Florence, and five years older than my brother. And they were born, my brother was born, I was born in 1918, she was born in 1914 and my brother was born in 1915. So that was the difference in ages there. But as long as my father lived, we just never, then my mother had, after that my mother had, including me, four children within five years.

AP: So that was really a houseful of children!

MZ: Yeah, all of a sudden we had six children. And everybody is about a year and two months apart. And my father had a grocery store and we just, and my father was totally involved and so absorbed with his children. I never saw a man like that and I've never met one since. I mean, my mother was his wife and he, we never saw a deeper, well, they never, you know the older people weren't that emotional. But they got along and whatever. But it was what he had with his children that was so significant and that we remember so much. I know that when we came home from school with our report cards we always went to him. If we needed anything, if we were sick, we went to my father. My father was just, you can't believe what it was. And see my father even took care, he didn't feel that my mother was qualified maybe because she was young and here he was thirteen years older and with a family that was a responsibility and he felt that he was the responsible person for his family. But, unfortunately, in 1931, my father got appendix and they burst and he died when I was only twelve and a half years old.

AP: Ohhh.

MZ: And he left this family that--we were so devastated. It was the biggest setback, naturally, in our lives. But--and everybody in Homestead knew about my father he was so connected with the synagogue and Dr. Moss was a very good friend and the dentist, Dr. Hirsh, he was his good friend. But my father was so well-liked and he was very bright. You know, he was very bright for a man who came here and he was up on everything. And he just was a very personable person. I mean, all the customers and all the Gentile people who dealt with him--it was like the Wailing Wall in our back yard when he died. 300--in those days in 1931 when you sort of felt the tinge of anti-Semitism among the ethnic people there, but they all came and they were hysterical. They just couldn't believe it and we couldn't either. So that was a terrible setback for us. And that was during the Depression and I was just starting high school. And my father said, you know, my sister, Florence, she took the academic course and my brother also took the academic course. He just had foresight, he knew his children. And he was very good with his hands. He said "Eddy, you're going to be a dentist; Florence, you'll be a school teacher; Mildred, you will be a lawyer." And I had trouble with that. He really wanted

me to take the academic course. Now he died and I was--I got in January cause I skipped a grade, you know, so I was a January entrant.

AP: This was when the schools had the half-year....

MZ: Half year--so I started in January. That's why I graduated in mid-year, too. So I said, he died in January of that year that I was going to high school. So I said to my mother, "Mummy what should I do? I may have to go out and learn how to type and get myself a job." "No", she said, "Your father really wanted you to have the academic course and you just go along with that academic course." So I did and, of course, I did very well and I had a scholarship to Pitt that I couldn't accept in 1936. My mother couldn't afford it. Everything went bad. The Depression people wouldn't pay their bills in the stores. We had property--they didn't pay rent--you couldn't throw them out. It was hard times and there was no, all I needed was 250 a semester. She couldn't do it. But anyway, I did have the scholarship to Pitt. So I went on to New York. I had my mother's friend. She was going to New York and she said she'd like to take me because her daughter would have company. And my mother said "Okay" she would find money enough for me to go and I had an aunt in New York. I could stay there with the aunt. So I went to New York and I was only eighteen years old--seventeen and an half--and I got a job in New York, when nobody could get a job. I got a job in a millinery store. When I came back to my aunt and I told her that I got a job, and all these other women, these girls, were sitting on the stoops out there in the Bronx because nobody could get a job, and they said, "How did you get a job? How could you get a job when we all had been laid off, we can't find work and you came in from Pittsburgh?" And they were like annoyed with me. And I said, "I walked in and I told them I had experience." Which I did, when I was eighteen I looked like twenty-one. Okay.

AP: Did you have experience?

MZ: No. But I watched what they did. And especially this millinery store. They made hats and you had to measure the peoples' heads. And this was something you had to do but I knew if I came in and said I want a job but I don't know what I'm doing, so I had to say, so they couldn't check me in Pittsburgh, you know. And I'm not the type to ever tell a lie but in that place it was a necessity, okay?

AP: You just went door to door, from store to store?

MZ: Store to store and I found one and they liked me and I said so I would watch how they were doing things. And I really did very well. Actually I'm like a born salesman I would say saleswoman. Then I came back to Pittsburgh.

AP: You left your job?

MZ: I left my job and I, but my mother wanted me to come home. I came home and I immediately went to Kaufmann's. And there was a line like three city blocks and I stood in line, stood in line, they were turning everybody away. And I got up there and all I said

was, "I just got back from New York and I'm experienced in millinery. Are there any positions open?" They says, opened the door, they says "We just happen to have a position in millinery." And in 1936 I got a job.

Interruption in tape.

MZ: ...to me that they had nothing on the fifth floor but they would, but I could go downstairs. And I went downstairs and I became top salesgirl. I mean, it was unbelievable how I was number one. And, I was there from 1936 to, in 1942, when all the men were going to the Army, they had a retail training class that they were-- They had Dr. Greenberger--I don't know whether you remember Dr. Greenberger?

AP: He was the psychologist?

MZ: Yes, that's right. And he was the head of the--what do they call it--personnel. So anyway I signed up for the test and I was recommended the, it was a college entrance exam. And a lot of people took it. And then we had to wait to see who would be in the class. The class dwindled down from five hundred to seventy-five and from seventy-five I think it went down to fifty or whatever. So, I was, I had done very well. I even said to--I can't think of his name now and I knew him so well. So I said, "Oh, Dr. Greenberger, oh, I'm so happy I passed that test. You don't know how much I wanted to get into the class because I would like to be a buyer. He said, "Well, you had no trouble. You were in the upper ten. You were among the first ten." So anyway I went through the course...it was a ten-month course.

MZ: And then that year or soon after anyway, first I became an assistant buyer in the men's department, which was unusual, and then from the men's department I became, I didn't become the buyer of the millinery because when you're in merchandise you can adapt to any kind of product it's basic, so I became the buyer for hosiery, bags, and gloves. And then I was there for three years until I got married in 1945, and then I got pregnant three months later with twins, so that was it.

AP: I just want to ask you something about when you were working.

MZ: Did you put it back on?

AP: Oh yes, because I wanted the story. Did you have to wear certain kinds of clothes when you worked for Kaufmanns at that time when you first got your job? Did they have...

MZ: No there was no, I think your basic instinct would tell you what you had to wear. If you were frivolous or anything I think you would have been told because it was conservative. I mean you know, it was a, and if you would go to any place you would be working you would be conservative about your dress. But if anything would happen that you didn't, they probably would tell you.

AP: But you did have specific...

MZ: No, no, no. You didn't have to have that.

AP: So you were in New York for four years before you came back.

MZ: No, I wasn't. I was only in New York maybe for the summer until the fall, October, I was only in New York, I went on the vacation and I think all the total I was in New York for maybe three months, four months.

AP: Oh, oh that's right.

MZ: Because I was eighteen when I started Kaufmanns. 1936.

AP: Okay, I got that date when your father died in my mind, but you were much younger than that.

MZ: Yeah that was 1931, and then I went through high school. And that was a terrible thing for our whole family, we just couldn't believe it. And it was hard for my mother, my mother, she was, we had a grocery store and there were times where she had to go to see a lawyer and she wanted me to stay home. I didn't want to stay home because I didn't want to miss school. But if I was forced to I would maybe go for a half a day or whatever. I had a sister that, well she didn't care because she was younger than I was, but it seems that although we were only a year apart I just never was a child after my father died. I never played with the dolls, I never even played with my sisters, or my brother as I was growing up. They always remembered me closing the door and studying. I was a serious student. But they weren't. So they said, "Oh she always had her nose in the book. No wonder she made the honor roll, no wonder she did this and that." No, I didn't no wonder, that's where I was motivated in. I mean I, and of course I never went to college, but I'm very well read and I don't think there's too much that, I mean going to college is reading and if you do it at home so you catch up somehow. You may not have the formal education but you know.

AP: Going back, your father was an immigrant.

MZ: From Hungary.

AP: From Hungary.

MZ: And my mother was from Hungary too.

AP: Oh she was. Did they speak to each other in Hungarian?

MZ: Yes they did, and as a result I can speak Hungarian.

AP: Oh you can.

MZ: But we had a Hungarian woman who was our nurse maid, and she did the cooking and took care of the children. She couldn't speak English and as a result when we were very little we learned how to speak Hungarian. My parents tried to speak English at the beginning maybe when we were very young they spoke Hungarian, but my father spoke, I mean when it was possible he spoke English, and he spoke English to us. And being in the store, and hearing all the ethnic languages I spoke Slovak, and we even had Spanish people and I was able to converse a little Spanish but I forgot that, but I didn't forget the Hungarian, the Slavish, it wasn't exactly Czech, it was Slovak I can understand anything anybody says.

AP: And that you learned just from hearing...

MZ: Yes. Just from hearing the people. But the Hungarian I can speak and I understand even to this day. In fact, they ask me if somebody speaks this they ask, "Where were you born?" And I says, "I wasn't born--I was born here." So I probably would have had a language aptitude. But anyway, they were both born in Hungary and my father was very bright, he really was. And he was a people person and he was just, I never met. There's not a day that goes by that I don't say something about him, that I don't think about him, and it's like I'm going to seventy-five in November, so it's sixty-one years.

AP: A long time.

MZ: And even when we go to my, to the grave, and my mother and father together, there's two separate stones but they're together. We always, all the children do it, we always go to my father first. And we lived with my mother longer than my father, she died when she was seventy-seven.

AP: So it was a good period of time.

MZ: Yeah, so she had, yeah. But he died in '31, just unbelievable. Oh where is it, I have a picture. (tape cuts out)

MZ: (tape cuts in) shoes from Italy. He loved fine leather, he liked fine materials and even when he would buy, we would go to the store shopping with my father. And they always selected fabrics that were very fine even if they were more expensive, but he really appreciated fine things in dress. And Sunday he was dressed like you would for a grocery store, but Sundays he got dressed up like you cannot believe how he would get dressed up for Sunday. He would have just like he does over there. And he made friends with a man that he was very friendly with, Mr. Hochhauser and they called each other every day. And then we used to go to Homestead to take my sister and my brother to visit their grandmother on the mother's side and the grandmother and the grandfather of my father was in McKeesport, we used to take them every Sunday to see their grandparents.

AP: Wait I have to catch you. Did you say you moved to McKeesport?

MZ: No, we used to take them from Homestead on Sunday.

AP: Oh from Homestead to McKeesport.

MZ: Yeah, on a Sunday.

AP: Was the store closed on Sundays?

MZ: Yes. Then we would take the two children and then we would go to visit, my father had an aunt, and her name was Tante Deitch (sp?) and Uncle Deitch. Lovely, lovely people. We would visit them, that was his father's sister and then we would visit some of my mother's relatives who lived in McKeesport, and then towards the evening or whatever we would pick up the two children. And it was like a ritual, we just did it, we knew there was something there, but nothing was there, it didn't affect the way we thought about them or whatever. We just knew that my mother wasn't their mother, but my father respected the grandparents because they knew that the grandparents never went anyplace. They were very religious. As a result my sister Florence became very religious because she mimicked her grandmother, and even when she got older she would walk like her and her house was strictly kosher and whatever. And then after, that was when my father was still living all those things happened. And then of course, oh and my father had a 1929 I guess, gee during the crash I guess, he bought a Lincoln. He had the most beautiful Lincoln car.

AP: A Lincoln, my goodness.

MZ: It was a beautiful Lincoln car with jump seats. Because he wanted, when he drove the car he wanted everybody to have a seat and there were four children in the back, two in the jump seat, and my mother and my father up in front. And it was a big car and my father used to lend it out for Gentile funerals. And he used to, and the Gentile customers were, there were a lot of immigrants coming in and they would be at the station and they would tell him and he would go down with them and to pick up the immigrants at the station. So he did a lot of nice things for a lot of people. I mean that's what he like to do, he just loved to make somebody happy.

AP: Now all this was from the grocery store.

MZ: Mhm. Yeah he was doing all this. And he had this big car and if the funeral needed it for flowers he would give the car because it was one of those big cars. And then when he died, can you imagine, everything you know he was the pillar of strength for us and then all of a sudden everything was taken away and it was rough. But anyway we managed.

AP: Did you have other family in Homestead?

MZ: I had, yes, I had two uncles. But they were having their own problems. Everybody was, you know when you talk about the Depression it was like there was no win situation and no way to get out of it, you were so lucky to struggle through or hold your own. So my uncles, they didn't help us very much. One of the uncles could have helped us, he didn't have any children.

AP: These are your father's brother.

MZ: Brothers, but he didn't help. And I always sort of resented it because, I didn't ask him even, I wouldn't even ask him because he would never even come over to, once and a while they would come over to see us, but they just--and my father brought every one of his family out from Europe. He was here first. He brought his mother and father, his sister, her two children who were not his sister's children, she had married a man with two children. He brought them out. He brought he brothers out. Everybody my father brought out.

AP: And did they all come to Homestead?

MZ: Everybody but they two younger ones. They went to Detroit, and then from Detroit they moved to California.

AP: Do you know why your father came to Homestead?

MZ: When?

AP: Why.

MZ: He came, he actually came to McKeesport because this, his first wife's parents were second cousins somehow to his father. So there was a relationship there, but a distant one, and when he came there, he came there because that was the only people that he knew. The Markowitzes. And here they had a lot of daughters and one who was eligible. In fact I'm named, my name is Malka and his first wife's name was Molly.

AP: Oh I see.

MZ: And I'm named after his first wife, which is...

AP: That's interesting. For the child to be named after the first wife.

MZ: It is. That's right, the first wife. And so I think that was one of the reasons he came to McKeesport, and from McKeesport somehow he got to Homestead. And then he met this Mr. Hochhauser who lived in Braddock and they were such good friends, I have never seen, I mean in those days we had particular friends or certain friends that we'd call every day, my father, and he had a grocery store, too.

AP: Which was in Braddock?

MZ: In Braddock. They had a lot of things in common. But every single day that he would call, Amel, and Louie, and you know it was one of those things, they had a wonderful friendship. And then as a result we got to be friendly with their whole family. And my father would bring six of us. And most people, like if you're coming visiting, you're not looking for six people, but it was okay because they loved my father so. When he came in they greeted him.

And of course and we were all, my father was a real disciplinarian, and we didn't, we feared not, I always say he disciplined us with love. So we were able to accept that kind of a discipline. He tried to be firm, but with love. And we knew that and we felt it, and we respected him. And it's strange that people, that we can't carry on like that because it was, we think it's easier to get in, but my father did it the right way. He was firm. We came in when we were supposed to. We did what we were supposed to, and we did it just because we wanted to do it for him.

AP: Do you remember his ever punishing any of the children?

MZ: No, because he would be annoyed but he would never hit anybody. No he would never hit any, he just would say what he felt. He says, "You're to be in at such and such a time." And that was it. There was just no wavering and you knew that he meant it and because of the great respect for him that we had we did everything that he wanted us to do. And even when, if any of us would get sick, my mother would have to sleep in the other room, if we were running a temperature we had to be in the bed with him. He would not even trust us, because if there was something wrong he wanted to be the one to administer the medicine and everything.

AP: He really did take a primary...

MZ: No I never saw anything like it, I've never seen it since. And I know a lot of men, and that's what we remember things. And you know we didn't have air conditioning. Naturally, in those days. And all these very hot days, and my father would take bedding and we would all get in the car, and we would all go to Schenley Park, and sleep in Schenley Park during the hot summer days. And he probably never slept because he was watching us but he didn't feel that he wanted us to be in this terrible heat when it was in the nineties.

AP: Was there a park in Homestead?

MZ: No, we went to Schenley Park.

AP: So there wasn't any...

MZ: No, no place, no. So we went, we to Schenley Park, Schenley Park, and he would put the blankets or whatever they were and we would used to sleep there. On the hot days.

AP: And you had to go back in time for him to open the store.

MZ: Yeah. But he did that, I don't think he did it on school nights, I don't remember, but I know, maybe he did, I don't know.

AP: It was probably summer.

MZ: It was summer. Oh, we were done with school so it could have been any day. But if it was hot we went. And he would, yeah.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

MZ: (tape cuts in) ...you know Mildred, we remember your father. Now I have to remember my father because he was my father. But now they have to go back and they're remembering somebody when they were twelve years old and told me specific things about my father. They says, "Your father was the kindest man." When we came by the store he would ask us, "Can I give you a banana, can I give you an apple?" They said he was the kindest man, he loved people, he loved doing things for people. And they said he was so kind and so nice to everybody, spoke so well and whatever. Yeah he was very bright. I always remember that. He used to read the Forward, and he would sit out in the store. And I remember I must have been about ten, ten and a half, and I said to him, we called him Puppi, I said, "Puppi, you seem to interested in the papers, what's new in the world?" I was always interested in current events. And at that time he said, oh things look very bad in Europe. There's a man, and he talked about Hitler, there's a man, a painter in Russia, I mean in Germany, that's gonna cause a lot of trouble. In fact he even said it in Jewish, *tsores*.

AP: You knew Yiddish as well.

MZ: Sure. And he talked about it, and I always remember what he said because there were already signs of it in the thirties you know. But he knew that there was problems there. And maybe he had a funny feeling about what was going on anyway because he brought everybody out. But it's so sad because he brought his sister out, he brought his mother and father, it was during the flu epidemic. So his sister was here three weeks and she died. She's buried at the Homestead Cemetery. His mother, she also got the pneumonia, the flu, and died. So the mother and the sister area buried together in Homestead. So his father stayed here for a while and then he went back to Europe.

AP: He did?

MZ: He went back, and I understand that he got, well he might have been young at that time too, and he got married and he might have started up another family, I don't know.

AP: And you never heard from him again.

MZ: No. But my uncles knew something. I think they did, I think my uncles heard from him and I think he did have another family. And we've never been in touch with them, but that's what happened. So when we go to the Homestead Cemetery, his mother and, that was in '21 because I saw the dates on the stone, and they were 1921 and that was around the flu epidemic, and they're both buried there. And then my father's first wife (tape cuts out)

AP: Pick up our train of thought because there's so much here but, it's really marvelous, the story, there are a lot of parts to it. Let's see you were talking about the fact that these two relatives who came here so briefly died within a short time.

MZ: Yeah, they were just here two or three, maybe only two weeks. But they died, they got sick and they died. A lot of people died in the, and I was born in 1918, so I see on their graves that it's marked 1921 but I never got to know, I was too young I wouldn't know them anyway.

AP: Did you move behind the store?

MZ: Yes. We lived behind the store.

AP: And that was where you lived the whole time?

MZ: Yeah, until the steel mill took over all the property. My mother had, we owned a bakery shop, and our store, our grocery store was here and there was an area, steps and so forth that led up to a second floor and there were two apartments there that we rented. And then we rented the grocery store, I mean not the grocery store, the bakery shop, and we're still friendly with the Bergers. Morris Berger, who is a lawyer, his mother and father rented our bakery. And my father was very close to Morris their son, and he went to Pitt from the store, and my father adored Morris because he was bright. He was another, he's still, he's eighty-eight years old and Morris always tells the story that he held me when I was a year old. Because he actually was maybe about, he's fourteen years older than me, so he might have been fifteen. And my mother was doing something and my mother, she says, "Moishe hold Mildred." And we're still very good friends, we're like, I'm invited to everything they have and as a result one of my daughters is very friendly with one of the Morris's children. She lives in Boston, her husband is a psychiatrist, and they are very close and they get to see each other.

AP: Suzie?

MZ: Suzie. You know Suzie? Suzie Jacobson, they're very close. And Judy, I had two bar mitzvahs this past year and every one of the Bergers were there. Suzie, Billy, no not Billy, cause Danny and Billy they aren't speaking for the last few years, but Peggy, Deena and all their children. They were all in New York for the bar mitzvahs on a big

boat. It was on the New Yorker in New York and it was a tremendous, fabulous bar mitzvah, and they were all there.

Now Judy, Suzie's son got married and I was of course invited too, but I wasn't feeling well, but Judy went to Florida and she went to the wedding. And we've just been, it's like a kinship, you know, our relationship.

AP: Was that a bakery, I'm just going to go back to the bakery, was that a bakery before the Berger's took it or was it a store room that they turned into a bakery?

MZ: Well I don't know how, but I know there was a big oven. And that was specifically whether it was built for the Bergers I'm not sure, but in the back of the yard there was this big oven. Behind the store.

AP: Outside the store. So they had to go out to bake.

MZ: Mhm. No, they didn't, they had a place, they did it all from, other than the basement they had another level, and that's where they did, they were able to do it from the other level.

AP: Now do you know if that was a kosher bakery?

MZ: No. No.

AP: It was not. Was there a kosher bakery do you know?

MZ: There was never a kosher bakery in Homestead. There was another major bakery, it was owned by the Weiners, that was on, he built this very modern in those days, I forget when I think my father was still living or was it after he died, could have been in the '30s that the Weiners built a beautiful modern building which you know compared to all the other places down there, they were old. And this was a new construction and we thought it was a very, it was very beautiful. But ours was an oven, it was a very good oven and it was very large. And after the Bergers left, we rented it out to another bakery. We had it rented out to other people and it was always a bakery.

AP: So was it called by the name of the people who owned it.

MZ: Yes.

AP: It was once the Berger Bakery, and then...

MZ: And then it was somebody else, the Woods, yeah. So it changed all the time yeah.

AP: And then your mother continued to run that grocery when your father died.

MZ: Oh yes, she run it until the mill, until the steel mills bought all the property there. And then we had property in the back of the house too. We owned another building in the back of the house, so like I say, if things would have been normal and wasn't the Depression, my mother would have, we would have had no trouble. But we were able to hold on to the grocery store.

I would have to say from the time my father died 'til I graduated high school we never had a lot of clothes. We had food to eat, we never were without food. But as far as having a lot of clothes, I know I used to have a blouse or two and I used to wash them every other night or whatever, maybe two skirts. But when I was fourteen I met my friend Ruth. In fact I was just at her seventy-fifth birthday, her name is Ruth Litman. I met her at a B'nai B'rith group, it was what would be the girls group in B'nai B'rith. Maybe the BBGs, yeah. I met her and they had a meeting at one of my friend's home in Homestead, and I met Ruth Littman. And she was fourteen and I was fourteen, she just celebrated her seventy-fifth. She took me, I was the only one, she took me to see Phantom of the Opera and we went in a stretch limo that her sons ordered for her, and I couldn't believe it. She said it was going to be a limo but I didn't think, maybe it's a car picking her up, but it was a stretch limo. The two of us were going to, it was just this Sunday. Then after it was over they picked us up, the limo picked us up and took us to the Carlton and we had dinner with her immediate family, so it was a nice way of them, the children celebrating their mother's big birthday. And then they picked up my husband later for the dinner. So anyway that's sort of like, I always, in fact I wrote her a very lovely, I didn't do it in poetry I did it in prose, and I just explained how I felt and what their family had done for me.

AP: Was their name Litman? That's her maiden name, okay.

MZ: And I used to go there since I was fourteen. Every Friday I would leave school, leave my parents' home with the children, as I said my attachment to my sisters and brothers I just never played with them. I mean I always, I was close to them in feeling but not in interest. And I would go and my mother would give me twenty-five cents for three car checks, that's what it was in those days. Then I would go to Braddock and I would, she lived right on Corey Avenue, I would go to their home there. They had a lovely home and she was the only daughter and there were four brothers. And I had Friday night dinner with the family, so there I had that kind of stability, and this went on until I was about nineteen years old. So we got married, we got you know. And when she got married and I got married, and we've been friends ever since. So it's been that way. But anyway they were very nice to me, her mother was so nice to me. Then the brothers, somebody in the family would take me home, so I always had two more car checks left for the next time. But I think, I don't remember not being there. And I was company for her because she was an only daughter, so I had that and they would, I would go to the movies with her. At that time, we were talking about it, she was wearing I. Miller (?) shoes. And for graduation when I graduated high school my mother gave me ten dollars and I bought a dress, I bought a pair of shoes, I bought a hat, in those days they wore hats, I wore a pair of gloves and a purse.

AP: All for your ten dollars.

MZ: All for my ten dollars, and I made it.

AP: Where did you shop?

MZ: In Homestead.

AP: I was going to ask you that. You said your father used to take you shopping.

MZ: He would take me to Grinbergs. He once took me to Grinbergs to get a spring coat. And in those days, that's in 1930 maybe just before he died, maybe 30. He loved the material, and this spring coat was twenty-five dollars. That was a lot of money, right, for a spring coat.

AP: Oh my God, yes.

MZ: And he wanted me to have it, it was a plaid coat I'll never forget it, it was so beautiful. And I didn't know anything about it, this is what I like, and this is what you're gonna have. And I didn't think about it but that's what he bought. Now I'm just telling you, when he went shopping with us he took, my mother, she would get up at twelve o'clock, we had the nurse, the woman we used to call her (?), she was Hungarian.

AP: Now what does that mean?

MZ: That means, like aunty, maybe.

AP: Oh I see, she was not a Jewish woman.

MZ: No. She was Gentile. And she would get our breakfast together. And my father, he'd supervise, and then my father even supervised the menu. My mother, he, every day we had, he absolutely told the girl what she was going to make. And he would buy whatever needed, the meats and so forth and I think it was on a Thursday we had milshic- - milk and the other days we had meat, and whatever it was it was his menu, he decided. I mean he really took over. I don't think he thought that my mother was stable, she was young, twenty years old, she was only thirty-three when he died. But she did well. I would have to say my mother, because she did take care of the store too, because he would take an afternoon nap. And then she would come down. She never got up until we came home for lunch. She got up at twelve o'clock. And we came home from school for lunch, a tremendous walk but we did.

AP: You lived far from the school?

MZ: When we think about it, which today of course it was a good thing to do, but when we did it, we used to go to school, walk to school. My father didn't drive us, not very much. He had to drive my sister to another school because she had to go to another

school because she didn't fair well, I don't know what she had to go for another school, so he had to take her.

AP: Do you know where that other school was?

MZ: That was first ward.

AP: So they were divided by different wards.

MZ: And she had to go to first ward, and she needed, and he felt she needed the help to go down there when she was younger and he would come and go there and pick her up. And we all walked. But we didn't mind it. It was just normal. And then we would come back for lunch and then go back again and come back. That was four times.

AP: Did you go to Hebrew school?

MZ: Oh, I went to Hebrew school. They wanted to make me, they wanted me to go to the yeshiva. I went to Hebrew school. I wanted to tell you about our Hebrew teacher at the school. His name was Mr. Krotein. He was a very old man even when I went there. And he had a strap actually. You know how they talk about it. If you missed something or did something he would hit the strap.

AP: Did he hit people with it?

MZ: No he'd just hit it...he would say to keep order. You know how kids can become a little rowdy and especially. But he had control. He did have it in his hand but he never used it. However, he was very old even when I got to him. Then we got a new man and his name was Mr. Proper. Mr. Proper was a very brilliant, spoke English, the King's English...and he was a wonderful teacher. So I learned under Mr. Proper. Well Mr. Proper thought--I went there until I was fifteen.

AP: Oh, so you went beyond...

MZ: I went beyond because Mr. Proper says, "It would be a pity for you to quit."...cause I was already starting to learn how to speak Hebrew, And I was--he could speak Hebrew and he said, "You just can't give up." And he told my mother, "I don't care about your other children. They don't know what they're doing, but she has to go." When I got to be fifteen I said "That's it. I had enough." And I didn't go anymore. But I was good at it.

AP: You went five days a week?

MZ: I went after school--sure.

AP: So he taught you beyond reading.

MZ: Oh yeah. And I can read Hebrew today, like most people, I mean, our age. Maybe they do, maybe they don't if they were born in Europe or something, you know. But I was very good in Hebrew.

AP: Did he taught you some understanding.

MZ: Oh yeah. I used to know words. (?), chair, you know and all.

AP: And he moved you on...

MZ: Oh yeah. He moved me on because he saw--he said, "You know it would be a pity for you to quit because you really--you're a natural. So why should you give up". And he started telling my mother and he came down to see my mother and I said, "Well okay, I'll go." And I did go until I was fifteen. And then when I got to high school like I told you I was very good in school. I mean I took geometry, I took trigonometry, algebra IV. I was really prepared for college.

AP: This is Homestead?

MZ: The standards were marvelous there. In fact, Morris Berger, who was 88 now, he graduated Homestead. And he said that the standards in Homestead, he was so well-equipped, of course, he was very bright. In Homestead standards were very high and we had the best teachers. I took Latin, I took French, I took physics, I took chemistry. Oh, I was--I took the hardest courses.

AP: Were those required?

MZ: Those were required, yes, for the straight academic course. That was required.

AP: So they set that out for you, you didn't make decisions if you took the academic course.

MZ: No. No. Yeah, I took two years of Latin, two years of French, and I was very good in English. And I liked to write. And I still have an aptitude for writing. I mean, I can express myself very well. Sometimes when I write, even my daughters, if they were writing anything--and everyone went to college-- they'll call me up, "Mother, what do you think?" And I would like proof-read it and if I see that there's something that I think they could do better on, I will tell them, But they have enough respect for me that they will do it even today. It's amazing but that's the way it is.

AP: Well, that's not surprising. They recognize...

MZ: No, they just--I mean. And then I had the lead in the senior class play. I was interested in the theater. And while I was going to Sunday school, Bernard Grinberg was our superintendent and he was very capable. We had other, then he got married and he

moved to Squirrel Hill, then we had other people. But, and then we had Roy Magrum used to be the director of the theater.

AP: The theater...?

MZ: In Homestead, of all the plays.

AP: Was he Jewish?

MZ: Jewish--Magrum Sam Magrum was his brother who was a lawyer. But Roy--he was a wonderful coach and director. And I was in every play from the time, I think, from the time I was about eight years old, certainly at nine. Any play that they had, I had a part. And it was--the parts that I had were not ingénue types. They were really heavy duty acting. And then when I went to high school and I auditioned for this play. And this is so funny, cause I tell my children the name of the play was "The G Woman"...

AP: The G Woman?

MZ: The G Woman. Imagine, like Angela Lansbury shows, solving murders. And I was the only Jewish girl in my class so when I auditioned they gave me a part as a newspaper woman. And the lead was the G woman. So one day very early on she was sick, Edith Still (?), so Miss Reisinger (?) said, "I want you to read Edith's part." Because she was the main part and everybody had to relate to that part to her and I started to read it and she said, "Oh my God! That's you. How did I miss out on it? I can't believe it! When Edith comes back she will be the newspaper woman and you have the lead." And that's how I got it, by default. Could you believe it? Because in those days they were not giving it to the Jewish ones. It's a shame. I hate to say that.

AP: I was going to ask you about that.

MZ: Because believe me if you were Jewish --like Edith Still --she was Waspy, she was a very beautiful girl, she was very popular. And she was going to get that part whether she was good at it or not, until she heard me. She just said, "Oh my God! That's it. Forget it. That's your part. When Edith comes back she gets your part." And Edith never said a word. Nothing was said and I was the G woman. And I did such a job that they wrote, "Although Mildred portrayed the G woman bold, all her fame as an actress has not been told." Yeah, they thought that I was going to Broadway. I had to go because--and I would have--and I think I would have tried harder...I really wanted to go to Carnegie Mellon for drama. So Pitt wasn't really...

AP: Wasn't really where you wanted to be?

MZ: I wanted to be at Carnegie Mellon. But I didn't get a scholarship to that. They weren't giving scholarships. Pitt gave the scholarships. But in the meantime, I, and then when I went to Kaufmann's and worked, I was even in the plays at Kaufmann's.

AP: Kaufmann's had plays?

MZ: Yeah, they had plays early on.

AP: So they had their employees...?

MZ: I never lost an audition. And not only that--when I was seventeen and I was finished with school, I auditioned because I used to sing. And I auditioned at Reuben's Furniture Store. There were like five hundred people that auditioned.

AP: Was Reuben's also in Homestead?

MZ: In Homestead. It was on the street. It was in the window. And this man came out and they were going to have a sustaining program on KQV whoever won. And out of all the people, I won. And I was on KQV for six months. My own program.

AP: On the radio...

MZ: On the radio. And I wouldn't change my name. My name was Mermelstein and they begged me, "Change it." I said but--I didn't. I said, "Nobody will know who I am." And so--I was very foolishly. And then somebody heard me and they wanted me to go out with a band and my mother wouldn't let me go. But then there was another person who had, who played theaters so I joined that group. So I sang at a couple of theaters: the Braddock Theater, the Memorial Theater, you know, something like that. But my mother didn't want me to go with a band...you know, out--which I didn't.

AP: Who wanted you to use a different name on the radio? Do you remember? I mean was it the Reubens or was it the people at the radio,

MZ: No. No. I think it was the man that--he had a lot of faith in me and he thought it would have been better for me. And it would have been better. I think had I done anything beyond the radio--the local--I might have done it. And then I had to go to work, you know, and there was nobody there to motivate me, But anyway, I had a stint of that. I loved theater and I would go out of my way to see, even in New York. When I visit the children they know that I have to see plays. I mean, that's where it's at with me. I just love theater.

AP: I can imagine. I wanted to go back to some of things that you had mentioned and try to expand on them. You were saying, for example, in high school, that you referred to the fact that something about a Jewish person getting a part. So I'm taking it that there was some sense of anti-Semitism there.

MZ: Oh yes. I always felt it. I was very friendly with two girls--one was Polish and one was Slavish, Slovak. And we were like the Three Musketeers. And we were, since the first grade, Dorothy, Mildred and Wanda. We, the three of us were in the same class and skipped a grade, so we skipped together. We went through the first grade til high school.

Wanda and I have exchanged birthday cards even until this day. We are still friendly. We call each other. And a very interesting thing happened. I said to her, "Where's Dorothy? I know that Dorothy lives someplace around you. Why hasn't she even shown any interest to contact me or you? I mean maybe--" She says, "I think I saw her once since we're out of school". So I says, "Doesn't she have any interest to see us? I have an interest to see her. We grew up together. We walked to school together. We did everything together." So about three weeks ago, yeah, just about three weeks ago. I see in the newspaper, and her mother was married the second time and I recognized the name. And then it says Dorothy Lynch. Her mother was ninety-nine years old and I didn't even know she was alive. And her mother died. And I know she was at the funeral home in Homestead Park where everybody migrated to from the mills and after the lower end was sold. They all went to West Mifflin and they went to Homestead Park so I knew where the funeral home was. So I says, "You know, I'd like to see Dorothy and I'd like to see her brothers." And I said to my husband and a friend of mine, Mae Ruskin, did you ever hear of Mae Ruskin? Stanley Ruskin? Okay. She was his mother and I was very friendly with her. She was up and she wanted to go to West View Cemetery. So we took her to West View because her husband's there. And after we got through with that, I said to my husband, "I want to go up to Homestead Park. I want to go to the funeral home up there." He said, "What are you doing at a funeral up there? Who died now?" And I said, "Well, it has something to do--I have to see this girl. So I sort of explained it to him. He said, "Well, I'm not going in." But Mae said she would go in. So I went up there and I go in the room (tape cuts out)

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

MZ: (tape cuts in) ...to make any kind of contact with these people. They still had that in the 30s and in the 40s. They still had that feeling. Jews were not, they were not quite ready to accept us in the inner circle. They would tolerate us and be with us but --I didn't want to say too much about it--but you always felt it. You always felt that you had to be on extra behavior. You had to be very careful. You had to weigh your words and you almost couldn't be yourself. And I always felt that, even though everybody was very well-liked. My father was liked and everything else. But we knew that we had to take one step back in order to deal with the people because of *their* mentality not because of ours.

AP: Did you ever hear of any anti-Jewish remarks?

MZ: Yes. We did hear. We heard them a lot.

AP: And did you also have some sense that that was some of the teachers in the school?

MZ: No. Not the teachers.

AP: Now, these two friends, for example, that you were talking about, you were saying that one of them was, that her family was really surprised to see this Jewish woman in their funeral home.

MZ: They'd never get over it. They would never get over it.

AP: Did they...

MZ: That was best public relations for a Jew to do.

AP: Was to go to her...

MZ: Yes, to come in like that because they couldn't believe it. They couldn't believe it. And my friend, Mae, who saw all this said, "I'll never forget this as long as I live, that scene. Too bad it wasn't recorded." But anyway that's what I did. I just did that three weeks ago.

AP: Now, were you included, did you go to their homes? Did they come to your home? Was there that kind of situation that you were their school friend?

MZ: Well, I was their school friend. In Dorothy's home, maybe I was in her home maybe twice in a lifetime and that's a lot. Now in Wanda's home, she had a couple sisters and somehow they liked me. When I was younger I had a lot of humor and I would say things that they couldn't believe. I had a good sense of humor. And it was a natural and I used to make people laugh, you know what I mean. So I had that kind of personality. And so they all liked me for that, and they still do. I mean, I go to Wanda's, everything that she's had--her Christenings, her graduations of her grandchildren, and we go to everything.

AP: Is she Catholic?

MZ: She's Catholic. And I've invited her to different things of mine and so forth. In fact, we're going to go out together again. I called her and she wasn't feeling good. She calls me. It's been an on-going good relationship. But unfortunately, it wasn't that way with Dorothy. But when Dorothy saw me, and her husband said, "My God, I've heard about you through the years." So she must have been talking about me, naturally, but she never did anything about seeing us. And then her brother--oh, he hugged me. He said, "I can't believe I'm seeing you. Do you know what this means to us?" And they just were so--I never saw anything like it. It was just such a reception. Mae said she'll never get over it. But anyway, I had to do that, isn't that funny? I wanted to do it. It was something that I had to do and I wanted to do it. And it was such an opportune time, you know. So anyway that's what happened there.

But we always--like when I went to Wanda's house--I would go there and they were nice to me, as nice as they could be. But I always felt--they were Polish--and Polish people, among all the ethnic groups of people, the Polish people were the ones who were the

least--they just couldn't--they didn't like the Jews. Even in Poland, Did you ever hear that?

AP: Uhuh.

MZ: So I felt there was a like a strain but I didn't feel it as much because--I have to talk about it on an individual basis, you know. But I would have to say that the Polish people in Homestead were anti-Semitic, and I felt it. And I'm not picking out one group.

AP: You felt that.

MZ: I felt that and I --absolutely. There were other people there, the Slavish people were nicer. They were a little bit more tolerant. But, you know, I see all these people. They don't realize. I mean, they don't have the background that I have because most people were raised among Jewish people but I wasn't. I was the only girl in my class. I was the...

AP: The only girl in your class?

MZ: In my class. In my Homestead High School class.

AP: You were the only girl?

MZ: The only *Jewish* girl.

AP: The only Jewish girl, okay, yeah. You were the only Jewish girl in your whole class.

MZ: And I had a very bad experience at one point and I was very upset. Nobody could even explain it to me. I was sitting in class and, like I told you, I was an honor student and I was up with all the people who were doing well in school. And one day they called out all my friends. They called Wanda, they called Dorothy, they called Edith Steel, and they all were called out of class to join something. And they didn't ask me. So I got very upset and I came home to my mother and I said, "Mummy, I don't understand what happened. They--all the girls who are bright and who are on the honor roll--they called them all out and they asked them to join something and they didn't ask me." So finally, my mother came up to school and she wanted to know why I was--

AP: She did go?

MZ: Yeah, my mother did and she wanted to know why I wasn't permitted to go because scholastically I was in the same category as all these other girls. And here is was the 4H club. It was a Catholic organization!

AP: The 4H is (?)

MZ: Yeah. It was 4H is and they didn't have any Jews.

AP: Hum. The 4H was like almost a farm kind of club.

MZ: It was actually more like--it was Catholic group. It definitely was a Catholic group. It was a--they didn't accept Jews. So when they told me it was a Catholic group then I could accept it. Then I accepted it. They didn't tell me anything. They just took these girls out there. They said, "We were asked to belong to this group." I said, "Why wasn't I asked?" Nobody explained it to me. And then, of course, they did.

AP: But there was a Catholic group meeting at the school.

MZ: Yeah. But I didn't care about that as long as I knew.

AP: As long as you understood.

MZ: Yeah. But I was a little--you know, I was kind of hurt about it at that time because I didn't--the minute I knew. But I had to go and I had to say to my mother, "I want to know. I think you ought to come up with me."

AP: And she did go.

MZ: Oh, yeah.

AP: So it didn't take Protestants either then?

MZ: No, it was Catholic. It was a Catholic group.

AP: And yet they were doing their recruiting in the high school.

MZ: Yeah.

AP: So the kids could be--if your mother hadn't gone you would not have known.

MZ: No. Well, I think at that point I might have asked the teacher. But I was--although I was very good in school and all of that, I was--it's amazing because that's not who I am today--but I was a little timid about certain things. And I think I was timid because I always had to try. I had to go this extra length to try to get along with all these people or to be a part of them. And I always felt that.

AP: Did you even get it also from your parents that it was important for you to not make waves or whatever or to do this little extra?

MZ: Yeah. I thought it would create a problem and I didn't want anything, you know. So I always took two steps back before I went forward with these people.

AP: Did these girls come to your house?

MZ: Yes. They could--they were able to come to my house freely--anything. Yeah, when I went to their house, they had to think about it. "I'll ask my mother." You know, it was one of those things.

AP: What did you do about dating when you were in high school?

MZ: Well, I didn't. Well, actually, I once dated, I went to the prom with a Jewish boy that my mother made--she made the arrangements. I would have never gone with him. But she wanted me to go so I went with him. And, believe me, I don't think I came home with him. But there was one Gentile boy that liked me, and I knew he liked me, and he came from a very nice family who were *totally* against Jews. He wasn't allowed to tell his mother. But he used to come to my house, and my mother just accepted him like, you know, he was my friend. I never thought about it as a romantic thing but he did. And I used to say, "Al, look. I hate to tell you nothing is--" I was seventeen then so there was no...but I says, "Al, I'm never going to marry a Gentile person and your parents would kill you if you married a Jew. You can't even tell your mother that you're even coming to see me. So this is so ridiculous." So he says, "Fine. We're friends and it's nice and you like me and I appreciate it." And they were very wealthy at the time. He had a car, and he used to take me to restaurants, and at seventeen, it was during the depression. But he was a very wealthy boy. Now his sister was also dating somebody, and they were Catholic, and she was dating a Protestant boy. Well, that was the worst thing that his mother wasn't permitted...the sister wasn't allowed to date this boy because he was Protestant. So here we were--they used to go to Sunday church--and what would they do? This didn't last very long, maybe three, four months and I started to date Jewish boys and stuff like that. I got older and I was in Braddock and I would meet fellows with my friends because they had more of a Jewish community, you know.

AP: They did. Was it because it was larger?

MZ: Yeah. They had the Braddock Community Center. And we didn't have that.

AP: Which was like a Jewish (?)?

MZ: Yeah. It was a community center. So when I went to Braddock I started to meet Jewish boys there, you know. So anyway the brother and sister--I dated the brother and the sister dated--so the brother, So they would go to church. But they never would go to church. They would pick us up, the four of us, and we would have breakfast. We would go out for a ride. And this was funny--forbidden fruits. I didn't even feel so bad because she was Catholic and wasn't allowed to go with *him*. And I didn't feel bad because I didn't care. It was nothing serious. But he really liked me and he used to come into my mother's store and he'd say, "Hello, Mom." And my mother would say, "What is he calling me Mom for?" And I'd say, "Mummy, you know that's his sense of humor." He did have a wonderful sense of humor. And then for Easter one day he brings me this Easter egg--chocolate Easter egg--and it has my name on it and whatever. And my

mother says, "What is this?" "Oh," I says, "Mummy, it doesn't mean a thing," which it didn't.

AP: Was she concerned?

MZ: No. She knew I wasn't interested. No. It was just something--one of those experiences. But in Homestead. I think I started to date after I graduated--like about nineteen or so.

AP: A part of what I'm picking up from, and you can correct me of these assumptions. First of all I noticed that you mentioned that your friend was in Braddock. So does that mean that you didn't have Jewish friends in Homestead?

MZ: Yeah. I did. I did but I didn't get involved with them as much. I had a--Ida Lembersky--none of the girls dated at that time.

AP: Were they a social group? Did you (?)

MZ: Oh, yes. I was very friendly with this group in Homestead, too.

AP: Oh, so there was--I guess I should have not said dating because I really wanted to get a sense of whether you had a social life...

MZ: Yes, there was a social life. There was a nice group. We used to go to Sunday school and we went to parties, and I had--Ida's dead. Lydia Mendelsohn is dead. Helen Fox is dead--all these girls. And they died young. They died young. And I was friendly with...I always had a lot of friends even in Homestead. But I preferred going to Braddock. That's where I preferred. And I made a decision about that. And even my sister said, "You really deserted us because you really went out every Friday."

AP: Did your family have you own Friday night Shabbos dinners? Or was there something more when you went to Braddock?

MZ: I had it there. My mother didn't have it.

AP: She did not?

MZ: No, because my mother--she had to be in the store. We still had help but there was no continuity. When my father was living we had Friday night services--Friday night dinners. Every Friday night and he adhered to all the traditions--Jewish traditions.

AP: He was observant.

MZ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, absolutely but my mother--we had a kosher home. My father--we had the *esrog* and the *lulav* and all that. We did all that with my father.

AP: Oh!

MZ: With the chicken, you know.

AP: He actually took a chicken and (?).

MZ: Absolutely. We did all that. We were raised--but my father was not hysterical about his Judaism. He was a traditionalist, he went to synagogue, he was serious about it, he was very learned. And he--but he never forced it on us. It was just a part of us. Oh my God, the first time I ate a hot dog, I mean, I thought I committed the greatest sin, you know.

AP: When was that? Do you remember?

MZ: It had to be after my father died. We would never do it to my father.

AP: You never ate out before that?

MZ: No. I would never do that. We would never do anything to hurt my father.

AP: And his (?) And he would not have done that himself. Would your mother have?

MZ: No.

AP: Neither of them. So they were together in terms of (?)

MZ: Oh, yes. They were both observant. But, I mean, you can see how I felt about my father. And it was the biggest loss. And like I say, I've lived a lifetime and I've seen a lot of different men and fathers and feelings, and I never saw a man in my lifetime that was like my father. Maybe all children feel that way. You know, they *might* feel that way.

AP: When you mentioned the *lulav* and the *esrog*. It makes me think that you were observing the whole range of Jewish holidays.

MZ: Oh, yeah. Every holiday we knew, we knew.

AP: And when (?)

MZ: Well, my mother tried to do it, too. She tried to follow up there but maybe on Friday nights my mother would have chicken soup or chicken or something like that maybe that was as far, but we didn't go through. See my children, my one twin, she has Friday night service. I mean, she celebrates the Shabbat with her children and her husband. They really celebrate it. When we're there that's when it all comes back again. But not the other one--the other one, she's like semi-interested. But Judy, the one that's

sitting on Norris's lap--now he's the one who can **daven** He's wonderful. Oh, my God. He's unbelievable. He's very learned.

AP: But he probably reinforces.

MZ: Yes. And she went right along with him and she happened to like doing it.

AP: Are they identical?

MZ: Yes.

AP: But this is an aside. I guess I sort of wanted to get back to your parents. Did you have a *sukkah*?

MZ: Yeah. My father did that.

AP: Did other people come?

MZ: No.

AP: Was it unusual to have a *sukkah*?

MZ: No.

AP: Do you remember?

MZ: No. My father--I think they had one at the synagogue, too. I can't remember--I think maybe in the backyard he might have done something or he--I can't remember that. Now the kids do. They're in the village and they have a terrace and you have to see the *sukkah* that they have. It's unbelievable what my son-in-law sets up for the holidays.

AP: Right out there?

MZ: Right out there. And it's so fabulous. He got certain things built so that he can put it away and every year bring it up and they invite people. Oh, yeah, they invite people. But they're not religious. They don't keep kosher or anything but, traditionally, they keep every holiday. And, of course, his mother--she keeps two sets of dishes and she had seders and break the fast and everything at her house. And, Passover--oh, God, it's unbelievable. They have thirty-two people at her home and stuff like that. So he gets it from his home.

AP: Yeah. Now that actually raises a question. I've seen that your father made seders when he was alive. Now what happened when he died?

MZ: We didn't have them.

AP: When he died, the rest of the Jewish community, that Homestead Jewish community, didn't pick any of the slack for your family?

MZ: No, nobody did. We were really left alone to go on our own. And nobody helped. There was nobody that came around. I'm the only one--actually what happened--the influence that I had from being with the Litmans, I realized what life--you know, I was motivated because I saw the way they lived. And I picked up and when I--even when I worked--I was only very young--and I would buy clothes and all my sisters they would wear my clothes. And if they had a date I would see that they had what they needed. And I sort of uplifted the family and I knew there was something better than what we--you know--you had to rise above it. And that's what I learned. That you can rise above it, and that's what you had to do. So for me the little bit I offered--I mean--I just set everybody in the right direction. Because I got in the right direction--I started work, I started work at Kaufmanns. I became a buyer. So I was the only one who uplifted the family. See. But it had to come from me--when I was heavy duty, you know.

AP: That's a large burden. But there was no larger community...?

MZ: No. Nobody came. They just didn't.

AP: Did you say your father had been active in the shul?

MZ: Yeah, he was very active in the shul. Yeah. He was very active in the synagogue and he was very well-known there. But the synagogue didn't do things like that. They--it was impersonal. It was personal in an impersonal way. Everybody--they would see each other for the holidays. They would meet and things like that. And, we were more or less left. My uncles, too, the one uncle was a little friendlier than the other one. And my mother--she could have used help because they were all in the grocery business and they could have helped her buy merchandise, the cash and carry--Rohm's was the cash and carry. But, no, strangers, some of the strangers use to help my mother. They would come over and say, "Mrs. Mermelstein, we're going to buy some things. If you want us to go, we'll drop them off--or whatever."

AP: You said "Rohms". What was that?

MZ: That was a cash and carry. But you had to have a car.

AP: It was where you could buy...

MZ: It was a wholesale place. But my mother couldn't go there because we didn't have a car.

AP: Your mother didn't drive?

MZ: No. And we had this car, this big, beautiful car. We sold it because who was going to drive. There was nobody to drive. So that was sold.

AP: You didn't really have a sense that there was a community, that there was a supportive Jewish community?

MZ: No, we were, like, on our own. And I, in fact, I wrote this note and I told her, "You and your family were very kind and gave me, I forget, and gave me the courage to go on." I have it over here.

AP: And who did you write this to?

MZ: To Ruth. And I said, "As for me, I remember the lean years and how you and your family lifted my spirits and gave me the courage to go on." So that's where I got the--

AP: Now you continued. You were still going to Hebrew school and you were still going to Sunday school.

MZ: Yeah. I quit because, I think that I quit because--I said that I quit at fifteen. I met Ruthie at fourteen--when I was fourteen. And then I quit. I think she wasn't going and nobody else was going so why should I go, you know.

AP: I guess what I was getting at was that you still had connections to the shul when your father died.

MZ: Oh, yeah. My mother would go. My mother had her own seat. And the women sat upstairs. That was the center of our Jewish life. We would have meetings there, we would have plays. I continued on with that and Sunday school. We all were confirmed. So we were all part of the Sunday school. Yeah.

AP: Did your mother read Hebrew?

MZ: Yes, I think. I don't know if she can read it now or not. I mean, whether she read it towards the end of her life. I imagine she did. Oh, yeah. I think she did. All my sisters know how to read Hebrew. I'm not so sure about my youngest. But we all read Hebrew. We all went to Hebrew school.

AP: Your youngest might not because she didn't go?

MZ: She went but I don't think she can read that well. She was nine years old when my father died. My brother--youngest brother--was seven and a half. He tries so hard to remember. He tries--he knows something about my father. But we tell him all the things about my father. "He had three daughters and then he had this boy. Ah--he worshipped him." I have a picture, wait a while I'm going to show you. I have a family picture. (Pause in the tape.)

AP: When your father died, what happened with your older, your half-sisters?

MZ: Well, she became a school teacher. She went --did she stay home? Oh, she was about--I was twelve and a half--she was sixteen. She was just graduating high school. Ready to graduate. And then from there she went to California State College.

AP: She did?

MZ: She did. Yeah.

AP: That was unusual for a Jewish girl to be off at one of these small colleges.

MZ: Yeah. She became a teacher and she taught in the McKeesport schools. Now my brother Eddy stayed with us. And Eddy--he didn't graduate high school. But my mother was--it was not her son, you know what I mean--but she felt so bad that he didn't, He just was sort of like, after my father died, he sort of rebelled, because there he was without. He knew that my mother wasn't his mother and he just couldn't handle it so he dropped out of school. But somehow, my mother a year or so later, told him that it was very important and he should to back. And he did and he graduated. But I think after my father died he just couldn't handle it.

AP: Did they call your mother "Mother"?

MZ: Yeah. They called her "Mother". But, see, there was a lot of interference after my father died because the aunts, some of the aunts and uncles, they came and they thought, "Oh, my God. He died and what's going to be with those two." But there was nothing. We always stayed friendly--very close. In fact my brother worked for my husband until he died. He was killed in an automobile accident. But--and Florence, we were very close. When she was dying in California, we all flew out before she died to see her. So we always stayed very close. We never--and in fact, his children--I wouldn't say we're as close as we should be or we could be but sometimes that happens where everybody is spread out. One is in California. But we're invited to everything. I just got in an invitation to my brother's daughter's son. They're getting married in New Jersey. So we're just--you know--I never felt like they're my half-brother. I never even said that word. And it's very hard for me to even say it, you know, because I just don't feel it. That's how close we were.

AP: I just want to come back around to some things that I missed--like the thing about the holidays and your mother having her seat in the shul. Did you all go with her to shul?

MZ: Uh huh.

AP: Did you all sit there?

MZ: No, we couldn't sit there because there was only room for the women. The children had to sit down--we would be at the children's services. So we had to go to a different--or we could sit in the back--if there were seats in the back we used to go in the back.

AP: On the first floor?

MZ: On the second floor, on the balcony. And my mother had a seat right in front because my father was a member of long standing, you know. My father was in the third row and he had his seat. Of course, they just now sold the synagogue. I've been back there and looked up and I saw where my mother used to sit and my father used to sit. Too bad I didn't take some pictures.

AP: I think there are some pictures some place.

MZ: Are there?

END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE

TAPE TWO, SIDE TWO IS BLANK

TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE

MZ: You know I made friends, and I kept them, you know what I mean. And I had a lot of friends when I was younger. I don't feel that my sisters were involved as much. No, I don't think they were. They had some Gentile friends. I had some, too, like I say, these girls. But, anyway, the Exlers--in fact, the day that my father died, Mrs. Exler took all of us to her house to sleep, because my father was laid out in our living room.

AP: Oh! Was that common?

MZ: I don't know, but that's where he was.

AP: And he body was (?)

MZ: Yeah. He was laying there. It was covered. But they said if you wanted to see him, and somehow it was like half opened, half opened. And not completely...but at one point I saw my father lying there. And I remember that. I don't know if anyone else saw him. But--

AP: And so the people they came and the service--

MZ: I don't understand how it happened, but he was laid out in our living room. And you had to go up the steps. You had to go through the--we had the store and we had the stock room. Then there was our kitchen and the steps and you had to go all the way down here to a --to the living room.

AP: Maybe he wasn't there very long.

MZ: They buried him the next day. And they had a wooden box built for him. In the back--they did it in the back of our house.

AP: The coffin? You mean there wasn't one already made?

MZ: There was a coffin--he was in some kind of a grey coffin. But when he was buried, he was buried in a plain wood box.

AP: And you remember them making this box!

MZ: Yeah...in the back.

AP: And they didn't do that until the person actually died.

MZ: Uh huh.

AP: Do you remember sitting shiva?

MZ: Yeah, I imagine I did but I don't recall that.

AP: But you don't remember, I guess what I was wondering about was if you remembered the services.

MZ: Oh, yeah. We had to wear bedroom shoes, and we sat on milk boxes, you know. And everything had to take place--I'm thinking, were we in the kitchen or were we upstairs. God, my brother was in the stroller so I'm thinking we almost had to be in the kitchen. I don't remember it being up in the--it would be too far away from everything. I think maybe it was in the kitchen. And I don't remember whether we went back to school right away or--that sort of escapes me. Isn't that funny.

AP: Yeah, some things just disappear. Do you remember you mentioned the teachers from your Hebrew school. Do you remember any of the rabbis?

MZ: Yeah, we had a Rabbi Racusin. But Rabbi Pincus I remember more because I was in the age group that I could remember more. And he had a young wife, and he was like young but he was from--I don't know if he was from Israel or not. He probably came from Russia or Poland so he wasn't Hungarian. We were Hungarians. There was some kind of scandal about him and his wife or something. I think they were going to get a divorce. There was just something there I remember about Rabbi Pincus and his wife. Then we had a Rabbi Widom. He committed suicide. Did you know that?

AP: I picked up a little piece of it.

MZ: Then there was Rabbi Racusin--right after Widom. Then there was Rabbi Pincus. Pincus was there when Dr. Proper was there. Dr. Proper he had a doctorate in whatever. He was very bright. I don't even know if he was married. I don't think so. But he was scholarly, very scholarly.

AP: Do you remember if the congregation was scandalized when the rabbi committed suicide?

MZ: They tried to keep it very quiet. People didn't even talk about it--you weren't allowed to talk about. But I remember, you know, the hush, hush period there. I remember when it happened because—yeah--I could remember when something happened and it was such a shame. He was buried in another part of the cemetery, which they do. I remember that because we had been going to the cemetery since we were very young. Because my father was dead when we were--we were the only one who were saying *yiskor*. There were no children during *yiskor* in Homestead except the Mermelsteins. There were six of us so we were there and everybody knew that we were there all the time. We'd been going to *yiskor* since I was twelve and my brother--and my sisters were ten and a half, nine and seven.

AP: So you often were going to cemetery.

MZ: And we were going to cemetery, sure. So I remember that Rabbi Widom was someplace away. Every community has their little--you know--they have different things that are not proper. That was kind of, it hit me though. I don't know why he committed suicide. I think they said something. He wasn't satisfied with something that was going on. I just can't remember what.

AP: Something with the shul?

MZ: Could have been. There was just something. But we were very good. That was the nucleus of our connection with Jewish life. Naturally it was the synagogue. And they had plays and they had--it was not a community center but in the synagogue they tried to bring a lot of--innovate a lot of things for the children.

AP: Oh, they did?

MZ: They did. Yes, they did. We had some very brilliant people. Mrs. Grossman was a brilliant woman. And Mrs. Grinberg, you know of the Grinberg family. She was very bright. And they were the presidents of the sisterhood so the sisterhood, they did a lot of things that were, a lot of times they would be having some kind of affairs just for the holidays. And they would be cooking, and we had a kitchen down there. I mean, they had a lot of things going, you know. It was very active.

AP: Was you mother involved with that?

MZ: No, my mother couldn't be because my mother had to take care of the business.

AP: Oh, once your father died. But before that, do you know? Do you know?

MZ: No, she wasn't.

AP: It was your father who was--

MZ: My father was always, yeah. He was very involved there. But you know, all of a sudden everything was going in one direction and then it was cut off. So we lost a lot of (?) yeah. It was--we had an insecurity I would say. We had a great insecurity. And so we had to overcome that. We had to overcome a lot of things. That's why I say I saw what life could be or, and I was actually motivated by being with the Litmans. They really had an impact on me, absolutely. I remember Mrs. Litman bought her, Ruthie had, well, they were wealthy people even then. And today they're still very wealthy people

AP: Are they the people who still keep the Braddock shul going?

MZ: Yeah., Eugene and his sister, Ruth. There's only one sister. But I remember her mother bought her a coat at Azen's, and I was with her. And it was a beautiful coat, a beige coat with lynx fur going straight down tuxedo style.

AP: Was that downtown--Azen's?

MZ: Uh huh, And I was with her in the store and so her mother said, "You don't have a coat do you?" I said, "No." And I was working at Kaufmann's and I wasn't making very much. So her mother said, "Mr. Azen, you put--Mildred's going to buy a coat and she's going to pay it off." I don't know if they put any money down or not. But anyway she says, "She can't pay much but she can pay ten dollars a month, maybe five." I don't remember what. But any way I got this beautiful black coat with lynx fur here. Imagine! I was like about sixteen years old because Ruthie was about sixteen then. And I was able to pay it off, and Mr. Azen did it because Mrs. Litmann said he should. And she said, "If for any reason she can't pay it, I'll pay it." That's how I got the coat. So you know, I couldn't even think of a coat. I was lucky I had a--like I said we didn't have, When I was in the play at Homestead High School, Ruthie loaned me all her clothes because I was very thin at the time--we were both very thin--the same size and I had to have a lot of changes because I was on the stage all the time and I had to have changes. And I was--I wore all her clothes and her shoes.

AP: It's good to have a friend who's the same size that you are. So you didn't go (?)

MZ: I think I went there. I think I used to go there for holidays. But at that point I felt kind of bad because I was leaving my sisters. So I didn't pursue it as much. But I was invited to all their seders or whatever they had. I was like a surrogate sister, you know. That's how all the boys feel about me and I'm very friendly with all of them. And I once wrote an open letter--I'm so mad because it was such a good letter and I wish I had a copy. I wrote them this fabulous letter when Ruthie was sixty-five years old and all his (?) brothers were there and the whole family and I wrote about each and every one of them and how I felt about them and what an influence they had on me. So one of the brothers is a lawyer--he's married to Roz--David Litman. Do you know David and Roz? So David came up to me and said, "Mildred, I'd like to have a copy of that". So I called

Ruthie up and I said, "Ruthie, do you have that?" And she said, "Oh, I don't know. You know we moved and I don't know whether I have it". And I don't think she had it.

AP: It probably got lost.

MZ: It got lost. But he wanted it. But I expressed myself you know because I thought that was the thing to do. And the brothers were so nice to me. They would take me home and they would--there was nobody else that ever did anything for me or *could* do anything for me. So I would say it started there. For me it was a good thing because it did give me hope. It did give me hope and not despair. It was very important. It was one of the things that I always talk about.

AP: (Difficult to hear.) Did you have any problem observing Jewish holidays when you were in school? (?)

MZ: No.

AP: And the other is--how did you feel about Christian holidays? Did they have any effect on you? Did you feel excluded or did you feel there were any kinds of problems with these observances that you couldn't deal with?

MZ: I didn't allow it to become a problem. And I--we just never made it an issue. And I never made it an issue. When the holidays came around and they were talking about--I would go to see their trees. They would invite me to see their trees. I would go to see their trees, not at Dorothy's, never at Dorothy's house but at Wanda's I would. And we had an undertaker next door to us, the Brazos, they very close to my father and we were very friendly with them. There was no, oh, they adored my father. And as a result we stayed friendly with them for many, many years. In fact, they're all just about gone now but we still stayed friendly with them, you know. And, so they used to invite us into their home. So we had a lot of things we could remember--nice things, you know.

AP: When you went to your friends home to see the trees, or went to your neighbors, did you wish you had one as well.

MZ: Never. That was just the way, you know. No never, never. I accepted it that they believed it. And then as I grew older--I hate to say it--I just couldn't understand how any intelligent person could accept Catholicism. I mean, I shouldn't say that. I mean, it's still their religion and they believe it but I used to--then I realized--I mean, I was so happy that I was a Jew for more reasons than one.

AP: That's nice because it meant that you had a nice, positive self-image.

MZ: Oh yes. I would never think of inter-marrying. Never! And I never had any envy of anybody even through my whole life and I've been with people who are--whatever I've done in my life, I have tried to help the underdog. And I guess it's something that I get--it's a carryover from what I saw about my father. He always--anybody that needed

help--I mean it's very easy to be friendly with who don't need help but put yourself out with people who do need help.

(Telephone ringing. Brief pause.)

AP: I did want to ask you what happened when the mills took over? You were saying that--

MZ: When the mills took over that was a God-send. We didn't get back much for it for a length of time but whatever it was we left Homestead. My mother bought a piece of property in Oakland.

AP: Oh.

MZ: She did. She bought a piece of property there and that's where we lived after they sold the property. And I can't remember what year the property was sold. Oh, I just don't remember. I know I was married in 1945. It could have been--no, it must have been in '38, something around there, maybe in the forties. I just can't remember. Anyway everybody knew they were going to leave, you know, and that's when I started--when I went to Oakland--that's when I started to be among Jewish people, you know. I was, that was the end of that era.

AP: Did you find that really different?

MZ: It was so different being with your own kind. You didn't have to pretend. You didn't have to pretend. There was always just something there that you knew that you were different. They made you feel that you were different, but they didn't say it. But you felt it. It was like a feeling, you know. It was something that you felt.

AP: So did your mother open another store?

MZ: No. No. No.

AP: And so that was--and then did she maintain a connection with the Homestead synagogue or anything like that?

MZ: No. That was it. She didn't do that. And then my mother got sick when she was 47. She had cancer of the lung and when she was 47 years old. And she had--I think I was married then--because I was married in '45. And, then my brother--I married my husband in '45. And then my brother started to work for him when he got back from the service. And my husband was so wonderful to all my family. It was just something that we never had to worry once I got married. Isn't that something?

AP: (?)

MZ: No, she was 77. But she was in the Home, when she was about 70 or 71 she got...I don't know whether it was Alzheimers or what it was, but she was at the home. She wanted to go to the home. She just didn't want to take care of an apartment anymore. We could see it already. But when she went to the Home, after about a year and a half they had to put her up on the third floor where they knew she would deteriorate mentally and physically. So it could have been a form Alzheimers.

AP: Yeah. It's very hard to know. But the point was that she was successfully treated for lung cancer way back.

MZ: Way back. Dr. Kipp. He was just wonderful to us. My brother...I remember the operation. There was almost no hope you know for a cancer diagnosis you know. But she pulled through it. But he was wonderful. We used to go back and see him all the time. He loved my mother. I used to bring him--what did I bring him? Oh, God. I can't remember. It wasn't candy. Maybe it was corned beef. It was corned beef and rye bread. Oh my God, he was so happy to see me when we got there every time we went to see him. And even when he died, my mother--I took my mother out to Fox Chapel because he was laid out at his home. When we walked up to the door and we said who we are to Mrs. Kipp, she said, "I know who you are. My husband talked about you and your mother all the time." But we went up to see--my mother was reading the newspaper--we even built a room for my mother. I had a home on Gettysburg Street. And we built my mother a room. And we sent her to Florida. I mean we really took such good care of her. And so one day she's sitting in my--she would get up early and I had help, too. And she was reading a newspaper and she said, "My God! Dr. Kipp died." And I said, "Oh, Mummy let me look at the newspaper." Sure enough he died. Well, then I checked with everything and then we went up and he was laid out at home and we went to see him. But he was at the Mercy Hospital. They took my mother from the St. Francis Hospital. When she got pneumonia, they took her there because she lived in the East End. And from there they took her to Mercy because she had to be operated on for cancer of the lung.

AP: Did you father die in the hospital?

MZ: Yes.

AP: He did. What hospital?

MZ: Homestead.

AP: They took him to Homestead Hospital. Was it still Dr. Moss who was his doctor?

MZ: No, Dr. Monheim.

AP: Oh, so was Dr. Moss gone already?

MZ: I don't think he was gone yet but Dr. Monheim was the GP at that time.

AP: Were you born at home?

MZ: Um, I was...yes, I think I was. I probably was born at home.

AP: Do you know the doctor's name?

MZ: I imagine that--

AP: He was Jewish doctor?

MZ: He was a Jewish doctor. Uh huh, in fact I know his son, Jerry Moss. And I said you know on my birth certificate, which I still have, not my birth certificate but something in writing that I have that Dr. Moss was my doctor. And I think he delivered all of us. Like I say, he was doing everything.

AP: So you remember him as the doctor that your family used.

MZ: Yeah. Like I say he did these big things with us, but we had family doctors. He didn't come to the house.

AP: Did he...there was another doctor who would come? You weren't taken out to Dr. Moss' office?

MZ: No. No. Doctors at that point would be coming to the house. My father was on top of us. Oh, God. If anybody got sick, with the medication and with the doctor. That would be a very bad time for him until everybody was sick and better, you know. And my mother didn't know anything. I had no contact with my mother when we were sick. I think if I'd have had my period, I would have gone to my father, which I got later right after he died.

AP: Did you mother talk to you about that?

MZ: We learned from our friends. They never talked. She never talked. Our contact with my mother was really not the closest association.

AP: And it's interesting that you think in retrospect that even for something that was very feminine you would not feel at all uncomfortable talking to your father.

MZ: Yeah. He used to take care of us if we were sick. Look down our throat and check us and he was always touching our head for fever. I mean, I can't remember my mother doing that. It was always him. He took charge, let's say, he just took charge. So that's why it was very traumatic for everybody.

AP: Oh, certainly. I guess before I finish I am wondering if you have any final impressions or things that I forgot to ask you about. Any way you would characterize the life you lived in Homestead, any summing up of the community, any thoughts?

MZ: Well, I liked living in Homestead. I mean it will always have a place in my heart--the place that I lived in. And my folks are buried there in the cemetery. And although we don't have plots per se it's because my children all live out of town, and I sometimes think, "Why should they have to come to Homestead and have to find somebody with a key" like they have to do you know. And so we have thought about that and I always told them wherever...if something happens to us in Florida, let it be Florida, if it happens in Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, and if you want us to be in New York, that's okay with us, too. I mean we're at such a crossroads at this point and when people say, "You mean, you're 75, you're husband's 82 and you don't know where you're going to be buried?" I say you won't believe it but that's where it's at. It's up in the air. So that's how it is. But I sort of feel that if I'm in Homestead I prefer to be buried there. But I hate to see it that my kids should be involved. But then they say, how many times do they come to the cemetery. I try to get out there every year. And sometimes I go if there's a funeral or something. It's okay. It just depends on what is going to happen in our lives. But Homestead does have a warm spot in my heart.

When we think about it, the way things were after my father died, and we were almost in despair. Not that, I said we always had food to eat. A lot of times people judge things by being hungry, and I don't have that. But I said, there were three girls, and we had to do with a lot, **without** a lot as far as clothes, that didn't seem to be so important. That was never, you know, I never look back in anger or said, oh, well, you know, it didn't have that kind of bad effect on us. We just knew we couldn't do it and we accepted it. But then there were other things that happened, thank God, in our lives, one of them you was that I made, once I went to Kaufmann's I made a lot of connections there.

And I kept going up and up--becoming a buyer was a big thing. That's why I said I know so many new people. Sometimes you know too many people. And as you get older you don't have the energy for everybody. But there are so many different areas that I can tell you that I have so many friends--Gentile people, from Kaufmann's, from Homestead, from my husband's business, from just everyplace. We have so many people that I'm involved with. And as you get older you can do with a lot less. Everybody thinks that you--there's just so much that you can take. And I'm glad I go to Florida because you know--

END OF TAPE THREE, SIDE ONE

TAPE THREE, SIDE TWO

MZ: We played the English records, too, the latest songs that came out. But he would play his Jewish records. Rosenblatt and all these famous Jewish singers. And he would take us--he used to frequent them, and he would take one child at a time.

AP: Now where did they perform?

MZ: Some place in Pittsburgh. I don't know where it was.

AP: So you came somewhere in the city to do that.

MZ: Yeah. There was some place that they went to. And any time there was anything that was of interest to him, you know, like theater. He loved singing and so forth.

AP: Did you see Yiddish theater?

MZ: Yes.

AP: It was Yiddish theater?

MZ: Yes. It was Yiddish theatre.

AP: And he had his victrola and...

MZ: Oh, yeah. And he had all the records and he would play the music all the time. Because we were interested in the hit of the week records he would buy it for us, too. So we were always, you know--

AP: Was it a winding?

MZ: No, it was electric.

AP: Was it a big ?

MZ: It was like this. It was no bigger than that because it was in a case. It was in one of those cases. It was portable.

AP: That must have been unusual in a grocery store.

MZ: Yeah, you'd hear the music, and he would put the Jewish records on when nobody was there, you know. If somebody wasn't there, then he would listen to them.

AP: Would that be late at night?

MZ: No, we closed it at eight o'clock. He made sure that we all got in. We'd be around the neighborhood, and somebody was in this yard, and somebody was visiting this...But at eight o'clock everybody had to be there. And we were *there* like Cinderella.

AP: Did he deliver?

MZ: He delivered, yeah.

AP: He did!

MZ: He delivered in certain places. There were people down near Kennywood he used to deliver. Not too many things. He didn't deliver too much around because the people he dealt with were all in the neighborhood.

AP: Then he wasn't dependent on the people who could come into the store. He was able to take--

MZ: Well, once in a while. He had maybe four or five customers like that. And these people absolutely, I never saw--when they came in, they adored him. There was a feeling--as far as my father feeling any anti-Semitism, he never did. Because they adored him--all of them, the women, the men--and when he'd be taking a nap and they came into the store, they would say, "Where's Mr. Mermelstein." "Well, he's taking a nap." "Well, we'll come back."

AP: Did he sell meat also?

MZ: No, just cold cuts. And he would not have candy in the store because he didn't want us to eat it. He didn't want us to get bad teeth.

AP: Did he sell ice cream?

MZ: No, nothing like that. There was a store across the street we could get it. But he did not want to be responsible. He knew that we would eat a lot of it. We always went to the dentist. He had us being checked up. Every one of us went to the dentist just like they take children now.

AP: Was this also in Homestead?

MZ: Uh huh...Dr. Hirsch.

AP: So all your...oh...

MZ: Dr. Hirsh was our dentist. And all the doctors, they were best friends. They adored him. They loved him. He was always friendly with all the professional people because they really sought him out. And when Morris Berger passed the bar, and my father died, his mother and father would not--he was studying for his law boards--and they never told him about my father after he died because they didn't want to upset him while he was going through this. And Morris Berger talks to me about my father like if he was today. He tells me things about him like can't believe. So many years--isn't that amazing?

AP: It certainly is. That is certainly an intense memory that you have. This was a wonderful opportunity to hear all this.

MZ: Oh, okay. But does that give you. I mean--but you really wanted to hear about Homestead didn't you.

AP: No.

MZ: I'm part of Homestead.

AP: You are. Unless there are things that I missed that I should have asked you about that you would like to add.

MZ: The synagogue was--oh, it was a wonderful place to be a part of because it was run very well. The Sunday school, the synagogue and they had wonderful leadership. And a lot of the people who were part of it really gave their all. So even holding on to it as long as they did...there were still people clinging to it. But when--during the time that it was an active place, it gave everybody a lot of stability to have that.

AP: So you had good feelings about it while you were there but you didn't feel so attached to it that you continued to come when you moved to Oakland?

MZ: No. I wanted my husband to come back because they always asked us to come back for the high holy days, and he didn't feel like he wanted to go. So we just never went.

AP: And your mother also didn't feel that she wanted to go back either?

MZ: No, she didn't go back. But she was not a well woman, though. She had a lung removed when she was 47 so she was not well. She lived with me.

AP: I take it before that when you were living there you used on the high holy days and walked.

MZ: Oh, we would go.

AP: (in audible)

MZ: But she would go to the synagogue on the holidays and we would go with her and, yeah, we would go even after my father died, she would go. I remember her sitting up there. And we would go. But it very traumatic, I mean, for all of us even to go. Every time I think about it I relate--I think about my father and his relationship to the synagogue, you know.

AP: So you think of it terms of him. And the things that happened after that were a real break for you.

MZ: Uh hum.

AP: Well, anyway...thank you for sharing all of these memories.

AP This has been Ann Schechter Powell interviewing Mildred Ziskind for the Homestead Hebrew Congregation Oral History Project of the Western Pennsylvania Jewish Archives at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, September 1993. The interview took place in Mildred Ziskind's Oakland apartment where she lives when she is not in Florida.